

KEY COMPETENCIES OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERS

Learnings Summary from: Strengthening Collaborative Leadership Capacity within the Federal Government: A Discussion Among Senior Environmental and Public Policy Mediators

On March 24, 2006, senior mediators from several organizations discussed competencies for collaborative leaders, specifically leaders within the federal government. The mediators shared experiences from 30 years of working with government staff and offered suggestions for the competencies needed to build capacity to lead and participate in collaborative activities. Invited staff from several federal agencies listened to the discussion and offered comments and questions about the competencies and how to integrate them into staff's skills and knowledge base. A list of invitees is attached.

LEARNINGS FROM EXPERIENCED SENIOR MEDIATORS

Mary Margaret Golten, CDR Associates

Ms. Golten noted that in her nearly 30 years of experience training Federal agency staff, standard mandatory training has not always worked well. Instead, she has seen success in designing courses as if planning an intervention—assessing the situation by talking with interested staff to assure that the content is specifically designed to address their daily challenges in resolving conflict or bringing groups to consensus. The key question in the assessment should be: *“What would make this training a real success for you? What is most challenging for you in your work today?”*

If the agencies are struggling in their work with outside stakeholders (the public or specific environmental groups, for example) or with other agencies (where Ms. Golten often sees serious but frequently unacknowledged conflict), CDR encourages agencies to include those people in the agency's training project. The “training” course would then use relevant, real-life cases and encourage discussion regarding current challenges in the discussions. Training and consulting that addresses on-going issues with stakeholders or other Federal or state agencies can help to depersonalize conflict and reduce mistrust, allowing parties to focus, together, on tools they might use or common language to address their issues.

Ms. Golten also stressed the importance of assisting Federal agencies to design effective programs by helping them to analyze the issue of power. No agency personnel want to see themselves as giving up control or making concessions where they have a legal mandate to regulate, for example. The question, then, is helping leaders learn how to appropriately exert their influence through an exploration of interests rather than by relying on the use of power, which frequently polarizes other agencies as well as the public and results in continuing opposition, defensive behavior, and deteriorating relationships.

Pat Field, Consensus Building Institute

Mr. Field explained that in work for one agency to train managers in all of its active state offices, CBI is using a module approach and conducting web surveys to understand issues specific to each state. After finding out what issues are most important in each office, CBI can vary which modules to stress. In another successful approach to instituting conflict prevention trainings CBI involve multi-stakeholder groups to develop training materials. They also embed training in larger agency efforts to develop policies and knowledge around consensus building and change the way the agency does business more generally. Place-based courses are being used as well, but more time is needed to see what impact these types of training have.

Mr. Field distinguished between two sets of basic knowledge and competencies: 1) tools, such as conflict assessment, facilitation, and mediation tools; and 2) processes, such as regulatory negotiation, fact finding, and deliberative dialogue. Effective management by leaders is needed to employ each of these tools and to think strategically but how collaborative and consensus seeking tools and processes fit into an overall agency strategy. Challenges to implementing these tools range from identifying a clear focus for the training, to engaging managers and motivating people, to knowing how to measure the value of these programs.

Common Themes From the Mediators Discussion On Capacity Building

As senior mediators and observers shared their thoughts on a wide range of potential competencies for collaborative leaders in federal agencies, a few general themes emerged:

- 1) Training is often most effective when treated as an intervention, not just general skill building.
- 2) Training ought to be embedded in larger organizational capacity building for collaboration. One method for managing this incorporation is to link more closely key personnel competencies/performance review measures with key training goals/objectives.
- 3) Evaluation of training continues to need work. Is it effective? Which kinds are more effective? What is best practice among all the various courses out there?

KEY COMPETENCIES

Mediators discussed the competencies for leading and participating effectively in collaborative activities. In some cases, mediators noted that the competencies may seem contradictory, such as skills in creating conflict or being stubborn, but actually do serve to build collaboration when employed correctly and at the right time. The mediators also commented that collaborative leadership involves developing and building on individual strengths and styles, not following a particular behavior model.

