An Empirical Examination of Collaboration as a Management Strategy: 
Part I – The Skill Set for the Successful Collaborator

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The Larger Project

• Web-based survey of both career and non-career Senior Executive Service (SES) members in U.S. federal government
• Focus: Their use of collaboration as a management strategy
• 15 questions (13 open-ended; 2 yes/no)
• Defined term:
  ◦ **Collaboration** means to work across boundaries and in multi-organizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved or easily solved by single organizations.
The Larger Project

- 305 usable surveys; 304 collaborators (biased results)
- Responses coded by 5 researchers
- ATLAS.ti. qualitative analysis
  - (Qualitative) master hermeneutic unit and (quantitative) frequency count dataset
Importance

- SES Executive Core Qualification (2002): *Building Coalitions*
- Bush Management Agenda (2005)

- Understudied, important group
  - Long tenure
  - Standard setters
  - Decisional authority
Profile

- **Age**: 46-55
- **Gender**: 64% male; 36% female
- **Education**: Advanced degree (78%); college degree (20%)
- **Location**: Washington (69%).
- **Status**: Career senior executive service (90%); appointed 8%
Focus of PRMC Paper

- **People** who engage in collaborations between or among organizations

We asked: What is the skill set for the successful collaborator?

**Importance:** Majority of literature on public management collaborations focuses on organizations, jurisdictions, and networks.
Propositions

#1 = Strategic management and visioning
(Goldsmith & Eggers 2004; Milward & Provan 2006; McGuire & Silvia 2009)

#2 = Facilitation, collaborative problem solving

#3 = Interpersonal skills
(Our “real world” work; Getha-Taylor 2008 Silvia & McGuire 2010; Emerson & Smutco, forthcoming)
Findings

What is the Skill Set of the Successful Collaborator?

- Personal Attributes
- Interpersonal Skills
- Group Process Skills
- Strategic Leadership
- Substantive/Technical Expertise
Skill Set for the Successful Collaborator According to SES Respondents:
#1 (tied) = Personal Attributes
Skill Set for the Successful Collaborator
According to SES Respondents:
#1 (tied) = Interpersonal Skills
Skill Set for the Successful Collaborator
According to SES Respondents:
# 3 = Group Process Skills

- Facilitation
- Interest-Based Negotiation
- Collaborative Problem Solving
- Conflict Resolution
- Mediation
- Consensus Building
- Compromise
- Skill in Group Dynamics, Culture, Personalities

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45
Skill Set for the Successful Collaborator
According to SES Respondents:
# 4 = Strategic Leadership
Skill Set for the Successful Collaborator
According to SES Respondents:
# 5 = Substantive/Technical Knowledge
Does Collaboration Yield Conflict?

- Yes (63%)

- Approaches to Conflict in Collaboration:
  - Conflict management (negotiation, compromise, interest-based problem solving) (81)
  - Facilitation (eliciting common ground, voice, clarification of rules and goals) (92)
  - “Let it happen” (37)
  - Listening (27)
What are Catalysts to Collaboration?

#1 = Relational

Followed by:

- Opportunity for improvement
- Sense of urgency
- Mandate
- Organizational
What are the Challenges to Collaboration?

#1 = Relational

Followed by:

- Logistical
- Political
- Organizational
- Personal
Surprising Find #1

Contrast between why they collaborate (to increase performance)
And
What they report is needed to obtain that increase in performance
(Traits)
Common thread = emphasis on people and people skills throughout survey responses

- Skill Set
- Catalysts to collaboration
- Challenges to collaboration
Supports Work of

- Huxham et al, Williams, Getha-Taylor, Silvia & McGuire, Emerson and Smutco, and others

EXCEPT for extent of emphasis on TRAITS
Supports Work of

- Goleman: Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the sine qua non of leadership; technical skills are threshold capabilities

- **EXCEPT** that SES told us: Strategic leadership (including visioning) and technical skills are important, but secondary variables for the successful collaborator
Next Week: Interviews

- Decouple strategic leadership and technical/substantive
- Investigate threshold versus non-threshold question
- Delve deeper into traits
Can Traits & Attributes of Successful Collaborators Be Taught?

- Goleman and others say yes (qualified)
- Certain people born with greater EI
- EI increases with age
- Coaching via incentives, videotaping, feedback; foreign country experience
- Rautalinko and Lisper (2004): training through modeling, then role-playing
Can Traits & Attributes of Successful Collaborators Be Taught?

- **We say** yes (qualified)
- Self-assessment long used at CCL, FEI, NTL
- Important = understanding of mental models & collaborative mindset
- O’Leary, Bingham, Choi (2010): course that teaches how to work collaboratively
- E-PARC free cases, simulations and syllabi on collaboration ([www.e-parc.org](http://www.e-parc.org))
Future Plans Using SES Data

- Additional exploration of the collaborative mindset
- Gender differences
- Differences across agencies
- Additional exploration of collaborative leadership
- IBM Report