

IMPROVING COLLABORATIVE OUTCOMES: A REVIEW OF PROJECT  
MANAGER AND FACILITATOR ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

A Thesis

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Lisa Marie Phillips

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Abstract  
of  
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Collaboration addresses the “knottiest” of problems that society faces, and collaboration addressing natural resource management issues becomes as complex as the ecosystems collaborative groups affect. While collaborative processes have received more scholarly attention in recent years, relatively little work has investigated the nature of two key roles and the relationship between them: project managers and facilitators. My study focused on these topics and how they may influence outcomes in collaborative processes involving natural resource management issues.

A data set that investigates all possible factors controlled by project managers and facilitators does not exist. Additionally, individual research methods carried risks and weaknesses that were unacceptable. Accordingly, I relied on multiple research methods. I utilized observation of collaborative meetings and interviews with project managers and facilitators to identify components of the collaborative process that improve outcomes in natural resource management. Observation of collaborative meetings provided opportunities to understand and witness various collaborative processes and the relationship between individuals in the project manager and facilitator roles. Interviews

provided depth to individual reasoning and an opportunity to understand the intricacies of the relationship between project managers and facilitators.

Through my research it became apparent that both project managers and facilitators view themselves as central to the collaborative process, which can cause tension between the individuals in each role. I present six practical recommendations to improve outcomes of collaborative processes addressing natural resource management. The recommendations provided are a direct result of the observations conducted and findings from my interviews with facilitators and project managers.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Collaboration has become a popular buzzword to indicate teamwork toward a common goal. Collaboration can occur, and be effective on large and small-scale projects or problems. It can be used for public projects, within organizations, or between members of a community trying to solve a problem, develop policy, or execute a project. Collaboration requires more than simply working together; it often requires a different thought process, willingness to think “outside the box,” and a willingness to compromise. A review and understanding of collaboration, when it can be used appropriately, and the parties involved in a collaborative effort can provide those involved, or considering involvement in collaborative process guidance on how it differs from other projects and experiences.

#### **Research Question**

Effective execution of the facilitator and project manager roles is regularly identified as a factor critical to the outcome of the effort (Doyle & Straus, 1976; Fisher & Ury, 1991, Innes & Booher, 2010; Lewicki, Gray, & Elliott, 2003; Sabatier et al., 2005; Straus, 2002; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Given the critical importance of the facilitator and project manager roles, and the relationship between them, it seems appropriate to fully investigate and learn about the best practices and those that reduce effectiveness in these roles and relationships. My primary goal is to contribute research that identifies ways a project manager and facilitator can understand their roles and work

together to improve outcomes in collaborative processes dealing with natural resource issues. The research question I will seek to answer is:

How do project managers, facilitators, and the relationship between them influence outcomes in collaborative processes involving natural resource management?

The first step to answering the question is defining it through operationalizing the terms and concepts. The *project manager* is typically the leader responsible for the project or proposal (Doyle & Straus, 1976; Straus, 2002). The *facilitator* remains neutral throughout the collaborative process, attending to issues of process and running the meeting when parties with different interests are present. The *relationship between them* refers to the relationship and dynamics that occur between the individual project manager and facilitator. The term *influence* refers to the level of impact that the project manager, facilitator, or their relationship has on the outcome. The *outcome* is the final result, and would be defined as the project or product the collaborative group was charged with creating or implementing. A *collaborative process* occurs when people work together to plan, create, solve problems, or make decisions. *Natural resources* are resources or substances that occur in nature, such as water, trees, animals, and air. *Management* of natural resources can take many forms, from conservation of an individual resource, to decisions affecting multiple resources. It is important to note that success in collaborative efforts is difficult to define, as there are situations where the best outcome may be that a project is cancelled or merged as a result of a collaborative process. The

difficulty defining collaboration and success in natural resource management projects combined with a lack of published research on the dynamic relationship between project managers and facilitators provided the impetus for this research.

### **What is Collaboration?**

Collaboration occurs when people work together to plan, create, solve problems, or make decisions. The terms collaboration, collaborative process, collaborative action, and collaborative problem solving, are used interchangeably throughout the literature (Straus, 2002). Collaboration seeks to build understanding, make wise decisions that are widely supported, get work done, and build capacity between agencies, organizations and communities (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). The Center for Collaborative Policy at California State University, Sacramento defines collaborative policy making and public participation as “a multiparty consensus-seeking process whereby representatives of all parties significantly affected by a public policy issue or decision craft a solution that meets the vital interests of all parties, including the public interest” (Center for Collaborative Policy [CCP], 2014, para. 1). Government agencies frequently have competing interests in accomplishing their mandates and collaboration is an appropriate tool to find common ground and develop solutions.

### **When is Collaboration Used?**

Collaboration is often used when the parties have more to lose by operating individually than they can lose if they attempt working together (Innes & Booher, 2010; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). It is also used when the parties expect to maintain

relationships beyond the current issue (Innes & Booher, 2010; Straus, 2002; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). The Center for Collaborative Policy offers 11 conditions that create a favorable environment for collaboration:

Table 1.1

*Conditions that Create a Favorable Environment for Collaboration*

<b>Condition</b>
<b>1.</b> Issues do not focus on Constitutional rights or basic societal values
<b>2.</b> There are potential areas for agreement and opportunities for trade-offs
<b>3.</b> The primary parties are identifiable and committed to participation
<b>4.</b> Each party has a legitimate spokesperson
<b>5.</b> Parties with the potential to act as deal breakers are at the table
<b>6.</b> No party has assurance of a better deal elsewhere
<b>7.</b> The parties anticipate future interactions
<b>8.</b> There is a relative balance of power among the parties
<b>9.</b> There are external pressures to reach agreement
<b>10.</b> There is a realistic timeline for completion
<b>11.</b> Adequate resources and funding are available to support negotiation

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Source: CCP (n.d.a)

### **Who is Involved in Collaboration?**

Throughout the literature, the parties regularly identified as being involved in collaboration are facilitators or mediators, project managers, and stakeholders. Recorders are identified in some of the literature, but the role can be accomplished through a variety of means.

Facilitators or mediators remain neutral throughout the collaborative process, running the meeting when parties with different interests are present and assisting the parties in gaining consensus. A facilitator is typically present during high-conflict negotiations, though they can be useful in everyday negotiations and meetings. Facilitators have been identified as a critical component of success in collaborative efforts (Doyle & Straus, 1976; Lowry, n.d.; Straus, 2002).

The facilitator is typically hired under contract by the agency or organization with primary responsibility for the project. While contracts can differ, facilitators are normally responsible for issues of “process,” which include: assessment of the issue being addressed, meeting logistics and scheduling, creation and setting the agenda, educate participants, and the use of innovative tactics to advance consensus and break gridlock.

Facilitators are trained to ask questions and educate parties involved in collaborative efforts to identify their interests, as opposed to their positions, and encourage all parties to engage in interest-based bargaining, which is designed to drill down to each parties true motivations and needs. Fisher and Ury (1991) identify a

*position* as something you have decided on, and an *interest* as the underlying driver that caused you to decide on a position. Straus (2002) notes that skilled facilitators who are properly modeling and educating participants to identify and negotiate based on their interests are likely to educate themselves out of a job with small groups that meet over a period of time.

Project managers (also called leaders, manager, or chairperson) are typically the leaders responsible for the project or proposal (Doyle & Straus, 1976; Straus, 2002). Lowry further states the project manager should have sufficient stature to mobilize resources and participation of key stakeholders without an expectation of a pre-determined outcome. A project manager typically uses coordination, communication, and scheduling to manage a project from inception through implementation and beyond. The project manager coordinates with others internally and externally to accomplish and define the project scope, develop the project and implementation strategies, provide planning and support, manage resource allocation, track deliverables, communicate with all required parties. The project manager also typically serves as the lead for environmental compliance coordination. Project managers largely rely on communication and planning skills, and relationships to accomplish their vast mandate successfully.

In government-run natural resource projects, the project managers employing agency typically have statutory authority to design, build, or implement a project.



Awareness and knowledge of the statutory authority available to a project can inform and assist a project manager in performing their role.

Stakeholders are the representatives of individuals, groups, and organizations that have an interest in a proposed action or project. Stakeholder interest could stem from support or opposition to a proposed action or project, an actual or perceived impact by the project, or a desire to learn about a proposal or project (Doyle & Straus, 1976; Lowry, n.d.; Straus, 2002). Stakeholders have a significant impact on the outcome of any collaborative process and there is a large body of literature available on stakeholder engagement and stakeholder management.

Recorders take notes to produce minutes and document the decisions gained during the collaborative process (Doyle & Straus, 1976; Straus, 2002). The formal role of a recorder is discussed in some of the literature, but the concept and recommendation to document decisions appears regularly as a process-oriented function that is important in collaboration. Technological innovations that record meetings and make them available to play back can also be utilized in this capacity.

