

What Do You Expect?: Assessing Whether a Situation is “Ripe” for Collaborative Governance

Michael A Kern^{1,2,3} and Amanda G. Murphy^{4,2}

- 1 Michael Kern Consulting, LLC, Seattle, Washington, USA
- 2 Washington State University Extension, Pullman, Washington, USA
- 3 University of Washington Evans School of Public Policy and Governance, Seattle, Washington, USA
- 4 William D. Ruckelshaus Center, Seattle, Washington, USA

Keywords

collaborative governance, public policy, conflict resolution, practice, observation, assessment

Correspondence

Michael A. Kern, 900 24th Avenue, Seattle, WA 98122. Email: m.kern@wsu.edu; mkern@uw.edu; michaelkernconsulting@gmail.com

xx.xxxx/ncmr.xxxxx

Abstract

“Collaborative governance” has emerged as a ubiquitous term in the United States and elsewhere, in both the public and private sectors. It has recently received more specific definition from scholars as it applies to multiparty, consensus-seeking processes, often facilitated or mediated by a third party, that are intended to resolve particular public policy challenges. But both theory and practice have shown it is not appropriate in all situations. So, practitioners have identified conditions they look for in assessing the likelihood of initiating and sustaining a successful collaborative process. Borrowing from international relations, they often refer to this assessment as “ripeness.” Building from experience gained during practice, we propose an additional condition for assessing ripeness—whether initiators and supporters are open to the proposed process resulting in a range of outcomes and solution sets. We provide a question that can be asked of those who are interested in initiating the process, to help practitioners assess this new condition: *“Do you expect that the result of the collaborative process you are interested in initiating will be that others realize the solution you currently favor is the correct one?”* We explain why this simple question about expectations can shorten lengthy lines of inquiry; make explicit the differences between partnerships, coalitions, and collaborations; and help parties better understand their priorities and process needs. The intent of this article is to encourage practitioners to experiment with this new question and condition, and researchers to formally evaluate its utility.

Considerable attention has been given in both academic literature and practice in the United States (US) and elsewhere to the use of collaborative governance processes to prevent, manage, and resolve complex public policy issues. Such processes seek the active engagement of all affected parties – public, private, non-governmental, and others – to address public policy challenges that cannot be easily addressed by any one entity on its own (Amsler, 2016; Ansell & Gash, 2008; Carlson, 2007; Emerson et al., 2012; Huxham, 2003; Weber, 2006).

The term “collaboration” has become ubiquitous in discussions of public policy, management, and governance in the US. While calling for a broad range of initiatives, efforts, projects, and programs to be conducted as a collaboration is increasingly popular in both the public and private sectors, evidence from both research and practice has shown this is not appropriate in all situations (Agranoff, 2004; Margerum, 2008; Moore & Koontz, 2003; Weber, 2006).

Therefore, practitioners trained in collaborative policy processes often conduct a situation assessment, to gauge whether circumstances are indeed “ripe” for collaboration (Murphy & Page, 2019; Susskind et al., 1999). This concept of “ripeness” is borrowed from international relations, where it is described as, “a second and equally necessary key” to settling disputes, alongside the substance of proposed solutions: “Parties resolve their conflicts only when they are ready to do so—when alternative, usually unilateral, means of achieving a satisfactory result are blocked and the parties feel that they are in an uncomfortable and costly predicament” (Zartman, 2008, p 1). This recognition is what Zartman refers to as “a mutually hurting stalemate and shared willingness to explore a joint way out” and is one of the necessary conditions for parties to consider acceptance of a third-party practitioner (Zartman, 1989, 2000, 2008, 2015).

Practitioners have identified conditions to be explored in order to assess the likelihood of a successful collaborative public policy process. This article proposes an additional condition, as well as a question that collaborative governance practitioners, policy makers, involved parties, and academics can ask to help assess this new condition. This condition and question can help establish whether the involved parties have in mind collaboration in any of its more general senses—such as a partnership, or a like-minded coalition—versus a collaborative governance process as defined below. The intent of this article is to encourage practitioners to experiment with this new question and condition, and researchers to formally evaluate its utility.

Collaborative Governance

Defining Collaborative Governance

Governance involves the processes of managing the delivery of public goods and services. Historically, approaches to governance in western democracies have largely been command and control, and regulatory (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). However, as public policy challenges have increased in complexity, they have often exceeded the level of expertise and resources available solely within government, and therefore, to successfully implement public policy, have required capabilities that are outside the scope of individual agencies (Gray & Purdy, 2018). Therefore, government actors have been increasingly turning to collaboration with other sectors to help solve public policy problems and implement solutions (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Sorensen & Torfing, 2011), which has transformed the way policy making and implementation is done (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015).

There are many terms used in the literature to describe different types of collaborative processes. These include partnerships, coalitions, and networks (Agranoff, 2006; Bidwell & Ryan, 2006; Himmelman, 2001; Leach et al., 2002; Poocharoen & Ting, 2015), collaborative rationality (Susskind, 2010), collaborative public policy (Carlson, 2007; Innes & Booher, 2018), co-management (Borrini & Jaireth, 2007; Singleton, 2000),

collaborative public management (Agranoff, 2004; O’Leary et al., 2006), cross-sector collaboration (Page et al., 2015), public-private partnerships (Minow, 2003; Forrer et al., 2010), and environmental conflict resolution (Dukes, 2004; Fisher & Sablan, 2018), to name a few. Bingham, Nabatchi, and O’Leary (2005) say, “Practitioners have developed a rich diversity of processes that use negotiation, mediation, facilitation, citizen and stakeholder engagement, deliberation, collaboration, and consensus-building,” and describe these processes as “the new governance” (p. 552). Scholars in public administration, political science, and other fields (particularly in the US, but also elsewhere) increasingly use “collaborative governance” as a term to describe these processes (Amsler, 2016).

