



MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION

**How Government, Business, and Non-Governmental Leaders
Transform Complex Challenges into New Possibilities**

a One Earth Future Research Report by

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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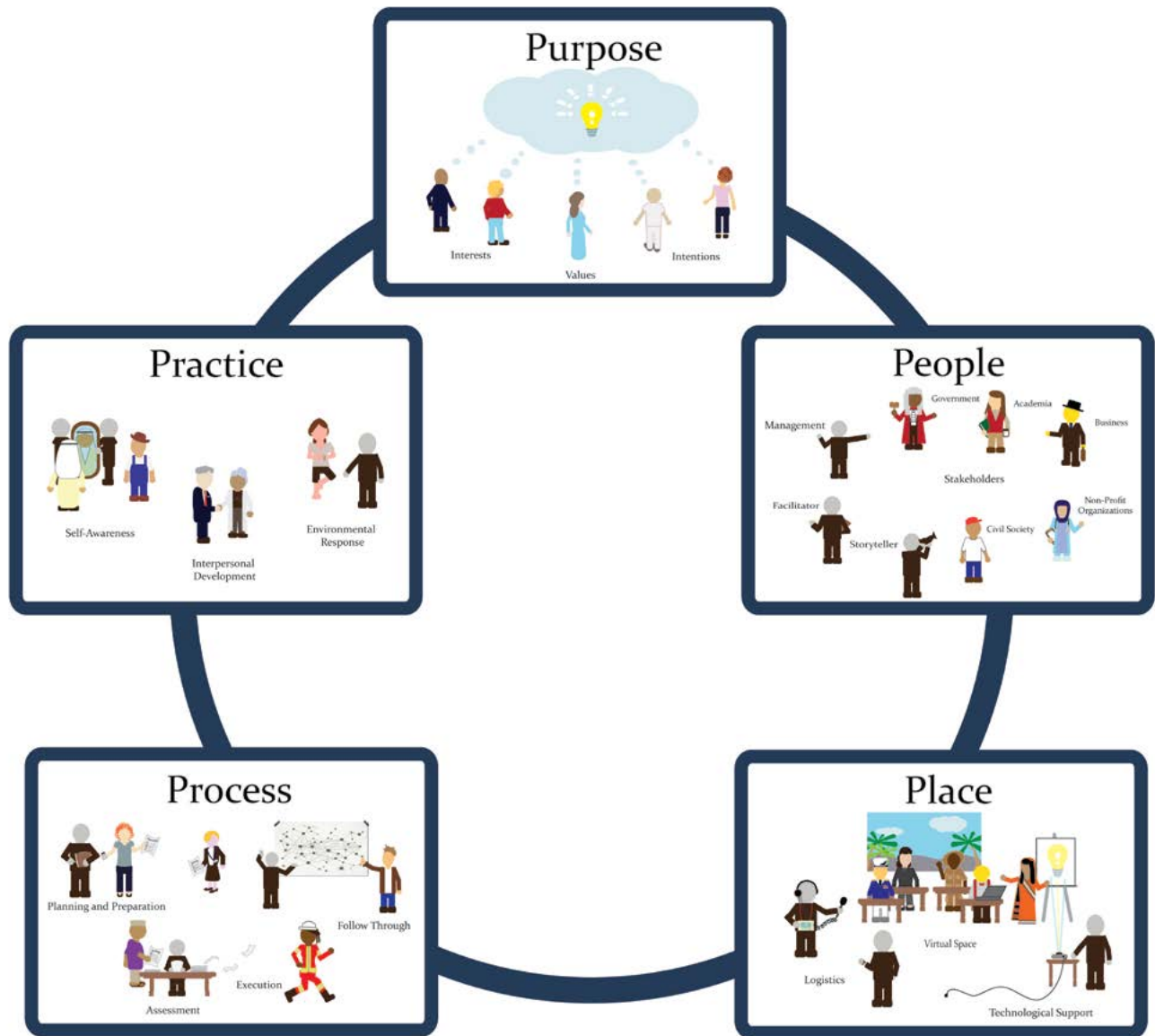
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THE 5 PS OF MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION



PURPOSE

MSC enables stakeholders to think, feel, and act together in innovative ways that allows new possibilities for the future to unfold.

PEOPLE

The MSC enterprise weaves together the stakeholders' different perspectives and capacities to generate new possibilities in support of superordinate goals.

PLACE

Venues must generate a sense of belonging and promote a relaxed environment. Facilitators can acknowledge the diversity of voices in a MSC forum and articulate that everyone belongs there.

PROCESS

Facilitators should work closely with stakeholders to discuss the root causes driving challenges; shared stakeholder interests; and what is needed to move the issue forward.

PRACTICE

MSC skills aren't just conceptual understandings, but performance skills learned through practice. Stakeholders learn how to embody collaborative behavior so that it becomes second nature.

INTRODUCTION

Witnessing people suffer and even die as a result of divisive conflict inspired me to search for creative alternatives to violence. My experiences as a military officer over the last 25 years, working across the domains of business, government, and civil society around the world, taught me that collaborative approaches to complex challenges can and do work. Harvard's Program on Negotiations, a trip to Northern Ireland to study the conflict there, and my support of a mediation process for an Israeli-Palestinian delegation were opportunities that provided me with pragmatic tools and rich practice in multi-party negotiations. In my experience designing a series of collaborative forums for groups of 300 diverse stakeholders from over 20 countries in which we would explore alternatives to violence in Southeast Asia, I learned that no matter how difficult the challenge, there is probably someone who is already working on a creative solution, or who has the know-how to generate effective outcomes. In facilitating a variety of interagency and multinational initiatives to tackle the issues of security, governance, and development in Iraq, Afghanistan, Colombia, El Salvador, Peru, Panama, Honduras, Southeast Asia, and the Balkans region, I learned the value of patiently cultivating relationships (which would become invaluable), developing collaborative processes, and discovering the possibilities of common ground for collective action. Over the years, I have sought out diverse innovators, built bridges between diverse groups, and provided platforms on which to share knowledge and address difficult challenges in governance in order to make a positive impact in society.

Purpose of the Report

In this report I share what I have learned from my experiences in the form of a guiding framework to help others successfully create and facilitate productive collaborative forums across business, government, and civil society sectors. Academic research and input from a variety of scholar-practitioners also bolster this comprehensive approach to complex challenges. Finally, I use three short case studies at the end of the paper to further illustrate systemic ways to place these ideas into pragmatic action.

Intended Audience

I want to share my learning with fellow innovators in business, government, academia, non-governmental organizations, and civil society who are searching for new ways to address complex challenges in a collaborative manner. This paper on multi-stakeholder collaboration (MSC) will serve business executives who are seeking to enhance organizational performance and take their multinational ventures to the next level. Civil-society leaders who want clearer processes with which to navigate complexity will find a tried and tested framework in the following pages. Social entrepreneurs will learn new ways to broaden their networks and enhance efforts to make a positive impact. This report will also assist government officials and leaders in non-governmental organizations who appreciate systemic approaches to dynamic challenges.

After many years of research and applied field experience, Judith Innes and David Boohar observed, "around the world communities, regions, and even nations are seeking collaborative ways to make policy as an alternative to confrontation, top-down decision making, or paralysis...ways which are more inclusive of interest, [and] more open to new options and opportunities."¹ Given the uncertainties

of today's complex challenges, many leaders are looking for better ways to navigate turbulence in a sea of multiple actors. Others, frustrated by the status quo, feel stuck and desire change in the way they interact with other stakeholders. Many of the civil-society organizations, government agencies, and international businesses that are seeking to increase their legitimacy and accountability are also putting greater emphasis on building wider partnerships.

Change-makers who bring state and non-state actors together to address messy problems see that the concerns of business, government, and civil society overlap. This observation is not new. In 1935, Mahatma Gandhi stated, "The whole gamut of man's activities today constitutes an invisible whole. You cannot divide social, economic, political, and purely religious work into watertight compartments."² These same factors continue to be intertwined, if not becoming more so, as globalization increases. One need only to look at the impact the US banking crisis had on international politics and global markets, or the Dalai Lama's effect on health and education, or to Apple's influence on technology and culture worldwide to appreciate these connections.

Compounding this reality is the fact that many of the interdependent challenges we face are outside the ability of any one actor to adequately affect. No one organization has all of the requisite knowledge, power, relationships, or resources to comprehensively address any one thorny issue that affects multiple stakeholders. Few actors are so powerful that they can afford to ignore other players in an interdependent world. If they do so, they can expect marginalized or disadvantaged groups to rise up in protest, as witnessed in the Arab Spring or in numerous other contemporary movements in Syria and Egypt. Whether diverse stakeholders are immersed in a bloody conflict, an international business venture, revitalization efforts in a local community, or any complex endeavor that crosses organizational and cultural boundaries, they are all looking for effective ways to manage these messy challenges in a fast-moving, chaotic environment.

No one organization has all of the requisite knowledge, power, relationships, or resources to comprehensively address a complex issue that affects multiple stakeholders.

This recognition is resonating with an increasing number of business executives, the managers of non-governmental organizations, and government officials as they try to make sense of, and manage, the constantly changing conditions affected by politics, economics, and society. Thomas Friedman, in observing complex challenges around the world, says that "we are either going to rise to the level of leadership, innovation, and collaboration that is required, or everybody is going to lose—big. Just coasting along and doing the same old things is not an option any longer. We need a whole new approach."³

The "5P" Framework for this Report

A variety of insightful books and articles on different aspects of collaboration, such as the multi-stakeholder process, are available. However, despite this knowledge, and in the face of overwhelming evidence that collaboration is necessary, collaboration routinely fails. Often, people in the multi-stakeholder arena may have clear intentions but lack necessary skills or attributes. Or, skilled people are eager to collaborate, but lack a coherent process. Sometimes, effective multi-stakeholder collaboration—with the right people and the right process in place—makes initial gains, however, no one captures the story, sustains the momentum, or measures the outcomes. Progress subsequently falters and

key insights fall through organizational cracks. Helpful learning does not get institutionalized and stakeholders end up reinventing the process, or worse, giving up.

The following outline illustrates my “5P” approach, which addresses the challenges mentioned and integrates the features that successful multi-stakeholder initiatives commonly share:

- *Purpose*: A specific issue, challenge, opportunity, or possibility that concerns all participants and provides the reason for convening
- *People*: The participation of multiple state and non-state actors including representatives from government, business, non-governmental organizations, academia, and civil society
- *Place*: A space where participants meet in person (and, as needed, virtually) for the sake of dialogue
- *Process*: A process of shared inquiry, learning, problem solving, and (potentially) decision making in new ways that addresses stakeholder concerns⁴
- *Practice*: The efforts made on a regular basis by stakeholders to train and develop the “skills, mind-sets and heart-sets of collaboration”⁵

First, I explore ideas around why people join multi-stakeholder initiatives and the potential purposes of such forums. Intentions and stakeholder values play important roles in MSC. Then I examine the different kinds of people involved in an MSC. Stakeholders, the convening or managing team, facilitators, rapporteurs, and assessors are the focus in this section. Having the best possible participants—in terms of diversity, will, and capacity—plays a vital role in the outcomes of an MSC enterprise. The place where people come together to generate dialogue is the third critical component of MSC. Stakeholders need a safe container in which to open up, connect, and design new possibilities. A thoughtfully crafted process that galvanizes stakeholder commitment is the fourth key element. An expertly facilitated process creates the possibilities for discovering mutual interests, generating future scenarios, building new relationships, and fostering pilot projects. Ways to maintain momentum and share narratives about the endeavor are also critical aspects of the MSC process. The fifth element is practice. Collaboration, like any successful collective endeavor, requires training and development. Finally, stepping back and integrating these five elements throughout the life cycle of an MSC endeavor bolsters the possibilities for continued learning and sustainable growth.

It is helpful to think about MSC as you would an elite sports team or other high-performance collective endeavor, such as a world-class orchestra or dance company. To be successful, a high-performing team needs the right kinds of players, coaches, and leaders, a place to perform, a purpose for coming together, individual and collective practices, and a process or activity to perform. When the right mix comes together, participants create amazing outcomes. They enjoy moments of flow in which the integration of these various components creates a synergy that no one element could have produced on its own.⁶

Like members of a sports team, MSC stakeholders train and learn by performing the craft of collaboration. Olympic teams and MSC endeavors alike bring together a diverse set of skills and motivations. Facilitators, like coaches, help enable participants to coalesce around a mutual purpose and to fully maximize their contributions to a collaborative process. A setting conducive to collaboration also buoys an MSC endeavor, just as a stadium supports a team or a music hall supports an orchestra. MSC conveners and designers, like the managers of a sports franchise or ballet company, seek the

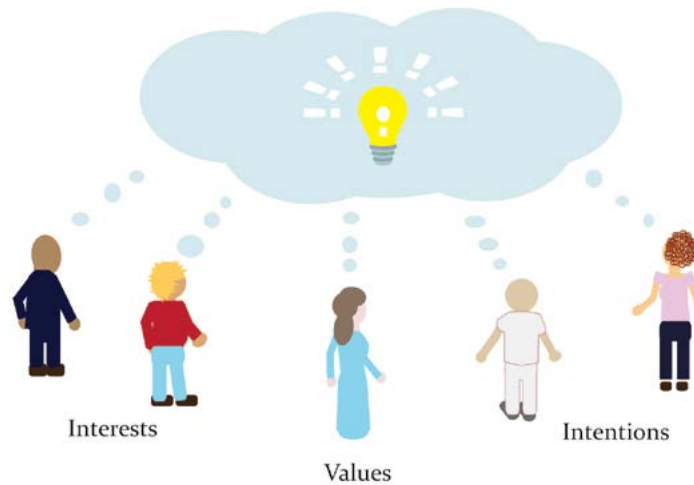
optimal mix of participants, place, process, practice, and purpose to enable new possibilities for collaborative performance to come to life.

Successfully leading a sports team, jazz ensemble, or MSC process means creating the conditions necessary for peak performance and new possibilities to emerge. People cannot be forced to collaborate, just as an Olympic team cannot be forced to win a gold medal. The 5Ps provide a road map that can be adapted to a variety of settings and challenges in support of collaboration in complex endeavors. It is not intended to be a lockstep approach. Instead, the 5P framework provides tried and tested principles that can enable diverse groups to co-create a safe and innovative space out of which new insights, relationships, and/or solutions can surface and make a positive impact.

Definitions

To facilitate the sharing of this pragmatic approach to collaboration, a few of the terms used should be defined. First, the term “stakeholder” refers to both the “participation of citizens as individuals and to the participation of organized groups” who are affected by a complex issue and care enough to do something about it.⁷ Second, “complex,” “messy,” and “wicked” are used interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to issues “for which there is no consensus on the problem or on the solution, and partisan interests [potentially] block collaboration.”⁸ Third, I define “governance” as the “systems that bring stakeholders and institutions affected by a specific issue together to share information, explore solutions, and make collective decisions,” bearing in mind that not all institutions actively seek or engage stakeholder input.⁹ Fourth, I define collaboration as one path of transformation for stakeholders who want to make a positive impact. It facilitates the growth of individuals and groups who are willing and able to come together to explore new paradigms. I believe that “collaboration is a practice of creating new observers and new possible actions together, in a mood of commitment to take care of the concerns of all parties as best possible.”¹⁰ This approach is not about building consensus at the level of the lowest common denominator. Instead, it is about integrating concerns, talents, and resources in a meaningful way that promotes self-organizing, builds critical mass for positive change, and addresses messy situations. Applied proactively, this approach can hedge against potential problems and address emerging opportunities. Collaboration occurs when diverse stakeholders participate in an inclusive process of discovery that produces beneficial outcomes.

PURPOSE



Introduction

In this section I explore the importance of purpose in the context of multi-stakeholder collaboration. Purpose is twofold: the overall aim of an MSC endeavor and the intentions of the individuals participating in the MSC initiative. First, the purpose of multi-stakeholder collaboration is to enable people to come together (often with some level of personal or professional risk) to think, feel, and act in new ways in the form of a shared inquiry with others.¹¹ Organizers with input from participants may have a specific purpose in mind, for example. Or, they may prefer to allow the MSC dynamics to emerge organically as the process unfolds. Second, people come together to collaborate for many different reasons. They bring unique perspectives to the MSC challenge, depending on what they care about and whether they have a sense of shared concerns. Stakeholders' perspectives influence the way they view problems, opportunities, and their fellow participants. Understanding these stakeholder worldviews and developing an overarching purpose can help focus the design of an MSC endeavor and attract the right mix of stakeholders who are affected by mutual concerns.

Purpose of an MSC Endeavor

When it is designed and conducted in a comprehensive fashion, MSC works, producing beneficial results for affected stakeholders. In my experience and according to Steven Yaffee and Julia Wondolleck, multi-stakeholder collaboration can:

- Build an understanding of individual and shared concerns that promotes information-sharing as well as creative win-win solutions
- Produce better decisions than adversarial processes can
- Improve the chances that decisions will be implemented. When people are not involved in change, they resist it. When they are involved, they are more likely to be committed to a plan of action and to sharing resources to get things done.¹²

Other positive outcomes of an MSC approach can include the creation of a network of stakeholders. Based on the outcomes of over a dozen collaborative dialogues, Innes and Booher conclude that successful MSC efforts produce “reciprocity, relationships, learning, and creativity” between stakeholders.¹³ Connecting isolated or disconnected stakeholders can also create a powerful sense of belonging and assist those who are affected with addressing grievances, if done appropriately.

Taking a comprehensive approach with finesse, an MSC project can help participants broaden their perspectives, solve mutual problems, share information and resources, and resolve conflicts.

Understanding Why People Join MSC Enterprises

It is helpful, when designing an MSC endeavor, to understand why people join a collaborative effort. Interestingly, people are often not aware of their intentions, or go about their business without consciously connecting to what they value. Simon Sinek argues that “very few people or companies can articulate why they do what they do. When I say ‘why’ I do not mean to make money—that’s a result. By ‘why’ I mean what is your purpose, cause or belief?”¹⁴ Sinek goes on to say that the purpose of any worthwhile undertaking “provides the context for everything else...has a profound and long lasting impact on the result...[and] is what inspires people to act.” Why people get involved, then, is a critical component of the MSC venture.