### **Format of Thesis**

This first chapter introduced collaboration, identified the parties involved in collaboration, discussed when collaboration is used, and most importantly, and identified a specific question about determinants of successful collaboration that needs to be investigated. Chapter 2 provides an overview of literature available on collaborative processes and instructional texts designed for facilitators and project managers. Chapter

3 provides a framework and explanation of the methods utilized in my research. Chapter 4 provides and analyzes the results of observations and interviews conducted during my research. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes key findings and draws implications for improving collaborative processes.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand how project managers, facilitators, and the relationship between them influence outcomes of collaborative processes involving natural resources management it was important to understand the existing body of literature. There is a reasonable body of “how-to” literature in books and professional guides addressing negotiation, mediation, and meeting management. Numerous books recount case studies of natural resource management projects, comparing and contrasting successful and failed projects. Stakeholder management is addressed regularly throughout the literature, but a description or review of the dynamic relationship between facilitators and project managers was missing. This chapter summarizes the literature reviewed by attempting to define collaboration, explain the collaborative process and its participants, and review the concepts of success and failure as they relate to collaborative efforts.

#### **Defining Collaboration**

The DIAD (diversity, interdependence, authentic dialogue) theory tells us when groups with a diversity of interdependent interests engage in authentic dialogue they develop reciprocity, build relationships, learn together, and inspire creativity which then leads to shared identities, shared meanings, new heuristics, and innovation (Innes & Booher, 2010). Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000) assert that collaboration seeks to build understanding, make wise decisions that are widely supported, get work done, and build capacity between agencies, organizations and communities.

The Center for Collaborative Policy (CCP) at California State University, Sacramento takes a slightly different approach by including the concept of seeking consensus and focusing on the outcome in its definition of collaborative policy making. CCP defines collaborative policy making as “a multiparty consensus-seeking process whereby representatives of all parties significantly affected by a public policy issue or decision craft a solution that meets the vital interests of all parties, including the public interest” (CCP, 2014, para. 1). Beyond the definition of collaborative policymaking, CCP contends that the use of a collaborative process leads to a long-term network that results in shared learning, improved relationships, and better joint problem solving. CCP also states that decisions made using collaboration are easier to implement, receive fewer legal challenges, make better use of resources, and serve the public better because the collaborative process allows decision makers to have more data and a deeper understanding of participant interests (CCP, 2014).

### **The Process of Collaboration**

Innes and Booher (2010) identify five overlapping phases of collaboration – planning, organization, education, negotiation and resolution, and implementation. CCP developed a document identifying these five phases of collaboration, activities likely to occur during each phase, and challenges to the phases and process of collaboration (see Appendix A).

The Collaborative Leaders Network (Lowry, n.d.) has offered nine stages of collaborative problem solving which he contends systematically build toward consensus

because participants analyze the issues, hear from experts, generate and evaluate options, review draft documents, and revisit group agreements at every stage. The nine stages of collaboration offered are: clarify intention, background inquiry, process design, group launch, issue analysis, generate options, evaluate options, produce documents, and executive review.

### **The Individuals in the Process**

Throughout the literature on collaboration, effective execution of the facilitator and project manager roles is regularly identified as a factor critical to the outcome of the effort (Doyle & Straus, 1976; Fisher & Ury, 1991; Innes & Booher, 2010; Lewicki et al., 2003; Sabatier et al., 2005; Straus, 2002; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Given the critical importance of the facilitator and project manager roles, and the relationship between them, it seems appropriate to fully investigate and learn about the best practices and those that reduce effectiveness in these roles and relationships. In the previous chapter, I provided an overview of the roles and relationships among the parties involved in collaboration; this chapter provides a review of what the literature suggests regarding how such relationships can enhance or impede the collaborative process.

The literature suggests the facilitator, project manager, and available stakeholders should work closely to assess whether collaboration is the appropriate mechanism to address an issue. The facilitator should spend time with the project manager and stakeholders ahead of facilitated meetings to gain an understanding of the issue, the commitment of the parties, whether the parties have better alternatives available

elsewhere, the deal makers and deal breakers, and assist with identification of additional stakeholders and appropriate representatives (CCP, 2014; Innes & Booher, 2010). Once the collaborative group is formed, the facilitator will also educate the group about interest-based collaboration, finalize stakeholder representation, attend to meeting logistics and schedule planning, lead the group in defining their ground rules and developing strategic documents, and assist the group in determining how to make decisions (CCP, 2014; Innes & Booher, 2010).

Doyle and Straus initially developed the Interaction Method as a conceptual method to share responsibility and ensure that parties involved in a collaborative effort stayed in their role. The Interaction Method has since been expanded so shared responsibility for success is central to the method, which also includes parties involved in the collaborative effort exhibiting a collaborative attitude, exercising strategic thinking, and using facilitative behaviors to build understanding and agreement (Straus, 2002). The Interaction Method suggests that the facilitator and recorder should have primary responsibility for issues of process; while the project manager and stakeholders should have primary responsibility for addressing the problem.

### **Defining Success and Failure**

Straus (2002) defines success of a collaborative effort as the participants being satisfied with all three dimensions of the effort: results, process, and relationships. While Straus does not offer instruments to measure participant satisfaction of those dimensions, he does define them. He defines results in terms of whether agreement was reached or

not. Numerous organizations have recognized that agreement occurs on a graduated scale, and have created instruments to measure an individual participant's level of agreement (see Appendix B for examples). Straus (2002) goes on to state that if participants do not like the process used to reach agreement, or do not feel like their concerns were heard, they are likely to be unsatisfied with the effort. If the process and agreement were acceptable, Straus (2002) notes that participants may still feel anger, resentment, or distance in their relationship with others based upon individual behavior during the meeting.

Leach and Sabatier (2005) developed a quantitative analysis to determine if trust and social capital were the keys to success in California and Washington state watershed partnerships. They identified the following three measures of success in watershed partnerships: the level of agreement on substantive issues, the implementation and extent to which the members of a long-term collaborative partnership follow through on their commitments, and the perceived outcome was a surrogate measure for the actual outcome due to the complications of measuring actual environmental outcomes in watershed projects (Sabatier et al., 2005). They designed a survey to measure these variables and performed a series of mathematical regressions that ultimately led to the following conclusions:

Table 2.1

*Leach & Sabatier's Findings*

Factor	Findings
Level of Agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust is an important factor in promoting agreement; however, young partnerships can overcome distrust to reach complex agreements.</li> <li>• Agreements are more likely when a state of crisis exists and stakeholders have strong norms of reciprocity and adequate authority to negotiate on behalf of the organizations they represent.</li> <li>• Social capital and process also impact the level of agreement.</li> </ul>
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insulated from the effects of trust and social and human capital, except for the influence of trust and social and human capital on agreements.</li> <li>• Once agreements are reached, implementation primarily depends on the resources of time and money.</li> <li>• Process and context of the project impact implementation.</li> </ul>
Perceived Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust and social capital have a strong influence on perceptions of a partnership's outcome.</li> <li>• The outcome also influences social capital in a reciprocal manner.</li> <li>• The process, context of the project, and implementation also impact the perceived outcome.</li> </ul>

It has frequently been said that “Success begets success.” Collaborative literature places significant emphasis on recognizing and celebrating successes early and often (Fisher & Ury, 1991; Sabatier et al., 2005; Scholz & Stiffel, 2005; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000) further make the point that getting people from various agencies talking about a problem gets people's attention, which is a magnet for



more attention, leading to more resources and an increased ability to work on the issue, translating to success.

### **Improving Outcomes**

Stakeholder commitment is frequently identified as a factor leading to success of a collaborative effort. If a stakeholder has an attractive alternative to being at the table addressing the issue, their commitment to the process could waiver; stakeholders who are local, and expecting to work together in the future are likely to view involvement in a collaborative process as an investment likely to return future reciprocity and increase human capital. Stakeholders frequently report engaging and maintaining involvement in collaborative processes due to fear of what could happen if they are not engaged or their inability to advance individual interests to achieve their goals (Innes & Booher, 2010; Lewicki et al., 2003; Sabatier et al., 2005; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Some stakeholders engage in a collaborative effort to earn positive public relations, or an opportunity to gain access to relevant stakeholders; a timber equipment company used a collaborative effort as an opportunity to reach out to environmental groups that were perceived to be down on logging, showing them the benefits of the equipment and timber management (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Early outreach to stakeholders, especially those who may be opposed to the project, ensures that options under consideration are not self-limited. Such outreach is also likely to build broad support and commitment; efforts with a wide constituency offering support and commitment experience greater success

and fewer challenges in the implementation phase (Sabatier et al., 2005; Straus, 2002; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000).

Freedom to think “outside the box” and support from agency leadership can also enhance a collaborative process. For example, United States Forest Service employees were meeting to develop an ecosystem management approach for an entire watershed. As the ecosystem was reaching the point of crisis, the staff group was unable to plan or implement projects. Finally, agency leadership told the collaborative group the only bounds on their activities were that their decisions could not adversely affect employees within the area, and could not conflict with laws or resource directives from Congress. According to the project manager, that statement from leadership “kicked the door open,” attracting people and ideas to the project, and providing the group the freedom they needed to be creative and innovative in their approach to ecosystem management (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Freedom to think creatively, crisis, and having individuals with authority to negotiate agreements involved in collaborative efforts are frequently identified as components that improve outcomes (Lewicki et al., 2003; Sabatier et al., 2005; Scholz & Stiftel, 2005; Straus, 2002; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000).

