

# Four questions

Reflections from Seven Student-  
Led Policy Dialogues in Singapore

# 7 Student-led Policy Dialogues

- **Policy dialogues:** My class held 7 different dialogues in Singapore:
  - Groups of 6-12 students per class.
  - Topics included: immigration policy, maritime museum, and labour policy.
  - Policy dialogues involved broad range of real stakeholders.
- **Internal negotiations:** student groups negotiated internally to choose a dialogue topic and then convene a dialogue



# Four questions

1. How can we get the **right parties to the right table at the right time for the right reasons?**
2. How can we prepare **representatives to negotiate more effectively?**
3. How prepare people to **negotiate up hierarchies?**
4. How do perceptions of “**in-group**” and “**out-group**” affect consensus building behaviours and attitudes?

# Right people, table, time, reasons

- There is a growing demand for participation

**AND**

- Legitimate concerns about implications for governance

**WHICH, WHEN COMBINED**

- Can result in poorly designed processes that leave all parties unsatisfied.

# Preparing representatives

- Often, people come with positions.
- Positions can be more inflexible in multi-level negotiations, e.g.:
  - Hard-fought compromise between internal factions, or
  - Restricted by mandate by law, policy, etc.
- Learning at the table and relationship building **often don't extend to constituents and bosses.**

# Negotiating with “Bosses”

- Little discussion on **how to negotiate up and down hierarchies.**
- Yet, policy dialogues often involve power and authority hierarchies **at the table and behind them**
  - E.g. government officials can have great power, **and** be very restricted in what they can do.

# “In-group” negotiations are different

- Negotiations among members of the same group can be very different in style and expectations.
- Sometimes, these differences help
- Sometimes, they impede

# Conclusions

- Our thinking needs to look more at the work of getting people to the table and helping them negotiate with those behind them.



Thank you!

"High Voice/  
Participation"

"Low Voice/  
Participation"

Effective  
Negotiations

Mediated  
Negotiations

Deal Making

Weak  
Negotiations

Public Hearings

Bureaucratic  
Procedure