Collaboration in Action: An Uncertain Process

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ABSTRACT. This article offers a framework of necessary conditions for getting to collaboration. A process model is presented that identifies both the conditions and steps under which people can understand their interdependence and what collaboration entails. Based on an analysis of several successful and failed case studies in different policy contexts, the article integrates real-life examples to illustrate the complexities practitioners face as they navigate through the often fragile and tedious process of collaboration. The article concludes by offering several theoretical propositions leading to testable hypotheses that may be useful in choosing an appropriate resolution strategy. It includes implications for theory building and for practice. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-342-9678. E-mail address: <getinfo@haworthpressinc.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com>* *© 2001 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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INTRODUCTION

In the field of social work administration and planning, practitioners are grasping for measures to assist them in addressing a variety of "messy" issues. Special interests, power inequities, resource constraints, shortsighted policies and seemingly irreconcilable differences make resolution to many

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issues difficult, if not impossible. Various forms of collaboration, partnerships and consensus-building models are re-emerging to address many of today's difficult policy issues. Organizations and groups of individuals are aligning as a means to enhance capacity-building efforts, respond to regional and community-wide problems and/or to create more community-driven initiatives. Many of these arrangements are gaining in popularity primarily due to the failure of conventional practices and a search for more effective and efficient alternatives (Wallis & Koziol, 1996).

While a growing body of research has outlined the potential gains that can be realized through the use of these alternative policy-resolution mechanisms (i.e., outcomes that are more timely, cost effective, and robust), the literature has also cautioned against their use as a legitimate form of problem solving and public decision-making (Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Gray, 1989; Hallet & Birchall, 1992; Kagan, 1991; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Weber & Khademian, 1997). Many national, state and local governmental agencies that serve as funders and regulators have increasingly been mandating consensus-making processes without a true appreciation of what it takes to initiate and sustain these efforts (Hallet & Birchall, 1992; Healey, Thomas, McDougal, 1997; Morrison, 1996). While the term collaboration has been touted a great deal as an answer to a wide variety of problem situations, surprisingly little substantive research has been done on the subject (O'Looney, 1994). The decision as to when it is most optimal to employ a collaborative framework remains unclear. Additionally, the benefits of collaboration are still obscure, the uncertainty associated with this method is high and the cost to sustain a policy outcome can be prohibitive (Amy, 1987; Porter & Salvesen, 1995; Weber & Khademian, 1997).

This article offers a framework of necessary conditions for getting to collaboration. A process model is presented that identifies both the conditions and steps under which people can understand their interdependence and what collaboration entails. Based on an analysis of several successful and failed case studies in differing policy contexts, the article integrates real-life examples to illustrate the complexities practitioners face as they navigate through the often fragile and tedious process of collaboration. The article concludes by offering several theoretical propositions leading to testable hypotheses that may be useful in choosing an appropriate resolution strategy.

WHAT IS COLLABORATION AND WHAT MAKES IT WORK?

In practice, collaboration is commonly interchanged with terms such as cooperation and coordination. However, the scholarly literature distinguishes among the terms (see Hord, 1986; Kagan, 1991; Melaville & Blank, 1991). A continuum moving from cooperation to coordination to collaboration moves generally from low to high formality. Cooperation is characterized by informal relationships that exist without a commonly defined structure or planning effort. The emphasis is on the sharing of information and authority is retained by each organization or group. On the other hand, coordination is characterized by more formal relationships. There is a modest amount of structure complexity and some planning and division of roles are required. The emphasis is on common tasks and communication channels are established. While authority still rests with the individual organization or group, there is some increased risk to participants (Winer & Ray, 1996). Task forces are examples of coordinated efforts.

Collaboration requires a more durable and profound relationship. The process unites previously separated groups or organizations into a new structure to achieve a mutual purpose. Such relationships require comprehensive planning, a shared vision and frequent and well-defined communication. Authority is determined by the collaborative structure and risk is more substantial because each member of the collaboration contributes its own resources and reputation. "Collaborative" is a term now commonly applied to a set of processes intended to create consensus among parties who, under normal circumstances, disagree about the issue at hand. Typically, collaboratives take the form of stakeholder groups, sometimes called consensus groups, which come together to try to solve problems jointly which none of the parties could solve alone, or which if any party tried to would create broad resistance (Reilly, 1998; Winer & Ray, 1996).

The social/political environment in which a collaborative effort is operating will differ from project to project and site to site. The ability of participants in collaborative efforts to adjust to a host of ecological, social, political, and economic forces is essential. Some of these forces work against collaboration, such as when interest groups become po-

larized and factions develop around an issue. In other cases, these forces operate to bring stakeholders together (Selin & Chavez, 1995).