It is crucial to define the mission and goals of a collaborative effort, as this promotes the development of a common vision and shared understanding of the problem. The development of charter documents and definition of goals and ground rules can also be logical places to begin setting up “small wins” and gain consensus from participants. Effective execution of the facilitator and project manager roles is regularly identified as a

factor critical to the outcome of the effort. When a facilitator is involved, they typically have primary responsibility for the creation of ground rules, mission statements, and goals (Doyle & Straus, 1976; Fisher & Ury, 1991; Innes & Booher, 2010; Lewicki et al., 2003; Sabatier et al., 2005; Straus, 2002; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Straus (2002) identifies providing tools to collaborative groups as one of the functions of a facilitator. Wondolleck and Yaffee (2002) discuss a community development project where the facilitator provided participants disposable cameras and instructed them to take ten pictures of community features they liked and ten pictures of features they did not like. The facilitator then organized the pictures to assist the group in developing a shared understanding, which then allowed the group to frame their mission and goal statements (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000).

The examples and stories told above represent a few of the most innovative ideas to advance collaboration and improve outcomes in natural resource projects using collaborative processes. The following recommendations in Table 2.2 to improve collaborative outcomes appear regularly throughout the literature:

Table 2.2

*Summary of Recommendations to Improve Collaboration from the Literature*

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Effect</b>
Build reciprocity	Creates a long-term relationship and shows willingness to work together
Identify common interests	Provides an opportunity to bridge compatible yet disparate interests
Conduct field trips or site visits	Provides opportunity for mutual learning and understanding
Create a project identity or logo	Generates agreement and strengthens commitment and pride of the parties
Maintain local decision-making to the extent possible	Increases stakeholder and public commitment and ownership of the decisions and process
Utilize project champions	Individuals who believe in the project can work through their individual networks to gain others approval and interest in the project
Develop written vision and mission statements	Provides all parties with an understanding of the project context

Table 2.2. continued

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Effect</b>
Develop written Memorandum of Understanding	Provides legitimacy to the process and symbolizes commitment from the parties
Educate participants and the public	Provides opportunity for mutual learning and understanding
Include the proper stakeholders (including opponents) and ensure they are involved early in the process	Increases transparency Reduces likelihood of litigation Opportunity to communicate and build mutual understanding
Make choices by consensus	Provides participants ownership of the approach Symbolizes commitment to equality
Have face-to-face meetings	Increases context and understanding
Employ a legitimate and fair facilitator	Increases transparency Increases equality
Establish ground rules	Opportunity for early agreements Frames the discussion

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Table 2.2. continued

Recommendation	Effect
Provide food	Increases casual conversation and individual understanding of participants Provides nourishment
Share fears	Provides context and understanding
Develop and share the idea that “We are all in this together”	Invites shared ownership of the problem, the process, and the outcome

### **Challenges to Collaboration**

Innes and Booher (2010) acknowledge the coexistence of collaborative processes with standard governance structures is a challenge; in the case of CALFED, elected officials imposed hierarchical structures, accountability and oversight on the collaborative effort, which reduced the trust and open dialogue that are central requirements to collaboration, effectively halting the collaboration that had been occurring.

Line-item budgeting, the budget process, and annual budgeting are widely identified as a challenge to collaborative efforts, as typical government budgeting is focused on functional area rather than project needs. The provision of basic human needs, such as food and drink has been identified as a factor that improves participation in meetings; however, it is often borne as an out-of-pocket expense by participants due to budgeting constraints. Free riders are those without an investment in a collaborative

effort, and can damage the effort. Occasionally, a stakeholder without the ability to make equitable contributions to a collaborative effort can contribute food and drink to display an investment in the effort (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000).

The examples and stories told above represent a few of the most challenging aspects of natural resource projects using collaborative processes. The challenges in Table 2.3 appear regularly throughout the literature:

Table 2.3

*Summary of Challenges from Literature*

Challenge
Conflicting goals and mission
Staff turnover
Lack of statutory authority
Lack of resources (e.g. time, money, personnel)
Line-item budgeting
Lack of trust
Group attitudes about each other
Lack of support or commitment
Concerns about private property rights
Assumptions
Individual willingness to try a new approach
Territorial agency staff

### **Does Failure Exist in Collaboration?**

Collaboration generally seeks to address the most complicated problems society faces, frequently referred to as wicked problems or knotty problems, in reference to the Gordian knot. Like a Gordian knot, issues surrounding natural resource management are frequently so complicated and so interwoven that untangling the knot becomes virtually impossible and those involved are required to think “outside the box” to overcome the intractable nature of the problem. As with the Gordian knot, the temptations to cheat and cut the knot exist, but those actions would not address the problem.

Relationships are complicated and ever changing; the foundation of collaboration is relationships. Similar to any relationship, breakdowns and failures do occur in collaboration over natural resource issues, but the problems remain and impact individual lives. The desire for change is fueled by those impacted, and they become moved to action when they experience discomfort. While failure exists in collaboration, it serves as an opportunity to step back, conduct triage of the effort, and make the proper adjustments to move forward again. Each failure has to be viewed as a learning opportunity because the problems that collaborative efforts for natural resource management seek to address will only continue to exist and compound as time goes on.

### **Conclusion**

While definitions and processes exist in the literature about collaboration, they are varied and building upon one another. The literature offers significant information and agreement on the roles of facilitators and project managers, but does little to address how



the relationship between facilitators and project managers influences the outcome of collaborative efforts. In this chapter, I identified the metrics commonly measured to define successful outcomes, and provided listings of recommendations and challenges that appear regularly throughout the literature. My research draws on the experience of project managers and facilitators actively engaged in collaborative efforts to further refine the definition of collaboration, identify factors that influence outcomes, and investigate the effect that the relationship between facilitators and project managers has on outcomes.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

Research can take many forms, and there were numerous research methods available to help identify components of collaborative processes that improve outcomes in natural resource management. My own study rested on two methods: *observation of actual collaborative processes* and *interviews with people who acted as facilitators and project managers in collaborative processes*. Observations provided opportunities to understand and appreciate the sensitivity of the collaborative process and the relationships of those involved in collaborative meetings. Interviews provided depth to individual reasoning and an opportunity to explore concepts with seasoned professionals drawing from multiple projects and experiences with collaboration, as well as the opportunity to understand the intricacies of the relationships between project managers and facilitators. While each method had strengths, they also carried risks and weaknesses that were unacceptable individually. The use of multiple research methods increases the reliability of findings through drawing on the strengths of each method and mitigating the weaknesses of the individual methods.

My research is informed by a quantitative study conducted by William Leach and Paul Sabatier (2005), which is further explained in the literature review chapter of this thesis. The data collected for Leach and Sabatier's study focused on the roles of social capital and interpersonal trust to explain variations in success of watershed partnerships. I am interested in finding a variety of factors that influence outcomes in natural resource

collaboration, which can provide project managers and facilitators an understanding of how they can influence outcomes individually and through their relationship with one another. A data set that investigates all possible factors controlled by project managers and facilitators does not exist.

### **Variables**

Explanatory research investigates the relationships between variables and attempts to explain the relationships in terms of cause-and-effect (Singleton & Straits, 2010). One of the limitations of explanatory research in a social environment is that causality cannot be proven, but can be inferred. Dependent variables are what research attempts to explain and independent variables are presumed to cause or have an impact on the dependent variable.

Leach and Sabatier (2005) utilized surveys and interviews designed to measure the level of agreement; the implementation status and level of follow-through on projects; and participants perception of the outcome when they studied the effect of trust and social capital on watershed partnerships. In Leach and Sabatier's study, the dependent variable was success in watershed partnerships; the survey and interview instruments sought to understand the effect of independent variables such as: level of agreement, interpersonal trust, new social capital, perception of crisis, reciprocity, funding, longevity of partnership, and authority to negotiate. This listing of independent variables is not exhaustive; the literature review portion of this thesis contains further information about the Leach and Sabatier study.

In collaborative processes, outcomes vary widely, and projects can be subject to change or abandoned due to factors beyond participant control, including funding and legal requirements. Identification of dependent and independent variables influencing the outcome of an individual collaborative process are as individual as the combination of the collaborative effort and the participants, the processes utilized, interaction of the parties, and the facilitation styles. My goal is to identify independent variables that exist in the project manager role, the facilitator role, or the relationship between them, which influence the outcome of collaborative efforts. The dependent variable is the outcome (success or failure) of the collaborative effort, and is being measured based upon the perception of the individual being interviewed at a moment in time. That is, with the data at hand I can only measure *perceived* success or failure; I have no direct measures of those outcomes.

The multiple methods research approach that primarily includes observations and interviews provides opportunities to understand and investigate the relationships between variables and is likely to reveal trends in cause-and-effect, with a series of “best practices” becoming evident. While uncertainty remains, project managers and facilitators may be able to draw on perceived relationships among variables in a trial capacity. For example, the literature states the provision of food during a meeting can encourage casual conversation and relationship building amongst participants. A project manager or facilitator who is working with a group that is struggling to build relationships may try providing food, and then observe whether participant relationships

change and casual conversation ensues as a result. In this example, a causal connection would not be proven, but a positive trend of relationship building could be observed.

