The Walk in the Woods:

A Step-by-step Method to Guide Interest-Based Negotiation and Conflict Resolution

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The literature on interest based negotiation lauds the advantages of stakeholders interacting and bargaining on the basis of shared goals, objectives, and concerns. Much has been accomplished in the fields of game theory and decision-analysis to support the premise that each individual player achieves more and with greater security if parties with mutual interests aspire to the common good, and with that, invest less on costly and distracting competitive behavior. Given these advantages, much could be gained by providing systematic guidance to would-be interest-based negotiators and mediators as they traverse key steps of the process: revealing interests, reframing assumptions, encouraging creative problem solving, and then engaging in the complex give and take of reaching agreement. For those who teach interest-based negotiation technique and for those who want to better integrate its assumptions into their practice, such direction would assist in better navigating the complex relationships necessary to achieve interest-based outcomes and for charting progress and overcoming obstacles along the way.

This article introduces a structured analytic process and method for doing just that, the "Walk in the Woods." The model is named for the classic 1982 problem-solving saga of two Cold War nuclear arms reduction negotiators, Paul Nitze, leading the United States delegation, and Yuli Kvitsinsky leading the delegation from the Soviet Union. Facing a desperate impasse in their talks, the two men together left the retreat center located outside Geneva, Switzerland where they were meeting for, literally, a walk in the woods. The scenic stroll resulted in an unauthorized compromise that could have involved significant arms reductions for both countries. During the walk, they discussed shared and divergent concerns, interests, and objectives. They achieved a genuine understanding for what their two countries faced in the escalating arms race, what they might accomplish if they were to reconfigure operating premises and with that, how they might realize significant mutual force reduction (a particularly noteworthy objective given Nitze's reputation as a hardliner on relations with the Soviets). While their agreement was subsequently rejected by both Moscow and Washington, the saga of their meeting was immortalized in a Broadway play and came in the literature to symbolize the advantages of informal interpersonal bargaining and interest-based negotiation.

The Walk in the Woods as presented here is a structured negotiation and conflict resolution exercise – a momentary diversion - that focuses attention on the interests, motives, and objectives of participating stakeholders. Its purpose is to improve the effectiveness and efficiency and then ultimately the satisfaction of the exchange process by expanding the range of interests and objectives that can be incorporated in the effort to reach agreement. When adversarial interactions find parties in conflict, this structured, four-part process for renegotiating working relationships can assist in constructively incorporating the ideas, ambitions, and concerns of the many parties who have a stake in both process and outcome. The method and its premises can be used to facilitate complex multiparty negotiation, to mediate conflict, or to guide an individual as a personal discipline through the steps and premises of interest-based negotiation.

It is common to assess and regard negotiation more in terms of its outcomes than in terms of its process. The question, "How much did you get for the car?" refers after-the-fact to outcome and says little about the process that secured the deal. In order to anticipate and activate an option that is different from positional bargaining, there must be a strategy for constructing a mutually balanced process: what it is, how it works, and what it can achieve. By clearly delineating steps that build upon what motivates or could motivate the parties, new found confidence in the method of negotiation affords expectant belief in the benefits and fairness of the potential outcome. It is this reframing and the structured pathway for getting there that encourages a willingness to engage creatively in interest-based negotiation.

THE DIMENSIONS OF NEGOTIATION
Concept: The analytic framework

The Walk in the Woods is a method for multi-dimensional problem solving. Multi-dimensional problem solving refers to the breadth of factors relevant to a negotiation: the many pertinent tangibles and intangibles, issues, concerns, and intentions as perceived differently by the stakeholders depending on their interests and angle on the negotiation. Each person who participates in a negotiation and each factor that must be accounted for adds its own unique set of dimensions. Multidimensional problem solving accounts for those different perspectives and makes working with them part and parcel of developing a mutually beneficial solution.

The "dimensions" of the negotiation could refer – among other things - to the measure of tangible and intangible gains that each party differently hopes to achieve, the relative power and influence of each of the stakeholders, and the history and experience that affects what occurs at the present table. Each negotiation carries its own unique set of dimensions. Therefore, one facet of the analytic process is identifying just what are the relevant dimensions of a particular negotiation and then working to account for them through the negotiation process. Failing to do so would be tantamount to negotiating blind.

The assumption of dimensional problem solving is that there is no single "correct" answer or solution to the problem at hand. While certain elements of a negotiation may be ascertained based on a "gold standard" derived from clear precedent or mathematical computation, taken as a whole, the many personal, historical, political, and interpersonal elements on the table during a complex negotiation defy obvious or formulaic solution. Negotiation therefore provides the stage for stakeholders to place that multiplicity of concerns on the table as a discovery process.

Method: Distinguishing negotiation perspective

Three approaches describe dimensional problem solving: uni-dimensional, two-dimensional, and multi-dimensional.

The uni-dimensional perspective considers a problem simply as a matter of satisfying "my own" wants and desires, ignoring other dimensions as if they do not exist or do not merit consideration. A uni-dimensional negotiator expects self-satisfaction, irrespective and sometimes even to the detriment of others. In the mind of the uni-dimensional negotiator, successful negotiation is about satisfying his or her objectives with little or no consideration for the needs or concerns of others. Negotiation success is measured exclusively in terms of outcome with scant consideration for process or the substantive impact upon and opinion of others.

The uni-dimensional – "selfish" – perspective on negotiation often sparks resistance from others at the negotiation table who are loath to accommodate uni-dimensional expectations. The resistance manifests itself into a "fight," or positional response, instigating a tendency toward two-dimensional problem solving.