An appreciation of stakeholder intentions helps designers see what is possible in terms of collaboration. Chris Ansell and Alison Gash report that “incentives to participate depend in part upon whether the collaborative processes will yield meaningful results, particularly against the balance of time and energy that collaboration requires.”¹⁵ Stakeholders weigh the advantages and disadvantages of participation. Designers and sponsors ought to evaluate what incentives are available to support stakeholder participation. The more the perceived potential return on investment, the more likely stakeholders are to opt to join a collaborative process.

Interestingly enough, often people are not aware of their intentions or go about their business without consciously connecting to what they value.

Breakdowns can also incentivize stakeholders to try something different with respect to a complex challenge they face. Collaboration can come out of failure or a sense of frustration with the status quo. Research shows that stakeholders turn toward collaboration “as a response to the failures of downstream implementation...[and] as an alternative to adversarialism.”¹⁶ Stakeholders may be suffering so much with their current situations that it pushes them to look for alternative ways of dealing with the challenge at hand.

Understanding breakdowns and frustration with the status quo, along with other reasons stakeholders might want to participate, is a key component of a comprehensive MSC initiative. The interests of participants play a fundamental role in creating the possibilities of collaboration. Exploring stakeholder intentions and motivations helps MSC organizers see whether shared interests might unfold that could lead to agreements or collective action. Sometimes when people find that they share similar intentions or goals, even though they are from different groups, they find new ways to break down barriers to cooperation. This appreciation for different perspectives will also help facilitators identify potential friction points and ways to bridge or translate between different groups.

Exploring What Stakeholders Care About

Another way to understand different stakeholder perspectives is by gaining an appreciation for their values—what they care about and find motivating. A worldview is comprised of a stakeholder’s values

plus their overarching beliefs about how the world is and how it should be. Stakeholders will each have unique orientations that are influenced by their age, stage in life, living circumstances, and culture. These mindsets shape how they view collaboration, and can enrich the MSC process if managed effectively by designers.¹⁷

To assist in aligning interests with MSC design, organizers need to know that diverse stakeholders have different concerns, including safety, power, order, achievement, relationships, and process. Therefore, stakeholders will view the MSC process differently depending on their perspectives. Some groups may see the MSC in terms of gaining or losing power. Others may see it as a way of increasing or decreasing stability and order. Gaining clear outcomes and results will be more significant to some of the participants. Building relationships or creating pluralistic processes may be other prominent motivations driving the participation of certain stakeholders. Effective designers and facilitators help weave these different considerations into the MSC process and apply their respective advantages as needed. This knowledge also bolsters efforts to translate differences in values to build bridges between different groups. Much of the art and science of MSC management has to do with the skillful meshing of these multiple perspectives.

For example, an individual (or group) who primarily values achievement generally respects status in other stakeholders and often behaves in a competitive manner. They generally view collaboration from the viewpoint that meritocracy should be the dominant force at play. When it comes to driving results or producing outcomes, achievement-oriented people can be counted on during an MSC process. The following chart outlines this example, along with other key operating principles at work within individuals and groups.¹⁸ This framework can help everyone involved in the MSC enterprise work more effectively with the variety of perspectives among various stakeholders:

Orientation	Value/Motivation	View of Collaboration	MSC Considerations	MSC Advantages
Power-Oriented/ Rebellious	Power/Survival	Survival of the Fittest	Spontaneity, Risk, Impulsive Behavior	Brainstorm, Take Bold Steps
Traditional/ Authoritarian	Order/Security	Positional Power	Stability, Tradition, Clear Rules	Set Ground Rules and Agendas
Competitive/ Achievement- Oriented	Success/ Independence	Meritocracy	Status, Goals, Results, Competition	Turn Ideas into Action, Generate Outcomes
Egalitarian/ Pluralistic	Social Networks/ Affiliation	Organizations of Equals for Mutual Benefit	Tolerance, Consensus Building	Build and Sustain Relationships
Integrative	Process/Systemic Flow	Interdependence of Complex Systems	Integration and Alignment of Systems	Manage Complexity and Create Synthesis

Bringing out the strengths of each of these orientations can bolster the MSC process. When a group is establishing the ground rules for the MSC, for example, stakeholders who care deeply about order will be helpful contributors. When the MSC group is looking at collective action plans later in the process, stakeholders who are results-oriented naturally provide the needed push to get good ideas into action. Those who are inclined toward tolerance will work toward the inclusion of the diverse opinions present. Participants who have a knack for seeing complex systems can help others connect the dots and appreciate interdependence. What is important for facilitators to recognize is which mindsets are prominent among the stakeholders present; they can then integrate them in the best way possible to support the organic unfolding of the collaborative process.

An inclusive approach to diverse perspectives helps bring together the right mix of stakeholders to listen to each other's concerns and discover what can unfold out of creative friction.

Knowing that stakeholders view challenges through different lenses based on their respective viewpoints will help MSC designers and participants in a variety of ways. Appreciating that different value systems influence behavior within an MSC initiative can help people step back and grasp the group dynamics that are naturally at play. This will also help conveners and facilitators predict friction points and potential ways to leverage the strengths of each perspective during the course of an MSC endeavor. Having a grasp on the different worldviews will help stakeholders articulate their concerns to a variety of unique listeners and appreciate that different motivations are present in the room. An inclusive approach to managing diverse perspectives helps bring together the right mix of stakeholders to listen to each other's concerns and discover what can unfold out of creative friction. Understanding the values of the participants and why they want to contribute to the endeavor, therefore, is a critical aspect in the design of a successful collaborative enterprise.

Practical Application

I applied this framework when I worked in Iraq. Senior military and civilian leaders at the time saw a need for greater coordination among actors at the national level, and I was asked to facilitate a multi-stakeholder body that coordinated a variety of security, development, and governance programs. The first step I took was to interview stakeholders about their potential participation. I quickly learned that a wide variety of values were in play. Some saw collaboration as a way to help their respective elements achieve optimal results. Others saw it as a way to improve their positional power. Certain organizations, feeling overwhelmed by day-to-day activities, saw the initiative as an unnecessary drain on their already-limited resources. A handful felt they could do things on their own and did not see the value in working as part of a larger enterprise. A number of groups wanted to find a better way to coordinate activities among themselves to avoid duplication of effort and inadvertently stepping on each other's toes. All of the groups, in spite of these differences, valued stability, and urgently wanted to alleviate violence in Iraq.

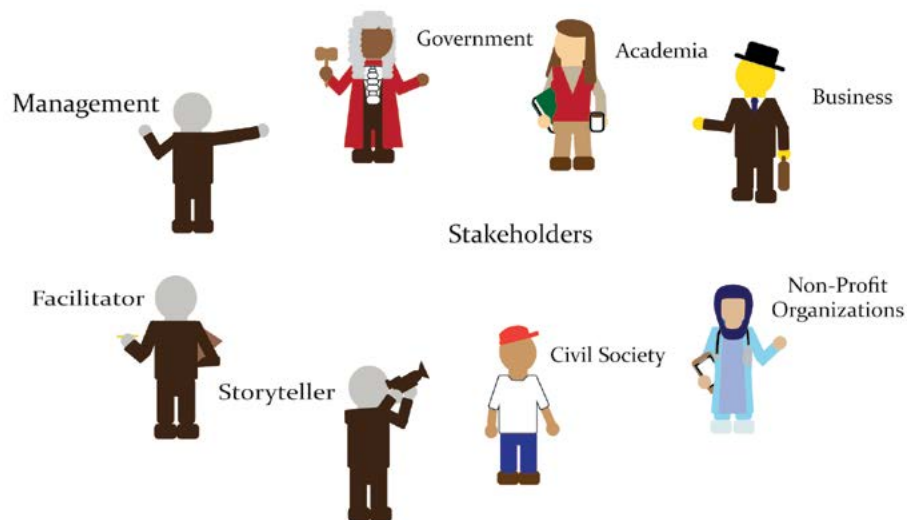
Focusing on this shared purpose of stability, I worked with the stakeholders to find ways to address their respective values. When the collective group met, I provided a clear agenda and process to support those looking for rules and order. Tracking and sharing successful results helped maintain the involvement of the achievement-oriented participants. An effort to make the group as inclusive

as possible made it attractive for those organizations that valued social networks and diversity to participate. The regular participation of senior leaders from the stakeholder groups appealed to those who valued power. The diversity of worldviews held among the various stakeholders helped us to examine the challenge of violence in Iraq in a systemic fashion. This led to a shared understanding of the problem and closer alignment on collective actions. By coordinating our efforts, we avoided duplication of effort, filled gaps, and addressed the roots of violence in a more comprehensive fashion. Stakeholders learned to blend security, development, and governance programs more effectively, which helped reduce violence and increase stability.

Section Summary

In this section, the values and intentions underpinning the potential support for an MSC endeavor were examined. Understanding why stakeholders want to participate in an MSC can help focus the planning of the project and give a sense of their potential level of commitment. Participant perspectives shape the parameters of the initiative. The diversity of stakeholder mindsets helps designers understand how participants view the world, the MSC challenge, and cooperation in general. This analysis can identify possible points of friction and help facilitators find ways to bridge differences. A clear articulation of stakeholder purpose and orientation helps scope the general direction of the MSC. MSC designers ought to be on the lookout for participants who are genuinely committed to the issue at hand and, ideally, value collaboration as a meaningful way to address the challenge. With this vision in place, designers can then consider the people, place, process, and practices best suited to generating beneficial outcomes for all parties concerned.

PEOPLE



Introduction

Knowing what stakeholders value assists designers in considering the most inclusive, diverse, and relevant set of stakeholders. The values and perspectives of stakeholders also shape the selection of facilitators and storytellers. This section will focus on the planning considerations for the four overarching elements—the convening/management group, stakeholders, facilitators, and storytellers—that make up the MSC enterprise.

The convening group includes the sponsors or entrepreneurial individuals who provide a vision, convening authority, and/or the resources that make it attractive for a diverse group to come together to engage in a dialogue. Stakeholders form an inclusive group of those who are affected by the MSC challenge. Facilitators support the MSC process so that stakeholders can listen to, respect, and learn from each other, as well as they can, in a collective inquiry to address mutual concerns. Storytellers capture the narrative of the MSC process, and assessors from the management team evaluate outcomes. The size, structure, and roles of these elements vary to a great extent. They depend on the nature of the collaborative effort, the complexity of the MSC issue, the needs (and sizes) of stakeholder groups, and the available resources.

According to Adam Kahane, the success of an MSC project “will depend above all on the people...[as they] will have the greatest influence on the content and consequences of the process and will also be most influenced by it.”¹⁹ Inviting people with suitable skills, values, experiences, and the perspectives that best fit the MSC challenge will produce relevant benefits. This applies to the core team that is managing the MSC initiative, the participants in the stakeholder group, the facilitators who guide the collaborative process, and the storytellers who capture the narrative. MSC designers want a diverse and inclusive range of participants who mirror the complex system in which they live.

Management Team

According to Siv Vangen and Chris Huxham, leadership is important for embracing, empowering, and involving stakeholders and then mobilizing them to move the collaboration forward.²⁰ The team that helps to manage the MSC, then, is a vital aspect of the overall enterprise. From a project management perspective, the element that will design and manage the MSC process should include members who are gifted in organization, vision, building relationships, and implementation in order to effectively manage the various phases of a project.

An appreciation for how complex systems interact and how to incorporate the needs of a variety of different stakeholders contributes to success of the enterprise.

The leaders of an MSC endeavor ought to embrace an integrative perspective. An appreciation for how complex systems interact and how to incorporate the needs of a variety of different stakeholders contributes to success of the enterprise. It is ideal to have holistic designers on the team who "...are able to see and intuit interdependencies, independencies, and natural hierarchies without reducing all to a simplistic web in which all are equally interconnected and influential."²¹ They appreciate the different perspectives and capacities that diverse stakeholders bring to the table. Moreover, they enable the MSC enterprise to weave together the different abilities available to the group to generate new possibilities in support of superordinate goals.

Ginny Whitelaw offers MSC organizers helpful recommendations for selecting the management team. She argues that effective leaders exhibit four characteristics in varying combinations: driver, organizer, collaborator, and visionary.²² Visionaries sense the strategic picture and have a gift for seeing possibilities and making new connections. Organizers can take a vision and create the detailed planning necessary to fulfill it. Drivers know how to execute the organizer's plan, focus an effort, and push to get tasks accomplished. The collaborator appreciates the importance of relationships and is gifted at outreach, cooperation, and finding the people essential to the MSC endeavor. These different talents do not necessarily require the dedication of a sole, specific person to each role. Management team members may each exhibit several of these traits and carry out multiple functions. What is important is that the management team appreciates the need for these different capabilities and clearly outlines who will responsible for what function in order to optimally manage an MSC.

Sponsors may also be part of the management team. They often provide the financial support to host a series of workshops or they exercise the convening authority needed to attract a critical mass of dedicated stakeholders. Sometimes the convener and sponsor are different entities. In any event, the design team has to consider how they will fund the initiative and manage the enterprise, what reasons would compel key stakeholders to join the effort, and how they will attract a critical mass of participants. The management team and sponsors have critical responsibilities that significantly impact the MSC endeavor.

MSC designers should consider dedicating people to the assessment process. Sponsors often want to see a return on their investment, so having a mechanism to track, monitor, and report outcomes addresses the needs of those who want to see results. I found that having analysts from outside of my organization at the table with MSC planners from the beginning has helped bolster an objective assessment process. This practice also facilitates two-way conversations that help designers learn what they need to do logistically to support the assessment process. Likewise, analysts learn about the context, constraints, and players involved in the research. When the right people are involved in planning from the very beginning, implementation goes more smoothly.

Finally, the management team should also plan for additional personnel who can be available on an on-call basis. Depending on the MSC challenge and needs of the stakeholder group, designers may need subject-matter experts, coaches, and trainers to address gaps in knowledge or capacity. The MSC management team should be prepared to bring in additional personnel who would enhance the stakeholders' abilities to address their respective concerns.

Facilitators

In addition to the MSC management team, facilitators play an integral role in an MSC endeavor. They provide four key functions:

- Process Guide
- Tool-Giver
- Third Party
- Process Educator²³

A skilled facilitator works closely with stakeholders to guide the MSC process. He or she co-creates the steps with the participants to systemically address their challenges. Facilitators help frame the discussion, set the ground rules, and support the dialogue. They pay attention to the needs of the group, recommending breaks and transitions accordingly. Blending time constraints, desired outcomes, and emerging developments, facilitators manage the delicate balance between people, process, and results. Facilitators enable stakeholders with a flexible structure that supports the dialogue throughout the phases of an MSC initiative.

To support and guide the process, a facilitator also provides tools to the stakeholders. These might include ways to resolve conflict, address problems, or assist in decision making. Stakeholder conversations will probably run into an impasse periodically. A facilitator can provide ways for a group to traverse these obstacles. Conversely, new possibilities and strategic insights may be bubbling just below the surface in a group discussion. In these instances, a facilitator can help midwife the emergence of a breakthrough.

Acting as a third party supports a facilitator's ability to guide a process and enable breakthroughs. They should not provide substantive content on the MSC issue, and should be careful not to take sides. Instead, they need to focus on the process and patiently help guide it in support of the purpose of the MSC enterprise. They should also intervene on behalf of any participant, regardless of which group they represent, in the event that verbal attacks ensue. Facilitators gain the confidence of the stakeholders by actively including all of the perspectives in the room, not favoring any particular group, and keeping their personal opinions out of the discussion.

Facilitators can earn credibility by sharing their knowledge and educating stakeholders on process-related issues. For example, reinforcing the agreed-upon rules for conflict resolution may not be enough in some instances. If skills are lacking among those in the room, a facilitator may need to teach an impromptu class on how to resolve conflict. In other situations a group may not have an agreed-upon way to solve a problem or they might not have the know-how to generate future scenarios. The facilitator can train the group in these areas and employ exercises to familiarize the stakeholders with new ways to tackle challenges. Experienced facilitators also model positive behavior, showing stakeholders by example how to manage the multi-stakeholder collaboration process.

Facilitators play a vital role in the enterprise. Their expertise and embodiment of collaborative behavior support the variety of functions that may be required during the course of the MSC initiative. Designers and facilitators work closely throughout the process to align stakeholder interests, needs, and capabilities in support of the overarching objectives of the MSC enterprise.

Stakeholders

A task critical to the planning and coordination of an MSC endeavor is the identification of stakeholders. Kahane recommends that participants be:

- Insightful, influential, and committed
- People who have a stake in the success of the future of the system and who have a range of positions and connections (from business, government, and civil society)
- Respected leaders of their own organizations, sectors, or communities
- Curious, systemic thinkers who are willing and able to reflect and speak freely and openly
- Energetic and action-oriented people (not just spectators or followers) who will take insights from the project and act on them in their own spheres of influence
- From a variety of backgrounds and perspectives (sectoral, ideological, professional, geographical, and so on, stretching beyond the usual participants in such activities to include those with different or dissenting views)²³

Bear in mind that there will not always be an opportunity to select the stakeholders, or they may not share all of the ideal criteria mentioned above. In the end, you work with who shows up.²⁴ Nonetheless, MSC designers should emphasize that collaborative forums are geared toward participants who want to roll up their sleeves and do the tough work necessary to make a difference. Lessons from a comprehensive assessment of over 200 wide-ranging cases of collaboration demonstrate that “individuals involved in successful collaborative processes were entrepreneurial. They established relationships, secured resources and institutional support, marketed their effort, and pushed for effective implementation.”²⁵ Entrepreneurial stakeholders should be invited since they tend to be innovative and are willing to take risks, learn, and adapt.

Collaboration is not a spectator sport. Just showing up at an MSC event to listen, take notes, and report to one’s parent organization is not enough. Ideal participants are those who want to contribute to the MSC effort, share knowledge, broaden their experiences, and apply their learning to the problem or opportunity at hand.