Collaborative governance efforts include several different kinds of structures, the most common being one that is predominantly led by a government agency (Gray & Purdy, 2018). Other examples include shared leadership structure (such as a steering committee); organizing an entirely new entity, (such as a stewardship council); public-private partnerships; and mandated collaboration (Gray & Purdy, 2018). Over the last decade, collaborative governance has received more specific definition as it applies to multiparty, consensus-seeking processes, facilitated or mediated by a third party, that are intended to resolve a particular public policy challenge. This is helping to distinguish this type of collaborative governance from the other types of collaboration mentioned above.

In 2008, collaborative governance was defined by Ansell and Gash as, “A governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets” (p. 544).

In 2012, Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh defined collaborative governance more broadly, as “The processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished” (p. 2). In 2015, Emerson and Nabatchi built a conceptual framework around that definition, describing the “collaborative governance regimes” under which parties engage in this type of governance. They borrowed the term “regime” from international political theory, where it refers to “sustained cooperation between state and nonstate actors” and features “explicit and implicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures.” Their collaborative governance regime definition includes “different interests and/or jurisdictions (as opposed to like-minded coalitions)” and “repeated interactions ... over some period of time, usually greater than one year.” (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015, p. 18-19).

In 2018, the University Network for Collaborative Governance (UNCG) added the idea that participants engage in collaborative governance to “enhance their communities and shape sustainable public policy decisions,” as well as to “leverage the unique attributes and resources of (the public, private and civic sectors) for the greatest impact” (p. 2).

Justifications, Merits and Critiques of Collaborative Governance

Both research and practice have explored the benefits and drawbacks of collaborative governance. Proponents have argued that collaborative governance processes allow participation by all interested and affected parties (Susskind et al., 1999); are a healthy response to policy gridlock and litigation (Kemmis, 1990); result in more informed, creative, and adaptive solutions (Susskind et al., 1999; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000); are more democratic, transparent, and inclusive, leading to the likelihood of more effective and equitable solutions (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Fung & Wright, 2001); can provide resources needed to accomplish what cannot be accomplished by any one single party or smaller coalition (Dukes, 2001); and can reduce future conflict among stakeholders (Bernard & Young, 1997).

While much of the focus in research and practice has been on the benefits of collaborative governance processes, there is also scholarship describing potential or observed drawbacks and adverse effects (Hileman & Bodin, 2019; Kallis et al., 2009; McGuire, 2006; Purdy, 2012; Scott & Thomas, 2017). Critics have argued that collaborative governance processes have been shown to delegitimize conflict (Kenney, 2000); can lead to government policymaking being co-opted by special interests (Koontz, 2004); can exclude or disempower indigenous communities and minority groups (Scott & Thomas, 2017; Singleton, 2009); can lead to environmental outcomes that are less protective of natural resources (Coglianese, 1999); and can lead to “lowest common denominator” solutions (Kenney, 2000). Provan and Kenis (2008) observe three tensions that exist in collaborative governance processes: efficiency versus inclusiveness, flexibility versus stability, and internal versus external legitimacy.

We mention both the many types of collaborative processes, and these merits and critiques, in order to establish the importance of assessing “ripeness.” It may be that these merits rise to the fore when a process is initiated and sustained under a favorable set of conditions, and that the critiques become warranted when this is not the case. Therefore, it is imperative to carefully explore and evaluate current conditions before initiating a collaborative governance process. Scholars are inclined, understandably, to seek definitive answers to questions such as, “Do collaborative governance processes lead to better policy outcomes?” If they must resign themselves to living in a world where the answers to those questions are most typically, “It depends,” we at least hope to shine light upon one of the areas upon which those outcomes may depend.

Conditions Favorable to Initiate and Sustain a Collaborative Governance Process

In general, researchers and practitioners agree there are conditions that, if present at the onset of a collaborative governance process, will influence the success of that process. Ansell and Gash (2008) narrowed the starting conditions down to three variables: (1) *imbalances between the resources or power of different stakeholders*, (2) *incentives that stakeholders have to collaborate*, and (3) *past history of conflict or cooperation among stakeholders* (p. 550-551). Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) identified four conditions (which they refer to as drivers) that are necessary for a collaborative governance regime to come to fruition: (1) *uncertainty*, (2) *interdependence*, (3) *consequential incentives*, and (4) *initiating leadership* (p. 44).

