Strategies for Success in Collaboration: A Workshop

Presentation by Olivia Walling, J.D., Ph.D.
Sponsored by Office of Research
Roadmap

• Types of Collaboration
• Tools and Skills
  – Building trust: Exploring differences and assumptions
  – Plan for success
  – Negotiation/communication basics
  – Role play
Examples of Novel Technologically Mediated Collaborations

• Shared instrument: primary purpose increase access to an expensive instrument (e.g., a telescope)
• Community data systems: information resource created for use by a community (e.g., Protein Data Bank)
• Open community contribution system: community tackles the same research problem with contributions in the form of work rather than data (e.g., handwriting recognition)
• Virtual community of practice: distributed community shares research area and communicates about it (e.g., Ocean.US)
Tensions Important in Collaborating

Originality ↔ → Tradition
Disinterestedness ↔ → Passion
Cooperation ↔ → Competition
Closing ↔ → Opening
Sharing ↔ → Secrecy
Distinctiveness ↔ → Belonging
Engagement ↔ → Independence
Autonomy ↔ → Accountability
Democracy ↔ → Autocracy
Explore Assumptions and Experiences

Handouts:

• Explore your assumptions and preferred approaches to research in order to address tensions before they become problems (Eigenbrode, et al. 2007)

• Learn about your collaborators’ relevant history in order to understand whether they would be valuable partners.
Plan Before Problems Arise

- Management and leadership: who decides, when, who will be consulted, how often, what are the deadlines?
- Communication: how often, by what means, who initiates, when should it happen in person?
- Credit and data sharing: allocation of credit, who owns data, for how long?
- Standardization/work flow: do you need to change practices to marry data/results, do you need to adopt standardization?
The Be-All and End-All

Rule no. 1: Assess Your Interests
- What are you seeking from the situation?
- What would it take to make you feel that it had been successful/properly resolved?

Rule no. 2: Ask Questions
Preparing for Difficult Conversations

1. Identify each side’s interests
2. Invent options that will satisfy everyone’s interests
3. Learn what standards or authorities external to the situation may dictate resolution of the dispute
4. Understand your best alternative to an agreement with the other side
5. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse
Be Genuinely Curious

• Don’t be afraid to open the door to others’ goals and desires. What if you started the meeting with the question: “What do you want at the end of this meeting that you don’t have now?”

• Consider seriously the fact that your perception of the situation may be mistaken.

• Pose concerns as questions, and make sure your questions are collaborative and curious—not accusatory.
  – Please explain that to me again....
  – I’m having trouble understanding why or how....
  – Help me to understand...
  – Please tell me where I went wrong...
  – Could you explain your reasoning to me again, I want to make sure I understand.
  – Why do we do it this way?
  – I was wondering...
Skills to Practice

• Listen actively: don’t interrupt, ask open-ended questions, agree whenever you can, acknowledge his authority and competence,

• Acknowledge the obvious: if it’s not going well, acknowledge that and ask how the other sees it; if you act awkwardly in tough conversations, acknowledge that that happens and assure the other that it’s not directed at her personally

• Express your views without provocation: remove “but” from your vocabulary—yes…and not yes…but, make “I” statements not “you” statements, acknowledge differences with optimism

• Ask problem-solving questions: why, why not, what if…, how do you see it working out…?

• Don’t be afraid of silence: pause and reflect, ask to reflect and continue the conversation later
Most Important

If someone shows him/herself to be untrustworthy, NEVER be untrustworthy back.

The correct response is to stop trusting that person.
After the Difficult Conversation

Assess your negotiation

• If turned down, ask why
• Assess how well you advanced or did not advance your goals and the reasons why
• Decide what you need to work on in the future
• Consider what next steps need to be taken and by whom
• Keep a record of your assessment and refer to it before future negotiation
Communication goes awry when others stop thinking the conversation is about the content and start thinking that it’s about your motivations or bad intentions. Ask yourself:

• Do others believe that I care about their goals?
• Do others trust my motives?
References