### **Observations**

Field research typically begins with observations, even when other research methods are being employed (Singleton & Strait, 2010). Field observation provides an opportunity to observe the participants in their natural setting, and is useful in research of social phenomena (Singleton & Strait, 2010). Unstructured observation of various collaborative meetings afforded me an opportunity to witness the interaction between project managers, facilitators, and stakeholders involved in various collaborative efforts. As a result of the literature review and unstructured observations, my research question and understanding of collaboration and the dynamics of collaborative meetings have evolved from a broad discussion of the components that improve outcomes to a more focused discussion of how project managers, facilitators, and the relationship between them impacts outcomes of collaborative processes involving natural resource management. I used interviews to crosscheck my observations and gain a better understanding of observed behaviors and practices.

Collaborative processes are often sensitive to individuals outside the process being involved and publishing information, so I worked with multiple facilitators to gain access to collaborative groups for observation. The identity of those I observed and interviewed is not crucial to my analysis; therefore their identities and projects are not identified, however my academic advisors are aware of them. Each of the five meetings I

observed were public meetings convened by a public agency in fall of 2013 to address natural resource issues with stakeholders, and utilized a facilitator. I did have the opportunity to observe one collaborative group twice, so I observed the dynamics of four collaborative groups. While attending the meetings, I primarily paid attention to the agenda, the surroundings, and the interactions among the facilitator, project manager(s), and stakeholders to gain a practical understanding of concepts I was reading in the literature.

### **Observations Related to Collaborative Group #1**

Collaborative group 1 was developing criteria and design standards for infrastructure improvements and repairs, and I had two separate opportunities to observe this group. The project manager leading this effort had a relaxed demeanor, but generally appeared overwhelmed. The facilitator seemed confident, and the facilitator's presence would ebb and flow throughout the meetings. The tables were set up in a square with the project manager seated in the center of one of the tables, along with the stakeholders. The facilitator was in the front and center of the room for the welcome and initial remarks, but moved naturally throughout the room during the meetings.

There was a dynamic between the project manager and the facilitator involved in this group where the project manager relied heavily on the facilitator for time management, and the facilitator would joke about having the role of "time cop". On several occasions the facilitator would verbally say that a "time check" was being performed, and then reminded the participants of the goals for the meeting, explicitly

stated the amount of time left, and set guidelines to ensure the goals would still be accomplished. Early in one of the meetings, the facilitator recognized that the project manager was reviewing comments at such a detailed level that time and stakeholder interest were quickly slipping, so the facilitator stepped in and encouraged the project manager to maintain a high-level review by only reviewing controversial or significant comments.

Based on observation during breaks, before, and after the meetings it was clear that many of the stakeholders work together regularly and have personal and professional knowledge and respect for one another. Humor was present at various points in the meetings, and was generally well received, but was occasionally at the expense of individual stakeholders. There were times the facilitator stepped in to soften the humor and move the group forward. The project manager had very little interaction with the stakeholders during breaks and before or after meetings, but exhibited genuine appreciation and was thoughtful of their comments and contributions during the meetings.

During one of the meetings, substantial conversation focused on the development of the introduction and proper framing of the document being created. As the meeting progressed, issues that needed to be included in the introduction continued to be identified, such that a robust introduction became likely. There were times stakeholders seemed to have trouble coming to consensus or essentially decided an issue was too

cumbersome to tackle, so “group think” ultimately caused the introduction to become the “dumping ground” for those issues.

### **Observations Related to Collaborative Group #2**

Collaborative group 2 was developing a natural resource management plan. There were two project managers involved in this effort, who both seemed aware of the principles of collaboration. The meeting I attended was the facilitator’s first facilitation with the group, which had been in existence and working together for some time. Tables were arranged in a “U-shape”, with the project managers facing the participants on one side in front of the room, and the facilitator had a podium in the front of the room, facing participants on the opposite side. The facilitator seemed very formal and maintained a presence that was central to the meeting.

The facilitator had participants indicate a desire to speak and contribute by turning their name tents on end, which seemed to be considerably less distracting and more noticeable than raising hands.

There were times it seemed that the group was bringing the facilitator along, and I am not sure if that was a technique used by the facilitator to ensure that all participants had a clear, consistent understanding, or if that was done so the facilitator could properly recap and provide minutes for the meeting, or if it was simply a function of the fact that it was the facilitator’s first exposure to the group. The facilitator generally stood without full visibility of the project managers who were located to the side and rear. There were a few occasions when the project managers were using nonverbal cues the facilitator could



not see due to their position within the room, indicating they felt they had consensus and an understanding of stakeholder desires, and were ready to move along.

The project managers were visibly appreciative of input by the stakeholders, often nodding their heads in agreement, and voicing appreciation for stakeholder involvement and comments. In addition to stakeholders, a cadre of technical advisors and regulators were involved in the meeting, and the project managers regularly thanked them and showed appreciation, acknowledging that their involvement “kept the dialogue open amidst the uncertainty of a changing regulatory environment”. They also regularly developed and shared the idea that there was shared ownership of the problem with verbal comments like “We are all in the same boat together.”

This observation was conducted during a federal government shutdown, and the group was awaiting a deliverable report from a federal agency impacted by the shutdown. The project managers acknowledged the uncertainty and stakeholder concerns related to receipt of the report by coming up with two distinct alternatives and a commitment to work with the federal agency and report back to the group at the next meeting. The issue of when the report would be received also highlighted a concern about differences in timing of public budgeting, which is widely regarded as a challenge to collaborative processes. Again, the project managers expressed appreciation for the concerns, and then used the meeting as an opportunity to be transparent and share their constraints and concerns about issuing their management plan with and without data from the federal agency. Ultimately, the issue had to be tabled to the next meeting for a final decision, but

a clear understanding of project manager and stakeholder concerns was attained, as well as a general consensus on the alternatives available.

The group used stickers to allow participants to vote for a visual logo and identity during the meeting, which aligns with scholarly suggestions as a way to create buy-in and establish a group identity. The final outcome was one vote short of unanimous and all parties acknowledged and celebrated the high level of agreement as a “win”.

### **Observations Related to Collaborative Group #3**

Collaborative group 3 was developing a strategic plan for management of a natural resource. There were about 40 participants present, and a contracted facilitator was responsible for time management and logistics, including participant movement. Circular tables were arranged throughout the room, and each table had two employees of the convening agency; one served as the table facilitator, ensuring all participants had an opportunity to participate and enforcing ground rules; the other employee of the convening agency was a note taker, responsible for capturing the decisions made through the facilitated discussion. The project managers and contract facilitator moved naturally throughout the room to maintain a pulse of table discussions and communicate with table facilitators.

During the first half of the workshop, the facilitator was in control of the meeting and responsible for time management, and the meeting ran according to the published agenda. At the break, the facilitator had to leave. Project managers from the convening agency took over facilitation in the facilitators absence, and the agenda and schedule

immediately began slipping, causing the workshop to conclude 25 minutes later than scheduled. By the time the workshop concluded, about half of the participants had left and those that remained appeared to be either stakeholders with an axe to grind, those seeking a moment with convening agency personnel, or visibly irritated but trying to be respectful by staying to the end. The convening agency's project managers took all questions, entertaining those stakeholders that likely would have been shut down by a neutral facilitator.

#### **Observations Related to Collaborative Group #4**

Collaborative group 4 was an advisory group convened by a public agency charged with development of natural resources regulations. The project manager seemed competent and knowledgeable, and was willing to admit knowledge deficits, but seemed to have an emotional commitment to the work which had been completed. The facilitator was prominent in opening and closing the meeting, and maintained an obvious interest in time management throughout the meeting. Tables were arranged in a "U-shape", with the project manager sitting on one side, in the front of the room. The facilitator primarily sat across from the project manager but occasionally moved front and center.

The project manager expressed appreciation for participant involvement and presence in the beginning and end of the meeting which was genuine and well-received by the stakeholders; however, early in the meeting, the project manager established dominance by advising stakeholders that their comments would be considered, but not necessarily incorporated into the final regulatory document. The stakeholders were

clearly competent professionals who knew their industry, and risked overregulation or industry shutdown if they did not participate in the collaborative effort. There was a strong emphasis from the stakeholders that they did not want the regulators telling them how to do their job, but simply wanted the requirements to be outlined so they could exercise appropriate professional judgment and minimize regulatory burden.

This meeting had more tension than the other observation opportunities I had, which seemed to be a function of the project manager's establishment of dominance and willingness to push back against the stakeholders and facilitator. At one point a stakeholder questioned the project manager's experience, and the facilitator immediately re-focused the conversation to the issue-at-hand before the project manager had an opportunity to respond or jeopardize relations with the stakeholders.

The meeting was scheduled from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., and it seemed as if all participants were growing hungry and agitated toward the end, despite snacks being provided. Shortly before the meeting ended, one stakeholder embarked on an overt speech backing their position, then "respectfully disagreed" when the facilitator tried to move the meeting forward. The facilitator moved the decision to the stakeholder group on whether to move forward or allow the individual stakeholder's positional speech to continue. The stakeholders agreed to move forward as a group, and then the project manager said something that opened the floor for the stakeholders positional speech to continue. Ultimately, the project manager became visibly anxious and left the room for a few minutes. The facilitator continued the meeting in the project manager's absence.