Moving beyond initiation, the literature on collaboration identifies several conditions that are essential in determining whether the collaborative process will be successfully sustained. For example, Mattessich et al. (2001) identify 20 factors that influence the success of a collaborative process, based on a review of 281 studies. These factors are grouped into six categories: (1) *Environment*, (2) *Membership characteristics*, (3) *Process and structure*, (4) *Communication*, (5) *Purpose*, and (6) *Resources* (Mattessich et al., 2001). Ansell and Gash (2008) reviewed 137 studies of collaborative governance, identifying a number of features necessary for successful collaborations including trust-building, participant commitment to the process, developing shared understanding, face-to-face dialogue, and intermediate outcomes. Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) discuss how the surrounding political, legal, socioeconomic, and environmental “system context” influences the formation and performance of collaborative governance regimes, and identify six key conditions: (1) *public service or resource conditions*, (2) *policy and legal frameworks*, (3) *socioeconomic and cultural characteristics*, (4) *network characteristics*, (5) *political dynamics and power relations*, and (6) *history of conflict*. Other commonly-cited conditions include a broad representation of stakeholders, shared and open decision-making processes, well-defined and agreed-upon goals and objectives, and open communication and sharing of information throughout the process (Bryson et al., 2006; Cestero, 1999; Emerson et al., 2012; Gray, 1985; Mattessich et al., 2001).

The “ripe moment” is a crucial concept in the study of peace and conflict. Ripeness theory seeks to explain why and when parties in a conflict will decide that an attempt at resolution (e.g., negotiation) is a

better option than continued conflict. According to Zartman (2001), “parties resolve their conflict only when they are ready to do so – when alternative, usually unilateral means of achieving a satisfactory result are blocked and the parties feel that they are in an uncomfortable and costly predicament” (p. 8). Specifically, the parties in conflict must reach a point where they recognize a mutually hurting stalemate (MHS) and a way out (WO) through negotiation (Zartman, 2000).

However, ripeness theory has been critiqued by several scholars and does have its limitations (Coleman et al., 2008; Druckman, 2001; Lederach, 1997; Mooradian & Druckman, 1999; Pruitt, 2007; Walsh, 2016). According to Walsh (2016), such critiques have largely focused on three areas: (1) low predictability or alleged tautology, (2) inability to explain why parties *stay* at the negotiation table, and (3) the micro-foundations of the theory or limited consideration of non-rational factors (p. 78-79) For instance, the basic reasoning of MHS lies in cost-benefit analysis (Zartman, 2000), which may be accurate when describing economic forms of decision making in conflict, but does not account for other types of decisions (Coleman et al., 2008). According to Coleman et al. (2008), “(D)ecisions related to maintaining group cohesiveness and solidarity typically use a very different set of criteria from decisions to maximize outcomes or achieve goals efficiently” (p. 6). In addition, the elements of ripeness theory (MHS, perceived way out, impending catastrophe, enticing opportunity, and valid spokesperson) (Zartman, 1996) are joint states that concurrently affect both parties. But this does not consider uneven states of ripeness amongst the parties (Pruitt, 1997). According to Pruitt (1997), “(T)he theory is more flexible if these components are viewed as perceptions by each party separately rather than as joint perceptions, though overall ripeness must be a joint phenomenon” (p. 248).

Readiness theory addresses some of the limitations of ripeness theory. According to Pruitt (1997), “It differs from ripeness theory in that it uses the language of variables rather than necessary states and focuses on the thinking within a single party rather than on the joint thinking of both parties to a conflict” (p. 1524-1525). This revision to ripeness theory makes it possible to examine factors that lead to changes in degrees of readiness, and to make predictions about conflict outcomes such as third-party intervention (Coleman et al., 2008). As Pruitt (2005) explains, “Readiness theory allows some parties to be motivated mainly by a belief that they cannot win, others mainly by the cost of the conflict, and still others mainly by the risk of a future catastrophe or pressure from a powerful third party. Such a model fits reality better than ripeness theory, which requires a uniform hurting stalemate for all cases” (p. 9).

Because readiness theory allows for different parties to be driven by these different motivations, “readiness” may actually be a better fit as a term to describe conditions favorable for initiating a collaborative public policy process, despite the fact that “ripeness” is the term more likely to be borrowed and employed as a metaphor by collaborative governance practitioners.

Assessing the Likelihood for Success of a Collaborative Governance Process

As the paradigm of collaborative governance has emerged, so has a field of process experts. These practitioners (working from private, public, and non-governmental settings) serve as professional neutrals, specializing in multi-party public policy dispute resolution, and designing collaborative processes (Susskind et al., 1999). They often work under contract with public agencies or other sponsoring entities, serving as third-party facilitators for collaborative governance processes (Weber, 2006).

Practitioners will often begin by assessing the situation, to determine if the requisite conditions exist for a collaborative governance process to succeed (Susskind et al., 1999). This is referred to as a “situation assessment” or “conflict assessment,” and derives from a standard practice in two-party mediations in which the mediator meets with each party separately, before meeting with them together (Herrman, 2009; Keir & Ali, 2014; Susskind, et al., 1999). The purpose is to better understand key issues, identify involved parties, and assess the prospects for collaboration (Murphy & Page, 2019; Susskind et al., 1999). Before initiating a

situation assessment, practitioners will often hold preliminary, informal conversations with key entities involved in the situation (sometimes referred to as a “pre-assessment”), to gauge whether a formal situation assessment would be productive (Murphy & Page, 2019). Together, pre-assessment and situation assessment form a typical first stage of the collaborative governance process. Later stages include planning, organizing, educating, negotiating, resolving, and implementing (Carlson, 2007).