The two-dimensional perspective sees the problem as "us versus them." The negotiators confront one another as opponents with rigid demands. Others at the table are seen as obstacles to be circumvented. Any gain or credit for the "other" side is seen as a loss for "us," so the parties become as concerned with constraining others as they are in winning gains for themselves. Two-dimensional problem solvers are singularly focused upon attaining victory and avoiding defeat. They use positional and confrontational strategies and tactics to get their way. Two-dimensional problem solving is typified as classic, win-lose adversarial behavior.

Uni- and two-dimensional negotiators show little interest in the interests of others. Rather, these other parties are seen as obstacles and opponents to be overcome. The purpose for knowing and understanding others is to better beat them: learn their vulnerabilities, develop a strategy to exploit them, and then head for victory. In their minds, the information gaining process has a very circumscribed and selfish purpose.

By contrast, multi-dimensional problem solving attends to the differences in perspective, ambition, and desires of the many parties whose combined efforts ultimately will determine the success or failure of the process and its outcome. Multi-dimensional problem solvers see a broad array of factors that must be considered if a deal is to be reached. For starters, they look at their own situation with an ordered perspective: they are able to distinguish that which they "must" get from that which they would "like" to get. In other words, they prioritize their interests, recognizing that they are more likely to gain what is important to them if they are willing to give on elements that are less important. Beyond that, they are actively curious about and aware of the ways others at the table order their interests. They view others, and opportunities to assist one another, as a productive means toward shared ends. Multi-dimensional problem solvers recognize that their best chance to achieve their own interests is by working with others to satisfy theirs.

Transitioning from step to step

The transformation from uni- and two-dimensional thinking toward multi-dimensional problem solving requires a fundamental and sometimes difficult shift in perspective and strategy. Uni- and two-dimensional behaviors are provoked in some measure by natural survival and self-protective instincts. Those hard-wired impulses often can accurately alert one to alarming risks and fearsome vulnerabilities that must be appropriately addressed and overcome. To be sure, there are times to be uni-dimensional: one must take care of oneself. In similar fashion, there are also times to be two-dimensional. Principles that must be upheld at times demand stalwart people willing to demonstrate the courage and capacity to advocate or rise into battle. However, it is important to keep in mind that there are often a variety of alternatives available to negotiators. The "fight" mode sometimes kicks in to the exclusion of other options that could achieve the same ends with greater efficiency and better results for the long run.

The Walk in the Woods is structured intentionally to encourage the necessary transition. It reveals and incorporates uni- and two-dimensional perspectives as a starting point from which the shift to multi-dimensional problem solving can be accomplished. In so doing, it helps negotiating parties to build solutions by incorporating key legitimate interests, prioritizing objectives, and encouraging an informed and constructive give-and-take. The process is geared toward reaching a deal with the buy-in and support necessary to make it work.

If one factor of negotiation success is the measure of the stakeholders' ability to work together, then the care invested in systematically accounting for the multiplicity of interests represented at the table is time and attention well spent.

THE STEPS OF THE WALK IN THE WOODS

Concept: A guide for building perspective

The Walk offers parties a step-by-step method to assist them in discovering and implementing solutions to multi-dimensional problems. In practice, The Walk serves as a detour from the normal course of discussion. Why is it described as a "detour?"

In typical problem solving, parties to a negotiation head straight to solutions, debating the relative merits of one solution over the other. This is often done without consensus on what is the problem, how it might be perceived or experienced differently by different constituencies, and how it might therefore distinctly affect these stakeholders. In extolling the merits of one solution over others, parties typically advocate for solutions that benefit their interests while they disparage solutions that advance the interests of others. The contest is waged by wielding their relative power, control of necessary resources, or by taking the moral high-ground, as in "My solution is better than yours because it is more ethically correct."

The Walk circumvents this entanglement by providing a systematic process to build solutions as a joint enterprise. By first gaining an understanding of just what is the problem, the parties are less likely to debate solutions which ultimately solve just a portion of their shared conundrum. Participants become less defensive and more willing to engage in the dialogue and creative enterprise of solution building, since dead end solutions which ignore fundamental interests are unlikely to gain traction.

Method: An evolutionary approach

There are four steps to the Walk in the Woods. Each step entails a specific negotiation activity. That activity generates an outcome which prepares negotiators for what is required in the next step. The steps are designed and ordered to allow participants to explore and exchange what differently motivates them through the process. By explicating those motives and working to transform them, parties are most likely together to develop solutions based on their combined motivations. For the purpose of providing an overview, following is a brief introductory description of the four steps.

The first of the four steps is *self-interests*. Each party states their interests: what he or she needs to gain or achieve in the negotiation. Implicit in this discussion is revelation of what individually motivates each party to the process. In the process, all parties are encouraged to actively listen to one another in a non-adversarial manner. Often, parties will remark at the end of this step that it was the first time they felt that people were genuinely paying attention to what others had to say.

In the second step, *enlarged interests,* the parties are asked to list what they view as points of agreement amongst them and what are their points of disagreement. Typically, even in highly contentious conflicts, the parties discover that their points of agreement far outnumber their disagreements. How is this so? Often, the parties share a common set of values, a shared recognition for the downsides of a continuing conflict, and the understanding for what are the possible advantages of a mutually beneficial solution. From this discussion, they discover their overlapping motivations, an extension from what was learned in step one.