## **Interviews**

Interviews provide an opportunity to expand and confirm information gained through the literature review and observations, and provide a detailed understanding of the depth of reasoning behind project manager and facilitator actions. I used interviews of project managers and facilitators involved in collaborative processes to gain a better understanding of their roles, their interactions with one another, how they view collaboration, and which components they believe impact outcomes. Stakeholders have a critical role in collaborative efforts, and can impact the project such that it succeeds or fails. The success of active projects could have been compromised if I became involved with stakeholders; therefore, stakeholders were observed, but were not interviewed for this research project.

I interviewed three facilitators and four project managers that have experience with collaborative processes addressing natural resource or environmental issues. As with many collaborative projects, the resource constraint of time limited the number of individuals I was able to interview, but I interviewed those individuals I was able to gain reasonable access to within the timeline available. Each of the project managers interviewed has ten years or more experience in project management dealing with natural resource issues, is presently employed by a public agency, and has prior project management experience as a consultant. One additional project manager was invited to participate, but did not respond to the invitation. Each of the facilitators interviewed had seven to 30 years of facilitation experience, and experience with natural resource

disputes. Three facilitators were invited and participated in interviews. It should be noted that the project managers and facilitators that I had access to for interviews were not necessarily the same individuals observed.

I expected the interviews to provide the most practical information and insight into practices useful for those involved in collaborative processes. Since interviews involve individuals, I developed a written consent form and interview questions (see Appendix C), then gained approval from the Human Subjects Committee on campus prior to performing interviews. I gained written consent of the individuals being interviewed at the time of the interview. The interview questions were designed to provide an understanding of when and how facilitators are used, illustrate and define the roles and relationship between project managers and facilitators, and draw on individual experiences to identify factors which impact the outcomes of collaborative efforts dealing with natural resource management. I assured all interview subjects' anonymity to the extent they desired it and traveled to their offices when it was practical, so they could speak more openly. The interviews were each scheduled for an hour, with most requiring 50 to 60 minutes. Two interviews were held via phone due to scheduling and distance constraints, one was held in a public café, and the rest were held in the participants' offices where they had a reasonable degree of comfort and privacy. In the results chapter, I did not seek to compare individual project managers nor facilitators, but sought to understand the best practices they employ in their roles and during collaborative meetings to improve the likelihood of a successful outcome.

## **Conclusion**

My goal is to understand how project managers, facilitators, and the relationship between them influence the outcome of collaborative processes involving natural resource management. There was no data set available with this information, so I relied on observation of public meetings addressing natural resource management issues, and interviews of project managers and facilitators to understand the dynamic interaction of the individuals, their roles, and how they influence outcomes. The next chapter provides the results of my research.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

#### **Collaboration: Beyond the Buzzword**

When I asked interview participants to define a collaborative effort, they unanimously made the point that collaboration is about the parties involved in the process having an opportunity to provide input on the project, and be heard and understood. Consensus was generally identified as an ideal of collaboration, but was specifically separated from the definition of a collaborative effort by project managers, who cited it as unrealistic or impossible for many projects. Some of the hallmarks of collaborative efforts that were cited include: following through on commitments; working together with a cooperative spirit toward a common purpose; maintaining respect for others; and bargaining in good faith.

#### **Defining Success and Failure**

The project managers' definitions of success were aligned; they defined success as everyone participating in the process so the project can move forward. It was commonly noted that all parties may not agree with the outcome, but that participation and understanding the reasoning behind decisions are the hallmarks of success that allow a project to move forward. The facilitators' definitions of success were in line with the project managers': a group engaging in dialogue, understanding each other, and increasing their capacity to work together was generally considered success. The concept that success runs along a continuum was raised by one of the facilitators, such that



everything from participants simply following the rules to achieving a desired outcome can be considered success depending on the level of conflict and other group dynamics present. Another facilitator broke success down further to separate policy outcomes from social outcomes with success defined as achieving the policy outcomes, and failure occurring when the policy outcomes are not achieved and social capital is not built. Project managers and facilitators alike defined failure as the inability to complete or move toward articulated project goals. Some of the dynamics associated with failure include stakeholder concerns being dismissed or not addressed, distrust or withholding of information, which leads to breakdowns in communication, and the convening party engaging in collaboration as a matter of procedure, or to provide “window dressing” to the effort.

### **The Project Manager**

In their own words, project managers identify themselves as the “glue” holding the project together. They are accountable for the project from beginning to end and report a broad set of responsibilities, including: setting project priorities; tracking, maintaining, and updating project status and timelines; managing the project budget; and to act as the liaison between technical experts, internal and external stakeholders, and agency management.

Each of the project managers interviewed have experience working for consulting firms, and are presently employed as project managers within a public agency. The project managers made several distinctions about the role for those employed by a public

agency, as opposed to those employed as consultants. Project managers employed as consultants are responsible for data analysis and to make recommendations to the client but do not bear the burden of decision-making authority; whereas project managers employed by public agencies have authority to make decisions. The project managers interviewed indicate that they feel a higher degree of responsibility and accountability in their roles as public employees than they did as consultants. They recognize that their decisions have real, tangible effects on other people's lives, and take that responsibility very seriously. The other significant difference project managers reported between employment as a consultant and employment within a public agency was workload; consultants in a project manager role typically have one or two active projects, while public agency project managers may have 6-12 active projects.

### **The Facilitator**

Like project managers, facilitators report seeing themselves as central to a project; however, their responsibilities vary from project managers. Facilitator responsibilities vary as the project progresses, and the facilitators report that 80-90% of their work occurs in the preparatory phase, before a facilitated meeting with stakeholders occurs. In this preparatory phase, the facilitator seeks to understand the project and the dynamics that occur between the parties involved. The facilitator also helps the parties determine if collaboration is an appropriate mechanism for the project through meeting with the project manager and relevant stakeholders to gain an understanding of whether the parties can get a better deal elsewhere and what would happen if a solution is not reached

through collaboration. Once the preparatory phase is complete and collaboration is deemed appropriate to address the project, facilitated meetings are then conducted. Prior to a facilitated meeting, the facilitator will typically work with the project manager to create an agenda and strategy to complete the desired outcomes for the meeting. During the meeting, the facilitator is tasked with: the creation of ground rules, charter documents for the collaborative effort; ensuring compliance with the timelines outlined in the agenda; and managing the conversation and conflicts that occur during the meeting such that order is maintained. Depending on how the facilitation contract is written, they may also be responsible for documenting the decisions of the group or creating written minutes, though WebEx and other technological advances can also be utilized. After the meeting, the facilitator typically meets with the project manager to review how the meeting went and determine the strategy for future meetings.

The facilitator is usually retained through a contract with the project's convening agency, but is required to stay neutral throughout the project. While maintaining neutrality was not identified as a challenge for facilitators interviewed, they shared that a high ethical commitment and transparency in their decision-making and facilitation style can prevent the facilitator from being viewed as biased. One facilitator characterizes the role as that of "*Trust Octopus*," stating that the facilitator has to work to build trust with all the parties involved in a meeting and noting that some individuals come to the meetings because the facilitator is there and they trust that individual. The concept of a *trust octopus* is that the parties may not trust each other, but they trust the facilitator, and

the facilitator has trust in the parties, so they continue involvement based upon their trust in the facilitator and the facilitator works to build trust between the parties.

### **The Project Manager – Facilitator Relationship**

Project managers indicate that they do not utilize facilitators for the majority of their projects, but utilize them when a neutral, impartial voice is necessary. The level of controversy surrounding an issue was the key factor that drove project managers to seek facilitator involvement in a project. Other factors that led to the decision to employ a facilitator were the size of the group and the diversity of interests represented; some projects use a facilitator for any meeting with public citizen involvement. For the majority of projects, the project managers reportedly perform all the functions of a facilitator in addition to fulfilling their project management duties. The project manager typically operates as both project manager and facilitator; however, when a facilitator is present the project managers report that their role changes. It was clear that the project managers involved in three of the four collaborative groups observed were aware of facilitative principles, and seemed comfortable serving as facilitators, though they were not as effective when serving in a dual capacity. During Observation 3, the schedule slipped as soon as the facilitator left, and it seemed like the table facilitators, who were employed by the convening agency, had difficulty staying neutral while listening to stakeholder input, as they did make subtle attempts to move the conversation one direction or another.

I previously discussed the roles of project manager and facilitator as each understood and reported their roles. Given that the role of a project manager changes with facilitator involvement, I felt it was important to understand what project managers felt were the most important functions of a facilitator. The project managers report the most important functions of a facilitator are:

Table 4.1

*The Most Important Functions of a Facilitator, According to Project Managers*

<b>Facilitator Function</b>
Maintain neutrality
Establish ground rules and processes
Enforce ground rules
Enforce commitments made by participants
Use people skills to effectively manage the participants
Cultivate a safe environment where people can express themselves
Ensure all participants have an opportunity to speak
Keep the discussion moving forward
Ensure the meeting stays on schedule
Work collaboratively with all participants, understanding the nuances of personality and social interactions
Plan the meeting
Provide feedback to the project manager

The project managers report they consciously try to re-frame their participation when a facilitator is involved. They report that they view themselves as another stakeholder, or an advocate for their organizational interests when a facilitator is present.