Both pre-assessments and situation assessments focus on whether conditions are favorable (or “ripe”) for a collaborative governance process. The Center for Collaborative Policy (CCP) at California State University, Sacramento identified eleven conditions, phrased as questions, for practitioners to use to assess the favorability for a successful collaborative process (Weber, 2006):

- 1) Do issues focus on fundamental legal rights or societal values?
- 2) Are there potential areas for agreement, preferably with multiple issues for tradeoffs?
- 3) Are the primary parties identifiable and willing to participate?
- 4) Does each party have a legitimate spokesperson?
- 5) Are any potential “deal-breakers” at the table?
- 6) Does any party have assurance of a much better deal elsewhere?
- 7) Do the parties anticipate future dealings with each other?
- 8) Is there a relative balance of power among the parties?
- 9) Are there external pressures to reach agreement?
- 10) Is there a realistic timetable for completion?
- 11) Are there adequate resources and funding to support the negotiation?

Note that while a “yes” is an indication of favorability for most of these questions, that is not the case for questions one, five and six. At times, it is apparent to the practitioner during the pre-assessment that conditions are not favorable to initiate a collaborative governance process. At other times, this only becomes clear when a full situation assessment is completed. If that conclusion is reached at either point, the practitioner works with the parties to discuss what other approaches can be taken to make progress on the issues involved and/or to shift the conditions to a place where they are more favorable. But, if the conclusion is that conditions are indeed favorable, the assessment will likely recommend proceeding with a collaborative process, and will provide guidance on how to design and conduct that process in order to maximize the chances for successful outcomes (Murphy & Page, 2019; Susskind et al., 1999).

An example can help illustrate how this assessment process functions in practice. In 2012, university-based practitioners in the states of Washington and Oregon conducted a collaborative engagement assessment at the request of the Columbia River Gorge Commission (Commission). The Commission is an interstate compact agency authorized by the National Scenic Area Act with the dual purposes of protecting and enhancing the scenic, natural, cultural, and recreational resources of the Columbia River Gorge, while encouraging growth and allowing development consistent with resource protection (Oregon Consensus National Policy Center [OCNPC] & The William D. Ruckelshaus Center [WDRC], 2012). The purpose of the collaborative engagement assessment was to assess the potential for collaborative approaches to the management of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (NSA). The practitioner team conducted interviews with individuals representing a wide range of interests, to better understand what issues needed to be addressed in managing the NSA, the positions and interests of those affected by management decisions, and the likelihood that collaborative approaches to managing these issues would be successful (OCNPC & WDRC, 2012).

As described throughout the assessment report, the practitioner team considered many of the eleven conditions (identified below via italics) in determining whether the situation and the relevant interests were amenable to collaborative processes. For example, in relation to whether there were *potential areas for*

agreement, the parties' willingness to participate, and whether they believed they had a better alternative, the assessment identified ten key scenic area issues (OCNPC & WDRC, 2012, p. 4-13) for which interviewees offered support for developing a collaborative process. The assessment found that many believed a collaborative process was either the best or only feasible option to successfully address those key issues (OCNPC & WDRC, 2012, p. 13). As to whether the parties anticipated future dealings with each other and the existence of external pressures to address the issues, the assessment found that interviewees believed a collaborative process would help parties achieve a better understanding of each other's interests and improve working relationships, which they, in turn, thought may help those divergent parties find solutions that would meet their collective needs (OCNPC & WDRC, 2012, p. 14). The assessment paraphrases one interviewee who captured a sentiment expressed by others, "As one interviewee suggested, there are 30 years of divergent and entrenched positions that might be beneficially impacted by a process to build the trust needed to solve complex problems by providing the parties with an opportunity to meet each other as equals, learn about each other's points of view, and get to know each other as people, not as opponents" (OCNPC & WDRC, 2012, p. 14).

The assessment also identified barriers to collaboration and what interviewees saw as challenges to successful collaboration (OCNPC & WDRC, 2012, p. 16-18). For example, it was unclear whether there were *adequate resources and funding to support a collaborative process* (OCNPC & WDRC, 2012, p. 16). In assessing *the condition of good faith participation and whether there were preferred alternative forums*, the assessment identified concern among interviewees that some parties would not be willing to seek compromise or had *any incentive to participate* in a collaborative process because the status quo, particularly current regulations, worked in their favor (OCNPC & WDRC, 2012, p. 17). Other interviewees were concerned that some parties may agree to participate in a collaborative process, but if the outcome wasn't everything they wanted, they would then later file lawsuits (OCNPC & WDRC, 2012, p. 17). This situation affected the *relative balance of power among the parties*.

Ultimately, the assessment concluded there was potential for successful collaboration, but upfront work was needed to address some of the identified barriers. This upfront work included the Commission first engaging in internal development work, and then convening parties to develop a common base of information before launching into a more formal collaboration process. This phased approach is referred to as *building collaborative capacity*, involving developing of a habit of collaboration and trust building among the various interests, and working together in situations of reduced risk, prior to attempting to reach consensus on more challenging topics (OCNPC & WDRC, 2012, p. 23). These recommendations moved the process toward a more *realistic timetable for completion* of collaborative agreement-seeking.

In considering the first condition (whether issues focus on *fundamental legal rights or societal values*), it is important to note that there is no such thing as a public policy challenge that in no way, shape or form affects *legal rights or societal values*. That is, in fact, what makes them public policy issues. So, in applying this condition, practitioners need to be on the lookout for situations where the impact is so large that it becomes *fundamental*. In those situations, the clarity of a judicial, legislative, or executive decision may be necessary, rather than a collaborative governance approach. For example, in this case study, the Gorge Commission's decisions often affect individual property rights, which are a legal right and a societal value. In many cases, the impacts of these decisions are at a scale where a collaborative approach is appropriate. But the Commission may be called upon to make certain decisions affecting property rights that are at a size or scale beyond which a collaborative governance approach would be effective; what we might call *fundamental* decisions, and where the Commission may be advised to seek judicial review, rather than a multiparty negotiation.