In the third step, e*nlightened interests*, the parties together craft new ideas and options which they would otherwise have been unlikely to even contemplate prior to this discussion. The explorative and creative brainstorming that occurs in this phase of the process generates a broad new set of ideas and options that newly motivates the parties.

The final step, *aligned interests*, is the bargaining, "give-and-get" phase when the parties finalize arrangements of the deal they have been negotiating. If they are truly motivated toward an interest-based solution, then each side is working toward their own advancement by enhancing the accomplishments of their collaborators. The solution they accomplish reflects the shared interests and motivations of those who are party to the process, thereby generating buy-in for the outcome they have negotiated.

Structuring transitions

The Walk in the Woods and its four steps has been and can be applied to a variety of negotiation scenarios. It could be used for example to structure a five person, two-hour problem solving staff meeting, during which approximately 30 minutes is devoted to each step. As more people are involved and the complexity of the issues increases, a longer time period is required for each step. It could also be used to guide formal mediation, whether it is a two party conflict or a large social dispute involving multiple stakeholders and interests. The Walk in the Woods has been used to structure full day dispute resolution discussion for contentious public policy and social issues. And it could used as a personal framework and discipline to guide one's individual practice of interest-based negotiation, encouraging questioning, active listening, and creative problem solving, even if the other person is unaware of the Walk and its different steps. As a generic framework for step-wise negotiation and conflict resolution, the Walk serves as a guide applicable to a wide range of circumstances and uses.

In the following sections, each of the steps - its conceptual framework, methods, and purpose in the transitional process of the Walk - is individually discussed.

STEP ONE: SELF-INTERESTS
Concept: Uncovering the dimensions

The purpose of the first step of the Walk is to give each party the opportunity to express their self-interests as well as to hear the self-interests of others. Negotiations reach an impasse when each stakeholder pursues his or her own agenda with little regard for the objectives or concerns of others. Those different agendas, when they promote escalating dimensions of selfishness, limit attention to a narrow set of objectives: "it's all about me."

An important distinction is made here between legitimate self-interests and selfish interests. It is natural to negotiate based on self-interests. Those interests define what stakeholders want to accomplish – for example financial or practice objectives - and what they want to avoid – the disruption of professional effectiveness. Legitimate self-interest describes what each party can expect to achieve based on commonly accepted norms. In a workplace, it is a legitimate self-interest to have a fair salary, an appropriate work space, and the tangible and intangible support necessary to achieve reasonable objectives.

Self-interest is different from "selfish interest." Selfish interest seeks advantage at the expense of others. It is all about "me." It creates an atmosphere in which parties come to believe that if they do not clearly triumph, then all will be lost. It is no surprise what results in such an atmosphere: the negotiation table becomes a battle zone at which each party grabs to gain advantage. Selfish interests reflect uni-dimensional thinking to the extreme.

A selfish, uni-dimensional perspective motivates conflict and provokes obstacles to forward progress. By contrast, the multi-dimensional perspective applauds both the differences and the legitimacy of the many viewpoints that must be balanced if an interest-based solution is to be achieved. How can one craft the expression of self-interests to gain an appreciation for the multi-dimensional aspects of an alliance, a change, or a shared set of problems?

Interest-based negotiation intends to address and realize the interests – mutual or different – that stakeholders bring to the table. Interests include the goals, objectives, ideas, concerns and hopes that they aim to address and satisfy through the negotiation. For people working together, interest-based negotiation implicitly reduces the effort invested in battling one another and increases efforts directed toward achieving mutual gain. To encourage the expression of interests, a "safe zone" of mutual respect and recognition must be an explicit feature of the process. Positional negotiation, by contrast, intends to establish winners and losers. The premise of positional bargaining is that one's objectives are best met by attaining victory, control, or dominance. Herein is the difference between a safe zone, in which one could achieve a mutually beneficial solution, and a dangerous environment in which one could be handed a serious defeat.

Method: Engaging the parties

When preparing for a Walk, the first question is "who is at the table?" Arriving at the answer is not as easy as it may appear. Identifying the involved stakeholders requires defining the problem and then identifying those people who believe they have a say in the matter as well as those people who will be significantly affected by the outcome. Since that definition could comprise an unwieldy number of participants, it is common for large constituencies to be represented at the table rather than participating en mass. Where one draws the line between inclusion and exclusion is critical. Omitting someone whose buy-in is essential could engender resistance to the negotiated solution, no matter how well it reflects their interests or desires. Similarly, creating an uneven balance at the table - whereby some constituencies or viewpoints are more generously represented than others – could threaten the ultimate acceptance and legitimacy of the outcome. And certainly, including each and every person with a stake in the outcome could create an impossibly large venue.

In general, smaller is better. With fewer people, there is more direct dialogue and less likelihood of grandstanding. On the other hand, it is important to ensure that all key stakeholders, ideas, and viewpoints are represented. Often, the best litmus test is the anticipated outcome of the Walk. If a particular constituency were excluded, would they be able to undermine the result of the process? If the answer is yes, they should be included. Or, does a particular stakeholder reflect a point of view that would otherwise be missing at the table? These questions offer guidelines, recognizing that who is and who is not at the table is often a matter of negotiation in and of itself.

Once the participants have been selected and the table is set, it is time to begin the Walk. In practice, during the opening self-interests step, each party or a representative of each constituency will make a statement about their perception of the problem or issues being negotiated, their particular interests in relation to that problem or issue, and what they hope to achieve through this process. If a facilitator or mediator is guiding the process, it is common for this person to call upon people around the table, to elicit their statements, and then to summarize what are the key points. If it is a meeting or negotiation without a facilitator, then each party in turn is given the chance to state their mind regarding the issues on the table. And if it is an interpersonal discussion in which just one person is familiar with the Walk, it becomes a personal guide that prompts and encourages expression and eliciting of legitimate interests rather than contentious positions.

