Reflections on Funded Team-Based Social Work Research: Collaboration or Cold War?

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This narrative examines the challenges and opportunities of funded team-based research with a focus on the collaboration aspects of the work. What is presented is a reflection on what the authors have learned during twenty years of collaborative research. The authors wish to take a long view from years of research experience to help others be better prepared to face the rewards, frustrations, challenges, and tribulations of this kind of research. They also suspect that we are trying to normalize the experience in all its incredible peaks and valleys.

Collaboration is one of those wonderful words that has fallen from grace, and frankly we're sorry to see it. Several years ago it seemed to describe something almost mystical, a coming together of the minds, a synergy in which partners join in well-intentioned efforts to make something important happen. Collaboration was characterized as an opportunity to go beyond individual competence to a place sometimes even beyond original expectations. We still know that can happen (indeed we have experienced that in our own collaboration), but we probably need to invent some new language to describe this type of productive mutuality we so admire because recently we note collaboration has been co-opted by the federal government and other funders who seem to be using the term when grantees are working to the funder's specifications, not as equal partners. Collaboration has become murky territory, especially in research and particularly in funded research. We continue to believe that collaboration is a wonderful impetus for creativity and collegiality, but we do have some concerns.

This is a series of reflections about a long-standing collaboration and what we've learned in the process of joining with others to conduct funded research. We offer this patchwork of stories almost as a parable to better prepare the new researcher or even the seasoned researcher undertaking collaborative work for the first time. We wish to take a long view from years of research experience to help others be better prepared to face the rewards, frustrations, challenges, and tribulations of this kind of research. We also suspect that we are trying to normalize the experience in all its incredible peaks and valleys.

Our Collaboration

We began our collaboration as two faculty members in 1997 when we wrote a chapter together in a niche book on incorporating gender into the social work curriculum in which we realized that women were essentially invisible in organizational theory (Netting & Rodwell, 1998). We actually knew this already, but in writing the chapter we discovered what an impact that omission had had on our own education and subsequently that of our students. That chapter began a process in which we developed syllabi, taught courses, started research on the influence of women in early human services, and began a virtual writing campaign to expand our and others' thinking about the potential for alternative, non-dominant perspectives in influencing the next generation of social workers to be more multi-paradigmatic in their thinking and practicing (Netting & O'Connor, 2003).

One of the first pieces we wrote (O'Connor & Netting, 1999) was entitled

"Teaching our Students about Collaborative Approaches to Organizational Change." In this piece we assumed that if we raised consciousness about how incredibly reductionistic and non-inclusive rational, planned change models can be, and then proposed a collaborative alternative in which multiple voices were heard, social workers would have more options. Looking back on the article we are amazed at our naiveté. What we failed to say in that article was that there are different kinds of collaboration. Occasionally they are one and the same, but probably true collaboration occurs less often than we would like (or have been led) to believe. There is the kind that funding sources and others leverage people to do that goes away when the funding ends. And there is the kind that *really* happens. The kind that really happens requires incredible stamina because if the collaboration moves people to a new place, it is met with resistance when powerful forces recognize that they might have to relinquish control of "what is." Yet, if that can be worked through, what a transformation can occur for the people involved and what they can produce! The leveraged kind, however, means that many collaborators go through the motions of working with mutuality. On the surface it may even seem progress is being made, but most participants have absolutely no intentions of letting go of their own agendas, assumptions, and control in the interest of the work. On the surface there is cooperation, but there is fundamentally no notion of change. In fact, much effort is exerted to avoid the modifications necessary to truly work collaboratively.

In our earlier article we blithely danced around the reasons why the second type of collaboration is so liberating, not even acknowledging the first type. When we read our own work several years later, we were amazed and somewhat embarrassed that we had written the article without fully explicating the nature of power in either types of collaboration. In a way this narrative is our public recognition that the power dynamics in collaboration may be temporarily suppressed, but should never be completely denied. We want to be clear about those dynamics because we now believe they are central to the very possibility of true collaborative work.