When identifying stakeholders who will participate, keep in mind that representatives deep within an organization or community who are focused on maintaining the status quo may not be the best choice. Richard Rohr argues that “practical truth is more likely found at the bottom and the edges than at the top or the center of most groups, institutions, and cultures.”²⁶ In my experience, people who are comfortable operating at the edges of their respective groups make superb participants for a collaborative effort. These organizational border-crossers have the ability and motivation to go in and out of their formal groups and find resources that support their institutional goals. They can also translate new ideas and possibilities voiced by stakeholders from other groups in a way that may be less threatening to their colleagues who are charged with protecting the status quo. They are loyal to their organizations and at the same time want to see their respective organizations grow and adapt in support of the MSC process. Stakeholders who know the needs and concerns of their own organization, are aware of the surrounding environment, and want to explore alternatives are excellent candidates for an MSC initiative.

Another aspect to consider is attracting participants who have power, relationships, knowledge, and/

or the ability to collaborate. Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic.”²⁷ Participants with power can make decisions for their organizations and help implement new initiatives with resources they manage. Stakeholders who are strong in terms of relationships and social networks can help generate momentum and connect people with needs to those with resources. Contributors with moral authority and experts in law or ethics can assist with managing inequalities and any grievances that arise. An MSC endeavor will benefit from having stakeholders who are knowledgeable about the issues at hand as well as those who have influence or resources that can facilitate positive outcomes.

Collaboration is not a spectator sport.

As MSC organizers identify stakeholders, roles and responsibilities become important. Identifying representatives who have decision-making authority for their groups, for example, is an essential task for facilitators and conveners. Some participants may provide critical ideas and input but do not have the ability to carry out action. Some may be present for the whole process while others come and go. Knowing who speaks with authority and under what parameters stakeholders are participating will assist facilitators as the multi-stakeholder collaboration process unfolds. In any event, MSC managers should seek a stakeholder constituency with influence, passion, and competence.

Stakeholders form the core of the MSC enterprise. They mirror the complex system in which they interact and face wicked conflicts of mutual interest. Depending on the issue at hand and diversity of participants, stakeholder groups exhibit varying levels of will and capacity. Some contributing organizations share values that align more with the MSC challenge than do others. Other groups have access to relevant resources (expertise, financial support, political influence, etc.) to help make a positive contribution to the MSC challenge. Border-crossers exhibit varying degrees of participation and decision-making authority depending on the values of the organizations they represent and the relative importance of the MSC issue to their group. Designers and facilitators make the most of their talents to attract an inclusive group of diverse stakeholders who are committed to discovering mutual concerns and new possibilities.

Storytellers

Another key player in the MSC enterprise is the person (or persons) who will document the process. Minu Hemmati recommends that “rapporteurs [or persons responsible for reporting on the group’s activities] need to be assigned beforehand and agreed upon by the group, as [does] the documentation process itself.”²⁸ Having people designated to take notes will help capture the content of the forums and provide a historical artifact to build upon in future engagements. I use the term storyteller because most MSCs deal with difficult challenges and generate many interesting anecdotes and engaging encounters. Graphic artists are well-suited to portraying the flow of the meetings, and writers can also capture the vivid details unfolding. Having writers and artists participate as invited stakeholders may be an organic way to co-create the MSC narrative. At the very minimum, note-takers should be a formal part of the process in order to record and share the proceedings.

Practical Application

In one of the MSC forums I managed, a participant with a background in modeling and simulations approached me and asked if he could go around to the different working groups and create a picture of what was happening. Not having a designated graphic artist on our management team, I agreed to his request as long as he would only observe and would not interrupt. After collecting his observations, he used a modeling program to draw the complex system that was being mirrored in the working group conversations. This showed the richness of the social networks and the multiple connections between stakeholders, ongoing activities, and the environment in which they cohabitated. It provided a comprehensive snapshot of the MSC forum and helped capture the dialogue in a format that everyone could share. We enlarged the complex systems diagrams, put them on poster boards, and shared them with the working groups. They were a big hit and everyone wanted a copy to take with them after the conference ended.

Do not underestimate the talent of assembled stakeholders and capitalize on the inherent skills available in order to enroll participants and improve the process.

I learned two lessons from this experience. First, do not underestimate the talent of the assembled stakeholders; capitalize on the inherent skills available in order to engage participants and improve the process. Second, I saw the value of graphically capturing the narrative of an MSC process. According to John Medina, “We learn and remember best through pictures, not through written or spoken words.”²⁹ A picture can help visually focus the participants and enable them to better appreciate the interdependent system in which they are participating. It also documents the process and can serve as an artifact to support future conversations and provide continuity for follow-up meetings. As a result, in other MSC endeavors I have sought out graphic artists, modeling experts, and video journalists to help document and share the compelling stories of successful collaboration.

Section Summary

Having a diverse and inclusive group of stakeholders that mirrors the complexity of the MSC challenge brings multiple perspectives together to work on key issues. Varying levels of will and capacity impact the outcomes of an MSC endeavor. The right mix of people with power, resources, knowledge, relationships, and a stake in the issue builds a comprehensive picture of the challenge and facilitates collective action.

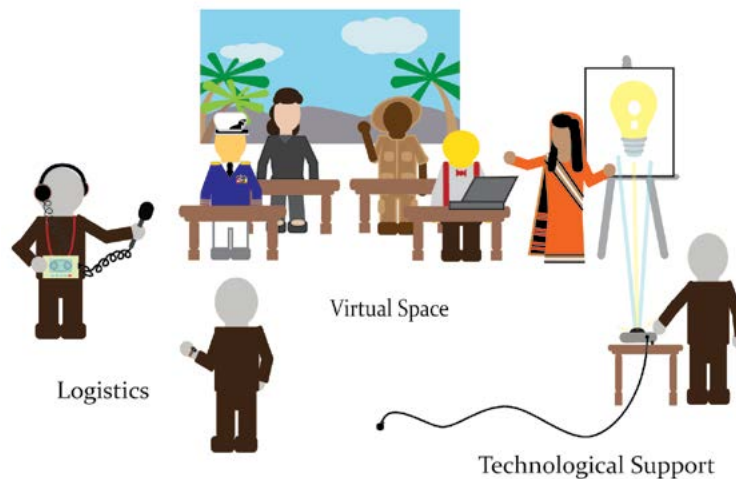
Skilled facilitators who are adept at managing group dynamics and multiple stakeholders greatly affect the quality of the MSC process. They focus on supporting the group’s process and are careful not to side with any particular group. As needed, facilitators also introduce tools to resolve conflict, solve complex problems, and broaden the participants’ abilities to see new perspectives.

Designers also bring a beneficial set of tools to the MSC enterprise. A management team that blends vision, outreach, implementation, and organization can take an emerging initiative and transform it into a community of committed stakeholders who make a difference in the world. The convening element synthesizes the various components of an MSC project to best support the stakeholders, process, and desired outcomes.

Storytellers and assessment analysts document the MSC endeavor. They capture the dialogue and distill the narrative of the proceedings. This provides a historical artifact as well as a means for sharing the MSC with a wider audience in compelling ways.

An MSC initiative may call for a number of different roles, but that does not necessarily mean that a large management team is needed. In more modest situations, it may be that some of these roles are more like functions for which designated individuals are responsible. For example, an MSC designer may also be responsible for the assessment and narrative of the process.

PLACE



Introduction

In addition to having an optimal mix of stakeholders and skilled facilitators, the location is a critical component of an MSC. This section will cover planning considerations for hosting face-to-face meetings, including considerations such as physical security, emotional safety, seating arrangements, and other logistical factors that support collaboration. Making space available for people to socialize and network is also critical to building rapport. People need to feel safe in order to open up, share perspectives, take risks, and connect with each other. The venue must help generate a sense of belonging and promote a relaxed environment. If this is not the case, collaboration becomes even more challenging.

Creating a Safe Container

An MSC happening in a conflict zone or location where security is an issue can be a significant challenge to collaboration. Kahane argues that stakeholders need to feel “both enough protection and safety...to be able to do their challenging work.”³⁰ Appropriate steps need to be taken to ensure that the site for the MSC is safe enough to protect the participants from violence. Hosting an event away from hostilities is ideal if that option is logistically feasible. In any event, if people feel physically safe they will be better able to lower their guards in order to become more open and available to participate.

Social and interpersonal security are also crucial aspects of designing a container for the MSC. Kahane recommends that MSC designers “attend to the political, psychosocial, and physical dimensions of this container.”³¹ Conveners can kick off the forum by declaring the meeting venue a safe space for learning, collaboration, and support. Facilitators will find it helpful to acknowledge all of the diverse voices in the room and publicly articulate that everyone belongs there. Kathryn Schulz recommends a statement such as “We can foster the ability to listen to each other and the freedom to speak our minds.”³² Organizers can also articulate what safeguards have been put in place to address social and physical security.

In my experience I have found that from time to time stakeholder groups offer their respective spaces for meetings. As groups get to know one another and build trust, or at least mutual respect, rotating the meeting places can be an economical way to sustain the process and support the stakeholders in taking responsibility for continuity. In the early stages of an MSC, however, this may not be ideal. Some stakeholders may view one group’s hosting as a grab for power or a way to influence the process in their favor. Selecting neutral ground for the first forum is usually a better choice.

Logistical Planning Considerations

The physical space and logistical support for an MSC also play important roles in creating a safe, welcoming environment that is conducive to collaboration. David Strauss stresses that “the physical environment...has a powerful impact on a meeting.”³³ Designers and participants will benefit from a venue that is flexible and service oriented. As an MSC develops over time, facilitators may need to change the setting to accommodate the needs of the group. A venue that is geared towards service management will support the needs of the MSC as they emerge. Good acoustics will benefit conversations, as will aids for visually and hearing-impaired participants. Technological capacity for presentations, comfortable seating, and esthetically pleasing views will all help support optimal conditions for collaboration to take place.

Arranging the space is another way to help make the MSC forum conducive to cooperation. According to Strauss, “one of the most powerful interventions you can make [in an MSC endeavor] is to arrange the seating before a meeting begins.”³⁴ For example, U-shaped seating and semi-circles help focus attention on developing a shared understanding of problems and possible solutions. In shaping the optimal space for an MSC, designers can use large spaces within a venue to quickly share information with the entire group. A large room for all participants is also advantageous for sharing output from working group discussions, or for listening to invited speakers. Breakout rooms for small groups will help garner input from individual stakeholders and promote intimacy. Depending on the needs of the group, smaller breakout rooms with round tables that seat eight to ten people can also benefit working-group discussions. Using a traditional classroom setting has advantages and disadvantages. These tend to focus a group’s attention on one person, so it is a helpful way to provide information directly to those who would benefit from that knowledge. If a classroom setting is not used skillfully, it may send unintended signals about power or inequality. Successful facilitators use space accordingly, with an appreciation for the needs of the group and how to support constructive conversations.

One of the most powerful interventions you can make in an MSC endeavor is to arrange the seating before a meeting begins.

Planning the space to facilitate networking and conversation during breaks also encourages collaboration. Insightful conversations take place and new connections are made “outside the immediate work of the group”³⁵ as well as within formal proceedings. Stakeholders can get acquainted over a meal or a cup of coffee. Longtime practitioners of collaboration realize that “you don’t build trust until you actually get to know people a little bit.”³⁶ Stakeholders might find out they share hobbies or have similar challenges in raising their children, for example. Away from the formal meeting, participants may feel more relaxed and therefore better able to clarify assumptions they might have about each other. Setting aside the time and space for these informal conversations is instrumental to the process.

During the breaks, playing culturally appropriate music that represents the diversity of participants is another way to accent the working environment. Musicians performing during meals can be another adept touch for setting conditions for collaboration. Displaying visually pleasing art by local artists helps people relax and provides impetus for conversation during breaks.

Providing materials for people to use to express themselves in different ways also supports collaboration. Designers should set up the space to allow introverts, extroverts, and other types of personalities to share their ideas in both written and verbal ways throughout the process. According to Strauss, in order to create an environment conducive to collaboration, MSC organizers need:

- An extensive number of flat wall surfaces on which paper can be pinned or taped
- Lighting that washes the walls
- Comfortable chairs on wheels
- Narrow, easily moveable tables that can be placed in appropriately-sized U-shapes
- Access to phones, local area networks, projection systems for video and computer, and audio and video conferencing equipment³⁷

Different kinds of supporting materials allow people to learn and communicate in various ways. Visual people often appreciate access to whiteboards, butcher paper, and other materials on which to display their ideas. Artists can be very helpful in capturing ideas in a graphic manner. Other participants prefer to communicate through the written word. People can share ideas with a group database via networked laptops made available during the MSC. A designated note-taker agreed upon by the group can also help summarize input and archive ideas in a written format to share with the community. Some stakeholders may be more kinesthetic in their approach to learning and participating. Interviewing people and taking video are other ways to encapsulate the details of the forum. The wide range of learning styles provides facilitators with the impetus to make a variety of ways to capture different perspectives available.

Cultural considerations also influence the planning of the space. What works best in one region may be very different from what serves stakeholders in another part of the world. Additionally, especially in an austere environment, creature comforts are simply not going to be available. A key takeaway here is the need to understand the cultural context, the needs of the group, and the resources at hand. Designers make the most of the meeting space available in order to facilitate the sharing of perspectives and to generate conditions for collective action. MSC issues and challenges are tough enough without adding unfavorable or uncomfortable meeting conditions. Planners find it to be in the best interests of all concerned to find and enhance the best possible meeting space for collaboration.

Size of Groups

The size of the group also plays a role in the number of collaboration possibilities. MSC designers need to manage the sizes and structures of the groups closely in order to promote the sharing of perspectives. In my experience, skillful facilitators can manage diverse working groups that number no larger than 20 people. Larger groups make it tougher to elicit input from everyone who is participating. MSC planners need to ensure that the ratio of participants to facilitators optimizes a robust dialogue. Given the nuances of stakeholder dialogue and the underlying forces at play, having two moderators per working group is a pragmatic approach. The facilitators can help each other observe group dynamics, manage the mood of the room, adjust the flow of the process, and keep track of the agenda. An MSC forum may also move back and forth from small groups to large groups depending on what the participants and facilitators need. The number of participants and corresponding sizes of the groups influence the requirements for the workshop location as well as the number of facilitators and other MSC support personnel.

Virtual Space

The inclusion of ways for people to connect virtually can promote collaboration before, during, and after an MSC forum. For example, online registration for the MSC can help people network ahead of time and share relevant reference materials, if appropriate. Group discussion questions can be placed online so that participants can share written input throughout the process. A working web site can introduce conference participants to a collaborative platform that they may use after the MSC. Providing an easy-to-use online platform helps build the continuity of the MSC effort. It gives stakeholders a shared virtual place to continue to exchange information and coordinate as needed.

Facilities that are service oriented and flexible to the needs of participants are advantageous. Facilitators need to be able to move tables and chairs around to support the process. They will want the ability to record brainstorming sessions on butcher paper or dry erase boards. Technological support for presentations and video teleconferencing is often needed in collaborative forums. Space for stakeholders to network and get to know each other over coffee or a meal is another important consideration in logistical planning.

Practical Application

In my experience, a hotel, convention center, or retreat facility can serve as neutral ground for MSC forums. A place near nature or a park can support having a quiet container and allow participants to reflect or take a walk with a conversational partner during breaks. Busy urban centers are convenient; however they also provide many distractions and make it easier for participants to get away from the forum. Therefore, designers should look for a neutral space that facilitates interaction and keeps people focused on the challenge at hand.

Creating an inviting space for diverse people to connect, socialize, reflect, and learn from each other is fundamental in a MSC enterprise.

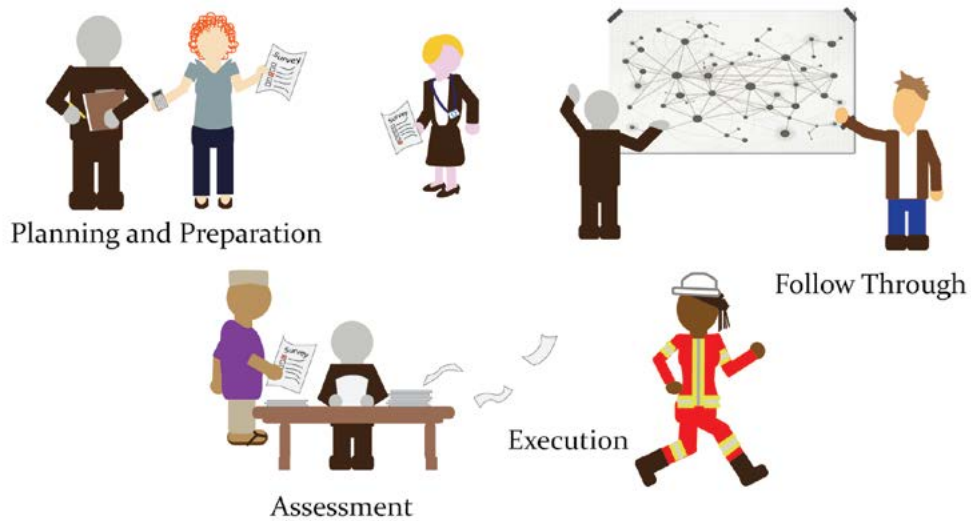
I have also organized successful MSC events on university campuses, which can serve as very useful venues. I have found that an academic environment offers neutral ground for a variety of people with distinct perspectives to come together. They are also convenient from a logistical perspective. The typical college campus has a variety of meeting spaces and classrooms, whiteboards or chalkboards, audiovisual support, internet connectivity, cafeterias, and other features that support collaborative forums. Often, readily-available professors who are subject-matter experts in areas of interest to the MSC challenge can provide additional insights to stakeholders as well. Universities that share an interest in the MSC challenge might even provide economic means to co-host the event.