The purpose of The Walk in the Woods is to help parties build or restore confidence and ultimately trust in one another. The process helps them recognize that those on the other side of the table are not necessarily the "enemy" to be defeated. It begins to identify the advantages and the results that could derive from truly working together: simultaneously uncovering both motive and incentive for those participating.

Parties often come to the table in a positional frame of mind. They do not trust the other side. They are convinced that the other side has deceitful, if not selfish intentions. They come in a protective mode, seeking at least to hold their ground and at best to conquer their opponents.

What is required for people who implicitly do not have a trusting relationship to begin talking and even listening to one another? Expecting people to abruptly establish trust is to ask for the near impossible. The word "trust" is often too charged and too personal.

There is an alternative. In place of trust, it is best to focus attention on "confidence." "What would it take for you to have the confidence that the other side will in fact do what they have agreed to do?" "What could you do to give the other side confidence that you will carry out what you have agreed to do?" These questions place emphasis on the present and the immediate future rather than on the past. Whereas "trust" refers to deep-seated matters of relationships and beliefs, confidence building refers to specific actions and behaviors. It could take years to repair the suspicions of the past, though nothing could do more to speed the process of interest-based negotiation than some successes and confidence building in the present and into the future.

Having established what it would take to build confidence, one can then ask each of the parties to discuss their self-interests. What do you hope to accomplish? What resources do you need in order to meet those objectives? What obstacles do you face? What resources can you bring to the table? How do you view others at the table?

Parties are encouraged to answer these questions in a straightforward, non-adversarial way. Establish a "no-zinger rule," a prohibition on words, gestures, actions, or derisive remarks that could derail the constructive and safe expression of interests. The purpose of step one of the Walk is to educate others at the table in a way that makes it as easy as possible to listen, hear, and understand. Obviously, if these comments are made with interspersed jabs, the discussion will soon deteriorate into name-calling and accusations.

The most important ingredient of the process is the listening. Participants are encouraged to listen "actively." This requires hearing and understanding of what is being said. Instructions could include, "Make it clear to others that you are paying attention, that you care about what they are saying, and that you are trying to understand." It is remarkable how often listening is lacking at a negotiation table. The most important information out of which the most resourceful solutions could emerge is obscured because negotiators are not paying attention.

Listening is not costly nor does it require extra time. And yet, it can generate a wealth of new value and confidence. Most importantly, there is nothing lost in the attempt. Done well, it allows all participants to gain a new appreciation for the hopes, objectives, problems, and constraints facing everyone at the table.

Transitioning to the next step

The first step of the Walk has reached its conclusion when there is appreciation for the legitimate differences among those at the table along with recognition that those distinctions need not necessarily be fodder for belligerency. While the parties may not agree with one another, they are able to see the logic behind diverging points of view. There is often a fresh respect among participants, an encouraging sense of relief that differences are on the table, and an engaging fascination that a process has been initiated to better understand and work with issues of importance. By the end of this first step, the parties have a much broader definition of what is their shared problem, how it is viewed differently by different players, and the ultimate necessity to balance these different perspectives if a solution is to be achieved.

Once the parties really begin to hear, understand, and exchange with one another, they discover all sorts of opportunities to "reframe" their differences and potentially even find ways to "expand the pie," create a set of options that they had not yet even considered or discovered. Hence, the next step of the Walk is called the "enlarged interests".

ENLARGED INTERESTS
Concept: Building analytic capacity

The purpose of the second step of the Walk is to help parties "reframe" their understanding of what they are negotiating about. This shift in thinking moves them from a natural state of uni- and possibly even two-dimensional thinking to a multi-dimensional problem solving perspective. What is meant by "reframing?"

It is common as one approaches a negotiation to have a "frame" or mental model for what is the problem and what is to be achieved. The data used to assemble that frame is self-generated and in service of a combination of legitimate self-interests and downright selfish interests. However, once parties have been exposed to the interests of others around the table, the newly acquired information could reshape their understanding of both the process and possible outcome of the negotiation. To create a new frame or analytic perspective, it is useful to systematically assemble that new data in a way that will allow for its constructive reinterpretation. How can this be accomplished?

In the typical "me-against-you" frame of mind, it is common to focus on points of disagreement and how they might be advantageously resolved. In the enlarged interests phase of the Walk, a new focus is placed upon the often invisible points of agreement.

Method: Reframing the negotiation

In practice, a facilitator or one of the parties will simply pose the question, "What is it that everyone around the table agrees upon?" Typically, two easels are used, one headlined "Agreement" and the other headlined "Disagreement" (a useful image even if it does not fit the circumstances of every negotiation).

It is important to first list points of agreement. This list will often include shared values, a common desire to resolve the issues or reach consensus, recognition of the downsides of not reaching agreement, and a vision for what might be achieved if the problem could be amicably settled. With a bit of grounded imagination, this list could be quite long and very revealing. There is frequently an "ah-ha" moment that emerges as the parties realize that on the most important issues, they actually do agree. They recognize that many of their interests and their motivations are overlapping, and with that, they see the possibility of developing an agreement that can advance those shared motives, values, and interests. That realization is what prompts the new understanding of what they are negotiating about, the "reframe" that opens the possibility of the Walk taking them to unforeseen conversations.