More recently, we have collaborated with others in writing about the challenges of doing team-based research in specific projects (Garland, O'Connor, Wolfer, & Netting, forthcoming). As we continue to reflect about our team-based research experiences, and as we have had more of those experiences, we think our reflections might have something to offer. Our goal here is not to dissuade anyone from engaging in collaborative research, because when it is done well it can produce exciting, rewarding, and useful results. We think some of our observations may help ensure success when facing what can become tough times.

Our reflections about our research experiences with several local and national projects with differing funding sources and different research questions suggest to us similar themes of ethical dilemmas and research-rigor challenges that we wished someone had talked transparently about many years ago. What follows are a series of stories that capture our experiences and give rise to what we have learned. We tell the stories as composites in order to protect both the innocent and the not-so-innocent. None of our "collaborators" have been asked nor have agreed to participate in this reflection, so in order to honor their confidentiality, we wish to provide examples of consistent experiences across multiple projects.

Team Research Projects

Over the last twenty years, we have been involved in multiple funded research endeavors that have required teamwork. We brought these experiences to our collaboration when we started writing together and compared notes on what we had learned. The variety of experiences made us realize just how many different ways in which these research collaborations could occur. For example, one of us participated in a federally funded program evaluation that was funneled through state agencies for a collaborative of contractees who engaged in work that could not be done by state personnel because of ideological/political concerns. The researchers knew that all collaborators wanted certain program evaluation results, but none except the researchers had the necessary research skills to adequately judge either the quality of the research design or the results that were produced.

Our involvement has included a number of foundation-funded grants with interdisciplinary teams of researchers to evaluate projects across the country. One project involved collaboration across social work, public health, and veterinary medicine. More recent projects have joined social work with business, geriatric medicine, and nursing. Another involved a multitude of collaborators from various research institutions and disciplines ranging from sociology to business. We have been principle investigators, grantees, contractees, and sub-contractors. In many cases, facing the challenges of working across disciplinary cultures was compounded by the geographical spread of projects, all having their own cultural contexts. Between the two of us, as collaborators we have covered a lot of territory from child welfare to geriatric case management research. These experiences have provided us with the themes identified in our narrative.

It is important to point out that we have greatly benefited from our affiliations with these various projects and from our association with these funders. And we acknowledge that we are telling the story from an *outsider-insider* perspective, with all the accompanying biases this may imply. By *outsider-insider* we mean that we are the beneficiaries of research funds and are, therefore, part of an *inside* group of persons who are funded to implement projects. In that regard we are part of the grantee or contractee network. On the other hand, we are not part of the internal structure of the funding source and are *outside* the daily activities and decision making that occurs within its walls. This means we often receive information and feedback through filtered sources without having been privy to the complex decision-making process or the politics among foundation trustees, program officers, or others involved in funding decisions.

All this sets up interesting relationship dynamics and power and communication issues that are very much a part of our narrative..

Relationships with Funding Sources: Who Saves Face?

We suppose that trial by fire is a good way to describe the manner in which we learned about funded research with a team twist. It was enough to try to get grants alone, but writing them with others was a mixed blessing. We always said that "there's good news and bad news – the grant's funded and now we have to do what we said we'd do." Then a project would begin and it would lead in unforeseen directions, no matter how we tried to be control queens about it.

We quickly learned that no matter how much foundation officers say they are glad to leave the implementation to us, they never really truly mean it. We had to learn to think like program officers. Our first clue should have been when the program officers would literally rewrite our grant applications or tell us exactly what words to say so that it would get funded. We even had the experience once when a program officer contacted us, literally sought us out at a national conference, and said, "We need a site in your geographical area. If you write the grant, we'll fund it."

We should have known from those interactions that there was something going on rather than a kind of mentoring activity. But it took us awhile to realize not only that this was an issue of assuring good research, but that it was about the role of the program officer in selling an initiative to a board of trustees and then saving face at every opportunity when the project moved forward.