Decision-making in a collaboration is usually accomplished by consensus. Members discuss issues until everyone's opinion is understood. Agreement by the group on a course of action is usually required before the group proceeds or the group refrains from taking action. Due to the amount of time and resources needed to engage in collaborative efforts, coupled with no guarantee that there will be an agreement reached by the affected parties, a process such as this should be selectively employed in problem resolution. Communities lacking in constructive civic engagement or where a history of working together is limited (or absent) may not be conducive to the demands often associated with collaborative problem-solving. Research has demonstrated that communities with higher levels of civic engagement are characterized by more trust in government and higher levels of community problem-solving abilities (Barber, 1998; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993). This has been referred to as social capital (i.e., " . . . the glue that binds members of a community together . . . " Wallis & Koziol, 1996, p. 4). In academic terms: through repeated patterns of active interaction citizens establish powerful norms of community behavior that lends itself to community problem-solving (Boyte & Kari, 1997; Putnam, 1993).

Research on collaborations have suggested that there must be several essential components for the internal operation of a collaborative including: (1) a central *purpose* that incorporates good timing, a shared vision and a critical need for action; (2) *membership* that is broad based, able to compromise and effectively represents the respective constituents or affected interests; (3) a *structure* that has clearly established roles, agreed upon ground rules, open and frequent communication and access to credible information that supports problem-solving; (4) a *process* that is open, has the buy-in of people in power to support outcomes, allows for interim success, and is able to effectively monitor the group's progress; and (5) *resources* that include sufficient funds, entrepreneurial leadership and a skilled facilitator that can effectively guide the group to consensus-based decision-making (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Gray, 1989; Kagan, 1991; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Melaville & Blank, 1995).

These internal factors have been documented as necessary for the collaboration to obtain tangible results; however, the external environment will greatly influence the success or failure of the collaborative effort. Continual adaptation to changing conditions is necessary and the ability to employ a contingency approach will increase the chances for accomplishing the stated objectives.

CASE STUDIES

An analysis of several successful and failed case studies in different arenas was conducted and utilized as examples of collaboration in differing policy contexts. These were used in part, to develop the Collaborative Pathway process model that identifies the conditions and steps under which people can understand their interdependence and what collaboration entails.

The collaborative case studies chosen were characterized by complex problems, diverse stakeholders, and differing social, political, cultural and ecological attributes. The research design was a "deep dive" case study of each successful collaboration. In addition, this analysis was supplemented with interview data and a review of various textual documents from failed collaborative efforts dealing with similar issues.

Four (4) successful collaborative groups from differing arenas were carefully selected for analysis. Each collaborative met the conditions defined previously in this article. The criteria for selecting the cases (based on Chrislip & Larson, 1994) were that: (1) they produced concrete results; (2) the problem was sufficiently complex; (3) significant obstacles existed that had to be overcome; (4) there were diverse stakeholders involved; and (5) there was widespread acknowledgment and recognition of success in dealing with the issue. The identified groups were:

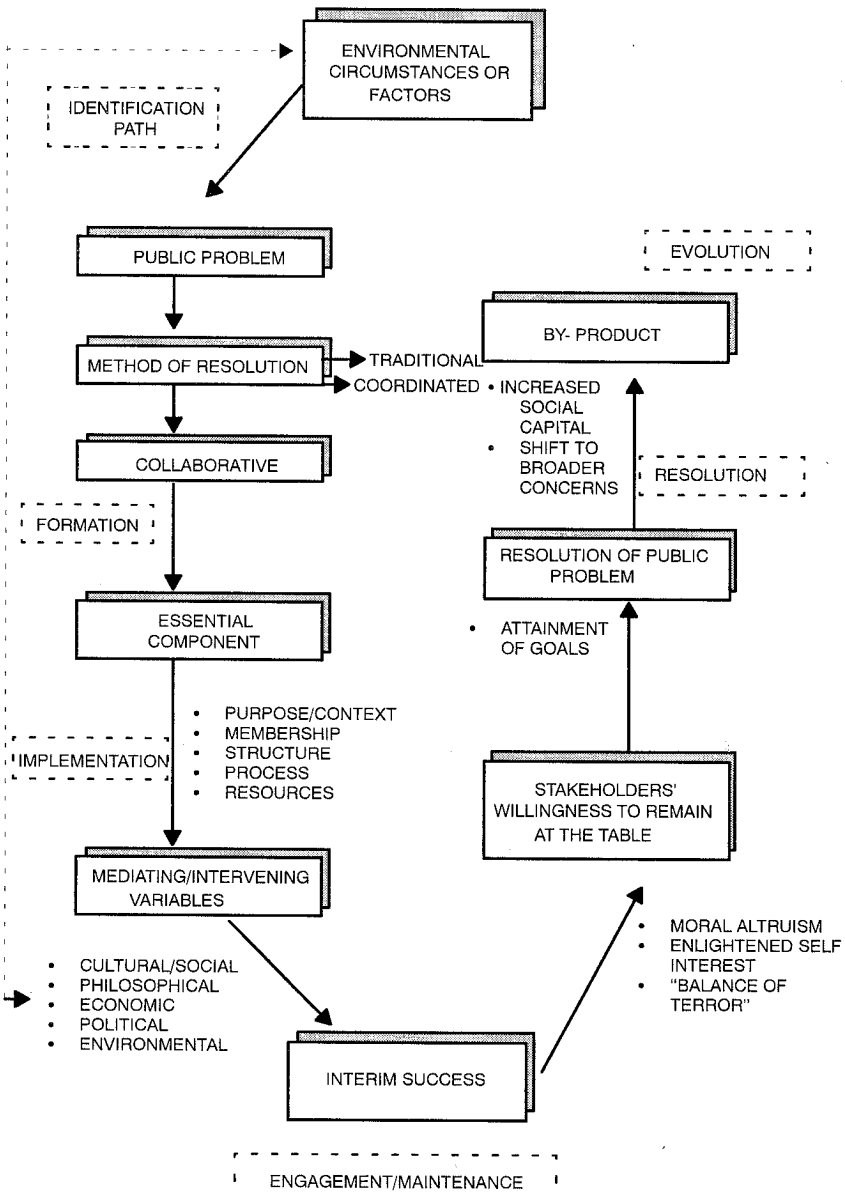
- The Clark County Habitat Conservation Plan for the Desert Tortoise (HCP)–a group dealing with the emergency listing of the desert tortoise under the federal Endangered Species Act in the Las Vegas Valley of southern Nevada;
- The Nevada Family Preservation and Family Support Program (FP/FS)–a group dealing with system-wide reform of the state's child welfare system;

- The Oregon Watershed Improvement Coalition (OWIC)–a group of industry and environmental stakeholders focusing on water use and management of riparian zones in the rangeland environments of Oregon; and
- The California Social Work Education Center Project (Cal-SWEC)–a group dealing with public service and university social work education throughout California.

Failed cases of collaboration that were used as a source of data for this model included the Western Mojave Coordinated Management Plan (CMP), a group dealing with the emergency listing of the desert tortoise in the California cities of Barstow, Baker and Victorville; the Nevada KIDS Count Project, a statewide collaborative aimed at collecting benchmarks on the status of children as part of a national effort by the Annie E. Casey Foundation; and the Clark County Cities in Schools (CIS) Project, a public/private collaborative linking social services with schools.

After a review of the textual documents from each collaborative occurred, a survey instrument was administered to key steering committee members of the collaborative project. The instrument developed by research funded by the American Leadership Forum (Omni Research, 1996) was used as a baseline measurement of the groups' current effectiveness. After the survey results were analyzed, face-to-face or telephone interviews of steering committee members from each of the four collaboratives were conducted over a seven-month period. The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended, requiring 30 minutes to an hour and a half to complete. At least six diverse representatives from each collaborative group were interviewed. Several interviewees were contacted again to clarify technical matters or to get further detail. The questions directed to members of the collaborative groups were structured to gain further insight into the historical development and environmental factors or circumstances contributing to the issue; the collaborative process; the mediating or intervening variables that affected the collaborative process; and factors leading to the resolution of the problem. Various theoretical tools were then employed to extract meaning and to develop the process model. The interview data was critical to the identification of the conditions needed for collaboration and for charting the Collaborative Pathway process model discussed next and illustrated in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1. Collaborative Pathway



The Collaborative Pathway Process Model

Individuals and groups enter into collaborations for different reasons. This was the case in each of the four successful case studies. In the Habitat Conservation Plan for the Desert Tortoise (HCP), for example, a community crisis and lack of options promoted participation. The Family Preservation and Family Support Program (FP/FS) was mandated by federal legislation. The Oregon Watershed Improvement Coalition (OWIC) was created due to the failure of conventional practices and as a result of a leader emerging who provided a vision compelling enough that interested stakeholders, were drawn to the table to implement it. For the California Social Work Education Project (CalSWEC), an opportunity to tap into federal funding created the impetus for working together.