On the second sheet of easel paper, the disagreements are listed. It is rare to find in this exercise that the points of disagreement exceed the number of points found on the agreement side of the ledger. Those points of disagreement look quite different when seen in light of the newly minted and enlarged points of agreement. Often, these points of disagreement seem less important and more resolvable when viewed alongside what are the sometimes profound points of agreement. The reframing process is complete when the parties discover a fresh perspective on the shared problem and a renewed energy and hope for finding a resolution.

In combative two-dimensional problem solving, it is common for the sides to focus far more attention on what divides them than on what might unite them. The enlarged interests exercise of exploring points of agreement and disagreement might allow them to reveal the merits of seeing the other side as a possible ally to be recruited rather than merely an enemy to be defeated. If this reframing can be achieved, it allows all sides to reinvest their energies toward exploring shared solutions over simply scheming to defeat one another. It is a discovery process because, in most cases, the parties did not recognize their mutuality of concerns, obstacles, and objectives.

In the course of this less confrontational dialogue - as they actively listen to one another – the parties often find that there might be new and innovative solutions to their shared problems. These solutions were obscured by their preoccupation with what divides them over what could in fact unite them.

Transitioning to the next step

The constructive dialogue that is at the center of this phase of The Walk in the Woods encourages the parties to see their own situation, and the circumstances that they share, from a new and different angle. They better understand not only their side of the problem. They also appreciate the problems from the perspective of others - its many dimensions. It is this broadened view that is at the essence of multi-dimensional problem solving.

The parties recognize in this process that their shared problems are not a simple matter of good guys and bad guys. Such a simplistic view is replaced by a real appreciation for the issues that all sides of the problem are grappling with – what they each need in order to meet their legitimate objectives. There is also fresh awareness that together they might even be able to help solve each other's problems. They could build options that neither could have considered if they were merely working alone.

What is the outcome of this phase of the process? Each side has generated a bigger picture of the work they are doing. They have reframed the problem. They see themselves as part of something larger: an interdependent system of people whose successes and failures directly affect the fate of others in their surroundings. It puts what they do - the problems they confront and the potential they face – into a whole new perspective.

It is the change in the mood of the negotiation and the new possibilities that are opened which propel the parties into the next phase of The Walk in the Woods. This next step, the enlightened interests, translates the "ah-ha" moment of the enlarged interests into new ideas, creative options, and innovative solutions. Step three builds upon the widened perspectives and new confidence that the sides are establishing with one another.

ENLIGHTENED INTERESTS
Concept: Engaging new thinking

Top notch negotiators share a common characteristic: the capacity to imagine. They are able to comprehend problems and develop solutions that others – who do not share the same visionary aptitude - are simply unable to see. Why is imagination so important?

Negotiation at its best is a process for finding and taking advantage of opportunities: a chance to explore options and discover an outcome that does not already exist. The most creative negotiators smartly hunt for possible advantages and devise ways to make them happen. For example, in a complex organization with interdependent components, it is impossible to fully achieve one's objectives without resourcefully doing so in concert with many others. Therefore, seeking gain at the expense of one's cohorts is imprudent. Advantage generated in concert with them can be synergistic. And it often takes a dose of grounded imagination to find these better options.

Engaging imaginative thinking is both difficult and important. Why? Young people are encouraged to imagine: early education curricula are designed to cultivate radiant creativity. With time and the process of personal and professional socialization, that gift and propensity for creativity fades, replaced by familiar patterns, safe solutions, and the securities of the known and tested. People accumulate a mound of "baggage" as their life and career progresses: biases, sour experiences, resistance to change, and downright stubbornness. Time constraints and pressure may compel the path of least resistance and acceptance of interim or less desirable solutions. This mind-set gets in the way of imaginative problem solving and obscures what could be possible to achieve through the negotiation process. Uncovering an innovative solution requires abandoning those blinders for just long enough to become inventive.

The purpose of the enlightened interests step of the Walk is to systematically generate the fresh and innovative ideas that can spark such a synergy of action and interaction. This step comes at the point – just after the substance of the negotiation has been reframed - when negotiating parties recognize the potentially untapped and valuable benefits that could accrue from a working partnership, mutually beneficial solution, or a peaceful settlement of their conflict. This recognition engenders new-found confidence and motivation that is a far cry from the likely reticence and resistance with which they initiated the process.

An infusion of creative and inspired thinking at this step of the Walk engenders fresh ideas, though it is especially onerous to activate if the parties are in a highly polarized conflict. Just as listing points of agreement and disagreement was a useful exercise during the enlarged interests step, an exercise to encourage creative problem solving and to practice mini-deal-making is at the heart of the enlightened interests. How is this accomplished?

Method:
Generating new opportunities

Once again, go to the real - or if not appropriate, "virtual" - easel board. Instruct the parties to brainstorm. During brainstorming, have them generate as many creative ideas as possible. There should be no commentary, editing, or disagreement with what is being said. Let new and imaginative ideas flow so they can stimulate even more fertile possibilities. Encourage not only positive and productive ideas. Urge participants to consider what could happen if the problem or conflict is not resolved. Spur them on with evocative questions: "What 'out-of-the-box' options can you think of that might move us toward a solution of this problem (or conflict)?" Try open ended questions, such as: "What if you tried … (filling in a provocative idea)?" Encourage them to think about both the short-term and long-term implications, "If the problem is solved, what are the benefits? And if not, what are the costs?" Remember: genius often derives from seemingly outrageous and unconventional ideas that when merged, offer innovative and exciting possibilities. Record each of the comments, observations, and ideas so they can be part of the subsequent analytic process.