Our foundation grant proposal for a study of multiple dimensions of service delivery within private agency contexts was accepted for funding, but the project officer told us that she "had just a few ideas in order to strengthen the project." We had already secured the agreement to cooperate with the project from researchers and practitioners in four cities throughout the U.S. We had clinical and administrative social workers and faculty from four universities ready to begin the process when the program officer "suggested" that we also include another site, a non-profit research center that had had a long-term association with the foundation. "These people are great. They will add a great deal to the process. They have contacts in their part of the country that you do not have. It will just improve the coverage of the research," he said. We discussed between ourselves if we really wanted to add an unknown entity to the project, but we were also interested in assuring four years of research funding for ourselves and our doctoral assistants, so we agreed to make this adjustment and began the process of subcontracting with all the project participants. It was only later that we learned the politics of the situation. The site that was added to our project was not added out of a collaborative spirit; it was added because they had applied for funding and had not been selected. The new collaborators had been our competitors and someone on the foundation's board was intent on their having a stake, no matter how small, in the project we had designed. This was because the president of the university where our new collaborators were located had called one of the foundation's trustees and threatened to create problems if some compromise could not be reached.

We had learned early on that foundation officers were interesting folks, but it has taken us a long time to really understand their role in research, and even when we thought we did, we have been surprised. We were working on a project that took us to nine sites around the country. We were cast in the role of "evaluators" but we were told not to use the "E" word because it would scare the sites. Indeed, they were scared, but it wasn't because a team of academics was evaluating anything. They were scared because the program officer was apt to embarrass them in public. We witnessed one encounter in which a project director was being dressed down by the program officer for asking probing questions about the intent of the initiative. "If you alienate me, you alienate every foundation in the country. We talk to one another!" she hissed. "You'll never get funded again if you alienate me." As she turned on her heel to exit, the tension in the room was palpable.

Another situation arose when we were setting up another project that involved ten sites around the country, all in large health care systems. We were traveling to each location, talking with each project coordinator and their staff, and assisting in the preliminary stages of project development. The targeted population was frail elders and each site had to conduct multidimensional assessments in order to fully know how to intervene. As researchers, we immediately asked what tools they were selecting, only to find out that they were choosing different ones and that a couple of sites were developing their own. Tickled to have some expertise that might actually be useful, we chatted with the program officer about the importance of using standardized tools. There were a number from which to choose and it made sense to have the sites decide which one would best meet their needs. If the same data were collected at each site, then obviously we'd have comparable data, make our biostatistician's life much easier, and be able to really evaluate what was happening. We waited. When no one moved to proclaim the selected tool, we persisted.

With the program officer's support, we found a leading geriatric instrumentation guru, invited this person to our first joint site meeting, and focused on the importance of assessment across sites. We were certain that once the presentation had been heard, and with the encouragement of the funding source, all sites would move to select a standard tool to use across sites. We hosted a small conference with three or four key staff from each of the ten sites coming together for a two-day event. Everyone came and the event went brilliantly, as the presenter did a fabulous job. Staff across sites began chatting with one another about how they could coordinate their efforts. Networking had begun! Imagine our chagrin when the program officer got up at the end and said, "This was a great opportunity to get together and we hope you'll find tools that are just right for your site. Perhaps some of the ones we've discussed in the last two days will be helpful, but if not, feel free to be innovative and develop your own."

We were dumbfounded. For months we kept asking ourselves "Did we not make ourselves clear?" "What about standardization did she not understand?" "What are we missing?" One evening in a bar, following the next get-together of the projects, we confided in one of the site administrators with whom we had a long-term relationship. "Why couldn't we get our standard tool message across?" we asked. He said almost too matter-of-factly, "Oh, don't you understand? If they use the same tool, then what if nothing works? If the sites all use something different, some will work and others won't. The funding source will highlight the ones that did well and simply not mention the others. You can't do that if the whole initiative stands on one dataset. This way, something is bound to work!"