Section Summary

The location of an event influences the outcomes. Participants need a safe space where they can share unique perspectives and work out differences. A comfortable and relaxed environment invites participants to open up and generate creative alternatives for the challenges they face. An inclusive

place helps stakeholders relax and share their perspectives with one another. Venue selection and logistical support should promote openness, transparency, and the sharing of ideas. The wise use of space and seating arrangements can break down barriers and create new connections between diverse stakeholders. Creating the space for diverse people to connect, socialize, reflect, and learn from each other is fundamental to an MSC enterprise.

PROCESS



Introduction

Just as careful consideration in selecting participants and place are critical factors in a successful MSC, the process that stakeholders use also requires thoughtful planning. An MSC process should enable stakeholders to listen to and respect each other and to suspend judgment in order for everyone to voice new possibilities to the best of their abilities.³⁸ This is not just an exercise in coming together to share information. The process evolves over time as stakeholders listen to each other and learn about each other's backgrounds and concerns. Conversations may unfold later in the process that reveal shared concerns and new possibilities for the future. This in turn may produce a dialogue around desired shared outcomes and how to coordinate new ideas into actionable results.

This section will be divided into three parts: pre-MSC, MSC execution, and post-MSC. Although this approach may appear linear at first glance, I recommend that we actually view the multi-stakeholder collaboration workshop process as a series of learning loops that evolve over time in support of the needs of the group. In order to enable sustainable change, collaborative dialogue needs to be an iterative process, not a one-off meeting or singular event.

Pre-MSC Workshop Process (Planning and Preparation)

As detailed earlier, participant, facilitator, and location selection are key activities for MSC designers to conduct prior to any collaborative forum in order to set the right conditions for success. Part of this coordination can include surveys and interviews with participants in order to sense desired outcomes, who is being affected by the current challenge, what is working well, what is not working well, and perceived obstacles to progress. Designers and facilitators also need to familiarize themselves with stakeholder concerns and learn about the current challenge. This input should guide MSC leaders to outline what they hope participants will know, feel, and do as a result of taking part in an MSC endeavor.³⁹ This research and analysis will inform the organizers and fine-tune the MSC process.

Surveys can include assessments to better ascertain what kinds of people will be participating. As mentioned, having a sense of stakeholder values and beliefs, motivations for attending, and how participants sense or perceive the world can also play critical roles in designing an appropriate process.

Interviews can help discover ongoing stakeholder initiatives, find additional participants to invite, and learn about what is needed to move forward. This kind of preparation can also uncover new resources, volunteers, helpful suggestions, and other kinds of support for the MSC endeavor.

Assessment

Based on interviews and desired outcomes, designers should include assessment planning up front in the pre-MSC process. This will help the management team track, monitor, and assess outcomes. A collaborative innovation “can’t have an impact unless it reaches the people who will benefit from it.”⁴⁰ Assessments can help stakeholders see what impact a project is having, reallocate resources to exploit success and minimize loss, and bolster strategic communications.

Designers should plan for the challenges associated with assessing MSC projects. Difficulties with empirically tested outcome-effectiveness studies arise from:

- The wide range of contexts in which multi-stakeholder collaboration is used
- Over-reliance on individual interviews as an assessment tool, rather than as objective studies
- The lack of a uniform definition of effectiveness
- The assessment of outcome effectiveness being a very long-term process
- Many of the goals not being formulated as measurable targets and timetables, which makes effectiveness difficult to evaluate
- Assessing effectiveness being difficult because it requires a set reference point from which to measure⁴¹

In spite of these difficulties, successful outcome-based assessments can demonstrate the value of this component in the MSC process.⁴² Assessments that focus on process effectiveness can also provide helpful insights. Specifically, studies show that participation in an MSC:

- Increases information available to decision makers, allowing access to dispersed knowledge, expertise, and ideas^{43 44}
- Reduces uncertainty by providing different perspectives on risks and uncertainties inherent to the negotiation process, allowing for more informed consideration of costs and benefits⁴⁵
- Can lead to better compliance and implementation by creating a sense of ownership and responsibility for the chosen course of action by increasing acceptance for a difficult decision, or by increasing operational efficiency and available resources. MSC increases the legitimacy of the decision, which leads to more long-term stability.⁴⁶
- Build networks between participants, enhance trust, disseminate knowledge to support learning, and build capacity^{47 48}
- Stimulate social learning and change along three axes: the individual, the organizational and the social:

Individual

Improves communication skills, self-reflection, sense and meaning-making, and increases tolerance for differences in opinion and enhanced social networking

Organizational

Creates post-dialogue monitoring and support structures

Social

Expands the space for further dialogue and participation, giving rise to new strategic stakeholder partnerships⁴⁹

Clarity in the goals and objectives of the MSC initiative assists in developing an appropriate assessment plan. Recalling the variety of values and motivations discussed in the Purpose section, it is necessary to specify what is important for the stakeholders and conveners to measure. Assessments are instrumental because they show participants and sponsors of an MSC a return on their investment in a variety of ways. For example, assessments can gauge actual results, the processes necessary to produce these outcomes, and/or the quality of the network of relationships that helped to generate the results.

Assessment analysts should take advantage of both qualitative and quantitative means for assessing outcomes. Likewise, they need to show relationships between dependent and independent variables in the assessment process, and help translate that research into language that practitioners can share with broader audiences. Over time, assessment analysts need to be clear about what is causal and what is probabilistic as the assessment database grows. Periodic updates with leaders of stakeholder groups to point out these patterns and trends can be very useful.

An effective assessment process will help participants integrate and coordinate planning with other stakeholders. During briefings to constituents or senior leaders, stakeholders will have an objective explanation of what outcomes they are producing. This transparent analysis can also help build trust among partners as the assessment process helps them find effective ways to promote success, manage friction, and share resources. Assessments can also help stakeholders communicate confidently with the media, think tanks, civic leaders, embassies, international partners, local communities, human rights groups, and other opinion leaders. For example, assessments can inform the talking points for a media engagement, bolster charts showing trends over time that might be displayed during an update with a sponsor, or augment written reports with visual examples of progress that can be distributed to a wider public audience. Helpful assessments provide short-term and long-term analysis, align with the goals of the MSC enterprise, and focus on what is important to the various groups involved.

Assessments may also indicate gaps in capacity. As stakeholders experiment with new concepts, they may discover that they need new capabilities or skills to move the MSC endeavor forward. The stakeholder group may have the will to try out new possibilities but may not have the requisite skills to break through to the next level. Stakeholders may agree upon what to do, but may not know how to do it. Assessments help point out areas where training can bridge the gap between current and projected capabilities. Doing periodic assessments throughout the MSC endeavor will help leaders understand what is working well and what needs to improve. Assessments play a vital role in assisting a group in achieving its desired outcomes.

Other Workshop Planning Factors

In addition to assessments, timing is an integral aspect of pre-MSW workshop planning. Organizers should plan the dates for the MSW forums to afford plenty of time to attract the right subject-matter experts, facilitators, and participants. Having an appreciation for holidays, organizational or societal vacation periods, and other major events that might compete for participants' time is imperative.

Planning time to allow stakeholders to get to know each other before the formal MSW event can often facilitate a collaborative process. Organizers may want to kick off the forum with a social event the night before. Icebreakers can help people relax and get to know each other beyond their preconceived notions and stereotypes. Shared meals and scheduled breaks for networking and conversations outside of formal agendas provide unconstrained ways for people to reach across organizational or cultural borders. This will help participants gain clearer perspectives of each other and create conditions with more potential to build relationships and find common ground.

MSW Workshop Process (Execution)

Having the facilitators declare from the beginning that the MSW space is a safe container and that all participants belong and will be heard will help set the right tone for the forum. Asking participants what they need in order to feel safe, included, and engaged in the process is invaluable before any substantive discussions on MSW issues get started. Facilitators should also engage stakeholders in establishing the ways in which the group wants to resolve internal conflict and ensure inclusivity. This means actively seeking ways to delineate the norms for conflict resolution and the collaborative process. A clear understanding of the "rules of the game" for these discussions will help generate a framework for conversations throughout the MSW.

Facilitators should acknowledge at the outset that discussions may be difficult at times and that emotions such as anger and fear can often arise. As a result, they need to be prepared to directly outline these potential conflicts and help the group articulate how stakeholders will signal disagreements or problems. If there is disagreement, moderators will reinforce the agreed-upon ways to handle conflict and remind people of the reasons they are there. Having participants remember their overarching intentions for being there can sometimes defuse group tensions. Discerning whether or not the disagreement is vital to addressing the strategic issues at hand can also be useful.

Framing the Challenge

With ground rules in place and a collaborative tone set, facilitators should then work closely with stakeholders to frame the problem and/or opportunity. Helpful discussion questions include:

- What are the root causes and the driving issues for the challenges?
- What are the interests of the stakeholders and why are these interests important?
- What is currently working or functioning well? How can that be shared and/or scaled?
- What needs to improve?
- What are possible scenarios for the future?

- What are the shared interests, problems, and/or opportunities?
- What is needed in order to move from shared understanding of a problem or opportunity to shared action and commitment?

Mapping the Complex System

To support the framing of the conversation, participants should collectively describe the environment in which they face the complex challenge. Participants can also provide an inventory of ongoing activities and initiatives related to the MSC. They can also visually map connections among stakeholder networks, environmental factors, and ongoing actions. Additionally, a description of constraints and obstacles will help depict the current situation. Discussions can also outline the risks affecting collaboration by identifying the pressures outside the room that influence the multi-stakeholder collaboration.

The conditions in which stakeholders live are directly related to the challenges they face. Examples of factors that are helpful to consider while building a comprehensive understanding of the environment include socio-economic factors; safety and security concerns; food, water, education, and health conditions; employment; geography, culture, history, and religion; and ideology, values, and belief systems. This is not meant to be a definitive list. Different complex challenges will have unique characteristics; so MSC designers need to attune to the environmental conditions that are specific to the system in which the affected stakeholders live and work.

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In addition to external environmental factors, understanding what is happening below the surface (i.e., in the inner landscape of the participants) also affects stakeholder dialogue. Concerns about the misuse of power, discrimination (race, gender, age, etc.) and other grievances may very well be woven into the fabric of the MSC challenge. Facilitators should be prepared to bring these topics into the MSC forum. In some cases they may dominate the discussion if they are the primary concerns of the stakeholders. Ensuring that group dynamics are visible will help all of the participants to see the multiple issues that are present in the forum.

This effort to paint a comprehensive picture helps participants develop a shared understanding of the environment, problems, and opportunities. The collective picture belongs to the group, not just one stakeholder or organization, because it integrates the diversity of perspectives in the room. Throughout the process, moderators should strive for a collective picture of viewpoints, one that is inclusive of the voices represented by the stakeholders and their organizations.

Stages of Stakeholder Group Development

As in most group endeavors, the participants go through developmental phases during an MSC. Some stakeholders may show up at an MSC only to get their respective interests addressed. Initially, as the group forms, individual participants look for ways to “make their solution king.” As MSC members learn about the interests of others, they may sense commonalities and move into a phase

of cooperative exploration. If conditions and timing are ripe, the MSC group may even advance to a stage of collaborative discovery in which they actively share information and resources in support of common goals and objectives, learning and adapting along the way.⁵⁰

One way to view the ways facilitators help groups move through an MSC process is to think about the process in progressive steps. David Johnson and Frank Johnson have identified seven stages that groups navigate with the assistance of expert facilitation:

- Define and structure process
- Conform to process and get to know one another
- Recognize mutual interests and build trust (if not respect)
- Rebel and differentiate
- Commit to and take responsibility for the goals, process, and stakeholder concerns
- Function in a mature and productive manner
- Terminate⁵¹

Understanding that a process goes through many evolutions helps stakeholders understand that it is normal (and expected) to have ups and downs, tension, breakdowns, and breakthroughs during the course of an MSC venture. Facilitators enable participants to learn and adapt accordingly as the life cycle of the multi-stakeholder collaboration develops over time. MSC conveners also learn to be patient with this progression and support its natural unfolding.

Regardless of the stage of development or possibility of reaching common ground, conflict can be healthy and should be expected throughout the process. Facilitators can also consider adding dissonance to the process when stakeholders are stuck, or can leave the working groups alone for a period of time to allow friction to play out the way it needs to without outside interference.⁵²

Friction helps balance the need for both stability and growth as new ideas or initiatives get attention. As stakeholder group dynamics evolve over time, facilitators should be on the lookout for extreme ends of the conflict spectrum. MSC managers should expect to encounter actors who appear to want only to kill the process, or others who withdraw and avoid all conflict. “Either/or” thinking can frustrate a collaborative process, while “both/and” approaches promote healthy debates.

Cultivating this attitude towards conflict during the MSC process enables us to grow and develop new possibilities. Robert Kegan recommends we, “focus on ways to let the conflictual relationship transform the parties (involved in the MSC endeavor)...”⁵³ We open to the friction between stakeholders to understand what is causing it, and appreciate how our individual and collective actions may be exacerbating the conflict. Just as a surfer rides a precarious wave with a relaxed yet alert attitude, we also ride the wave of conflict with a flexible approach allowing the energy to carry ourselves and our respective organizations to higher levels of understanding and new actions.

Like a manager of a forest fire, a moderator must allow for the “controlled fires” of conflict to open up lines of communication and support healing. At the same time, the moderator must be prepared to deal with potential spoilers and saboteurs of the process. Managing this and other kinds of potential friction will be examined in more detail in the Contingency Planning section of the paper.

Pilot Project Design

As the group develops a comprehensive picture of the MSC, facilitators can start exploring the possibility of discovering common ground and shared goals. Given that inequalities and grievances are often present, the group may need to build confidence or co-create alternative scenarios among themselves. This is also where diplomatic language can be extremely important to a process. Richard Sennett recommends using the subjunctive voice, instead of declarative linguistics, to allow diverse participants facing complex issues to speak in a way that leaves room for discussion.⁵⁴ Open-ended questions such as “What is the possibility of exploring the following option...?” “What alternatives might be feasible here?” and “I wonder what it might be like if...” promote creative thinking and relax hardened positions. By honoring differences and employing a dialogic approach, participants learn how others view the situation from their respective viewpoints. This fosters a possibility for collective action.

If common ground emerges during the MSC process, facilitators can work with stakeholders to design pilot projects and prototype possibilities. According to CEO and top designer Tim Brown, prototyping:

- Explores an idea, evaluates it, and produces useful feedback to improve upon it and drive the concept forward
- Communicates an idea with sufficient clarity to gain acceptance across a variety of stakeholder groups, prove it, and show that it will work
- Avoids costly mistakes such as becoming too complex too early and sticking with a weak idea for too long—thus producing results faster⁵⁵

Low-hanging fruit is a smart prototyping opportunity to pursue in order for the stakeholders to gain confidence and show others that progress is possible. Pilot projects help build momentum for the MSC endeavor.

The will and capacity of individuals and organizations to take on pilot projects play a significant role in whether or not progress is possible. Small-scale, clearly defined, and feasible objectives with a clear timeline help serve the group’s interests, especially when stakeholders self-organize and make clear commitments to each other on next steps. People will take on projects they genuinely care about that address their heartfelt concerns. If support and incentives are made available to help carry out these small-scale efforts, chances of success become higher. Quick wins supported by incentives offer more possibility for sustainable change than tackling the toughest issue or attempting to make large-scale systemic changes with an initial pilot project.

If grievances or inequalities are such that from the outset there is no common ground, moderators could consider developing a pilot project with the goal of building confidence or designing scenarios to consider what might be possible in the future. If conditions are ripe, facilitation that promotes mutual understanding of an inequality or demonstrates empathy for a grievance can also be powerful experiences. Steps such as these can move groups toward healing and reconciliation, which are meaningful goals.

Implementation

When a group aligns around a pilot project, facilitators should enable stakeholders to outline a vision

and strategy. The group should provide a detailed implementation plan with desired output and outcomes. They should also negotiate the criteria for success and make commitments, including:

- What task or project?
- Who is responsible for the assigned task?
- Who is the customer and who is the executor for the task?
- When? (Road map or timeline for execution)
- Why? (Purpose/intent of the assigned task)
- What are the conditions for success?
- How will agreements or commitments be enforced?
- How will breakdowns be addressed?

The time for implementation reinforces the criticality of having the right kinds of stakeholders in attendance. To follow up and take action requires people with the willingness, legitimacy, and ability to get things done. They need to have some level of power, influence, and/or authority in order to persuade those in their parent organizations or communities to take new steps. The ability of group representatives to negotiate with their own organizations is crucial to getting solutions truly framed, explored, crafted, agreed to, and implemented.⁵⁶

Another method to help support the implementation process is to have conveners share at the start both what they hope to achieve and what they are able to support in terms of possible future initiatives. This can help set the parameters of the MSC forum in terms of what is possible. Later, after the stakeholder group has compiled a list of prototyping ideas, they can brief the conveners and/or influential leaders of stakeholder organizations in order to allocate resources, make commitments to projects, and start down the path toward implementation. Scheduling updates and progress reviews among decision makers with resources and project leaders who are implementing the action plans helps put ideas into collective action.

Post-MSc Workshop Process (Follow-Through)

Designers also need to plan for the key activities that will take place after an MSC workshop occurs. Assessments, sharing stories, and other ways of sustaining the momentum of the MSC enterprise are critical post-MSc event considerations.

Momentum and Continuity

MSc designers should consider having a process in place to help ensure that collaboration continues between and after events. Doing so helps stakeholders maintain momentum and generates a sense of continuity. Here are some ideas to consider that can help participants stay engaged in the MSc process and stay informed about the progress being made:

- Newsletter
- Website for sharing research and other information

- Online collaboration platforms
- Digital libraries
- Blogs
- Interim workshops and seminars
- Social events
- Email listservs
- Video and telephonic conferencing
- Distance learning
- Project phase or milestone reviews

If resources are available, the sponsors of the MSC can help kick-start some of the means of continuity. Participants can also look to the existing forums and events of their own organizations for additional platforms to share information and keep each other informed. In any event, social media tools are easy to use, readily available, and relatively cheap. All of these advantages help sustain a community of interested stakeholders.