For the sake of illustration, consider that 40 new points have been listed on the easel board. Each of these points has different possibility, meaning, or implications for each of the participants. Negotiators felt safe to put these ideas on the board because they are nothing more than that: playful and exploratory thoughts considered on the pathway toward a workable solution. Among them are options that are promising, impossible, funny, frightening, and exciting. The question now is what to do with them.

Just as one "warms up" before engaging in serious exercise, the second phase of the enlightened interests is the opportunity to warm up in advance of the real deal making that occurs during the final step of the Walk. How is this done?

After the brainstorming list is complete, every point is individually discussed and assigned a number: 1, 2, or 3. The criteria used to categorize each point depends on the nature of the issues being negotiated. For example, ideas could be categorized by level of agreement. If everyone agrees on a point, it gets a "1." If there is clear disagreement, it gets a "3." And if there is ambiguity about agreement or disagreement, the idea is assigned a "2." Similarly, the categorization could be by feasibility, time frame (what could be done in the next week, month, or year), or sellability (acceptability to represented constituencies, such as a board of directors, staff, or a labor union). After going through each point, do one last review of the ideas that received a two – "maybe" - asking whether what was learned through the exercise could modify and thereby nudge any point up into the "one" grouping or down to the "three" category. Points assigned a one are the "deal makers" and those given a three are the "deal breakers."

Next, start a new list of only the points that garnered a "one." It is this set of ideas that will be carried into the next step of the Walk as the substantive bargaining gets underway.

Transitioning to the next step

In addition to providing substantive points for later negotiation, in what way has this sorting exercise been a warm-up for the bargaining that occurs during the aligned interests step of the Walk?

Assuming that the enlightened interests generated 40 new items, the negotiators have just had 40 opportunities to engage in mini-deal making. The low-stakes discussion about each item gave them a chance to get to know one another, experience how they differently perceive the issues and outcomes, and to practice arriving at an agreement about the number each item is assigned. Every point that achieved a one or a three represents an agreement. Every item that received a two was a matter of disagreement and perhaps further negotiation.

Note the behavior that is often present during this step of the Walk. The sometimes zany discussion evokes laughter, story telling, and a fluid discussion among the participants. Typically, it is a fun, funny, and a stress relieving experience. Whereas participants might have started the Walk in a contentious frame of mind, by the time they are well into and engaged in the enlightened interests, they begin to see the shared problem or conflict on one side of the table and themselves on the other striving to resolve it together.

It is common for this brainstorming exercise to evoke a reservoir of new ideas and even a measure of goodwill. The imaginative dialogue that has occurred during the enlightened interests step is reflective, responsive, and invigorating. The creative exchange eschews hope and new confidence that workable solutions can be found. Just as it opens doors to new opportunities, the low stakes discussion allows participants to discover doors they never knew existed. Intuitive, inventive insight shares its place with the pragmatic sides of linear thinking. The necessary risk taking, flexibility and openness to innovative ideas is buttressed by the new confidence found in the first steps of The Walk in the

Woods. The familiarity and practice experienced through the exercise has created a set of new ideas and new motivations that will take them into the next step.

In the course of the enlightened interests discussion, parties generate "new dimensions" to complement the multi-dimensional understanding achieved during the prior step of the Walk. As they transition toward the aligned interests, they will employ those new dimensions to build a multi-dimensional solution to their shared problem.

ALIGNED INTERESTS
Concept: Redefining success

The first three steps of the Walk serve as prelude to the bargaining – the actual "getting" and "giving" - that occurs during the aligned interests. As implied in its name, the purpose of this step is to guide the parties toward an outcome – decisions, exchanges and relationships - that link and balance what they each hope to achieve. This is the destination point – depending on the nature of the Walk - when the deal is struck, the conflict is settled, or the partnership is endorsed.

When the parties began their Walk, they each likely had a definition for what would be a "successful" outcome. Success of course has a number of important connotations, speaking to more than just the actual booty acquired at the table. It also encompasses, among many other ingredients, the achieved status, image, relationships, and implications for future negotiations. Success as opposed to winning accounts for the complexities and interactions of the negotiation above and beyond the tangible take.

"Success" at the outset of the Walk is most often defined in relatively narrow, uni-dimensional terms: the parties each seek victory. That frame of reference defines how their acquisitions could enhance their well-being or advance their cause. The purpose of the Walk is to expand that horizon, in other words, to redefine success so that it integrates considerations beyond the uni-dimensional.

If the parties at this point have in fact achieved this redefinition of success, then the discussion during the concluding step of the Walk will be significantly different from what otherwise would have occurred. This difference is the value added of the process. It reframes what the parties are negotiating toward, the criteria to assess whether it was attained, and the story that will be told about both the outcome and the process of their negotiation.

Method: Prioritizing and expanding interests

In real life, one does not "get" everything he or she desires. Each individual sets priorities and then allocates time, assets, and effort to achieve that which is deemed most important. In negotiation, this process is made explicit, not simply in the confines of one's own personal thinking and behavior, but rather as an interchange between two or more stakeholders who must align their priorities to best satisfy their different interests.