A similar episode occurred in a project that had fewer sites and was dealing with a different set of issues. We discovered as we participated in the research that one site was having real difficulties. The professionals who were part of the treatment and comparison groups were becoming intermixed as the system in which they were located reorganized. In short, the treatment group was seeing professionals in the comparison group and vice versa. The integrity of the project's design was not only at risk, but it was like fruit basket turnover. We debated for a couple of days about what to do. It was nobody's fault; it was just the craziness of being in a system that was in turmoil and in doing "real world" research. After a long dialogue, we finally concluded that we had to call the funding source and tell them that the project was in jeopardy. We fully expected that they would terminate the contract and we hated to be the whistle blowers, but ethically we had to say something because it was clearly impossible to do the research.

We remember making the call as if it was yesterday. This was a huge grant and ending it would have an impact not only on us as researchers, but on all the programs that were receiving overhead money from the grant. Sitting in a conference room with a speaker phone in front of us, we laid out the problems we had discovered in great detail. The program officer carefully listened, then said he would make a special trip to the site, instructing us to meet him there the following week. The key stakeholders gathered, everyone thinking the worst, but ready to face the realities. No one could argue that the grant as written could not be implemented. The program officer talked in vague terms for a while, then said, "I know it will be hard, but I expect you [looking at us] to work with everyone here to figure out how to make this right. We're going to declare victory regardless of the results!" It was then that we realized that the program officer's reputation was on the line and that he had convinced a board of trustees to fund this multi-site, multi-million dollar project. It was not about us; it was not about the site; it was about that program officer's reputation. Our role was to figure out a way to redesign the project and cobble it together in the interest of saving face, not doing good science.

Grantees tend to believe that funders know what they want when a research contract is developed. More likely they know what they do not want when they see it. Assuming that there is a pre-ordained plan about how the research should be enacted can be troublesome in the long run because the only workable rule of thumb is that program officers tend to react negatively when things don't seem "right." The other rule of thumb is that grantees will try to figure out what is "right," but the program officer really doesn't know until he or she sees it. The result is that grantees (and their contractees) feel manipulated at best and jerked around at worst. Actually, this lack of clarity does not appear to us to be an intentional play for control; it is just the way the process seems to unfold. However, we have seen power plays in other contexts with other members of our teams.

Team Relationship Dynamics: Who Has Power?

Clarity in communication and ground rules about process are necessary in collaborative research, but one can not be naive about the power dynamics that are interwoven into the communication and ground rule structure. There is formalized decision making, and then there is informal relationship development – both are important. When the same terms are used, there will be different definitions and understandings. Even when there are rules for engagement in data collection and analysis, team members or subgroups will do it differently. We've found that the trick is to allow for individual idiosyncrasies while protecting rigor, especially in qualitative research.

In one project focusing on program efficiency and effectiveness, we were the only researchers who were familiar with both the practice contexts and the mixed research methods that were to be used. Based on negotiations with the funding source, several additional researchers representing business and advanced statistical analysis were added. These "new" participants joined the team after the research design had been determined, but wished to add their expertise. During the five years of the project, those representing business continued to expect that the project would assess programs using standard for-profit business practices and that we would always do what they said was necessary. When we tried to explain that non-profit organizations and management styles were probably different and required a more open assessment strategy, we heard them grumble to themselves, "What do social workers know about running an organization?" We chose not to address that, but we were forced to directly discuss the qualitative/quantitative design conflicts that also arose because we knew for certain that none of them had ever engaged in an interview, let alone a fully developed qualitative project. They did not trust us and we never fully trusted them. We thought that we would be able to handle all the qualitative parts of the project, but those who had never engaged in this type of research "wanted to learn from us." They did not trust that qualitative research would produce anything usable, so they wanted to be involved when it came to making decisions about the qualitative aspects of the work. The quantitative researchers kept saying, "We want to do it all," meanwhile resisting our advice at every turn. We double checked their data in very subtle ways at each stage of the process just to make sure that both their collection of information and analysis of the data were consistent with our expectations. When it came to the quantitative part, they went off on their own, never once asking for our participation or advice.