A Question of Expectations

The William D. Ruckelshaus Center (Ruckelshaus Center or Center), a joint effort of Washington State University and the University of Washington, is an example of a practitioner organization working from the public and academic settings (Hall & Kern, 2017). Its mission is to help parties involved in complex public policy challenges in the State of Washington and the Pacific Northwest tap university expertise to develop collaborative, durable, and effective solutions. Practitioners at the Center use the CCP conditions, as well as the Center's own set of project criteria (William D. Ruckelshaus Center, 2020), to help identify the appropriateness of the Center's involvement in a given policy situation, and the "ripeness" of the issues involved for a collaborative governance approach (using the Ansell and Gash 2008, Emerson and Nabatchi 2015, and UNCG 2018 definitions of the term collaborative governance).

Practitioners at the Center have learned from over 15 years of practice that it is not uncommon to determine through pre-assessments and situation assessments that, while the initiating parties have interest in participating in a collaborative process, they have in mind the more general definitions of collaboration mentioned earlier. They are seeking to develop a new, or strengthen an existing, advocacy-based *partnership*, working together to share responsibilities and tasks. Or they wish to develop a *like-minded coalition*, pursuing a common aim in the belief unity will make each member stronger, more effective, and more likely to achieve a mutually agreed-upon solution. In either case, the goal is to gain allies for, and reduce opposition to, the adoption and implementation of a *specific* policy prescription, often one they have already thought through and adopted as their preferred outcome. Another way to think about this is in terms of the dual concerns model, which "makes the following predictions about (strategies available to negotiators): concern about both own and other party's outcomes encourages a problem-solving strategy; concern about only one's own outcomes encourages contending." (Pruitt, 1983, p. 172).

For these reasons, practitioners at the Center have come to believe that it is important to determine if this is the case, and therefore propose to extend current negotiation/mediation theory by adding a twelfth condition to the current CCP list of eleven conditions practitioners explore in assessing favorability for a successful collaborative process. That new condition is this: *whether initiators and supporters are open to the process resulting in a range of outcomes and solution sets*. To help practitioners assess this new condition, the Center proposes a question that can be asked of those who are interested in initiating the process:

"Do you expect that the result of the collaborative process you are interested in initiating will be that others realize the solution you currently favor is the correct one?"

This simple question about expectations can shorten potentially lengthy lines of inquiry, make explicit the differences between partnerships, coalitions, and collaborations, and help the parties better understand their priorities and process needs. Practitioners can get valuable information both from the parties' answers, and from their own inferences and interpretations of those answers. They can learn where the parties stand in the dual concern model (Pruitt, 1983), whether they yet have concern for the other parties' interests and needs.

For example, if a party answers yes to the question (or if the practitioner comes to believe that there is really a "yes" behind one or more parties' "no," "maybe," or more complex/nuanced answers), it can indicate that those parties have a set position on policy outcomes they wish to pursue, via gaining allies to "sign on" to their view. Put another way, they are seeking a partnership or like-minded coalition, not a collaborative governance process as defined above. In the latter, one anticipates, expects, or hopes that the result will be a solution that meets one's and other parties' needs and interests. But one does not enter this type of collaborative governance process *believing one already knows what that solution will be*. Rather, it emerges from the process. This is similar to how a "ripe moment" is described by Zartman (2008): "Parties do not have

to be able to identify a specific solution, only a sense that a negotiated solution is possible for the searching and that the other party shares that sense and the willingness to search too” (p. 2).

This is an extremely important point to explain to the parties because it represents the fundamental value of this type of collaborative process. Out of the myriad possible solutions to a complex, multifaceted public policy challenge, the participants do not remain fixed on the solutions they have developed over weeks, months, years, or even decades of thinking about, working on and/or fighting over the issue(s) prior to the collaborative governance process. Those solutions were likely based mostly or solely on what they, or the interest(s) they represent, want, and need. Instead, they work not just with other like-minded parties, but with parties whose wants and needs are often very different from their own, to identify a solution set that harmonizes all interests and addresses all needs. It is this search for a mutually-beneficial solution set that distinguishes the type of collaboration intended in these collaborative governance processes from partnerships, coalitions, networks, etc.

This type of collaboration has value because there is often a collective creativity in a collaborative governance process that exceeds what any interest, partnership or coalition is likely to achieve on its own. There is also the advantage that all parties to a collaborative policy solution have the incentive to work together toward its implementation, versus the “active opposition” that is created when a solution is implemented via traditional governance processes, especially one adopted via a narrow approval margin. (Dukes, 1993; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Imperial, 2005; Innes & Booher, 1999).

Practitioners at the Ruckelshaus Center have over the past few years asked this question about expectations during informal pre-assessment and assessment conversations, on policy challenges ranging from natural resource management to education. For example, they used it to frame conversations about an expert commission that state and county officials were forming to create consensus recommendations in the wake of a natural disaster. They employed it to help a state legislator realize he was already invested in a specific outcome for a collaborative process he envisioned relating to education governance, and would be better served by initially investing in a situation assessment. And they used it to help advocates of flood prevention and fish restoration in one of the state’s largest watersheds realize that the “collaborative” processes they had been involved in for years were not making progress because they were not focusing on comprehensive solution sets that take into account these and other important goals.