One of the keys to continuity is having a social network manager; someone who fans the collaborative fire by keeping people connected with updates, success stories, and signs of progress. This could be a role or position that rotates over time among different stakeholder organizations. The network manager might also be part of the MSC's convening team or management team. Regardless of where this manager resides, they need to be incentivized to keep the community up and running.

Another means for sustaining the momentum of collaboration is to always end a meeting or event by announcing the next stepping stone. This could be an online conference, a social event, an in-person workshop, or whatever activity best serves the needs of the group. Connecting and building upon collaborative forums stimulates stakeholder interest and generates a sense of rhythm for the group. MSC designers should use stepping-stone events to periodically assess MSC outcomes and verify the results of activities. Checking with stakeholders to see whether there is an opportunity to scale up, for example, is helpful for growth and expansion if the timing and conditions are ripe. In other cases, an MSC initiative may be coming to a close, so the group might want to declare completion and move on to other projects. Periodically checking to see what else needs to be done to help make projects self-sustaining and to support accountability of task completion promotes progress. Stepping-stone events may also help stakeholders recognize that new projects or ideas are emerging that warrant the group's attention.

During its life cycle, designers and stakeholders learn to appreciate that an MSC is an evolving and adaptive process. Different stakeholders may take on more responsibility or start new initiatives while others drop out. An MSC endeavor is typically not a linear process. Instead, it is more like a spiral in terms of new initiatives, completion of projects, new participants entering the process, the departures of longstanding stakeholders, and requirements for new processes emerging over time.

Developing an MSC Narrative

Another critical way to maintain continuity in an MSC endeavor over time is to capture and share the compelling stories that such initiatives generate. Oscar-winning film producer Peter Guber describes building a captivating story in three parts. First, he suggests capturing the attention of the listeners with an unexpected challenge or question. Then, he recommends giving listeners an emotional experience by narrating the struggle to overcome the challenge or find the answer to the opening question. Finally, he recommends galvanizing the response of the listeners with an eye-opening resolution that calls them to action.⁵⁷

We can think of a meaningful MSC as an engaging story. Stakeholders come together to collectively face a challenge. These heroes face risk and uncertainty as they struggle with the given issue. They experience exciting highs and frustrating lows during their journeys of inquiry. Insights and “aha” moments might even generate transformational development as participants discover new ways of seeing themselves and others, and as they learn new ways to deal with the issues at hand. Resolution of a challenge builds stakeholder confidence while making a positive impact. As participants return to their organizations and communities, they bring back and share their stories of the MSC experience.

The development of the MSC story must incorporate the sensitivities of the ongoing efforts. Documentation should be as transparent as possible and reflect the “full breadth and depth of discussion.”⁵⁸ At the same time, designers must consider the protection of certain stakeholder identities. Some of the stories may be meant only for internal stakeholder audiences while other aspects of the narrative are destined for a larger audience. MSC designers and stakeholders have to balance the transparency of their efforts with maintaining trust among each other.

“Relating to the general public is very important” during many MSC processes, according to Hemmati.⁵⁹ An engagement strategy considers the target audience, message, means of dissemination, and ways of gauging reception to the story. Sharing a narrative can serve to describe outcomes, gain support, and generate momentum within a wider audience. Outreach, public relations, and social media are key considerations in the narrative development for MSC endeavors that have constituencies that need to be kept informed.

The assessment process and narrative development should go hand in hand. Assessments support the explanation of the outcomes using facts and analysis. The narrative provides emotional content and galvanizes action. Guber observes that “when someone tells us a story with data tucked inside, our brains cleverly lock the data onto the feelings we experience while listening to the story...The

Creating a narrative about the MSC initiative enables stakeholders to share their compelling journeys of challenge, struggle, and triumph.

more rewarding our experience of the tell, the more positive our view of the data is likely to be.”⁶⁰ Synergistic integration of the narrative and the assessment supports the possibilities for increasing appreciation for, and continuity of, the MSC process. During one MSC effort, for example, I combined input from field reports, research from think-tank analysts, and the work of a video journalist to help produce assessments. Blending the qualitative and quantitative aspects of what was occurring into a narrative format provided a more complete and interesting account.

Creating a narrative about the MSC initiative also enables

stakeholders to share their compelling journeys of challenge, struggle, and triumph. Combined with the assessment, the sharing of the story of the process is also a practical way to provide information. An MSC narrative tells the story of the process, people, and/or projects. It is transmitted inside the group in order to learn from victories, setbacks, and best practices. Sharing an assessment outside of the stakeholder group can also be a powerful way to communicate the outcomes of the MSC, highlight the successes, and show what is possible in order to embolden further action.

Practical Application

During a particularly intense MSC workshop, I became anxious that the facilitators and I were not going to achieve the results we wanted by the end of the week, and I shared those concerns with the management group at a daily wrap-up meeting. One of the facilitators reminded me of my own words, “we are here to enable a coalition of the willing and able” and that we had to let go of our expectations for the outcome. I learned from that experience that wanting to control the outcome of a collaborative process is counterproductive. I had influence over my actions and our team’s detailed planning and preparation for the MSC workshop. However, I could not directly influence the outcome of the stakeholders’ process. Trying to force an agenda or stubbornly stick to a schedule is not helpful either. I learned to allow time and space for the unexpected to arise and to support what needed to emerge within the stakeholder group. For me, the collaborative process became more about creating the right conditions and nurturing the habitat for new possibilities to naturally arise. Like an athlete who enters a state of flow when focused and relaxed, I learned to work with the MSC enterprise to enable flow within the process.

Contingency Planning for Breakdowns and Unexpected Change

One of the lessons I have learned over time is that preparing for both what can go well and what might fail or cause problems in an MSC endeavor is a critical investment. As in any complex endeavor, challenges will most assuredly surface during an MSC initiative.

One way to prepare is to plan for contingencies prior to kicking off any face-to-face meetings. Planners should brainstorm what could go wrong as well as what might go well and exceed expectations. Preparing for mistakes and success should go hand in hand. In this way designers can proactively seek ways to manage friction and take advantage of positive turns. Designers ought to consider fallback plans for the logistical aspects of MSC meetings and workshops. Creating a habit of rehearsing any complicated movements minimizes potential problems. Whenever a speaker plans to use technology during a presentation, for example, MSC planners should check it out ahead of time. Video conferencing should always be exercised ahead of scheduled meetings. Showing up early to verify tables, chairs, and seating arrangements is a must. A review of the key components for the MSC forum will reveal what parts need to have a backup mechanism in case the primary one goes down. This might include having alternatives in mind for such key components as facilitators, space for working groups, guest speakers, and delivery of food and beverages. Redundancy supports building flexibility into a multi-stakeholder collaboration plan.

Reviewing the MSC agenda and backup plans on a daily basis with facilitators, conveners, and other key people supporting the forum also supports smooth execution. Designers can develop checklists of what is planned for the day and what to do if events do not go as planned. Building flexibility into the schedule allows for changing circumstances and gives planners time and space to respond as needed.

Other Potential Pitfalls to Strategize For

During the course of an MSC endeavor, other kinds of challenges can arise. Just as we brainstorm what can go wrong in terms of the logistical and administrative planning of a workshop, we should also strategize what else can go badly and develop contingency plans for those items. Peter Denning and Robert Dunham point out seven problems (and I add two more for a total of nine) that can cause a multi-stakeholder collaboration process to fail, and I offer ways to manage these issues.⁶¹

Not developing a shared interpretation of the problem

Albert Einstein once said “If I had an hour to solve a problem I’d spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions.”⁶² Applying this attitude toward an MSC challenge requires the patience to share perspectives, map the complex system, and understand the root causes of the challenges the stakeholders face. Before brainstorming possibilities or pilot projects, participants have to feel that their concerns are included in the dialogue. Everyone involved must exercise patience as they envision the possibilities that the group can work with as the MSC process moves forward.

Falling into authoritarian or competitive approaches

Participants will bring a variety of different values and mindsets to the table, including attitudes such as “do it my way” or “winner takes all.” The healthy sides of these perspectives can spur groups to action. If unchecked, they trigger resistance and sideline other groups. Facilitators need to weave together all of the voices present and enforce ground rules to balance the different approaches available in the room. We can also remind ourselves, in the words of philosopher Richard Rorty, of “the permanent possibility of someone’s having a better idea.”⁶³

Trying to do it alone

Some groups may get frustrated and want to move forward on their own or they may not value collaboration from the outset. Designers and facilitators should introduce examples of interdependence early in the process to show the connections between different groups and their respective concerns. They can also demonstrate the advantages of having diverse stakeholders who have a variety of necessary tools and areas of knowledge, the process can be very effective in addressing the complexity of tough challenges. Facilitators can also consider using the videos from Daniel Simons and Christopher Chablis that help demonstrate challenges with perceptions and how we can sometimes miss key pieces of information.⁶⁴ I have used them in workshops to great effect and find that they enable participants to open their apertures. A variety of different ways of seeing, then, helps mirror the system in which we interact. Noting the advantages of multiple perspectives can also help groups see collaboration as a viable alternative to tackling a messy problem on their own.

Technology-only solutions that do not address the social issues

Technology may provide support in addressing a human-centered challenge. Problems arise when

certain stakeholders see solutions through only the lens of technology. They might think that a new software application or new piece of hardware will solve the complex problem by itself and that nothing else is needed. Technology can certainly address some noteworthy aspects of MSC challenges. It also provides amazing support by providing collaborative platforms for information-sharing and real-time communications, and shared spaces for social networks to learn and coordinate. The MSC enterprise clearly needs to take advantage of technology to support collaboration, but should not forget that “behind the world’s most difficult problems are people—groups of people who do not get along.”⁶⁵

Being unprepared for resistance from groups outside of the MSC process

New ways of thinking and doing can appear threatening to certain constituents who are comfortable with the status quo. Some observers of the MSC process will not see the benefit in trying innovative approaches. When stakeholders return to their parent organizations or communities, they may find that their peers are not willing or able to appreciate the possibilities, projects, or solutions that an MSC workshop provides. Change naturally produces resistance, so members of an MSC enterprise should prepare accordingly. One way to manage resistance is to make sure that there are enough leaders who have resources and influence engaged throughout the process to help overcome some of the waves of resistance. Early wins and short-term successes, as well as a compelling narrative, are helpful at producing buy-in and counteracting resistance.

Demonizing other stakeholder groups

Sometimes people will blame others rather than take an honest look at themselves or assume responsibility for their own actions. In other instances groups may attack the people behind the ideas in a workshop. Schulz points out that we often think our beliefs are based on facts (i.e., the truth is on our side), so we conclude that people who disagree with us are:

- Ignorant—they haven’t been exposed to the right information
- Idiotic—they have the facts but do not have the intelligence to comprehend them
- Evil—people who disagree with us are not ignorant of the truth, and are not unable to understand it; they have willfully turned their backs on it. This assumption in particular can provoke violent conflict.⁶⁶

Designers and facilitators should work with stakeholders early in the process to establish the rules of conduct and the ways in which people will deal with differences and resolve conflict. They can remind participants that from time to time we all make mistakes in our assumptions. Fostering a climate of openness and transparency is helpful. Having the ability to check on facts and verify issues that stakeholders raise can further assist the process. When the norms are broken, having a mechanism with which people can seek forgiveness and make repairs should be part of the dialogue.⁶⁷

Inadequate follow-up

When participants return to their communities and organizations, they will be tempted to fall back into old habits and may lose the momentum gained from the MSC forum. This is when the importance of practice comes into play. One way to maintain energy and create new habits is through sustained

practices, as discussed later in the paper. Another way to overcome inadequate follow-up is to focus on gathering low-hanging fruit and achieving early wins. Storytelling, a well-managed community of interest, and regularly scheduled future events all promote following through on collaborative initiatives and help to sustain forward movement.

Another key challenge to follow-through is that of continuity. Government officials, for example, generally rotate in and out of positions on a regular basis. Further compounding that challenge, they tend to focus on relatively short-term goals during their tenures. This time horizon can frustrate people who have a more stable presence in certain sectors or non-governmental organizations with long-term perspectives and enduring relationships. An appreciation of the varied perspectives on short-term and long-term goals and how people move into and out of communities of interest can inform a facilitator's approach to an MSC process. Knowing that inadequate follow-up is an issue for MSC endeavors, designers can proactively integrate continuity efforts in planning and implementation.

Other versions of internal conflict

The unique value systems represented among those in the stakeholder group will naturally create conflict within the MSC enterprise. As mentioned, this is organic to the process and should be expected. Problems arise when internal friction tears the budding cohesion or breaks the MSC group apart.

Designers need to identify and invite a critical mass of pragmatists from all affected groups who represent the diversity of needs and concerns and who want a different future.

Preparing for the potential for polarizing conflict mitigates friction. In addition to setting clear ground rules and providing the tools and practices of conflict resolution, the MSC management team also has to scrutinize who is attending the MSC forums. On one hand, it is desirable for the diversity of opinions and perspectives to mirror the complex system, but having participants who actively want to tear apart the enterprise is not constructive to the objective. To be able to create new possibilities, I reiterate the need to bring in people who understand the concerns of their respective groups and who are also looking for a constructive way out of the mess. Designers need to identify and invite a critical mass of pragmatists from all affected groups who represent the diversity of needs and concerns and who want a different future.

Tensions between top-down and bottom-up perspectives

Tensions among top-down-driven and bottom-up-oriented groups may surface during an MSC endeavor. If groups with power are attempting to use an MSC project to push their agendas in a top-down fashion, groups with less power or those supporting bottom-up initiatives will probably not be inclined to collaborate. In such cases, MSC designers can explore ways to connect top-down groups with bottom-up groups. A group pushing “top-down politics faces special problems in practicing cooperation, as revealed in the forming and maintenance of coalitions; these often proved socially fragile.”⁶⁸ Societal elites also often appear to have more in common with their counterparts from other organizations or communities than they do with their own constituents or fellow countrymen. In order to be more relevant, top-down groups should consider connecting their resources to legitimate needs

and actively seeking new partnerships that honor grassroots initiatives. Exploring ways to develop more inclusive (and therefore stronger) coalitions that apply top-down resources to genuine bottom-up concerns is a way for top-down organizations to fully participate in an MSC enterprise.

Bottom-up-driven organizations tend to build strong local relationships, but as Sennett observes, “their political force is often weak or fragmented.”⁶⁹ To grow and scale up their efforts, grassroots organizations need resources. Participation in an MSC may offer a way for some groups to articulate bottom-up needs to a broader community. Developing relationships with top-down groups might create win-win scenarios for grassroots organizations. If bottom-up groups sense a genuine possibility for dominion *with* (and not domination by) other stakeholder groups looking for legitimate investment opportunities, they may be willing to take a risk and participate. New possibilities for cooperation that would serve mutual needs can motivate grassroots stakeholder groups to join an MSC project.

Practical Application

In Afghanistan, the tension between top-downs and bottom-up groups was clear in the work I was supporting. For instance, rural village leaders recognized the basic needs of their communities, such as safety, water management, and agriculture, but did not necessarily look to the central government or other entities in the capital for assistance. Many organizations based in Kabul focused on institution-building and worked with the central government, but did not often engage with grassroots leaders in rural districts. Often we facilitated meetings so that Kabul-based organizations with resources and authorities could meet with village and district leaders with constituent needs. Thanks to this exchange, top-down resourcing became more relevant in the eyes of community leaders, and community leaders were better able to scale their governance efforts. Whereas before there had been little to no contact between the different top-down and bottom-up elements, we began to see mutually supporting sustainment systems slowly begin to develop.

Many challenges, such as the tension between top-down and bottom-up participants, can emerge during the course of an MSC endeavor. Contingency planning and detailed preparation can mitigate, if not eliminate, many of the potential problems designers might face. MSC project managers and facilitators should also check in with each other on a regular basis to discuss what is working well and what needs to improve. Anticipating challenges and developing appropriate courses of action help leaders alleviate risk and keep the process moving forward.

Section Summary

In the previous section, I outlined considerations for planning the collaborative process. Prior to face-to-face meetings, planners should conduct interviews to help understand the issues and challenges that shape the purpose of the forum. They check out potential locations for the meetings. Conveners also begin to identify facilitators, storytellers, and stakeholders.

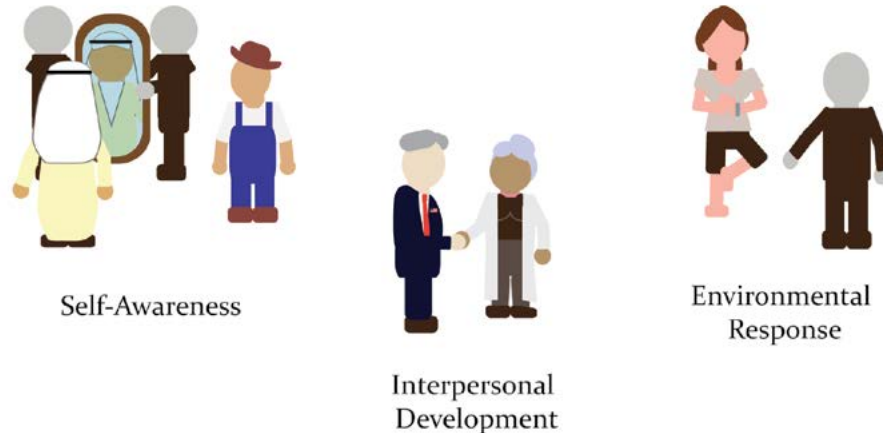
After preparation is complete, conveners move into the execution phase. They establish a safe container, and facilitators support a shared inquiry about the challenges the participants collectively face. Stakeholders map the complex system in which they reside in order to visualize their interdependent environment and shared concerns. Given the complexity of MSC issues, the process cannot be rigid or strictly linear. Instead, it should offer a flexible pathway with space to accommodate whatever unfolds organically among stakeholders.