Most of the time we have really liked the people we have worked with in teams; however, in one project, it was clear that certain team members (mostly men) neither liked nor respected us. The whole situation became clear over conflicts related to what constituted rigorous qualitative research. In meeting after meeting, decisions would be needed about the appropriate next step. The quantitatively inclined team members would argue that the best way to proceed would be based on what they knew to be true based on their reading of their discipline's literature. We, on the other hand, because of the emergent design of the project, continually argued in favor of letting the data speak for themselves. Generally, about five minutes into the discussion, it would get heated, with their side making broad statements about what was necessary to guarantee the quality of the project. Our response always took us back to the research proposal and our understanding about what was necessary to comply with the proposal. Soon it felt like we were just talking to ourselves because small subgroups would begin chatting or others would start looking at "important" documents. Finally, one of the business people would say "Okay, okay, these are human service agencies. Do what you want." After months of these kinds of experiences, the breaks, social hours, and meal times became more and more uncomfortable. We really didn't like each other very much.

Just because a funding source brings researchers together in a joint venture, leveraging into a team may not work. When really disparate parties are brought together, the parties may never coalesce into a bonded team moving in the same direction, no matter what the incentives. Bonding exercises are necessary and appropriate, but they may or may not work for team development. If deep underlying assumptions are in conflict, no amount of meetings in nice places, meals together, chances to conference, drives in beautiful settings, agreements made face to face, or formal contracts will control individual researcher behavior vis-à-vis the team. This means it is also important to try to maintain an ability to make choices about who will be teamed with you and what you can do to protect yourself or the project when the team is not working and the project is in jeopardy.

Teamwork can be difficult, tedious, and time consuming. It can also be a whale of a good time. A team is not an efficient mechanism for getting the work done, even when the research project is huge. However, the quality of the work will be better, if the team is able to work together. It is important to realize that getting to teamwork requires time and it usually takes longer than anticipated. With the challenges we have had, we also have had an incredible team experience of such synchronicity that we would end one another's sentences. One person would begin writing a report or an article and hand it off to another person, who would pass it to another team member. As it moved through the team, we totally lost touch with who had written what. In the end we were all certain that the product could not have been as good had any one of us done it alone. When this happens there truly is an incredible sense of trust in the power of the team.

Trust is difficult to achieve across geography where researchers return to their "home environments" without the need to face their team members every day. In another project that had multiple sites around the country, a whole substratum of research associates and project managers worked for the faculty members who were the PI contractees at their respective universities. It was a complicated structure. Each site had a handful of research associates and a manager who did the daily work of the projects. These folks were in constant communication, keeping email buzzing about the day-to-day activities. What we hadn't fully realized was that they were becoming totally connected and we, as the PI's at one site, were actually dependent upon our associates for knowing what was "really" going on. This situation came perilously close to disaster when one of the associates learned information about faculty members at another site and the negative things they had said about one another. Soon we were privy to information that we didn't want to know, much less should not have known, but we had to admit somewhat sheepishly that it did explain a lot of the dynamics we were picking up on in phone conversations and face-to-face meetings.

There was also an undercurrent of persons "in the know" and persons "out of the loop." The substrata had built trust among themselves. It was as if a secret society had been built among the research associates who learned how to work together under the radar screen of the faculty team members who were not getting along. We as researchers realized that our associates had managed to cross ideological borders that we could not cross and there was a temptation to use them as informants. It is in these border crossings that a network of relationships across these troubled teams grew and upon which real teamwork was being built. We also realized, rather fearfully, that information exchange was the glue that held this secret society together. And if we were privy to dynamics within other sites, perhaps our own dynamics and internal politics were leaking out to others!