While the Center’s practitioners have not gathered empirical data on the results of asking this additional question, their anecdotal experience has been that answering this question has the benefit of leading potential process sponsors, participants, and decision-makers to engage in valuable introspection and come to one of several conclusions, each of which is useful for productively proceeding. In some cases, respondents can authentically say no, they are not entering the potential policy process with a preconceived sense of the “correct” solution. This bodes well for a collaborative governance approach, for the reasons discussed above.

More often, they realize that they are in fact entering the process with a specific solution set in mind. If they are truly wedded to that solution, the parties (and the practitioner) can know that they are unlikely to benefit from a collaborative governance process. But it is not uncommon that this realization, and subsequent conversations with the practitioner, help parties to understand the potential value of a collaborative process, and the need to reset their expectations, and open themselves to other possible solution sets, before engaging in a such a collaboration. Or that they may want to consider leading or participating in a like-minded coalition on some (perhaps short-term) aspect of the issue, while also supporting a (perhaps longer-term) collaboration on a larger element, or different aspect, of the issue.

The question also has the value of helping to dispel the notion that the reason others do not yet agree with the solution one favors is that they have not yet been exposed to it (and the logic behind it) properly, thoroughly, slowly (or even loudly) enough. As such, it is a good starting point for preparing the parties in a collaborative governance process for the need to be open to new information (establishing a shared set of

facts or common information base), see the issues from other perspectives, and (while holding firm to their underlying interests), loosen up their thinking about particular positions and solutions (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Susskind et al., 1999). For these reasons, practitioners at the Center intend to add this question about expectations to the questions they ask during formal situation assessments as well, and are proposing that the corresponding condition be added to the set of criteria practitioners use for evaluating the “ripeness” of a collaborative process.

As it becomes a more widespread part of the thinking among practitioners, this condition and question should also help inform the thinking of researchers and scholars, as they explore under what circumstances collaborative governance leads to favorable outcomes, and results in better public policy. The purpose of authoring this article is to present the Ruckelshaus Center’s experience with and observations about including this “question of expectations” in its practice, in order to encourage other practitioners to experiment with this new condition, and researchers to formally evaluate its utility.

Conclusion

It is important to recognize that there is not a value judgment implied in this question about expectations for the outcomes of a process. As mentioned before, the type of collaborative governance discussed in this article is not inherently “better” than partnering, coalition-building, or other ways of resolving policy challenges. It is not a failing to determine that one is seeking these other approaches. Though some of the potential advantages of collaborative governance have been articulated above, those advantages are likely to disappear if collaborative governance is applied to situations where it is not appropriate. So, all these means of resolving conflicts and addressing policy challenges should be seen as different tools in the public policy toolbox that are appropriate, and likely to be successful, under different circumstances. The goal should be to deploy the right tool for the situation. The “twelfth condition” and “question about expectations” presented in this article can be important additions to the standard set of conditions and questions practitioners currently use to identify when collaborative governance is the correct tool, and that researchers use to evaluate and understand those collaborative governance processes.

References

- Agranoff, R. (2004). *Collaborative public management: New strategies for local governments*. Georgetown University Press.
- Agranoff, R. (2006). Inside collaborative networks: Ten lessons for public managers. *Public Administration Review*, 66, 56-65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00666.x>
- Amsler, L. B. (2016). Collaborative governance: Integrating management, politics, and law. *Public Administration Review*, 76(5), 700-711. <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12605>
- Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(4), 543-571. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mum032>
- Bernard, T., & Young, J. (1997) *The ecology of hope: Communities collaborate for sustainability*. New Society Publishers.
- Bidwell, R. D., & Ryan, C. M. (2006). Collaborative partnership design: The implications of organizational affiliation for watershed partnerships. *Society and Natural Resources*, 19(9), 827-843. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920600835585>
- Bingham, L. B., Nabatchi, T., & O'Leary, R. (2005). The new governance: Practices and processes for stakeholder and citizen participation in the work of government. *Public Administration Review*, 65(5), 547-558. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2005.00482.x>