The ebb and flow of dialogue shifts as stakeholders move through a process of group development. As group dynamics mature, conversations about new possibilities may foster the development of future scenarios. The search for common ground can also lead participants to look for ways to actively apply their learning and improve their current situations. In either event, stakeholders develop pilot projects or prototype experiments, based on superordinate goals, which take into account the concerns of all stakeholders in order to co-create a new future. Conversations that clarify roles and responsibilities on these collective action plans promote mutual respect and can pave the way toward building trust among stakeholders. As participants honor their commitments by following through with their actions, they create new possibilities for their collective future.

The MSC process creates a series of learning cycles in which practitioners consider new ideas and prototype possibilities. They periodically consider what is working well in order to maximize success. MSC participants also “reflect on potential improvements...recommit...reset (their) intention and start again.”⁷⁰ This methodology supports participants during rough spots as well as when a dialogue is producing positive results. An effective MSC process provides a flexible structure that supports learning, builds relationships, manages conflict, and facilitates beneficial outcomes.

After the face-to-face meetings, the MSC enterprise assesses outcomes and shares its stories. An MSC endeavor is an iterative process, not a stand-alone event. So, all of those involved in the process proactively seek ways to build continuity between events and build upon successes to create momentum. Having a dedicated person (or persons) to manage the community of stakeholders, share updates, and promote progress helps keep people connected and the collaborative spirit alive.

PRACTICE



Introduction

This section will discuss practice as an integral aspect of the MSC endeavor. According to Innes and Booher, “collaborative dialogue...requires skills, training, and adherence to a set of practices that run counter to the norms of discussion to which many people are accustomed.”⁷¹ I define practice in an MSC context as the efforts made by stakeholders on a regular basis to learn, improve, and sustain the craft of collaboration. Organizations can also adopt best practices that enable collaboration. Just as an athlete trains off of the field in preparation for competition, the MSC practitioner practices the skills of collaboration in preparation for successfully engaging in collaborative endeavors. These skills are not just conceptual understandings, but performance skills that are learned through practice. Through repetition and training, supervised by coaches, practitioners learn to embody collaborative behavior so that it can ultimately become second nature.

Practice can be instrumental in an MSC endeavor for several reasons. During the course of the collaborative process, participants may see the challenge and agree on a way ahead, but they may not have the skills to move forward. Training for and introducing new practices fills gaps in capacity. Difficult conversations may point out the need to learn how to resolve conflicts in more constructive ways. Challenges with seeing other perspectives or novel possibilities may highlight areas that would benefit from developing new competencies. Training that supports collaboration can be introduced throughout the lifecycle of an MSC endeavor.

To help frame this discussion I will focus on three domains. In my experiences with training and leader development, I have found that practices that help people learn about themselves, how to relate to others, and how to respond to the environment support success in the MSC enterprise. Leonard Riskin offers, “For a person to appropriately implement the strategies associated with the new approaches to mediation and negotiation and lawyering [and multi-stakeholder collaboration], she must have a set of foundational capacities including awareness, emotional sophistication, and understanding.”⁷² Intrapersonal skills help practitioners learn to suspend judgment and be open to new possibilities. Through reflective practice, people can better appreciate their own perspectives, filters, strengths, and weaknesses. Building interpersonal capacity to listen to and connect with others serves stakeholders who engage with others on complex challenges. Having the ability to deal with unexpected changes in a chaotic environment helps practitioners adapt and overcome challenges in concert with other actors.

Practicing for collaboration, then, is like training for any high-performance endeavor. A member of an Olympic team or top-performing jazz band practices his or her individual contribution to the whole,

as well as how to coordinate with, and offer support to, the collective effort. To become proficient in collaboration, people learn new concepts, exercise them with fellow practitioners, and incorporate coaching from competent teachers.

Conveners and managers of MSC endeavors ought to consider the component of practice in the overall design up front. Practices can be included in the process of an MSC event and taught in the planning and start-up of the activity. They can also be introduced as needed during the course of the MSC initiative. Sponsors might offer follow-up training and coaching to support participants between formal meetings. Planners should consider what would be best for participants in terms of whether to provide collaborative practices before, during, and/or after a formal MSC event.

Practices for Self-Awareness

Developing higher levels of self-awareness enhances the ability of participants to act constructively in an MSC endeavor. The better participants understand their own perspectives, blind spots, and conflict management styles, the better they will be at framing discussions and engaging other stakeholders. MSC issues can trigger emotional reactions, so knowing those concerns and being alert to the signs that tensions are rising can help a participant manage stress. Anger, fear, jealousy, despair, and desire for revenge may arise during an MSC. Self-awareness can help a participant recognize these feelings and, with practice, guide them to see what is beneath those emotions and learn how to articulate what needs to be addressed.

Some MSC practitioners have turned to mindfulness as a tool to use for increasing self-awareness and managing stress. We have seen this in a variety of professional fields, including negotiation and mediation. Riskin reports that mindfulness training provides negotiators and mediators with "... methods for calming the mind, concentrating, experiencing compassion and empathy and achieving an awareness of, and 'distance' from, thoughts, emotions, and habitual impulses that interfere with making good judgments and with building rapport and motivating others."⁷³ In practicing my own mindfulness, I have noticed that people learn to become more aware of their breathing, body sensations, thoughts, and emotions. This heightened awareness helps people see when they are being triggered or are acting in a reactive fashion. Training can help stakeholders discern what is happening in the present moment and when they are caught up in their conditioning. Mindfulness helps people learn to relax around their perspectives to see what else might be possible in a situation without losing ground.

Other options are available for those who do not find mindfulness training appealing. Elite athletes and sports teams often review the films of their competitions to observe what they are doing well and what they need to improve in terms of individual and collective actions.⁷⁴ They observe their behavior, reflect, and then refine or invent moves to take themselves to the next level. Facilitators and coaches can apply a game-filming approach in a variety of ways to support collaborative development. At the end of each day, for example, facilitators can review what went well and what needs to improve in the interactions among stakeholders. This technique is known in the US military as an "after action review," or AAR. It helps participants examine their intentions, actions, and what they learned about themselves and others during the course of the day's activities. Military units generally use the technique after a training event to capture what they are doing well and note what needs to be sustained, as well as what did not meet their objectives and needs to improve. Some businesses have also adapted the AAR tool for their own organizational practices.⁷⁵ This type of reflection promotes the development of self-awareness.

Journaling provides an additional path for increasing self-awareness. Daily journal entries can focus on an awareness of thoughts, emotions, and sensations. Insights, moments of feeling stuck, and sensations of being open or closed to what was happening in the moment are a few of the journal-entry topics that foster self-awareness. During an MSC workshop, facilitators could use time at the end of the day for participants to share their perspectives on the activities of the day with each other and to take time to write down their insights for their personal development.

Practices for Interpersonal Development

Practicing interpersonal skills also supports MSC efforts. Just as a participant can learn to appreciate his or her inner world, he or she can also practice ways of interacting effectively with others. Giving and receiving assessments is an example of a practice that can facilitate interpersonal skills development. The intent of assessments is to exchange feedback in order to learn, improve the process, clear up misunderstandings, and fulfill commitments.

I first learned about Fernando Flores' assessment tools while training at the Strozzi Institute and have found them to be very useful over the years.⁷⁶ First, ask to receive or give an assessment. It is important to make sure that the timing is right for the conversation and demonstrate openness. Also, check your intention in giving the assessment. Does it come from a desire to make a helpful contribution, or does it emanate from emotional reactivity? Then ground the assessment in an observable fact or piece of information that both parties can see. For example, stating that the sky is blue is a clear statement that is not easily refuted. On the other hand, saying it is a wonderful day is an opinion and not a fact.

Here is a sample script for an assessment conversation:

Contributor	(Say their name), I have an assessment that I would like to discuss you. When will you be available for a conversation?
Recipient	Say when you will be available to talk, assuming that you are open to having the dialogue. Once a time is set up, have the discussion.
Contributor	My assessment is (make the assessment)...and the reason I say that is... (give your grounding assertions and facts that support your assessment and demonstrate the standards you are using). Also, here are some things you are doing that I find helpful and that I invite you to continue to do...(provide this portion of the feedback in the same fashion).
Recipient	Thank you for providing the assessment.
Contributor	You are welcome. ⁷⁷

An assessment often points out a missing skill, competence, or awareness. This can lead to a conversation about possible developmental practices that address what is missing. The value of an

assessment is generally based on the competence level of the person making it. Trust in (or at least respect for) the assessor is necessary in order for the assessment to be taken seriously and treated as valuable. Providing and receiving assessments is a beneficial method of practicing self-awareness and is a way to skillfully train in real-time communications with fellow stakeholders.⁷⁸

Another way to practice skillful communication is by asking yourself whether what you are saying during an MSC dialogue is:

- Helpful: Does the input promote increased understanding?
- Respectful: Are the words being used friendly, kind, or at least neutral, in support of relationship-building?
- True: Is the statement accurate, and are opinions clearly differentiated from facts?
- Timely: Is this the appropriate opportunity to give this input?⁷⁹

Training to listen closely without judging, comparing, or fixing other people can help increase mutual understanding and respect.

A related skill is conflict management. During the course of an MSC, disagreements, emotional outbursts, and misunderstandings should be expected. Collaboration can actually benefit from creative tension. Jeff Weiss and Jonathan Hughes observe, “the disagreements sparked by the differences in perspective, competencies, access to information, and strategic focus... actually generate much of the value that can come from collaboration across organizational boundaries.”⁸⁰ Stakeholders benefit from learning a practice for how to respond appropriately in these commonly occurring situations.

The talented practitioner of multi-stakeholder collaboration “learns how to deflect confrontation when things are getting so hot that one of the participants threatens to drop out; he or she puts unpalatable home truths indirectly so that an antagonist more readily can face them.”⁸¹ Weiss and Hughes recommend six strategies that MSC participants could learn and practice for effectively managing conflict:

- Devise and implement a common method for resolving conflict
- Provide people with criteria for making trade-offs
- Use the escalation of conflict as an opportunity for coaching
- Establish and enforce a requirement for joint escalation
- Ensure that managers resolve escalated conflicts directly with their counterparts
- Make the process for conflict resolution transparent⁸²

Providing relevant tools from negotiations, mediation, nonviolent communications, or one of the many other available forms of conflict management enables stakeholders to learn beneficial communication habits. Breakdowns and mistakes will occur during an MSC endeavor, and participants need tools to deal with them effectively. Developing beneficial approaches to conflict and trying them out in low threat/low risk arenas can build stakeholder capacity for more challenging MSC situations.

Practices for Responding to the Environment in Appropriate Ways

I have found that training in somatic awareness and embodiment skills can also support MSC participants. People do not just learn about collaboration from the neck up. Like athletes on the playing

field, MSC practitioners can benefit from kinesthetic learning. For example, using easy-to-learn moves based on Aikido, participants can learn about their conditioned tendencies when it comes to conflict. They also learn to better appreciate when they are open or closed to another person or situation. In sensing how they turn towards or away from conflict or freeze, students learn to expand their capabilities for appropriate response. How to blend in is another skill somatic movement practitioners learn. Instead of charging head first into a disagreement or automatically backing away, students learn to feel what is happening in their bodies, see more clearly what is going on in the immediate environment, and then make more informed (and more appropriate) decisions on how they will deal with the situation they face.⁸³

William Isaacs states that this kind of Aikido training "...is particularly well-suited to dialogue because it invites practitioners to become aware of, and blend with, the energies of one's 'assailants,' whether they are hostile individuals or challenging circumstances."⁸⁴ Somatic awareness training can help improve skills for coordination and conflict management. Being grounded and centered are helpful practices for MSC participants. Somatic movement practitioners learn to sense when they are balanced, alert, and focused. They check periodically to see if they are relaxed and feel the ground beneath them. This awareness helps inform people as to whether they are open or closed, and whether or not they are aligned with what they care about (such as their purpose for participating in the MSC).

Like athletes on the playing field, MSC practitioners can benefit from kinesthetic learning.

When learning how to respond appropriately to events, noting how people speak to each other in terms of the coordination of commitments is also an important practice. Stakeholders honor their commitments with their actions. Having a common language supports the execution of tasks and builds mutual confidence. This is especially vital due to the self-selected and voluntary nature of many MSC enterprises in which people come together from different organizations with different norms of action. A key part of collaboration is building shared standards for conversations and appropriate actions.⁸⁵

As pilot projects and prototyping ideas take shape, having clear roles and responsibilities is helpful in maintaining the forward momentum and sense of accomplishment. Having an agreed-upon approach (method and schedule) to facilitate ongoing dialogue on role clarification, reducing role ambiguity, and managing role conflicts is necessary.⁸⁶ Practicing these conversations for action is instrumental in the support of project execution. Based on the work of Flores, best interpersonal communication practices support the coordination of MSC actions.

For a given pilot project, for example, two parties agree on who the customer will be and who the provider will be for a given task. Then the customer makes a request articulating the desired conditions of satisfaction. Once that is negotiated, the provider takes the necessary steps to produce the desired result. The provider lets the customer know when the task is complete. At this point, the client reviews the results in relation to the conditions of satisfaction, and declares completion of the action if the customer is satisfied with the outcome. Establishing how the two parties will manage potential breakdowns during the process also helps improve the chances of success. Dunham and Denning recommend practicing conversations for action, since "nothing is more powerful for bringing rigor to all coordination."⁸⁷

MSC participants can also look at the organizations they represent to see what level of organizational support is available for collaborative practice. Groups that enable collaboration capacity-building also enable their members to align the values of the organization with evolving practices. An impasse or obstacle in an MSC may emanate from the fact that one or more of the stakeholder organizations does not promote or even have a culture comfortable with engaging diverse partners in chaotic conditions. Without support from within their parent units, practitioners may have to look elsewhere to build collaborative capacity. If this is the case, MSC organizers or inspired participants can engage the leaders of stakeholder entities to see whether they are open to new approaches within their own organizations that would support collaborative capacity-building. Managers of organizations that participate in MSC endeavors might then consider what practices would enhance their collective ability to operate with multiple actors in a complex environment. After all, desired outcomes for a collaborative project require specific kinds of actions. These actions require specific kinds of skills which can be fully developed only through practice, not just through cognitive understanding.

Practical Application

In Afghanistan, my interdisciplinary team worked in an ever-changing and chaotic environment. Consequently, I introduced some simple somatic movement exercises into our routine. We found that centering and blending practices helped us to be more effective in highly stressful situations. For centering, I invited my colleagues to each be aware of their body's center of gravity. With practice, they became increasingly aware of when they would "go into their heads" and become off balance. Sensing their feet on the ground, they would come back to center and re-engage the challenge at hand. In blending, my teammates and I would practice settling in our bodies, facing each other in an alert and relaxed manner, and then extending toward each other in a spirit of exploring what was possible without losing our own perspective. As we moved closer to one another, sensing each other's energy and mood, and our own physical sensations, we then blended our individual moves, thus creating a new collective movement. This practice helped us embody collaboration in concert with other people in a stressful environment. I knew I was on to something beneficial for the group when one of my colleagues stated that he would have appreciated starting this practice even sooner than we did (and practicing it more often).

Another awareness practice I have used effectively in collaborative work that has helped me be more inclusive is to ask the group I am working with "What are we missing?" and "Whose perspective is not present in the room?" then do our best to reach out to those groups that we had not yet included to seek their input and share our views. For example, during a conversation in Afghanistan my team and I observed that we did not know the perspectives of human rights groups in great detail. So we invited members of these organizations to a series of conversations in order to better understand one another's concerns. This proved to be invaluable in broadening our views, fine-tuning our efforts, and improving the ways we communicated our actions.

Section Summary

Practice is vital to MSC endeavors. The ability to see people as they are without judging them, to integrate various perspectives, and to coordinate mutual actions requires training and practice. Theories of conflict management, complex-systems thinking, project management, and facilitation

provide intellectual building blocks for multi-stakeholder collaboration. Taking these concepts and putting them into action to see what works and does not work in a given situation is just as imperative to learning. New ideas are not enough. Stakeholders must experience coordination for themselves to genuinely appreciate its value and embody new behaviors.

Performing collaborative exercises over time, as one would practice for a team sport, helps improve individual and collective capacities. It can be beneficial to attend a short training workshop, but higher levels of competency require sustained practice over months and years. Coaching and expert instruction contribute to this development. The learning cycle spirals upward when stakeholders exercise collaboration in a deliberate fashion in concert with fellow practitioners under the guidance of expert coaches.

The ability to see people as they are without judging them, integrate various perspectives, and coordinate mutual actions requires training and practice.

Designers and facilitators can look to the stakeholders to see if anyone has any collaborative practices organic to their communities that could be shared. If not, practices can be introduced before the MSC starts, and additional training or coaching could be made available throughout the MSC process. Training in collaborative practices can also be powerful in helping to sustain the momentum of the MSC initiative after the workshops or other face-to-face events. Participants, with minimal support, could self-organize and train together periodically. Sponsors should consider providing resources to enable training opportunities for stakeholders to come together and continue to learn and practice collaboration. Throughout the timeline of an MSC endeavor, stakeholders need to explore and fine-tune what works best for them. Once they find an approach that suits their needs, they can practice in order to broaden their repertoire of healthy responses to complex challenges in concert with others.

Developing “muscle memory” for collaboration requires training, practice, and coaching. With time and effort, stakeholders gain knowledge and experience in relating to diverse perspectives. Like a member of a high-performing sports team, a stakeholder will learn new moves in conflict resolution, empathic listening, and coordinated action. An MSC endeavor can offer participants an opportunity to develop new capacities for self-awareness, interpersonal skills, and responding appropriately to the environment. These tools and accompanying practices enable stakeholders to be more effective in collaborative approaches to complex challenges.