Figure 1, based on these study findings, outlines a process model that builds towards collaboration. Included in this Collaborative Pathway model are the following steps: identification path; formation; implementation; engagement/maintenance; resolution; and evolution. While ultimately, determining success of a collaborative effort must be based on whether the originating objectives were obtained, it is proposed in this model that certain additional components of the process must be mastered successfully to attain the desired outcome.

The model begins with the uncertainty that surrounds the formation of a public problem, and the ultimate link between the identification of a problem, the possibility for a solution and a favorable political and social climate. According to Kingdon (1984), issues get on the agenda when " . . . a problem is recognized, a solution is available, and the political climate makes the time right for change" (p. 84). At any given time, the particular items on the agenda are a mixture of several independent streams: problems, solutions, and politics. When all three streams converge at a critical point, a "window of opportunity" is opened for a short period of time. According to the author, since change in each stream takes place independently from changes in the others, what actually ends up on the agenda often depends upon luck or good timing. Once the three streams are aligned, the next critical step is their coupling. This is the intentional effort to seize the opportunity and place the problem onto the agenda before conditions change. This is done by a champion or "policy entrepreneur" who is knowledgeable about the issue and willing to invest the time and resources to keep the streams together.

Each of the four case studies on collaboration began with a complex problem–an endangered species that halted growth and development (HCP), the need for child welfare reform (FP/FS), the lack of coordination in managing riparian zones (OWIC), and the lack of education of social workers for public service (CalSWEC)–that connected with a window of opportunity, a political and social condition that was ripe and a real potential for a solution. While the initial conditions that created the problem and allowed for the problem to be elevated for resolution are varied among the four cases and not completely understood, the pathway for resolution was similar as were the patterns and processes that were followed.

The "window of opportunity" for the HCP to form and address the endangered desert tortoise in the Las Vegas Valley occurred at the right time. Given the current political climate in the national and local environments, a time delay in 1989 listing could have been detrimental to the process. The debate presently occurring in southern Nevada on the merits of limiting growth, that is being advanced by certain politicians, could have been significantly reframed. The need to allow for more growth and development may not have been as strong and the issue of the listing of the endangered tortoise could have been caught up in the political debate on the merits of unchecked growth. Failure to submit a plan to the federal government which would have ceased development in parts of the county may not have been viewed a negative in today's climate.

On the national level, similar public land management efforts for the desert tortoise in other high growth regions of its range (southern California and southwestern Utah) have failed or are still in the process of trying to reach solutions to the multiplicity of public land-use issues (e.g., the Western Mojave Coordinated Management Plan, the Washington County HCP and the northern and eastern Colorado Desert Coordinated Management Plan). Some jurisdictions like San Bernadino County have chosen to wait out current debates in Congress on the fate of the Endangered Species Act. Because of this dialogue going on in Washington, the federal U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has chosen not to vigorously enforce the regulations on disturbances of habitat for the tortoise.

In the FP/FS program, the ability of the "policy entrepreneurs" to ensure that the state budget office and oversight department allowed for a consensus-based group to decide how the allocation of the federal

dollars for child welfare reform would occur was a key factor in the group's initial success. Similar policy entrepreneurs or "champions" emerged in each of the case studies.

Identification Path

During the identification path, a method of resolution is chosen. This could include the continuum outlined earlier in this paper (i.e., cooperation, coordination or collaboration) or a more traditional approach used in various arenas to address complex problems. The traditional approach can incorporate standard local, state and federal regulatory proceedings (i.e., notice and comment rule making procedures); legal avenues; and/or free enterprise market-driven transactions (i.e., privatization or compensation for land uses). In the four case studies, a variety of social variables served as guides in deciding that a collaborative process was the optimal choice in enhancing the chances for goal attainment. Stakeholder diversity, potential for alternative resolution and immediacy of need for resolution were three of the variables that will be briefly discussed.

Stakeholder diversity–In each of the four studies, there were a large and diverse number of stakeholders that needed to be brought to the table. For example, in the HCP study, when the desert tortoise was listed as endangered by the federal government, development was stalled in the Las Vegas Valley at a time when over 6,000 people per month were relocating to the area. The action resulted in a classic confrontation between economic interests and the conservation of endangered species. Local ranchers who were required to cutback on grazing areas and seasons were threatening a range war and off-road vehicle enthusiasts were up in arms on the restrictions imposed on their use of the desert. In order to reach an acceptable mitigation plan by the federal government, it was necessary for these players to develop an action plan with environmentalists who were responsible for securing the listing of the tortoise.