To align priorities, they must be explicitly described and defined. Each party to the negotiation has his or her order and hierarchy of interests. In practice during the bargaining phase of this concluding step, the participants articulate what they "must", "want to", and "would like to" get in order to consummate the deal. It is almost always the case that lists differ around the table. In similar fashion, the parties articulate what they are "eager," "willing," and "unwilling" to give in order to achieve an agreement. Over the course of this discussion, it is likely that some of the items at the top of their lists drop into the secondary category as they recognize the value of flexibility on the road to crafting a deal. The discussion during this step creates conditions that encourage the lists to adapt as long as the dividend – an agreement – satisfies a desirable combination of interests.

It is not uncommon for this discussion to begin with the momentary feel of horse trading: the horse seller exaggerates the beauty of the animal while the buyer points to its scruffiness. With a bit of refocus, the stakeholders are reminded of what brought them to the table and what has been learned through the Walk: their shared interest to consummate the metaphorical "horse sale" at a fair price and in a manner that encourages continued trade into the future.

Once the priorities of the "give" and "get" have been articulated, the discussion moves toward fleshing out the actual exchanges necessary to achieve consensus. It is common to hear, "I would be willing to… in exchange for…" At this point, the parties discuss: to what they are willing and not willing to commit; the strategy, logistics, pragmatics, and timeline for accomplishing their objectives; and the implications of the deal for future collaboration and negotiation. In other words, "I would be willing to satisfy some of your top priorities if you would be willing to satisfy some of mine." The mesh of gears – the alignment – is reached as the parties recognize how their different yet overlapping interests allow them to satisfy the other as a means to satisfy themselves.

Ultimately, if the negotiation is going to end in a deal, each party must achieve some recognizable gain: they must "get" something. What they each get certainly need not be the same and it need not even be of equal monetary value.

The value of what each stakeholder gains in the process – whether it is tangible such as money or intangible such as recognition - is gauged by the importance it has for each stakeholder. A deal is reached if the parties are able to think imaginatively about what they value and what they are gaining by having come to a deal – the very frame of mind which the Walk hopes to inspire. There is certainly value in the booty they take from the table. There is also value – if they are negotiating a conflict – to the ceasefire, the savings realized by not having to wage battle, and the goodwill engendered by the deal. If it is a business arrangement, there is not only value in the current dollars on the table, but also in the future deals and opportunities opened by the agreement. And if it is a matter of negotiating a working relationship, there is value in the exchange of knowledge, synergy of ideas, and boosted morale that come in developing a satisfying partnership. By attributing clear value to these dimensions of the deal being achieved – many of which are intangible and therefore defy monetary significance - negotiators discover that there is much more available for exchange and therefore much more to be gained through their creative and interest-based approach to crafting an agreement. In this way, the parties truly "expand the pie:" they each get more because there is more to be gotten.

Transitioning toward the conclusion

The reformulated definition of success reached during the aligned interests is: "If I succeed, you succeed; and if you succeed, I succeed. Therefore, let's work toward achieving mutual success."

What occurs in this final step of the Walk is the "so what" of the process: the commitment, the transaction, or the resolution of the conflict. At the outset of the Walk, the parties articulated the problem, process and purpose for their coming together. The Walk provided them a structured, directed, and deliberate venue for working toward an alignment of their interests. It is at this point that they can assess their progress in achieving a working relationship that spawned a viable agreement.

The arrangement must meet several tests if it is to persevere for the long run. It must be acceptable to each of the constituents. It should be conspicuously clear what each stakeholder has to gain, just as it should be fully understood what each stakeholder has put on the table. As each side evaluates the deal, it must meet - in its balance - the test of fairness. If it does, it likely will fulfill its long-term challenge: the test of time.

The intent here has been to find common ground. As the bargain is being finalized, this is not the moment to inflate desires or to exaggerate needs. Rather, this is the time to seek a just balance, pledge to work together, and begin to anticipate the rewards of the resolution. Each party gets more because they conceived more. Each party is just as concerned about the others' satisfaction as they are about their own and that of their constituents. The deal they are accepting is based on a synergy of intent and outcome. If it achieves its potential, it will spawn its own new successes.

The process is punctuated in a form appropriate to the nature of the negotiation. Whatever that might be – a memorandum of understanding, a letter, or a contract – it is useful to write down the agreement, careful that the language, spirit, and depiction of the process and outcome is acceptable both to those who participated as well as those who did not but will ultimately judge what occurred. It is likely that what was accomplished was in the end worthy of the time and effort invested: it should be duly documented and celebrated. Reaching agreement is not to be taken lightly. It is hard work, requiring a wealth of patience, perspective, and flexibility. What was achieved is significant not only for what it clarifies about the past, but more importantly, for what it opens for the future.

THE WALK IN THE WOODS IN PRACTICE
Concept: The value added of the Walk

Negotiation is a perplexing process. There are a multitude of factors at play. Some of these factors are knowable and others are not. Some of this important information is available to some people at the table and not to others. And for what is known, it is often difficult to pay attention to and account for everything that must or could be considered.

This phenomenon creates its own pitfalls and dangers. Overwhelmed and bewildered, parties can opt to heed a limited set of variables to the exclusion of those which may be critical to finding a solution. They might be distracted by variables that demand the most attention. Or they may retreat to their own comfort zone, caring only for what they want to achieve while ignoring the legitimate interests of others. This proclivity to isolate certain variables and exclude others is a danger in the negotiation process that could yield skewed or less than optimal results. It could generate new and otherwise avoidable obstacles which themselves impede forward progress. It is an important factor in negotiation failure.