With a facilitator, the project manager's primary responsibility becomes listening to stakeholders closely to gain an understanding of their comments, without losing sight of the project goal or their organizational interest.

While project managers may be able to re-frame their involvement into a stakeholder role, they also admit that challenges arise when a facilitator is involved. Some of the challenges arise when the facilitator has either too little or too much subject knowledge about the project. A facilitator with too little project knowledge may not recognize when a discussion is no longer pertinent to the effort; a facilitator with too much project knowledge may become overly involved in the conversation and act as another stakeholder, ultimately jeopardizing their neutrality.

One of the project managers stated that the use of a facilitator adds a level of formality to their projects that can cause people to resort to position-based bargaining, rather than interest-based bargaining, and encourage stakeholders to fight for a "win," instead of a mutually agreeable compromise. When a facilitator is involved, that individual can hold the project manager accountable for transparency in their efforts, so project managers who typically converse and build relationships with stakeholders through offline conversations report feeling constrained in their ability to have those offline conversations, as they feel it reduces transparency to discuss project issues without all parties in attendance.

Through my observations, I found that utilizing a facilitator removes the project manager's ability to steer the meeting and control the direction the project is heading.

During the interviews, one project manager reported being likely to signal not wanting to follow the agreed-upon process by acting out (e.g. become preoccupied, request a break) when the project manager has a feeling they have lost control of the meeting or has internal reservations about the direction a project or meeting is trending. While the project manager may want to find a way around addressing the issue and be hoping for a “saved by the bell” moment, the project manager still expects the facilitator to hold them to their agreement and commitment to the process by pushing the issue and gently forcing them back into the process, as they would any other stakeholder. It seems a facilitator who does not gently force a project manager back into the process would jeopardize neutrality, though a facilitator who tries to force a project manager back into the process risks the project manager leaving the meeting altogether, as happened in Observation 4.

### **Project Manager & Facilitator Advice About Improving Outcomes**

One of the project managers shared a clever technique he has used in collaborative meetings to engage the participants while maintaining light-hearted humor and a focus on the meeting outcome. In a group that had worked together on various projects over a number of years, the stakeholders used a hand signal to indicate they felt another individual was getting off topic. When an individual was speaking about something that was not relevant to the goal of the meeting or discussion, other members of the group would use a “bunny ear” hand signal to indicate they felt the individual speaking was going down the proverbial “rabbit hole.” The individual speaking was then given a 30-second appeal period to make their case as to why the discussion was relevant



to the desired outcome and the group could vote on whether to allow them to continue or move forward. While a rabbit ear veto may not always be appropriate, the project manager emphasized that the group had worked together for a period of years, and that the group imposed this on themselves, so they owned this process. Establishment of a rule or understanding to this effect may have changed the dynamics that occurred in Observation 4 when the stakeholder embarked on a positional speech, by introducing a little humor and opening the floor for another stakeholder to identify the speech as overtly positional and off topic, rather than the facilitator.

Humor has a place in collaboration, and can lighten the mood and serve to unite stakeholders at another's expense; however, the parties have to ensure the humor does not get out of hand or turn into personal attacks. One of the facilitator's I observed frequently characterized his role as that of "time cop" or "time nag", which provided a humorous aspect to the meeting and offered opportunities for light-hearted humor at a third party's expense.

All the project managers interviewed spoke to the fact that the project manager has to be genuine and sincere in their attempts to listen, understand, and work with stakeholders. During three of the observations, the project managers seemed genuine and sincere in their dealings with stakeholders; however the project manager involved in Observation 4 had such a strong personality and was so defensive that expressions of appreciation beyond thanking participants for attending the meeting seemed insincere and made the effort seem like it could have been "window dressing". During the interviews,

one of the project managers shared an opportunity to promote goodwill and improve the environment. While working on a project the project manager's agency recognized it had additional land that would be prime land for environmental mitigation, but had no need for mitigation at the time. The project manager approached other agencies about the idea of seizing the opportunity to do advanced mitigation planning by setting the land aside as mitigation land prior to any regulatory requirement to do so. Addressing the issue in advance turned out to be a larger project than expected because of its novelty, but it showed that the agency had a genuine and sincere interest in improving the environment, and it provided environmental benefits while improving relationships, coordination, and communication between agencies. Ultimately, the project provided the agency the tangible benefit of mitigation land they could use in the future, and the intangible benefit of improved goodwill within the community and other organizations.

A project manager shared about a project that was drawing angry letters and widespread criticism during one of the interviews. In an effort to change the dynamic, total transparency was instituted so that all parties had access to the same information at all times, in real time. There was a small lag for stakeholder access to certain scientific readings, but that was minimized, and the readings were made available to stakeholders as soon as it was feasible. The group also worked to clearly define the areas of disagreement, set them aside, and they often reached a point where the areas of disagreement were no longer worth arguing over. These actions allowed the group to find common ground, build relationships, and trust. Ultimately, the project manager

shared that the project went from drawing angry letters and criticism to receiving praise in Congressional letters. This dynamic of setting issues aside and continuing forward progress seems similar to what occurred in Observation 1, where issues were set aside to be included in the introduction.

The collaborative group observed during Observation 4 utilized a laptop and projector to display the document the members were working on, and then the project manager used the “track changes” feature of Microsoft Word to take notes and make changes to the document. All parties involved in the meeting were able to see the notes taken and the changes that were being made to the document under discussion in real time, which provided stakeholders assurances that their comments were captured correctly.

Finding commonality between participants and interests is stressed as being important throughout the literature and by participants of collaborative efforts. If the group is struggling to find what they already have in common, project managers report that they try to find agreement around something all parties want. Once there is a common interest and goal, the parties become more willing to compromise. This compromise is central to collaborative efforts and project managers indicate they maintain awareness and look for the places they can compromise throughout projects.

Each of the facilitators indicated that the commitment of resources is an important factor in improving collaborative outcomes. The collaborative group needs funding for a sufficient period of time so that the group can work through group norms and become a

high-functioning group. Project managers and facilitators alike state collaborative groups generally take years to become high functioning. In addition to time and resources, facilitators identify executive support of the project and the collaborative approach as a factor that improves the outcome of collaborative efforts.

### **Challenges**

I previously identified that collaboration seeks to address the “knottiest” of problems that society offers. Issues dealing with management of natural resources are particularly “knotty” because of the hard decisions and trade-offs that are inherent in them. The collaborative effort that seeks to address these issues can be just as challenging as the problems themselves.

Both project managers and facilitators overwhelmingly identified communication as a challenge of collaborative efforts. Facilitators are typically involved in projects to ensure that communication occurs, and is effective. Project managers cite their many responsibilities, and state they rely on facilitators when they are involved, to assist them with keeping everyone in the loop. Each of the collaborative groups observed decided dates and times of subsequent meetings together, but relied on the facilitator to develop and deliver reminders and agendas to all participants. Three of the four groups observed also relied on the facilitator to develop the minutes for the meetings; the facilitator had a separate recorder in attendance to document the decisions of one group. During Observation 4, the meeting was broadcast utilizing technology which recorded the discussion and information presented on the projector.

The commitment of time and resources were cited as important factors likely to improve outcomes; project managers and facilitators universally cite the lack of resources and difficulty attaining resources as a challenge that threatens collaborative efforts. Specifically, governmental budgeting issues and processes trickle down to have impacts at the project level, which was also part of the conversation during Observation 2, where the convening agency was dependent on a report provided by a federal agency subject to the federal government shutdown. One of the project managers interviewed stated that the public agency approach of “doing more with less” can threaten project completion at the extreme, and makes project delivery more cumbersome. The project managers also report that the expectation that a public agency project should be completed on-time and on-budget is a challenge for them because the nature of a project utilizing collaboration is that stakeholder involvement and input changes the project over time.

### **Conclusion**

In Table 2.2, I summarized key points from the literature aimed at improving collaborative outcomes. Most of the recommendations outlined in Table 2.2 were observed during the observations and raised during the interviews, though there were varying levels of agreement from practitioners. The importance of building reciprocity, identification of common interests, building relationships through face-to-face meetings, and ensuring proper stakeholder involvement were strengthened through the interviews. The concept of consensus was identified as ideal, but not necessary, and was further characterized as an unlikely goal by project managers. The provision of food was

identified as unlikely to occur due to public agency budget constraints, but it was noted that stakeholders do not expect public agencies to utilize taxpayer funds to provide food.

Table 2.3 summarized the key challenges to collaborative efforts, as identified in the literature. While many of the challenges listed in Table 2.3 were never raised during the interviews, some of them were observed during the observations, and there was wide agreement that communication and a lack of resources, in terms of both time and money are significant challenges to collaborative efforts.