Similarly, in the OWIC study, instream water interests who sought to protect instream flows for the benefit of native riparian species and processes (i.e., recreationists and environmentalists) were at opposite ends of the spectrum from interests which would divert and consume water–primarily irrigated agriculture and industrial water users. In order to ensure the diverse players would not co-opt the process, an extensive amount of deliberation and consultation from a wide range

of participants on specific strategies and objectives were necessary. A collaborative process that incorporated consensus-based decision-making was seen as an optimal way to proceed.

Potential for alternative resolution–Alternative methods of resolution such as appeals through politicians or litigation may afford some individuals or groups a more attractive option. There may not be full commitment to the process if another alternative is more viable. In both the FP/FS program and the CalSWEC, federal regulations to some degree mandated various interest groups to come together to reach their goals. In CalSWEC, a shared governance structure developed that consisted of deans and directors from the schools, county and state human service directors and representatives from state and national child welfare groups. In order to qualify for federal matching funds, applications had to be made through the human service director and these requests has to be funneled through the CalSWEC project.

In the HCP, after repeated efforts by developers and state and local governments to invalidate the listing by the Federal Department of Interior had failed, there was little recourse left but to attempt to craft a compromise to allow for continued development and at the same time protect critical habitat for the desert tortoise. In each of the four studies, options for alternative resolution was low and therefore engaging in the time and resource intensive collaborative effort was seen as advantageous.

Immediacy of need for resolution–Although traditional regulatory proceedings and litigation can be time-consuming, the time demands for a consensus form of decision-making can easily equal if not surpass the traditional methods. Furthermore, even after all the time and effort is expended, it can be an uncertain process and fail to result in any type of agreement. The transaction costs associated with a collaborative form of decision-making can be considerable and result in an unfair playing field for organizations and individuals who lack the expertise, staff, time and other resources. With traditional proceedings, there is at least a final outcome (albeit not to the satisfaction of all parties). Coordination and cooperation may also be avenues for problem resolution since they do not require the resource and structural complexities that are required in collaborative efforts.

In each of the studies the need for immediate resolution was not high. In the FP/FS program, the problems confronting the child welfare system were long-standing and the process mandated by the fed-

eral government required adequate time to initially begin working through a collaborative effort and to address the focal issue of community-based initiatives and programs to protect children. Even in the HCP, there was an ability to craft a short-term or interim plan that permitted development in exchange for conservation of prime habitat public lands while a long-term solution was being addressed.

Formation and Implementation

The formation and implementation stages become critical to the overall success of the collaborative process. Failure to ensure that the five dimensions of collaboration discussed earlier in this paper–purpose, membership, structure, process, and resources–are addressed will significantly impair the use of this pathway. Structuring a process that closely resembles the dimensions stated above should enhance the ability to weather the host of mediating or intervening variables. These variables will confront the collaborative effort throughout the pathway but may be especially acute as the process moves from implementation to engagement or maintenance. The same factors and uncertainty that came into play during the problem identification may resurface in one form or another and affect the pace and outcome of the collaborative effort. The ability to understand and interpret this unpredictability and navigate through these mediating variables is one of the most important aspects as to why one collaborative effort succeeds and another fails. Given this inherent unpredictability, any collaborative effort may fail to achieve its goals as a result of events beyond control of its participants.

In each of the successful case studies, formal legal agreements were established outlining the commitment of the organizations and their leaders to the collaborative effort. Organizational structures were carefully crafted to established clear communication channels, agreed upon ground rules, resources to be committed or jointly secured and established roles of its membership. Considerable attention was given to ensuring that all stakeholders affected by the issue were brought to the table. This did not occur without problems given the diversity and intensity of views. In each of the HCP, FP/FS Program and the OWIC, the group had to request that at least one of its original member groups either send another representative or stop attending due to the inability of the group as a whole to progress.

In several of the failed case studies, a key reason attributed to the lack of successfully achieving their stated goals was that failure to include some critical stakeholders affected by the issue. For example, the failure to involve some key citizen groups in an HCP in the affected California cities of Barstow, Baker and Victorville (the Western Mojave Coordinated Management Plan) resulted in the complete lack of acceptance by local residents. After three years of virtually internal planning and development, public support for the plan was solicited as required by the federal government and duly rejected.