By design, the Walk in the Woods intends to address the problem of collecting, exchanging, and analyzing data critical to negotiation decision-making. Though not a perfect or failsafe process, the Walk explicitly encourages stakeholders to place information on the table, pay attention to what others have added, and then use this fuller picture to drive the direction and objectives of the negotiation. It is an organizing method for the task facing the negotiators. Through the process, options, choices and consequences are made explicit. By deepening the understanding of the multiple dimensions of the problem, issues, or conflict that brought them to the table, the Walk helps stakeholders distinguish what is important from what is not.

The process also helps participants better understand one another and the dynamics that affect the course of their negotiation. And in an even more subtle way, the Walk helps parties to better understand themselves. With the focus on interests, it allows each party to explore what is critical for them to achieve in the negotiation, to distinguish what are their real priorities, and to apply these new insights to the emerging solutions and choices being considered. It is common for individuals to start with a measure of unacknowledged or even unrecognized confusion about what is really being negotiated and what really is at stake. At its best, the Walk offers participants an added measure of clarity and self-confidence along with a wider range of options from which they can make better informed choices.

Enhanced self-confidence is an important ingredient for encouraging parties to have greater confidence in one another. They are better able to identify points of agreement and generate new ideas as they better recognize what they individually hope to gain from the process and as they discover opportunities to generate mutual gain in collaboration with others. By the time they arrive at the final step of the Walk, they have already achieved three important new realizations: about themselves and the own interests; about the overlap with the interests of others; and about the potential to create change by injecting new ideas and opportunities. These "ah-ha moments" set the stage and increase the odds for them to negotiate a solution, settlement, or agreement that otherwise could have been elusive. Getting them to this point is a matter of carefully guiding them through the process.

Method: Leading a Walk in the Woods

As indicated earlier, there are any number of ways to use and apply the concepts and methods of the Walk. There are three primary categories most commonly used: 1) a guided Walk in which an expert leads others not familiar with the process, as in facilitation or mediation; 2) a collaborative Walk in which two or more people familiar with the process use it as a framework for their own discussion or negotiation; and 3) as a personal discipline used to informally guide discussion with others not familiar with the process. For the purpose of illustration, this discussion will focus on its use to formally facilitate negotiation or resolve conflict.

The first problem in setting out on a Walk in the Woods is determining who is at the table. This must be done in consultation with the parties, careful not to be overly inclusive or overly exclusive.

Once the table is set, the facilitator sets the stage for negotiation. The introduction includes a description of the problem that triggered the meeting; the outcome desired stated in general terms; and a brief description of the process. This opening should include a very brief synopsis of what is found in this paper: the premise, steps, and process for achieving an outcome that incorporates core interests of those around the table. It is often useful to include the story of the Geneva Walk in the Woods. Participants should be given an opportunity to ask questions about the process, and then move directly to step one.

As described above, each step has its own objectives, methods, and intended outcomes. Each step is designed to lay the groundwork for what comes next. It is useful to begin each step with a brief review of what is to be discussed, why, and what the step hopes to achieve. It is useful to conclude each phase with a synopsis of what has been discussed and resolved, and ways in which it leads to what happens next.

As one moves through the Walk, it is important to be flexible. Though the process has been described here as a neat, linear, step-by-step method, in real life, it does not always progress in a straight line. At times, in the midst of the enlightened interests conversation, someone wants to discuss a self-interest that they were to this point reluctant to reveal. It is wise, as appropriate to the tone of the discussion at the moment, to go back, hear what is being said, and let others comment or further contribute to this new piece of information. In other words, in practice, it is important to go with the flow, show flexibility as a facilitator, and most importantly, to use the Walk as a vehicle to encourage free flow and discovery of information. It should not be a rigid process that gets in the way.

Conclusion: Generating buy-in

In the course of their Walk, stakeholders discover an array of choices available to them and the resulting consequences linked to each. Often, they end up choosing an option that at the outset looked far less than perfect. They do so because in the course of the process, they have come to accept that the "uni-dimensional perfect" was likely unattainable, could have been secured at an unpalatable cost to others, and in the long run, would not serve their purposes. This is an important shift in thinking, and one that has taken both time and attention to achieve.

What results as a consequence of this shift is "buy-in" to a solution that they otherwise might not have accomplished. This "buy-in" is a result of the recognition that the outcome reached was likely as good as it could get, given real constraints. As a result, the parties are generally enthusiastic about the outcome they achieved. They are also encouraged by the support of others at the table, who themselves accepted an outcome that was less than what was originally seen as perfect. This measure of buy-in is perhaps the most important dividend of the Walk, and the best insurance that what was decided will be implemented in good faith. In other words, everyone wants the solution to succeed because the solution is serving everyone's best interests.

This important realization likely would not have derived from an adversarial process. It more likely, and certainly more convincingly, can emerge from the lessons learned during interest-based negotiation. By reducing the hyperbole and posturing from the negotiation process and replacing it with candor mixed with flexibility, parties are encouraged to acknowledge the possible pain that current constraints are placing on everyone at table. And they are likewise encouraged, at that point, to redirect their collective energies toward generating gains that would otherwise elude them. Simple formula: more gain, less pain.

Multi-dimensional problem solving and the Walk in the Woods serve as guides to decision making among people who share a common purpose and a shared fate. The name of the process itself is a metaphor with intentionally rich and vivid imagery. It evokes the importance of getting away from the conflict or controversy, injecting perspective into the negotiation, meaningfully engaging the stakeholders, and with that, producing something that otherwise would not have emerged. In the end, it is the ownership of process and product that is most critical to the success of the experience, for both the stakeholders who will benefit and the facilitator who has led them through the paces.