- Borrini, G., Jaireth, H., Farvar, M. T., Pimbert, M., & Kothari, A. (2007). *Sharing power: learning-by-doing in co-management of natural resources throughout the world*. Earthscan.
- Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Stone, M. M. (2006). The design and implementation of Cross-Sector collaborations: Propositions from the literature. *Public Administration Review*, 66, 44-55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00665.x>
- Carlson, C. (2007). *A practical guide to collaborative governance*. Policy Consensus Initiative.
- Cestero, B. (1999). *Beyond the hundredth meeting: A field guide to collaborative conservation on the West's public lands*. Sonoran Institute.
- Coglianesi, C. (1999). The limits of consensus: The environmental protection system in transition: Toward a more desirable future. *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, 41(3), 28-33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00139159909604620>
- Coleman, P. T., Hacking, A. G., Stover, M.A., Fisher-Yoshida, B., & Nowak, A. (2008). Reconstructing ripeness I: A study of constructive engagement in protracted social conflicts. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 26(1): 3-42. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.222>.
- Druckman D. (2001). Turning points in international negotiation: A comparative analysis. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45(4):519-544.
- Dukes, F. (1993). Public conflict resolution: A transformative approach. *Negotiation Journal*, 9(1), 45-57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01000415>
- Dukes, E. F. (2001). *Collaboration: A guide for environmental advocates*. Institute for Environmental Negotiation, University of Virginia.
- Dukes, E. F. (2004). What we know about environmental conflict resolution: An analysis based on research. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 22, 191. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.98>
- Emerson, K., & Nabatchi, T. (2015). *Collaborative governance regimes*. Georgetown University Press.
- Emerson, K., Nabatchi, T., & Balogh, S. (2012). An integrative framework for collaborative governance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 22(1), 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mur011>
- Fisher, M., & Sablan, T. (2018). Evaluating environmental conflict resolution: Practitioners, projects, and the movement. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 36(1), 7-19. <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21222>
- Forrer, J., Kee, J. E., Newcomer, K. E., & Boyer, E. (2010). Public-private partnerships and the public accountability question. *Public Administration Review*, 70(3), 475-484. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2010.02161.x>
- Fung, A., & Wright, E. O. (2001). Deepening democracy: Innovations in empowered participatory governance. *Politics & Society*, 29(1), 5-41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329201029001002>
- Gray, B. (1985). Conditions facilitating interorganizational collaboration. *Human Relations*, 38(10), 911-936. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001872678503801001>
- Gray, B. & Purdy, J. (2018). *Collaborating for our future: Multistakeholder partnerships for solving complex problems*. Oxford University Press.
- Hall, W., & Kern, M. (2017). The public sector as mediator: The role of public institutions in environmental collaboration and conflict resolution. In A. Georgakopoulos (Ed.), *The mediation handbook: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 282-289). Routledge.
- Herrman, M. S. (Ed.). (2009). *The Blackwell handbook of mediation: Bridging theory, research, and practice*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Hileman, J., & Bodin, Ö. (2019). Balancing costs and benefits of collaboration in an ecology of games. *Policy Studies Journal*, 47(1), 138-158. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12292>
- Himmelman, A. T. (2001). On coalitions and the transformation of power relations: Collaborative betterment and collaborative empowerment. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 29(2), 277. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1010334831330>

- Huxham, C. (2003). Theorizing collaboration practice. *Public management review*, 5(3), 401-423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1471903032000146964>
- Imperial, M. T. (2005). Using collaboration as a governance strategy: Lessons from six watershed management programs. *Administration & Society*, 37(3), 281-320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399705276111>
- Innes, J. E., & Booher, D. E. (1999). Consensus building and complex adaptive systems: A framework for evaluating collaborative planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 65(4), 412-423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944369908976071>
- Innes, J. E., & Booher, D. E. (2018). *Planning with complexity: An introduction to collaborative rationality for public policy*. Routledge.
- Kallis, G., Kiparsky, M., & Norgaard, R. (2009). Collaborative governance and adaptive management: Lessons from California's CALFED Water Program. *Environmental Science & Policy*, 12(6), 631-643. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2009.07.002>
- Keir, L. S., & Ali, S. H. (2014). Conflict assessment in energy infrastructure siting: Prospects for consensus building in the northern pass transmission line project. *Negotiation Journal*, 30(2), 169-189. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nejo.12054>
- Kenney, D. S. (2000). Arguing about consensus: Examining the case against western watershed initiatives and other collaborative groups active in natural resources management. *Natural Resources Law Center*, University of Colorado School of Law.
- Kemmis, D. (1990). *Community and the politics of place*. University of Oklahoma Press.
- Koontz, T. (2004). *Collaborative environmental management: What roles for government?* Washington, DC: Resources for the Future.
- Leach, W. D., Pelkey, N. W., & Sabatier, P. A. (2002). Stakeholder partnerships as collaborative policymaking: Evaluation criteria applied to watershed management in California and Washington. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management: The Journal of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management*, 21(4), 645-670. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.10079>
- Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace.
- Margerum, R. D. (2008). A typology of collaboration efforts in environmental management. *Environmental Management*, 41(4), 487-500. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-008-9067-9>
- Mattessich, P. W., Murray-Close, M., & Monsey, B. R. (2001). *Collaboration: What makes it work* (2nd ed.) Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.
- McGuire, M. (2006). Collaborative public management: Assessing what we know and how we know it. *Public Administration Review*, 66, 33-43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2006.00664.x>
- Minow, M. (2003). Public and private partnerships: Accounting for the new religion. *Harvard Law Review*, 116(5), 1229-1270. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1342726>
- Mooradian, M., & Druckman, D. (1999). Hurting stalemate or mediation? The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. *Journal of Peace Resolution*, 36(6):709-727.
- Moore, E. A., & Koontz, T. M. (2003). Research note a typology of collaborative watershed groups: Citizen-based, agency-based, and mixed partnerships. *Society & Natural Resources*, 16(5), 451-460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920309182>
- Murphy, A.G. & C. S. Page, C. S. (2019). A framework for conducting situation assessments. *WSU Extension publication FS318E*. Washington State University. <http://hdl.handle.net/2376/13219>
- O'Leary, R., Gerard, C., & Bingham, L. B. (2006). Introduction to the symposium on collaborative public management. *Public Administration Review*, 66, 6-9. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4096565>
- Oregon Consensus National Policy Center and The William D. Ruckelshaus Center. (2012). *Collaborative engagement assessment report of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area*.