Through observation of various collaborative efforts, it was clear that the relationship between project manager and facilitator could be tense and had the ability to influence collaborative projects. The literature had clear definitions of both the project manager and facilitator roles, but did not address the relationship between the two. The interviews provided the context that project managers utilize facilitators for about 10-20% of their meetings, which was less than I had expected; the other 80-90% of the time the project manager serves in a dual capacity as project manager and facilitator. Through the interviews, it became apparent that both project managers and facilitators see themselves as central to the collaborative process, which likely explains tension between individuals in the respective roles. It has been said, “Too many cooks spoil the broth;” is the same true for collaborative efforts? The final chapter will provide practical recommendations that facilitators, project managers, and others involved in collaboration can use to improve their relationships and the outcome of collaborative efforts.

## Chapter 5

### CONCLUSION

Collaboration addresses the “knottiest” of problems that society faces, and collaboration addressing natural resource management issues becomes as complex as the ecosystems they affect. Through my research, I sought to understand how project managers, facilitators, and the relationship between them influence outcomes in collaborative processes involving natural resource management issues. This conclusion provides an overview of my research and findings.

In defining the term collaboration, I sought to move beyond the buzzword that signifies people are working together toward an outcome. The literature offered theories about how collaboration operates, what it seeks to accomplish, and the idea that consensus has a place within the process. Observation gave me the impression that there were nuances to collaboration that make it a delicate art. Professionals that are actively involved in collaboration on a daily basis unanimously made the point that collaboration is about the parties involved in the process having an opportunity to provide input on the project, and be heard and understood. While consensus was identified as an ideal goal of collaboration, the project managers separated it from the definition of a collaborative effort because they believed that consensus is unrealistic or impossible for many projects. Ultimately, it became clear that the term collaboration refers to a process allowing interested parties (people) to work together with integrity, respect, and a cooperative spirit to influence the outcome of a project. This process needs to be understood as a

dynamic and ever-changing process that is predicated on the relationships between individuals and their individual and collective perceptions of progress toward an ever-changing and often ambiguous goal.

The concept of success seems to be incremental in collaborative processes; it occurs on a continuum and is individual to the project. Due to the intractable nature of natural resource management projects that collaboration seeks to address, it is very important to celebrate successes early and often. If a project is struggling, it becomes even more important to find successes that can be celebrated, such as the nearly unanimous agreement that occurred as a result of the sticker votes for a logo during Observation 2. If the participants view themselves as part of an effort that is enjoying success, it provides an institutional inertia that can propel the relationships and efforts of the group toward further success. Failure occurs when movement toward the goal stops, and is frequently associated with strained relationships. While failure may occur in collaborative efforts, the problems collaboration seeks to address still exist, so it can be re-framed as an opportunity to step back, conduct triage of the effort, and move forward again with renewed vigor and understanding.

Project managers have primary responsibility for the outcome of their assigned projects. I was initially surprised by the fact that project managers report feeling a different level of responsibility as employees of a public agency than they did as contractors, but it makes sense that the decision-making authority public agency project managers have is a heavy burden that impacts the individual and their relationships with



others personally and professionally. One project manager noted that there can be a tendency to study something forever in lieu of making tough decisions; however, they also noted that this strategy does not move a project forward. Building relationships based upon (sometimes brutal) honesty, genuine empathy and understanding, careful definition of the goals, and enforcement of established ground rules can build an environment where relationships between the parties involved in a collaborative effort flourish. When the individuals involved in a collaborative effort build these types of relationships over time, they may not always like what they hear, but they have an easier time separating the people from the problems and are more likely to have trust and commitment to one another, so they band together as they collectively navigate uncharted territory. The primary tool a project manager can leverage in addressing a problem is relationships.

A facilitator has primary responsibility for issues of process within a collaborative effort seeking to address the problem. Facilitators are used less than I would have expected; while some project managers were not able to estimate how often they use a facilitator, those who were able to provide an estimate stated they utilize facilitators between 10 and 20% of the time. Given that project managers serve in a dual capacity as facilitator and project manager most of the time, they admit that there are benefits and challenges to the use of a facilitator. One facilitator pointed out that collaborative project outcomes may become suspect when the project manager serves in a dual capacity. During Observation 3, the table facilitators were employees of the convening agency who

had undergone minimal training and did not have experience in facilitation. They became visibly uncomfortable and froze when differing opinions came up, which is in contrast to facilitators who utilize summaries, humility, or actively attempt to define similarities and fundamental differences to clarify and bridge differing opinions. Additionally, when the table facilitators encountered a strong personality or a stakeholder who desired to share their position through an overt speech, they were unable to balance that dynamic or stop the stakeholder. Given that they were employees of the convening agency, the table facilitators may have had concerns about stakeholder perception, or may simply have not had the training or expertise to manage an amicable transition. One of the table facilitators involved in Observation 3 identified herself as a member of the public agency's executive team, and that table became a magnet for stakeholders with strong interests and personalities; it would have been interesting to see if that table had as many participants if that individual had not self-identified as a member of the executive team.

### **Recommendations for Individuals Involved in Collaboration**

#### **Recommendation 1**

*When a facilitator is utilized within a collaborative effort, that individual should be primarily responsible for issues of process, with secondary responsibility for the formation of relationships. The project manager should maintain primary responsibility for relationships, and secondary responsibility for issues of process.*

Both the project manager and facilitator should share responsibility for the projects outcome as they navigate both the people and the process. Assigning primary responsibility for process issues to the facilitator and primary responsibility for people issues to the project manager divides these responsibilities and provides both parties a task to focus their efforts throughout the collaborative process. Assigning secondary responsibility recognizes that the project manager role changes when a facilitator is involved, but maintains respect for the fact they typically handle issues of both process and people. If this recommendation is violated and both the facilitator and project manager attempt to maintain full responsibility for people and process, there can be significant tension between the individuals in the project manager and facilitator roles which can impact project outcomes and the dynamics with stakeholders.

### **Recommendation 2**

*If a facilitator is involved, that person should have responsibility for determining if collaboration is an appropriate mechanism to address the problem.*

Facilitators placed strong emphasis on the importance of assessing whether the project is an appropriate candidate for collaboration. One facilitator made the point that an organization may request a facilitator when a public relations campaign, litigation, or some other tool may be more effective than collaboration. Project managers placed an emphasis on preparation for collaborative meetings, but did not seem to consider whether collaboration was appropriate for a project. There may be a variety of reasons for this from public agency mandates to interview questions that were not designed to tease this

factor out, but, as the facilitators pointed out, collaboration is but one tool within a larger toolbox. Facilitators may have more objectivity about whether collaboration is possible given their prior experiences and lack of personal investment in the outcome.

### **Recommendation 3**

*The facilitator should have responsibility to ensure that ground rules and desired outcomes or charter documents defining the project scope, objective, and participant involvement are established and enforced.*

Both facilitators and project managers stated that establishment and enforcement of clear ground rules and unified charter or strategy documents are vital to achieving outcomes in projects utilizing collaboration. As stated in Table 4.1, project managers identified these tasks as being among the most important tasks of a facilitator, and agency personnel were simply not effective at this task during the observations.

### **Recommendation 4**

*The facilitator and project manager should discuss and agree on their individual roles in advance of facilitated meetings.*

Based on my research, I would contend that clear expectations, assessment, and careful definition of the project manager and facilitator roles, and their relationship are as vital to the collaborative process as the establishment and enforcement of ground rules and charter or strategy documents. This arrangement may be communicated via different forms such as using verbal communication to ‘talk through’ clarification of roles or using written expectatons embedded in the original contact or a supplemental document. If

possible, the project manager and/or facilitator may consider attendance at meetings conducted by the other before they work together, as it may assist them in understanding each other's styles and expectations. In some cases, facilitators and project managers have been working together for years and/or have developed a personal relationship. In these cases both the project manager and facilitator have to maintain awareness of their professional roles and the importance of the facilitator's ability to remain neutral aside from any specific relationship they have developed.

### **Recommendation 5**

*Schedule meetings such that they do not interfere with standard meal times.*

When people are hungry or need a break they become agitated, and may become more likely to act out or shut down and quit participating. Planning ahead so that standard meal times are considered and accounted for, either through provision of a meal, provision of a meal break, or avoiding a meal time altogether avoid this issue. Provision of meals can be impossible, and the provision of a break can give participants an opportunity to leave, but it can also provide an opportunity for participants to build their relationships or calm down, such that cooler heads to prevail. I would encourage facilitators and project managers to be aware of the risks and opportunities inherent in scheduling their meetings, and actively consider them when scheduling meetings.

**Recommendation 6**

*Maintain transparency to the extent possible.*

Trust and relationships are of primary importance in collaborative projects; transparency is one of the first things that can be done to establish a foundation of trust in any relationship. If there are challenges to total transparency, clarity regarding those challenges is appreciated by stakeholders and other participants.

**Opportunities for Further Research**

Through my research, I have developed and shared an understanding of how the relationship between facilitators and project managers can influence individuals in each of those roles and the project. Additional research should be conducted to test different methods of building the relationship between facilitators and project managers, and further defining their roles. Another opportunity for further research would be to expand the interview pool, as I interviewed those individuals whom I had reasonable access to within a prescribed period of time.