Another key factor cited by the successful case study groups were their decision to bring in an outside and skilled facilitator to assist the group in dealing with controversial issues and/or to guide the group through a consensus decision-making process. OWIC identified someone from the local University, the FP/FS Program put out a Request for Proposal (RFP) and hired a full-time facilitator, CalSWEC brought in national experts and the HCP hired an attorney, who earlier had successfully facilitated a similar HCP in Coachella Valley, California involving the Fringe-toed Lizard.

The most common intervening variables that surfaced and threatened the successful case studies involved change in political leadership at the state or local level; the departure of key participants who were involved in the inception of the program and the uncertainty of continued funding. The potential for loss of funding and decreased political support were at times high; however, the formal organizational structure and documentation of past leaders to support the outcomes assisted the groups in working through these obstacles.

Engagement/Maintenance

The collaborative process is a time consuming endeavor. It can take years for the formation and implementation of the process to occur. The four successful case studies in this article had been together for a minimum of six (6) years and all felt it was essential that some sort of interim or short term successes were achieved to keep stakeholders at the table and committed to following through with the effort. These successes were often formally celebrated and time was taken by the group to openly acknowledge their progress.

Given the lengthy process involved in collaborative efforts, stakeholders must have a compelling reason to agree to become part of the process and remain at the table. It has been proposed that there are basically three

assumptions as to why this occurs: (1) moral altruism; (2) enlightened self-interest; and/or (3) a balance of terror. Some research suggests that moral commitments were able to attract members to organizations when the organization had altruistic objectives (Hage, 1974; Knobe, 1988). "Moral altruism" describes those individuals who are oriented towards achieving a broader or collective good even when they do not personally benefit.

"Enlightened self-interest" describes those participants motivated to either come to the table, or remain there, due to a combination of self-interest and moral commitments (Etzioni, 1988). Sometimes individuals may initially agree to participate due to rational self-interest and later evolve into a broader concern for community-wide issues. A "balance of terror" describes participants who remain at the table for fear of losing out if they were not involved, or a concern that the process would create a huge liability for their competing interests if they did not stay with it (Porter & Salvesen, 1995).

Although the majority of participants in each of the collaborative efforts suggested that their motivating reason for remaining at the table was a commitment to the larger societal goals, it did not appear to be the sole reason. In reality, self-interest and "a balance of terror" were more reflective of the true reason that individual groups and stakeholders continued with the process. There appeared to be very few cases of pure moral altruism. Enlightened self-interest seemed to describe the motivation of most participants. They initially came to the table from a rational self-interest perspective and later evolved into a genuine concern for the broader picture. This occurred through repeated deliberation, dialogue and successful experience in working together with people who are different.

The "balance of terror" seemed to also fit several participants, especially with the HCP for the desert tortoise. Since all affected parties were at an impasse (and legal avenues were exhausted), a collaborative effort was a strong motivating factor to commit to the HCP process. Since the HCP process was adopted as the pathway for compromise, interest groups felt compelled to stay with the process for fear that there needs would not be addressed, or would be eclipsed by competing interests.

Whatever the primary reason for staying at the table, it is imperative that one develop. In reality, in the four case studies, to some extent, it was probably a combination of all three reasons. However, remaining

at the table and forging a resolution are two different issues. People can remain discussing an issue and not ever develop a viable solution.

Resolution and Evolution

The resolution stage is reached when the originating goals of the collaborative effort are achieved. Each of the successful collaborative groups attained a good portion of their original goals. For the HCP–strategies are in place to protect the desert tortoise and economic development is continuing at record pace; for the FP/FS–community-based programming throughout the state is in operation that is assisting public agencies in protecting children; for the OWIC–legislation passed that has created a mechanism to resolve water use management disputes and to encourage improvements of private and public watersheds in Oregon; and for CalSWEC–a set of practice competencies for child welfare workers are in place and a stipend and placement program is in operation throughout the state.

However, given the intractability of many of the controversies associated with these policy disputes–endangered species, child welfare, and natural resource management–the issues will continue in one form or another. Whether they evolve to the point that a pathway is charted for resolution will depend on how the issues are framed and the political and social environment in which they appear.

The model suggests that after the stage of resolution is attained, a final stage entitled "evolution" may occur. Evolution includes by-products of increased social capital and a shift to broader concerns. The increase in social capital is based on the premise that repeated success in working together creates social capital and that the more it is used, the more it grows. Similarly, repeated experience in deliberating and engaging in discourse between people who are different, and success in collaboratively achieving joint goals, will lead the group to a shift in focus to broader common concerns. The by-products outlined in this model enable the individuals and groups engaged in the collaborative effort to evolve and expand the application of their successful efforts to other initiatives and problems.