SUMMARY

Now that the key components of, and challenges to, a successful MSC enterprise have been discussed, let us step back and appreciate a synthesis of the different elements. In the early stages we consider the issues, stakeholders and their intentions, and the complex environment in which they mesh. During this co-exploration stage we integrate the components of people, purpose, place, and pre-MS process to broaden our apertures and create new understanding. As the exploration ripens, we move into a co-design phase. Here we take our understanding and transform it into new possibilities. In co-designing, we blend people, process, purpose, and place in order to translate ideas into action. This can take the form of developing future scenarios, pilot projects, or prototyping experiments. This process of scenario development and prototyping pilots can be an effective way to help build relationships across organizational and cultural borders. To maintain momentum and deepen learning, we share stories, practice new skills, and assess the outcomes of our initiatives. During co-learning we integrate the people, purpose, post-MS process, and practice components. Throughout the entire process designers and facilitators brainstorm contingencies to exploit successes and mitigate challenges that emerge. As we learn by doing, members of the MSC endeavor to continuously refine and adapt the five components to support achieving superordinate goals.

A look at the 5Ps together as a whole shows the importance of aligning committed stakeholders, resources, and the needs of the group in a focused fashion. Connecting the projects with people who are committed to their completion promotes collective action. Stakeholders who demonstrate personal alignment enhance trust-building within the group. Structural alignment supports resilience and efforts to build continuity for the MSC endeavor. Designers make the effort to analyze and integrate the different parts of the MSC enterprise in order to close gaps and synergize collaborative action.

Synthesizing the various aspects of the multi-stakeholder collaboration helps each part of the enterprise learn from every other part. This fusion enables leaders "...to see the emerging forms of things to come and outline what should be done to meet or anticipate them...[and] constantly reappraise what was being done...[given that] policies acquired their own momentum and went on after the reasons that inspired them had ceased."⁸⁸ This may include generating new initiatives or partnerships. It could also mean completing actions or terminating projects that no longer serve the group. New practices or support systems may be necessary to help stakeholders move forward. Stepping back and reflecting on synthesis can help designers and stakeholders see how the whole system is evolving and consider what steps can be taken to further sustain the MSC effort.

Complex MSC challenges require comprehensive approaches that do not necessarily follow a linear sequence. Different challenges will require a different mix of components at different times. Integrating the various parts and aligning them in support of a superordinate goal promotes synergistic action. Unique scenarios will require different applications of this approach. Managing an MSC enterprise is like leading an orchestra. Depending on what is needed, designers will call upon different arrangements of the five components. When leaders conduct the five instruments of MSC in concert with each other, stakeholders benefit from new opportunities for increased harmony and coordination.

CASE STUDIES

The following three case studies demonstrate different applications of the 5Ps. They differ in terms of the sense of urgency and the degree of ongoing collaboration in each. The cases share the common theme of stakeholders seeking new ways to address complex issues in light of their importance. In all cases, stakeholders saw the need to address breakdowns or sensed an opportunity to improve multi-stakeholder processes in support of mutual interests.

The Afghanistan case study describes a multi-stakeholder collaboration in the heat of an ongoing conflict with initial isolated pockets of collaboration. We applied the MSC principles to immediate concerns and enabled a more inclusive group of stakeholders to coalesce around mutual concerns. The Pacific Special Operations Conference (PASOC) demonstrates an MSC in which we stepped back from our day-to-day activities to bring stakeholders together in the form of workshops to generate collaboration. In this case, there was not as much urgency as in Afghanistan. Additionally, many of the stakeholders did not have regular contact with each other, so the degree of ongoing collaboration was initially low. The third case study provides an example in which an outside group was brought in to bolster an ongoing formal coordination process. Stakeholders from the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia saw opportunities to improve collaboration around the mutual concern of piracy, so they invited a team from the Oceans Beyond Piracy project to support their efforts. In all cases, mutual concerns around complex challenges that were deemed important by stakeholders motivated them to seek collaborative ways to address collective issues.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION IN AFGHANISTAN



Spc Daniel Love, US Army- Flickr

Introduction

Rugged terrain, a myriad of diverse tribes, nationwide poverty, a weak central government, widespread corruption, multiple distinct languages, 30 years of war, and a general distrust of foreigners combine to create an incredibly complex and uncertain environment in Afghanistan. At first glance, any possibility of collaborative action between security, development, diplomatic, civil, and governance actors seems impossible. However, in this case the complexity of the situation in Afghanistan actually provided an amazing opportunity to successfully apply a collaborative approach in concert with multiple stakeholders. Assisting Afghans with rebuilding rural communities after decades of conflict required an intimate understanding of social networks, the socio-economic environment, and how to build partnerships to co-create sustainable systems to meet essential needs.

Purpose

The wide variety of stakeholder groups offered an equally wide variety of motivations for their respective programs and activities in Afghanistan. An appreciation for that diversity helped us assess the plethora of perspectives and concerns. Regional stability, trade and commerce, and business development motivated select stakeholder groups. International security forces wanted safety and security. Several non-governmental organizations and Afghan civil leaders were striving for social justice, education, development, and human rights. Various international organizations aspired to build Afghan governance capacity. Certain groups wanted to increase their political power while others competed for financial growth. Many Afghan community leaders worked hard to meet the basic needs of their villages. In rural areas, Afghans wanted to farm, procure clean water, and raise their children in relative safety. Some stakeholders just wanted to survive. We sought opportunities to coalesce around mutual interests concerning rudimentary levels of stability, development, and governance.

People

The diversity of the stakeholders and the complexity of Afghan social networks led us to pay close attention to the people aspect of this MSC. We established an engagement team to build rapport with Afghan ministries and international embassies. This team also set up meetings between our leaders and their Afghan counterparts in order to share information, relieve points of friction, and develop new initiatives. Our units in the field took a similar approach. As a result, our organization and its component units engaged multiple stakeholders at the national, regional, and local levels. These relationship-building efforts also helped build healthy connections between top-down resources and bottom-up needs.

Place

We conducted the MSC events in different locations throughout Afghanistan and occasionally in the US, depending on the needs of particular stakeholders. Security played an important role; we did everything we possibly could to provide physically safe containers for meetings. Respect for Afghan cultural norms around community gatherings also influenced the way we supported MSC events in the field. We often utilized NATO and Afghan transportation resources to help bring stakeholders together from geographically dispersed areas.

To prepare military leaders for their deployments, we hosted events in the US. During these forums, we had video teleconferences between stakeholders in the field and their US counterparts. This provided real-time sharing of relevant experiences and best practices. To broaden this exchange, we brought in a variety of practitioners from other agencies and organizations with experience in Afghanistan. They shared their expertise in the domains of cultural anthropology, negotiations, governance, economics, and the media.

Process

The design and implementation of a systematic approach to helping community leaders provide alternatives to violence required a deep appreciation of Afghan culture. To learn about the complexities of life in Afghanistan, my civil-military interdisciplinary team designed a series of collaborative forums. On a regular basis we brought stakeholders together with experts in Afghan politics, culture, history, and economics to identify mutual problems and opportunities, search for common ground, and develop collective action plans.

We also expended considerable effort observing local customs in order to incorporate some of the effective ideas for security, governance, and economic development that already existed in villages. Witnessing these examples of positive deviance helped us co-design and implement a comprehensive strategy with our Afghan partners that incorporated relevant best practices and respected cultural norms. To scale this grassroots initiative, I prepared our senior leaders to engage senior Afghan officials in bringing this effort into law, which bolstered legitimacy within the Afghan government. Senior leader engagements played a key role throughout this MSC endeavor to ensure that our efforts worked hand in hand with those of our Afghan and international counterparts.

Prototyping also helped us scale community mobilization efforts for rural areas. We frequently hosted video teleconferences so that our teams in the field, Afghan stakeholders, and interagency partners across the country could share best practices and address emerging needs. These collaborative forums facilitated rapid decision making and information exchanges. We constantly shared what experiments were (and were not) working well in water management, economic development, agriculture, security, and governance projects.

To assist in assessing and sharing the outcomes of these programs, I augmented my team with analysts from a think tank, including an Afghan-American. Together we synthesized reports from our field teams, surveys of rural Afghans, and analysis of economic and governance trends. We then distributed monthly assessment reports within our stakeholder network. This storytelling helped articulate impacts, allocate resources efficiently, and bolster Afghan confidence.

Additionally, I recruited an Emmy-award-winning photojournalist to help us capture interagency partner perspectives, lessons learned, and stories of rural Afghans rebuilding their communities. We made copies of the videos and shared them with incoming units and other partners who worked with us. We also distributed the videos to training centers in Afghanistan and the US and used them during planning workshops. These videos helped transfer knowledge to incoming teams and share our best practices with interested stakeholders.

Practice

Our senior leaders set high standards for collaborative behavior by personal example. As a result, our teams and staff practiced accordingly. Leaders routinely brought stakeholders affected by a problem together. This happened in person as well as over video teleconference, depending on the urgency of a given matter and the distances between concerned stakeholders.

In-country we participated in multiple MSC forums at a variety of sites, from the village level all the way up to the capital. Sometimes we hosted events, other times we attended forums that others had organized. Often our organization acted as a bridge to help connect top-down resources from the central government and international partners with bottom-up needs from villages and districts.

Another best practice that facilitated collaboration was the use of liaison personnel. With an appreciation for key stakeholder organizations, we placed representatives in strategic locations throughout the country. They worked side by side with Afghan ministry representatives, diplomats, local government officials, development workers, and various military and police units. Together we formed a flat network that quickly shared information and addressed stakeholder issues in an effective manner. Video teleconferencing and face-to-face meetings with liaison personnel facilitated our decision-making process and raised the mutual awareness of needs and available resources.

An appreciation for Afghan culture played an integral role in our human-centered approach to successfully addressing socio-economic needs in impoverished villages. Close observation showed us positive deviance and culturally relevant solutions. Brainstorming helped us discover common ground. Collaborative forums facilitated collective action. Storytelling generated momentum. A collaborative approach, embraced by our senior and junior leaders, helped build a countrywide network of stakeholders. This network coalesced around mutual interests that focused on security, stability, development, and governance at the local, regional, and national levels. By building bridges between Kabul-based organizations and rural communities, we helped our partners connect resources with needs and thus make inroads in building sustainable support systems.

These collaborative efforts produced tangible results. Our assessments showed that security conditions improved where we instituted these collaborative programs, which also allowed Afghans to bring goods to market and generate income to provide for their basic needs. Afghan local police successfully withstood attacks and protected their communities. Rural Afghan citizens consequently began to respect and appreciate their local police. Logistical systems grew to connect Afghan central government resources with rural community needs and provide the beginnings of a pipeline of essential services. Rural Afghan leaders, seeing the success of these initiatives, requested similar programs in their villages. As a result, rural Afghans working with multiple stakeholders successfully rebuilt over 40 districts and 100 rural villages in less than two years. Senior NATO, embassy, and Afghan officials applauded these collaborative efforts. Ultimately, this MSC continues to evolve, grow, and reach new villages every month, demonstrating its power and sustainability.

Key Takeaways

In this case, we applied MSC principles in a comprehensive fashion to help stakeholders address urgent and important needs. Senior leaders set a positive example in our organization and in the NATO headquarters in Kabul. They empowered their units to flatten communications and build partnerships with a wide variety of stakeholders. This also supported the strategic placement of liaison personnel throughout the country to form a dynamic network for information sharing, decision making, and action. A dependable communications platform enabled the network to quickly bring stakeholders together to share information, solve problems, connect needs with resources, and build relationships. Our teams at the grassroots level built trust and confidence as stakeholders saw that the network responded to their concerns in a timely manner. As a result of this cumulative effort, we took isolated pockets of coordinated action and transformed them into a countrywide collaborative network.

PACIFIC AREA SPECIAL OPERATIONS CONFERENCE CASE STUDY



U.S. Pacific Command - Flickr

Introduction

During a three-year period I designed and managed a series of multi-stakeholder collaboration forums called the Pacific Area Special Operations Conference (PASOC) in Honolulu, HI. This series is distinct from the Afghan example in terms of urgency and the degree of initial collaboration. PASOC allowed us to step away from the urgency of day-to-day activities and share an inquiry into violence in the region. Given the breadth of different countries the stakeholders represented, PASOC provided some with their first opportunity to meet in person. These conferences brought together approximately 300 stakeholders, including government leaders from 22 countries, academics, think tank analysts, business consultants, religious scholars, social activists, members of the media, and senior policymakers. We met in order to develop a shared understanding of the underlying causes of terrorism, to build relationships, and to coordinate innovative action in Asia. The format included plenary panels, guest speakers, small group discussions, social events, and representatives from individual countries having dedicated meetings with our senior leaders. Daily press conferences reported the highlights and offered interviews with key leaders from the US and the Pacific Rim who were attending the forum.

Purpose

PASOC brought together leaders from a variety of agencies, sectors, and nations to refine a shared understanding of the regional environment, explore mutual interests, deepen relationships, and coordinate innovative action to help address violence in Asia. The desired outcomes of the MSC endeavor included developing a shared:

- Understanding of political violence in Asia as part of a larger evolving system
- Responsibility for that reality
- Strategy for influencing the future of political violence in Asia with actionable, multinational plans and programs

- Network of relationships and contacts
- Sense of continuity and community (i.e., PASOC as a bridge to similar events and projects)

Facilitator Goals:

- Develop a space for trust and intimacy
- Support people in feeling safe
- Help participants trust that this was a space where they had a voice, and where they could speak out
- Assist the groups in finding common ground and creating collaborative projects

Guest Speaker Goals:

- Share perspectives from a variety of backgrounds
- Stimulate new ideas and actions
- Raise challenging questions
- Share best practices, lessons learned, and recommendations for action

People

Management Team

The team that I directly managed became the core element that managed the overall effort. Since the collaborative forum was a high priority for the commanding general, other staff elements in our organization played a significant role in the planning that led up to the event. Several sections took care of logistics (contracts, security, hotel coordination, local transportation, and travel). Another element handled selection and invitation of stakeholders. My team and I coordinated the overall conference design, media engagement, selection of guest speakers, and the MSC process with the facilitators we chose. Altogether, approximately 20 people were involved on a regular basis in the preparations for the conference. During the workshop itself, the management team grew to about 35 people, which included facilitators, note-takers, and media relations, logistics, and protocol personnel.

Facilitators

The facilitators and I worked together from the outset of planning to co-design the agenda and process. Their expertise in facilitation and MSC design and their passion for making a positive impact made the design process highly rewarding.

Storytellers

The storytelling team included people trained in public relations and working with the media. Our

close working relationship made it easy for them to see the collaborative purpose of the forum and to sense the narrative that eventually emerged. Throughout the process they crafted talking points for our senior leaders and coordinated daily interviews with local and regional media outlets.

Stakeholders

The aim was to mirror the complex system in which we all worked, so we invited a diverse group of participants. Each year attendance varied, but generally between 17 and 22 countries sent representatives. Stakeholders came from multiple sectors including government, civil society, the media, religious groups, academia, think tanks, business, and non-governmental organizations. From within these different domains there was a rich mix of senior leaders and grassroots participants.

Place

The convening element resided in Honolulu, Hawaii, along with all of the organizations that supported the MSC event. Honolulu, given its penchant for good service, great weather, and beautiful natural surroundings, offered an ideal location for the MSC forum. Geographically, it also provided a convenient meeting point for stakeholders coming from the Asia Pacific region and the United States. We chose a hotel (not a government facility) with excellent conference facilities, which provided neutral ground for the meeting place. Conference surveys provided very positive feedback on the choice of a hotel as the venue for the workshop.

Process

Overall Facilitator Process

On the first day, the focus was on discovering the wisdom in the room, engaging in an inquiry to appreciate the best of what was currently available. During the second day, we explored future possibilities. The third day we focused on designing scenarios and proposals in which we asked what the “what if” would look like and what was required to enable such possibilities. On the fourth day, we developed action plans to implement and articulated the next steps to move forward. During the fifth day, we evaluated what had gone well and what needed to improve, and developed ways to maintain continuity for the collaborative process.

Daily Process

In the mornings, a summary of the previous day’s themes and key takeaways was provided to the assembled participants. We also held a plenary panel of noted experts sharing their perspectives on themes of mutual interest. To optimize time, we ate lunch together while listening to an invited speaker. In the afternoons, we broke into small groups and had facilitated discussions based on the designated theme of the day and needs of the group. At the end of each day, I met with the facilitators and management team to review the day’s proceedings and prepare for the next day’s events. Evenings were open for stakeholders to network and socialize, and one evening we hosted a dinner banquet for the participants.

Conference Process: First Day—Framing the Challenge

Before looking directly at threats and opportunities, we took a step back to analyze what was happening in the region. The need to be open to new possibilities without judgment was imperative to effectively dealing with terrorism and insurgencies. We studied the situation from many angles and asked ourselves what was fundamentally going on. To foster this learning, we asked guest speakers to discuss what was happening in our security environment (local, regional, national, and international). The speakers also sought to help us understand how socio-economic conditions, grievances, governance, health, education, and technology were affecting the security environment.

After the morning panel discussion, we broke into small groups to appreciate the best practices from the experiences of the participants in the room. We considered a collaborative activity which each had participated in or directly observed. Facilitators asked participants to describe the activity, who had been involved, what the stakeholder's role had been in it, and what outcome had been achieved. Then the groups talked about what they thought had gone well and why, as well as what had not worked well and why. Groups also analyzed the stakeholders involved and how they had managed difficulties. Finally, the group examined specific lessons learned from the experience.

Conference Process: Second Day—Understanding the Problems and Opportunities

With an understanding of what was happening in the region, and ways to think about the challenges learned from the previous day's discussions, we focused specifically on the problem of political violence. First, we discussed being part of a regional system, and being part of the security challenges—i.e., that the challenges were not separate from us or “out there.” The message was that if we believe that violence is a problem we have to solve “out there” and we don't see or want to see any possible relationship between ourselves, the ones who are trying to solve the problem, and what the problem actually is, we will not be able to understand political violence accurately in all of its complexity. We therefore may unwittingly be contributing to maintaining the undesirable situation. With this premise, guest speakers discussed the current threats and opportunities in the region. Throughout the morning the speakers also described how economics, infrastructure, employment, education, physical geography, governance, cultural barriers, and politics contributed as underlying conditions for violence in the region.