**Conclusion**

Facilitators, project managers, and the relationship between them influence outcomes in collaborative processes dealing with natural resource management. Facilitators and project managers each bring a different skill set and focus to collaborative efforts. Project managers frequently report serving in the role of facilitator; therefore, they may have an emotional reaction when a facilitator steps in to steer the project for which they have ultimate responsibility. While many literature sources have

discussed and defined the roles of facilitator and project manager, the literature has not discussed the relationship between them, or provided ideas on how individuals in each role can work together. This thesis identified a gap in the literature, and I sought to bring attention to it and scratch the surface of understanding how facilitators, project managers, and the relationship between them influence outcomes of some of the “knottiest” problems our society faces.

APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

CCP's Five Stages of Collaborative Decision Making

## FIVE STAGES OF COLLABORATIVE DECISION MAKING ON PUBLIC ISSUES

ASSESSMENT/PLANNING	ORGANIZATIONAL	EDUCATIONAL	NEGOTIATION/RESOLUTION	IMPLEMENTATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Conflict Analysis &amp; Assessment                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do the parties want to negotiate?</li> <li>- Are the issues negotiable?</li> <li>- Can the parties get a better deal elsewhere?</li> <li>- What are the chances for success?</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Identify:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What's the problem</li> <li>- Mission Goals</li> <li>- Range of Issues to be Addressed</li> <li>- Preliminary Process Design</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Representation Issues (Stakeholder Analysis)                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Who are the deal-makers &amp; deal-breakers?</li> <li>- What groups should be represented?</li> <li>- Who can legitimately speak for each group?</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Assess Adequacy of Staffing                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Process</li> <li>- Policy</li> <li>- Administrative</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Assess Adequacy of Commitment:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Time</li> <li>- Financial Resources</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Training in Interest-based Collaboration</li> <li>o Meeting Logistics &amp; Schedule</li> <li>o Settle Representation Issue</li> <li>o Settle Mission/Goals</li> <li>o Develop Ground Rules                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decision Making</li> <li>- Press/Observers</li> <li>- Roles/Responsibilities</li> <li>- Other</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Deal Breaker Analysis</li> <li>o Determine Ongoing Communication &amp; Accountability Systems with:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Constituents</li> <li>- Elected/Appointed Boards</li> <li>- General Public</li> <li>- Other Important Players</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Agenda Setting for Education Phase                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Initial Discussion of Issues</li> <li>- Initial Issue Framework</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Finalize Process Design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Review History, Context &amp; Legal/Statutory Framework</li> <li>o Develop Common Understanding of Problem &amp; Issues</li> <li>o Thorough Understanding of One's Interests &amp; Adversaries' Interests</li> <li>o Thorough Understanding of Most Likely Alternatives to a Negotiated Agreement</li> <li>o Develop Common Information Base                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What information do we have?</li> <li>- What portion of that information is accepted by all?</li> <li>- What new information is needed &amp; how to get it? (data gaps)</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Educate Constituency to Issues &amp; Interests</li> <li>o Develop Framework for Negotiation, Including Range &amp; Order of Issues to Be Addressed</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Key Challenges by Stage</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Turn Interests into Decision Making Criteria</li> <li>o Option Generation/Brainstorming Inventing without Deciding</li> <li>o Developing/Refining Trial Balloons</li> <li>o Linking &amp; Packaging Agreements                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Agreements-in-Principle</li> <li>- Agreements in Detail</li> </ul> </li> <li>o If Get Stuck:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Revisit Underlying Interests</li> <li>- Revisit Alternatives to a Negotiated Agreement</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Constant Feedback from One's Constituency</li> <li>o Develop Agreements with:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Quid pro Quo Linkages</li> <li>- Assurances for Mutual Commitments</li> </ul> </li> <li>o Integrating Implementation into Agreements</li> <li>o Ratification by Constituencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Linking Agreements to External Decision Making</li> <li>o Monitoring Implementation to Assure Compliance and Respond to Changing Conditions</li> </ul>
<p>Can problem be successfully addressed through negotiation?</p> <p>Not excluding any party that could undermine negotiated agreements.</p>	<p>Determining how group makes its decisions.</p>	<p>Agreeing to devote sufficient time to this stage.</p> <p>Postponing judgement to learn about other parties' interests.</p>	<p>Reconciling conflicting interests</p> <p>Bringing constituents along</p> <p>Development of Assurances</p>	<p>A test of how well implementation was integrated into the agreement.</p>
<p>Developed by: Center for Collaborative Policy, California State University, Sacramento</p>				

Source: CCP (n.d.b)

## APPENDIX B

## Instruments to Measure Participant Agreement

**Instrument 1 – Gradients of Agreement**

Endorsement <i>(I like it)</i>	Endorsement w/Minor Point of Contention  <i>(Basically, I like it)</i>	Agreement w/Reservations  <i>(I can live w/ it)</i>	Abstain  <i>(I have no opinion)</i>	Stand Aside  <i>(I don't like it, but I don't want to hold up the group)</i>	Formal Disagreement, but Willing to Go w/ Majority  <i>(I want my disagreement noted in writing, but I'll support the decision)</i>	Formal Disagreement, Request to Be Absolved of Responsibility for Implementation  <i>(I don't want to stop anyone else, but don't want to be involved in Implementing it)</i>	Block  <i>(I won't support the proposal)</i>
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Source: UNM Human Resources (2010)

**Instrument 2 – Gradients of Agreement**

1	2	3	4	5	6
Fully Endorse	Endorsement with minor issues	Agreement with conditions	Stand aside	Disagreement/ Neutral	Full block/Veto
I strongly support the proposal !	I generally like it, proceed with my support.	I can support if some steps are taken now or in the future.	I don't really like this, but I don't want to hold up the progress of the group. Proceed.	I don't want to stop progress on this proposal, but I don't want to be held responsible for it.	I do not support, and want to go on record accordingly.

Source: CCP (n.d.c)

**Instrument 3 – Levels of Agreement Used in Leach & Sabatier’s Study**

0	No agreement on anything
1	Agreement on which issues to discuss or address
2	Agreement on general goals or principles
3	Agreement on one or more implementation actions (relatively limited and unintegrated), such as fencing ten miles of stream and installing a drinking trough on a cattle ranch to reduce sedimentation and fecal coliform
4	Agreement on a relatively comprehensive watershed management plan with specific projects or proposals; a management plan typically includes partnership goals, problems to be addressed, policy principles, and a list of restoration and other implementation projects

Source: Sabatier et al. (2005, p. 240)

## APPENDIX C

## Human Subjects Interview Consent Form &amp; Protocol

**Consent to Participate in Research**

You are being asked to participate in research that will be conducted by Lisa Phillips, a Master's degree student in Public Policy and Administration at California State University, Sacramento, as part of her thesis requirements. The study will investigate factors related to collaborative approaches to natural resource issues.

You will be asked to discuss your thoughts about the collaborative approach to problem solving, and share your experiences using the collaborative approach. The interview may require up to an hour of your time. You can decide not to answer any question(s).

An objective of this research is to use the results of the study to help practitioners who are involved in collaborative efforts.

You were asked to participate in this research because you are a professional practitioner involved in collaborative approaches to address natural resource issues. Your identity, projects, and agency affiliation will only be revealed to the extent you are comfortable. Please initial the information you are comfortable sharing publically through this research:

\_\_\_\_\_ First name  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Last name  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Projects  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Agency affiliation  
 \_\_\_\_\_ I am not comfortable sharing any personal identifying information.

In the interest of full disclosure, the researcher is currently employed by the United States Bureau of Reclamation. She is charged with enforcing the acreage limitation provisions of the Reclamation Reform Act of 1982, but does not have a professional role in collaborative efforts with the agency.

If you have any questions about this research, you may contact the researcher, Lisa Phillips, at \_\_\_\_\_ or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Ted Lascher at (916) 278-4864 or by e-mail at tedl@csus.edu.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. Your signature below indicates that you have read this page and agree to participate in the research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

### **Project Manager Interview Questions**

How long have you been a Project Manager?

Could you briefly describe your responsibilities when you have a project with stakeholders and facilitators involved?

How would you define a collaborative effort?

How do you define success and failure for a collaborative effort you undertake?

Thinking back to your most successful collaborative effort, what were the factors that made it a success?

What do you feel is the most important function of a project manager in a collaborative effort?

What is the biggest challenge for a project manager?

When leading projects, how often have you used a professional facilitator?

What are the factors that determine whether you use a professional facilitator?

In your opinion, what are the most important functions of a facilitator?

In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges when utilizing a facilitator for your projects?

What advice would you give to a new project manager about concrete ways to improve outcomes of collaborative efforts using facilitation and engaging multiple stakeholders?

### **Facilitator Interview Questions**

How long have you been a Facilitator?

Could you briefly describe your responsibilities when you have a project with stakeholders and project managers involved?

How would you define a collaborative effort?

How do you define success and failure for a collaborative effort you facilitate?

Thinking back to your most successful collaborative effort, what were the factors that made it a success?

What do you feel is the most important function of a facilitator in a collaborative effort?

What is the biggest challenge for a facilitator?

In your opinion, what are the most important functions of a project manager?

In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges when working with a project manager on collaborative projects?

What advice would you give to a new facilitator about concrete ways to improve outcomes of collaborative efforts using facilitation and engaging multiple stakeholders?

What advice would you give to a new project manager about concrete ways to improve outcomes of collaborative efforts using facilitation and engaging multiple stakeholders?

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