Various action oriented groups have spun off as a result of the successful collaboratives. The HCP in Clark County, Nevada is in the process of evolving and expanding its focus on other species which may be equally impacted by the pace and development in the Las Vegas Valley and surrounding areas. The Clark County Multi-Spe-

cies Habitat Conservation Plan seeks to provide both public and private land owners the assurances that, with a few modifications to the current conservation plan for the desert tortoise, the federal government will not require substantial additional lands to be set aside for the protection of the additional target species.

Likewise, in Oregon, consensus-based groups such as the Trout Creek Mountains Working Group and the Central Region Natural Resource Coalition are logical extensions of the OWIC philosophy. An increase in social capital was evident in each of the four successful case studies. Participants uniformly identified instances where problem resolution occurred on similar but unrelated disputes because of past relationships that developed.

So when do collaboratives end? While the HCP and CalSWEC are still operating as a collaborative; the OWIC has moved towards a less formal and informational-sharing (cooperative) role and the FP/FS has dissolved due a lack of funding. The degree to which the group has successfully been able to achieve its originating goals, available funding to support the lengthy process, and the on-going political and social environments should provide some indication to the governing structure on whether to continue, evolve, transform or dissolve.

DISCUSSION

The field of collaboration does have its share of critics. Many national educational, environmental, and human service groups are worried about the trend towards local collaboratives. They see it as a ploy by various governmental agencies and private industries to cut them out of the picture and instead deal only with local stakeholders who may not have the same negotiating skills or resources and thus may be more willing to compromise. Weber and Khademian (1997) note that many consumer and environmental advocates voice concern over their ability to stay involved over the long term. Staffing problems were most acute for these advocates, which typically had to rely on a handful of expert staff as opposed to the large amount of personnel employed by industry and government.

Douglas Amy (1987) posits that the use of collaboration can be a subtle but significant form of political control by various economic interests which can co-opt citizen involvement in the name of consensus-building. Hallett and Birchall (1992) have suggested that the re-

search about the definition, practice, and efficacy of collaboration in the child maltreatment field is confusing and incomplete. The authors fear that many collaborative efforts begin without an appreciation of the true complexity of the effort and that the process of collaboration often gets confused with the outcomes of the effort.

The uncertainty of the process has been cited by many authors as a deterrent to embracing a collaborative form of policy-making (Porter & Salvesen, 1995). There is no guarantee that, after all the time and resources are spent, there will be an agreement reached by the affected parties. Additionally, the high transaction costs that may result from the considerable amount of interactions between government officials and citizens has been cited as a factor in its limited use (Warren & Weschler, 1986).

Finally, the lack of a funding mechanism to support and sustain these efforts has thwarted their more widespread use. This, coupled with the failure of many groups to establish a clear set of formal, binding rules to ensure others will not preempt appeals through politicians, litigation or a public-relations campaign is another major limiting factor in its broader application (Reilly, 1998; Weber & Khademian, 1997).

Despite these concerns, this article provides four case examples of organizations and groups who have successfully mastered the collaborative process and reached resolution to various problem situations. Whether spurred by vision, opportunity, adversity, or mandate, all of these collaborations accomplished something similar. Essentially, they figured out how to work together to achieve their stated goals. While the initial conditions that created the problem differed, the pathway chosen for resolution was similar as were some of the patterns and processes that followed. Several elements were in place in each of these arenas: entrepreneurial leaders or policy entrepreneurs emerged in each case; the essential internal components necessary for the collaborative process and documented in the literature were mastered; a contingency approach to the process was employed to meet the unique demands of each situation and its mediating variables; interim success was achieved; and a compelling reason or reasons to stay at the table developed.

Reducing some of the uncertainties surrounding collaboration will require addressing appropriate funding and the development of formal mechanisms to bind outcomes. A considerable amount of funding and

resources are needed for effective collaboration. Funding for initiating and sustaining a policy outcome through collaboration is rarely available at the level needed (Berman, 1996; Porter & Salvesen, 1995). In addition, ensuring that some type of formal mechanism is in place in collaborative resolution methods to bind outcomes is an important step in convincing politicians and the general public of their long term viability. Most of the interview participants expressed reservations on engaging in future collaborative efforts without conditions outlining formal binding rules.