<https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2180/2013/06/GorgeNSACollaborativeAssessmentFINALREPORTreduced.pdf>

- Page, S. B., Stone, M. M., Bryson, J. M., & Crosby, B. C. (2015). Public value creation by cross-sector collaborations: A framework and challenges of assessment. *Public Administration*, 93(3), 715-732. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12161>
- Poocharoen, O. O., & Ting, B. (2015). Collaboration, co-production, networks: Convergence of theories. *Public Management Review*, 17(4), 587-614. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2013.866479>
- Pruitt, D. G. (1983). Strategic choice in negotiation. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 27(2), 167-194. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000276483027002005>
- Pruitt, D. (2005). Whither ripeness theory? George Mason University, Working Paper No. 25.
- Pruitt, D. (2007). Readiness theory and the Northern Ireland conflict. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 50(11), 1520-1541. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764207302467>
- Provan, K. G. & Kenis, P. N. (2008). Modes of network governance: Structure, management, and effectiveness. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 18(2), 229-52.
- Purdy, J. M. (2012). A framework for assessing power in collaborative governance processes. *Public Administration Review*, 72(3), 409-417. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2011.02525.x>
- Scott, T. A., & Thomas, C. W. (2017). Winners and losers in the ecology of games: Network position, connectivity, and the benefits of collaborative governance regimes. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 27(4), 647-660. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/mux009>
- Singleton, S. (2000). Co-operation or capture? The paradox of co-management and community participation in natural resource management and environmental policy-making. *Environmental Politics*, 9(2), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09644010008414522>
- Singleton, S. (2009). Native people and planning for marine protected areas: how "stakeholder" processes fail to address conflicts in complex, real-world environments. *Coastal Management*, 37(5), 421-440. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08920750902954072>
- Sorensen, E. & Torfing, J. (2011). Enhancing collaboration innovation in the public sector. *Administration & Society*, 43 (8): 842-68.
- Susskind, L. (2010). Complexity science and collaborative decision making. *Negotiation Journal*, 26, 367. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1571-9979.2010.00278.x>
- Susskind, L. E., McKearnen, S., & Thomas-Lamar, J. (1999). *The consensus building handbook: A comprehensive guide to reaching agreement*. Sage Publications.
- University Network for Collaborative Governance (UNCG). (2018). *University Network for Collaborative Governance Strategic Directions Plan*. <https://www.kitchentable.org/page/uncg-strategic-directions>
- Walsh, C. (2016). Rethinking ripeness theory: Explaining progress and failure in civil war negotiations in the Philippines and Colombia. *International Negotiation (Hague, Netherlands)*, 21(1), 75-103. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341325>
- Weber, G. S. (2006). Initial steps towards an assessment of the potential for a collaborative approach to Colorado Delta ecosystem restoration. *Pac. McGeorge Global Bus. & Dev. LJ*, 19, 79.
- William D. Ruckelshaus Center. (2020). *Project Criteria*. <http://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/provide/>
- Wondolleck, J. M., & Yaffee, S. L. (2000). *Making collaboration work: Lessons from innovation in natural resource management*. Island Press.
- Zartman, I. W. (1989). *Ripe for resolution: Conflict and intervention in Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Zartman, I. W. (1996) Bargaining and conflict resolution. In E. A. Kolodziej and R. E. Kanet (Eds.), *Coping with conflict after the Cold War*. Johns Hopkins Press.
- Zartman, I. W. (2000). Ripeness: The hurting stalemate and beyond. In P. C. Stern and D. Druckman (Eds.), *International conflict resolution after the Cold War*. National Academy of Sciences.
- Zartman, I. W. (2001). The timing of peace initiatives: Hurting stalemates and ripe moments. *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, 1(1), 8-18.
- Zartman, I. W. (2008). "Ripeness": The importance of timing in negotiation and conflict resolution. *E-International Relations*.
<https://www.e-ir.info/2008/12/20/ripeness-the-importance-of-timing-in-negotiation-and-conflict-resolution/>
- Zartman, I. W. (2015). Mediation: Ripeness and its challenges in the Middle East. *International Negotiation*, 20(3), 479-493. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341317>

Author Bio

Michael Kern is Principal at Michael Kern Consulting, LLC. He spent 12 years as Director of the William D. Ruckelshaus Center at Washington State University (WSU) and the University of Washington (UW). He is an Adjunct Associate Professor at WSU Extension, and Affiliate Associate Professor at the UW Evans School of Public Policy & Governance (where he earned a Master of Public Administration degree). Michael has over 30 years of experience helping diverse groups reach common ground on public policy issues. He has published on the role of universities in collaborative governance, evaluating environmental collaboration, the public sector as mediator, hatchery reform, nuclear site cleanup, eldercare, and other topics.

Amanda Murphy is a Senior Facilitator at the William D. Ruckelshaus Center, and an Associate Professor with Washington State University Extension. Amanda designs and leads or co-leads multi-party, collaborative processes that help people develop shared solutions to public policy issues; the Ruckelshaus Center's Collaboration Governance Training Program; and the Center's Collaborative Leaders Internship Program. She has a Master of Marine and Environmental Affairs degree from the University of Washington; and a Bachelor of Science degree in Ecology and Evolutionary Biology from the University of Arizona. Amanda has published on situation assessments, and marine protected areas.