In the afternoon, the small groups (considering the experiences described the day before) took advantage of the wisdom in the room to describe a different and better future state that could be realized for establishing security in the region. They also considered the possibility that coordination across the various stakeholder groups might create significant improvements in the region.

The groups imagined arriving at future PASOC events with all of the conditions described the day before having become “the norm,” and with security in the region being significantly better and constantly improving. They then described the future conditions that enabled that new state of affairs. These possibilities included having novel kinds of collaboration in place that impacted regional security positively.

Conference Process: Third Day—Action Plans (The Interagency Way Ahead)

With the understanding of the threats and opportunities in the region that the forum had explored the day before, the workshop then focused on what could be done from a multi-agency perspective. By

collaborating across agencies, participants not only put their ideas together, they also put their common purposes together. Guest speakers recommended ways for interagency stakeholders to leverage each other's strengths and synchronize efforts in order to be more successful.

The afternoon breakout sessions focused on what future possibilities could look like and what would be required in order to enable new ideas. Participants examined how to better coordinate political, diplomatic, economic, law enforcement, military, commercial, education, health, and information programs. They also sought ways to better enlist, empower, or support regional partners in the effort to reinforce sovereign exercise of responsible law enforcement and internal security practices. Participants looked for new ways to better integrate efforts to strengthen the efforts of legitimate governments to secure peace and stability within their respective borders and across the region.

Conference Process: Fourth Day–Action Plans (The Multinational Way Ahead)

Just as different government agencies must collaborate better in order to effectively address transnational concerns, regional partners need to do the same. Participants examined what actions they could take from a multinational perspective to do so. In order to defuse threats and build capacity, stakeholders explored how to work together to offer alternative ideologies, economic opportunity, safety, different channels for political influence to travel in, and ways to strengthen family and cultural ties outside of violent movements. With a better understanding of the concerns, they would be better able to provide more appropriate alternatives to political violence. This required leveraging the knowledge and capabilities of the US and partner nations and their diplomatic, informational, economic, financial, military, and law enforcement instruments of power in a coordinated and focused effort.

Morning speakers developed the day's themes, mentioned above, while assessing what multinational efforts were working well and what activities and programs needed to be sustained. They also provided recommendations on what was needed to better manage weaknesses, seams, and gaps. The panel also suggested possible next steps for supporting the multinational way ahead to improving stability in the region.

The afternoon breakout sessions explored steps for implementation and concrete ways to move forward. Based on the previous day's discussions of new possibilities, participants developed ways to turn their innovative ideas into action. This included developing ways to better integrate multinational efforts for security, development, and governance. They also analyzed what regional activities and programs needed to be sustained and what needed to improve.

Conference Process: Fifth Day–Consolidation and Integration

On the fifth day, the facilitators, note-takers, and management team were brought together to review the week's activities. We focused on the workshop outcomes, stakeholder commitments, what we learned from the process, and follow-up actions. We also compared our respective notes in order to develop a fuller narrative of the MSC endeavor. The output from this day's effort became the monitoring and tracking mechanism for post-PASOC activities.

In terms of post-conference actions, we provided the recommendations developed at PASOC to appropriate senior leaders in government and civil society for follow-up. We tracked and monitored initiatives produced at PASOC in order to sustain momentum. We also bridged to other regional events and the next PASOC by continuing to build networks, seek partners, and find projects of mutual interest in order to support continuity in our efforts.

Practice

The main practice that we introduced into this MSC enterprise centered on Appreciative Inquiry (AI).⁸⁹ It shaped the agenda, guided the working groups, instilled a spirit of collaborative exploration, and brought out relevant best practices during the MSC process. The facilitators used AI to assist stakeholders with focusing on their strengths and shared experiences in interagency and multinational collaborations. We did this to promote learning and build on that previous knowledge to pursue other collective initiatives.

To practice this approach, we asked participants to reflect on experiences of which they were especially proud where they had been part of a collaborative effort. We discussed activities that required stakeholders to work across entity boundaries and work with multiple perspectives. We also examined where the efforts resulted in exceptional outcomes beyond what was originally anticipated.

Throughout the forum, we asked the following questions in order to practice and benefit from appreciative inquiry:

- What about this collaborative experience caused it to leave such a strong positive impression on you? What about it made you so proud? Did it have the same impact on others? Describe the impact.
- Who was involved? How were you involved? What role did each person/entity/agency/nation play?
- Describe the outcomes that resulted from collaboration. How were the results different from what was originally anticipated? Describe the differences, and what enabled them.

Key Takeaways

I appreciated that leaders need time to step away from the intense busyness of their day-to-day lives to reflect on what is working well and what needs to improve in the context of an MSC challenge. When planned properly, the 5P road map makes great use of this reflective time as it facilitates the emergence of new ideas, new connections, and new possibilities. I learned that all stakeholders potentially have important roles to fill and contributions to make. No country or stakeholder group is so large that it can go it alone; no country or stakeholder group is so small that it cannot make a strategic impact and contribute in a meaningful way.

I valued having integrated the facilitators and the management team early in the planning process of the MSC. Because of this integration, the agenda and desired outcomes of the workshop helped to determine the organization of working groups, guest speaker invitations, venue, breakout room design, and the flow of panel discussions. These planning considerations generated logistical and administrative requirements. Having a matrixed team of planners and facilitators working together before and during the MSC workshop anticipated friction points and forecasted requirements in a timely manner.

OCEANS BEYOND PIRACY CASE STUDY



Jens Vestergaard Madsen - Oceans Beyond Piracy

Introduction

Distinct from the Afghan and PASOC examples mentioned previously, the Oceans Beyond Piracy case study highlights the application of MSC principles from the outside in. The Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS) invited staff members from the Oceans Beyond Piracy project (OBP) of the One Earth Future Foundation (OEF) to help bolster an ongoing, informal, and voluntary coordination process. While the situation was perhaps not as urgent as the one in Afghanistan, the various leaders of affected stakeholder groups nonetheless saw a critical need to build more connective tissue among each other in order to address the important issue of piracy. Differing from the PASOC example in terms of the degree of ongoing collaboration, the OBP case study examines the efforts of a third party assisting stakeholders in an already-ongoing process. OEF was interested in helping because they see piracy as a significant transnational issue complicated by multiple political, industrial, and civil-society concerns. Given its complicated nature, cutting, as it does, across a variety of sectors and a vast geographic area, addressing maritime piracy calls for a novel approach. Pooling the knowledge, resources, and capacities of diverse stakeholders provided an exciting opportunity for all concerned to close the governance gaps that piracy exploits.

Purpose

Given the gaps in governance surrounding piracy, OEF created a collaborative team called Oceans Beyond Piracy. OEF sought to apply research and resident expertise to an important problem, so it dedicated resources to actively support stakeholders. The purpose behind this initiative stems from OEF's values system. OEF's web site states:

We believe that effective and inclusive governance is the key to averting armed conflict. By ‘governance’ we mean systems that bring together stakeholders and institutions affected by a specific issue to share information, explore solutions, and make collective decisions. OEF believes that governments are just one part of inclusive governance systems. Business and civil society are also key stakeholders. Each of these three sectors has unique capabilities that can be leveraged to address global problems.⁹⁰

OEF values the concerns and capabilities not only of state actors, but of business, academia, and civil society as well. Given the range of actors and issues requiring enhanced coordination, OEF believes that actively applying its approach to support stakeholders affected by piracy is a worthy and meaningful investment.

People

OBP provides a variety of services in support of the CGPCS. The CGPCS is a voluntary body of government officials acting collectively to address the maritime piracy emanating from Somalia that poses a threat to regional stability, trade, and energy security.⁹¹ While the initial focus was on government cooperation, OBP has lobbied CGPCS leadership to normalize participation and provide leadership opportunities for industry and non-governmental stakeholders in the CGPCS process. It also helps facilitate collaborative forums for stakeholders to meet and discuss issues of mutual concern. OBP acts as a bridge-builder between these different groups to enable information-sharing and improve mutual understanding of stakeholder perspectives. The exchanges that OBP broker also assist key actors with connecting strategic resources to the grassroots needs on the field.

Place

OBP emphasizes the use of neutral spaces for their forums. Geography is also a key consideration for OBP in planning collaboration space. Many of the international stakeholders operate in Europe, East Africa, India, and South Asia. Hosting meetings in London or supporting coordination efforts in India, for example, supports collaboration between stakeholders affected by piracy.

Process

Pre-MSC Coordination

OBP works closely with stakeholders prior to a meeting in order to learn about what they value and understand their current concerns and high-priority issues. They also analyze the parameters of possible negotiated outcomes. With an appreciation for stakeholder issues, they look for ways to bolster and complement the ongoing CGPCS process. For example, they provide opportunities prior to collaboration meetings for stakeholders to inform the agenda.

OBP also focuses on concrete issues that are important to the participants. These issues are not categorized as urgent, so OBP has time to prepare for meetings. Part of the preparation is seeking high-level support for the process. Senior leaders from the stakeholder groups help define the parameters and key discussion points for the meetings. With senior leader accord, OBP is empowered to facilitate working group discussion.

MSC Execution

OBP often employs two facilitators in a collaborative forum. This serves them very well as they observe group dynamics, manage the mood of the room, and simultaneously focus on current and future agenda items. A key focus of their process is identifying specific problems or opportunities that are not currently being addressed. Some of these items come to light simply through bringing the different groups together. Through a collaborative dialogue, they find out what items have fallen between institutional gaps and require attention. Then, they seek consensus within the CGPCS on who will commit to completing what action. OBP emphasizes discrete problem sets, so the group starts out with small-scale, feasible goals and builds upon gains to better address larger issues.

OBP also enables the CGPCS to work out friction points between technical issues and political issues. Sometimes, technical experts within the forums agree to a course of action that will solve a problem, but the plan does not sit well with political leaders. Conversely, some strategic issues that get worked out at a senior level fail in their implementation due to a lack of consideration around the tactical aspects of the plan. It requires finesse on OBP's part to moderate open and frank discussions in forums where rank and position may influence the quality of conversations. Different issues may require unique mixes of rank and subject-matter expertise.

OBP looks at the given issue and facilitates gathering the right groups of people in the room; groups that have the necessary authority to make decisions and the requisite knowledge to formulate actionable plans. One without the other spells setbacks in policy formulation at the top or problematic implementation at the pointy end of the spear. A desire to proceed successfully compels OBP to seek out the appropriate stakeholders and ensure broad and inclusive representation from industry, government, academia, and civil society.

During meetings, OBP closely monitors the dialogue. They track who provides input and who wishes to speak. Facilitators ensure that no one voice dominates the conversation and that all participants have the opportunity to share their perspectives. Although notes are taken, meetings are always conducted under the Chatham House Rule.

Post-MSA Activities

OBP follows up with detailed forum notes in order to share outcomes and provide an implementation mechanism for agenda items. Note-takers stick to what was actually discussed in the workshops. OBP may offer additional opinions or input outside of the scope of the actual proceedings, but these are clearly labeled as "OBP Comments" to maintain the integrity of the document. They are also careful to phrase contentious items in a dialogic fashion to keep the dialogue open to further discussion. OBP provides the outcomes of their forums to the CGPCS for them to consider incorporating the recommendations and collective learning into their own processes. Narrative development has to balance the need to protect the sensitivities of the proceedings with the transparency of process. Creating a strategic communication plan helps tell people who you are and what you are doing.

Assessments also play an important role in OBP's post-MSA activities. The assessments examine what impact they have had in three categories: people, process, and results. In terms of people, OBP examines how many new and relevant stakeholders have been brought into the contact-group process. Once new stakeholders are identified, OBP evaluates who shows up for meetings and how their perspectives are integrated within the group's process. From a results perspective, OBP analyzes how their contributions support policy formulation, decision making, and resource allocation.

OBP also assesses how the trend in piracy has shifted over time and how that impacts their role. Early in the collaborative process stakeholders shared a common concern: the urgent threat of piracy. As levels of violence and piracy incidents have decreased in recent years, OBP is looking at new challenges. Piracy is still important but not as urgent in the eyes of many stakeholders. Finding ways to maintain momentum and develop sustainable solutions are becoming increasingly important to the collaborative process. Long-term risk management and continuity of best practices is required in order to keep piracy at bay.

Practice

OBP works with stakeholders to identify technical and training-capacity needs; of particular note is the recently formed Capacity-Building Coordination Group (CBCG) under Working Group 1 of the CGPCS. As part of OBP's support to the international organizations that form the membership of the CBCG, OBP has developed an online platform to enable regional states, donor countries, and implementing agencies to match capacity-building needs with support, as well as provide a transparent overview of ongoing and planned capacity-building projects in the Horn of Africa and Western Indian Ocean Region.

Since the late spring of 2013, OBP has also become more involved in identifying "softer" capacity-building needs related to economic development and job creation. Once gaps are identified, OBP reaches across the network to seek ways to connect available resources and needs. The team also helps inventory ongoing capacity-building initiatives. With so many actors involved, duplication of training efforts, for example, is not uncommon. OBP reaches out to stakeholders to help align current programs and focus resources. The organization also analyzes future needs in order to co-design a prioritized list of future capacity-building activities.

In addition to identifying and coordinating technical capacity-building requirements, OBP developed the interpersonal skills of participants. The team appreciated the need to learn about group dynamics, facilitation, active listening, and conflict resolution. They sought out training in these areas and began actively practicing collaboration. As a result, the members of OBP engage a set of interpersonal skills that promotes respect and trust with the stakeholders.

Key Takeaways

The OBP case study highlights the benefits of using a third party to help stakeholders strengthen a collaborative process from the outside in. OBP staff learned the importance of gaining support among senior leadership for collaborative processes. Seeing their strategic concerns, objectives, and parameters taken into account empowered the OBP team to work with grassroots and technical groups and experts to develop implementation plans and take action. Facilitation efforts by OBP also demonstrate the importance of third-party MSC efforts that focus more on the process of bringing stakeholders together than on trying to influence the content of participant issues. Stakeholders respect OBP's independent and balanced efforts because the facilitators enable all voices to be heard and help stakeholders appreciate one another's diverse perspectives. As confidence in this collaborative effort has grown over time, senior leaders from the CGPCS have increasingly entrusted OBP to participate in, and sometimes facilitate, dialogue around issues of strategic importance and sensitivity.

CONCLUSION

Multi-stakeholder collaboration is a challenging endeavor, but one that is sorely needed in our complex and uncertain world. Successful multi-stakeholder collaboration requires risk taking, persistence, patience, and a balanced and integrated blend of the 5Ps. A well-designed process and supportive container enable stakeholders to learn from each other as they collaborate and overcome the inherent challenges in tackling wicked problems. Appreciating one another's perspectives, participants develop overarching goals that transcend stove-piping and individual agendas. With sustained practice, stakeholders coalesce around a superordinate purpose to mobilize resources and align in collective action.

A successful MSC enterprise requires competent facilitators, dedicated participants, an effective process, relevant pilot projects, qualitative and quantitative assessments, and compelling storytelling. Members of an effective MSC team seek a healthy balance between analysis, action, and reflection as they learn and develop a collaborative mindset over time. They also practice integrating the right mix of relationship-building, task accomplishment, and process development as they address their common challenges. When done right, multi-stakeholder collaboration generates dynamic results that make a positive impact in society and creates healthy social networks. A systematic approach that thoughtfully integrates the components of MSC helps create the synergy and momentum necessary to transform ourselves, our organizations, and the complex challenges we face into new possibilities for peace and prosperity.

NOTES

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- ⁷⁸ Fernando Flores, *Conversations for Action and Collected Essays: Instilling a Culture of Commitment in Working Relationships* (Creative Independent Publishing Platform, 2013): p. 48.
- ⁷⁹ Robert Dunham, email correspondence, Aug 3, 2013. Robert is the founder of the Institute for Generative Leadership, and co-author of *The Innovator’s Way—Essential Practices for Successful Innovation* (see note 8). He has also worked since 1981 as an executive, consultant, educator and coach.
- ⁸⁰ I first learned about mindful communications through training I received from Donald Rothberg, a leading teacher and writer on meditation and socially engaged spiritual practice. He is a member of the Teacher’s Council at Spirit Rock Meditation Center and author of *The Engaged Spiritual Life: A Buddhist Approach to Transforming Ourselves and the World* (Beacon Press, 2006).
- ⁸¹ Jeff Weiss and Jonathan Hughes, “Want Collaboration? Accept and Actively Manage Conflict” in *Collaborating Effectively* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2011): p. 67
- ⁸² Sennett, p. 76.
- ⁸³ Weiss and Hughes, p. 67.
- ⁸⁴ Richard Strozzi Heckler, *Leadership Dojo* (Berkeley: Frog Books, 2007).
- ⁸⁵ Isaacs, p. 124.
- ⁸⁶ Robert Dunham, email correspondence, Aug 3, 2013.
- ⁸⁷ Russ Volkmann, email correspondence, August 18, 2013. Russ has worked for over 30 years as an organization development consultant and executive coach. He is also the publisher and Editor of the *Integral Leadership Review* and has published numerous professional articles.
- ⁸⁸ Denning and Dunham, p. 237.
- ⁸⁹ Dean Acheson. *Present at the Creation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969): p. 219.

⁹⁰ Gervase Bushe, “The Appreciative Inquiry Model” in *The Encyclopedia of Management Theory*, ed. Eric H. Kessler (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013): p. 41. Bushe explains that, “Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a method for studying and changing social systems (groups, organizations, communities) that advocates collective inquiry into the best of what is in order to imagine what could be, followed by collective design of a desired future state that is compelling and thus, does not require the use of incentives, coercion or persuasion for planned change to occur.” [doi:10.4135/9781452276090.n13](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452276090.n13)

⁹¹ <http://www.oneearthfuture.org> as of June 29, 2013.

⁹² Danielle Zach, D. Conor Seyle, and Jens Vestergaard Madsen, “Burden-sharing Multi-level Governance: A Study of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia,” *One Earth Future Foundation*, 2013: p.1, available at http://oneearthfuture.org/images/imagefiles/BurdenSharingMulti-levelGovern_final.pdf

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