Specific competencies mentioned include general management abilities, skills in partnering and guiding collaborative processes, leading staff in a way that uses and fosters collaboration, and certain personal characteristics that work well with collaborative processes. The list below captures a range of ideas within these categories.

The ability to:

- Develop and articulate vision.
- Be clear about interests.
- Know what skills and knowledge to deploy, how to do it, and when.
- Navigate inside their organization to find resources and build support.
- Take different perspectives on an issue and see different positions.
- Build bridges and build coalitions.
- Build trust among people.
- Articulate and set clear solution spaces for collaboration and negotiation (boundaries, products, timeline).
- Combine strategic (broader, long-term) and tactical (practical, short-term) vantage points.
- Actively elicit conflict and have the courage to resolve it at the right time, in a way that is not destructive to the process or relationships, and to know when to resolve conflict.
- Listen well.
- Identify interests.
- Frame perspectives.
- Summarize discussions.
- Diffuse tension (asking questions, naming differences, seeking differences)

The dedication to:

- Institutionalize dispute resolution within agency.
- Align actions and attitude with the purpose or goal of collaborating.

In relationships with staff:

- Sends appropriate signals that show the dedication to collaboration.
- Demonstrates facilitative spirit and style.
- Cultivates leadership.
- Takes time with people.
- Leads from the middle.
- Has a clear plan - each team member of team knows their role, responsibilities.

Personal qualities may include:

- Creativity
- Flexibility
- Curiosity
- Risk-taking

Larger Personnel System Context

When offering examples of competencies, the mediators emphasized the need for agencies to frame competencies around the results to be achieved, not just the behaviors or techniques. The personnel systems should also be set up to offer opportunities to practice, not just one-time skills trainings. Mediators stressed including intentional goal setting, opportunities for reflection, and coaching.

MEASURING COMPETENCE

The mediators acknowledged that many of these competencies or qualities are subjective and difficult to measure. They suggested that the employee-supervisor relationship is important source for building and evaluating many of the skills and attitudes. Another approach is to invite external stakeholders to participate in the personnel review process.

March 24, 2006

**Strengthening Collaborative Leadership Capacity within the Federal Government:
A Discussion Among Senior Environmental and Public Policy Mediators**

March 24, 2006 Conference Call

Invited and Participating Mediators

Name	Affiliation
Gail Bingham*	RESOLVE
Juliana Birkhoff*	RESOLVE
Christine Carlson	Policy Consensus Initiative
Paul De Morgan*	RESOLVE
John Ehrmann*	Meridian Institute
Michael Elliott	City and Regional Planning and Public Policy Program, Georgia Institute of Technology
Patrick Field*	Consensus Building Institute
Mary Margaret Golten*	CDR Associates
Scott McCreary*	CONCUR, Inc.
Rafael Montalvo	Florida Conflict Resolution Consortium
Lucy Moore	Lucy Moore Associates

*Participated in conference call

Federal Employees who RSVP'd

Names	Affiliation
Ann Aldrich	BLM: Department of Interiors
David C. Batson	US Environmental Protection Agency
Jay Benforado	US EPA, Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation
Patricia Bonner	US EPA
Kevin Brown	USDA/NRCS
Darlene Byrd	US EPA, Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation
Michelle Chavez	BLM: Department of Interior
Curtis Dahlke	USDA, Office of Human Capital Management
Debbie Dalton	US EPA, Center for Conflict Prevention and Resolution
Beth Duff	US Department of the Interior
Sarah Evans	Department of Defense- Civilian Personnel Management Service Staffing Advisory Service
Julie Faulkner	Department of Defense
Ashley Goldhor-Wilcock	US Forest Service
Tom Harvey	US Department of the Interior
Mary B. Hoagland	NOAA
Marianne Hudnell	OPM
James C. Knox	Bureau of Land Management

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Dawn Lagrotteria	US Fish and Wildlife Service
Jeff Lape	OGC/ US Environmental Protection Agency
Lisa Manning	NOAA/NMFS- Office of Protected Resources
Norma Martinez	US Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation
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Claire Milam	US Environmental Protection Agency
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Jahari M. Rashad PhD	US Environmental Protection Agency
Tahani Rivers	US Environmental Protection Agency
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