Despite these limitations, employing collaborative efforts in various arenas and communities where policy disputes stubbornly resist resolution can result in important additional benefits. The by-products of successful collaboration can be lasting and especially important for communities that lack social capital. In communities where these important social networks are lacking, participating in the often tedious and fragile process of collaboration can produce benefits that create "collective or free spaces" where individuals can come together, express their concerns, learn about each other, and forge a common political and social identity (Kirlin, 1996; McKnight, 1995). The local conflicts played out in each of the four case studies brought together not merely individuals with different interests and stakes, but people operating in different ways to construct the issues of conflict and different ways of organizing and conducting discussion around these issues. This continued interaction and discourse translated into shared understandings and mutual trust which created relational resources that could be called upon at future times. This building of relationships created social capital (Boyte & Keri, 1996; Putnam, 1995). Collaborative planning finds its roots in this type of relation-building processes (Wallis & Koziol, 1996).

FUTURE RESEARCH

Additional studies aimed at understanding various aspects of collaboration are needed. For example, what are the long term effects of collaborative efforts and how stable are the outcomes negotiated in the collaborative arena? What are the boundaries of collaborative efforts? Do they translate into political action, resource development and other collaborative ventures? How can the uncertainty associated with the collaborative process be minimized?

Further, when is it most optimal to employ a collaborative framework instead of a cooperative, coordinated or more traditional approach? Based upon this research, it is hypothesized that the following social variables have predictive value in deciding whether a collaborative process would be most optimal in achieving goal attainment for problem situations. Additional research is needed to determine whether these theoretical propositions prove useful.

Diversity of stakeholders. The larger the number and diversity of stakeholders involved (including those who are on opposite spectrums of an issue), the better off one would be with a more consensus-driven process that requires some form of broad-based participation. In order to ensure diverse players do not co-opt the process, an extensive amount of deliberation and consultation from a wide range of participants on specific strategies and objectives is usually necessary. Involvement in designing the process and having input into the product will more likely result in buy-in from all participants (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Kemmis, 1990).

Degree of social capital. The premise here is that in communities with ample amounts of social capital, agreement on all aspects of life together are embedded within a larger structure of personal relations and networks. There is a greater ability for collaboration to take place because individuals/organizations have a history of working together. Communities lacking in social capital may have difficulty adhering to the demands necessary for collaboration. Less formal structures such as cooperation and coordination may be more appropriate avenues for initially working together (Bellah, 1985; Boyte & Keri, 1996; Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993).

Potential for resolution. When alternative avenues exist for resolution, it is theorized that a collaborative method of resolution is not optimal. Collaborative efforts consume a considerable amount of resources and alternative methods of resolution such as appeals through politicians or litigation may afford some individuals or groups a more attractive option. There may not be full commitment to the process if another alternative is more viable (Porter & Salvesen, 1995; Weber & Khademian, 1997).

CONCLUSION

The process model presented in this document offers a framework of necessary conditions for getting to collaboration. The model identifies both the conditions and steps under which people can understand their

interdependence and what collaboration entails. Additionally, the study supports the premise that success in achieving a positive outcome through collaboration is dependent on a wide variety of circumstances. Understanding both the initial conditions that created the problem and the historical patterns associated with the issue is critical (Mucciaroni, 1992).

In addition, structuring a process that includes mastering the essential dimensions of a collaborative, should enhance the ability of the actors to weather the host of the sometimes unpredictable variables (i.e., social, economic, political and environmental) that will confront their effort. However, there is no guarantee that accomplishing these tasks will ensure success. Continual adaptation to the changing conditions by a policy entrepreneur can minimize the uncertainties. Further, interim successes and a compelling reason for stakeholders to remain committed to the process are imperative. Finally, the by-products of the collaborative pathway can translate into increased social capital and a shift to broader concerns.

Employing collaboration to resolve policy disputes and intractable problems is fairly experimental and is being done in an atmosphere of extreme conflict and fractured communities. This form of policy resolution can be extremely time and resource intensive and despite many of the purported benefits of this method, it remains an uncertain process. This uncertainty, coupled with the high transaction costs, clearly is a major deterrent in its enhanced deployment.

Collaboration cannot exist solely because the organizational machinery is in place, or even because it is felt people are working well together. While formal processes are essential, too often such aspects of the collaborative process become confused with the ability to achieve tangible outcomes. However, the atmosphere of conflict will keep politicians, bureaucrats and the general public interested in at least trying consensus-based mechanisms for resolution. Recognizing the heavy price that society pays for the existence of the many "messy" issues, and for the inability to deal with them effectively, there is good reason to continue the exploration and refinement of this method of resolving complex problems.

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