Unfortunately, in this situation the connections were not being built among the faculty researchers at different universities. When we tried to build those bridges, we encountered tremendous resistance as the project culture had already been built around lack of trust. One particular problem was a contractee who had had funding from this source before, and she was always bringing up her relationship with the funding source. This was particularly painful for the current PI who was actually at the grantee site and who had contracted with this woman. When meetings got difficult and stalemates arose, the contractee would pull out the "I know the funder card" and say things like, "Well, when I ran into the program officer in Philadelphia at a meeting last month, she mentioned something entirely different. But perhaps she's changed her mind. I certainly trust that you know better than I." The power dynamics inherent in pulling this card were stifling and would bring communication to a standstill. We imagined that the PI would have liked to have said to this person, "Get a life! It's totally inappropriate for you to be talking with our funder. That's my role." But that never happened. Instead we continued to bicker while the secret society of research associates, mostly graduate students, would kick one another under the table as they watched the faculty carry on.

In every team there is an archivist who reminds the group where they have been and in what context they are operating. Because they hold the details, they hold great power in the team. They may engage in historical revisionism to support their own perspective, especially when all discussion has not been recorded. They may play a pivotal role in the ability of a project's members to coalesce into a viable team in the way they shape the participants' understanding of process and decisions. No archivist is a neutral scribe.

In one collaboration, we had an experience in which there were multiple archivists, all with their own version of what had been said and their own interpretation of what the notes of each meeting "really" said.

We would attend a meeting of the various sites, leave the meeting feeling like progress had been made, and then be sideswiped time and again when everything happened literally the opposite of what we thought we had experienced. We began to question our own sanity. When we would get notes from the meeting, we would wonder if we had even been at the same meeting. It was obvious that what we had to say was either so controversial, or seen as so off track by others, that people would go to great lengths to change the course of history. Sometimes, when the revision negatively impacted the research design we would ask for clarifications, but most of the time we would just let the social construction stand.

A good sense of who you are as a professional and a good dose of honest self-awareness are critical to a team project. You must first trust yourself. Then, even if it takes work, there must be some level of trust, along with a high tolerance for different perspectives in the team. Respect for the project's leadership, experts, participants, and processes help. Trusting the team means that not everyone on the project must participate in all aspects of the project to have a functioning team with great teamwork. Tolerance and respect for both process and method will be needed. It is only when tolerance and respect exist that you come to realize how detrimental to the research process their absence is.

Dissemination: Who Gets Credit?

Finally, and most interestingly, when it comes to results dissemination, even those persons who did not think the data were worth pursuing seem to develop a curious desire to control what is written. No matter how elaborate the publication plan, there will be assumptions made that subgroups are taking advantage of everyone else. No matter how clear the agreement about targets for publications or presentations, no matter what level of screening is put in place, someone on the team will not be satisfied. Some members will expect more help in conceptualizing publications and presentations; others will resent team oversight

In one project several years ago, the funding source wanted us to edit a book in which the results of each of the project sites was published. It sounded like a good idea, but we ran into some very strange reactions. Because everyone's job status was based on publishing, faculty members wanted to get an edited book chapter done, but they wanted refereed journal articles more than books because articles "counted" more in their university settings. They wanted to write chapters for the book, but were unwilling to share any of their results, saving the data for journal articles. The book became a description of each project, without anyone really knowing what had been found as a result of the research.

On another project we developed very detailed guidelines for what could be published, who had access to the data, who would qualify as an author, and where publication would occur. We had some specific interests and expertise and others had the same. This was a huge project with data available from many dimensions and of interest to many disciplines. We proposed to write several articles that had either content or method specificity. We assumed that, because there had been so many challenges to the qualitative aspects of the project, most of our team members would be uninterested in the parts of the project that we found most fascinating. We followed all the guidelines about publication and dissemination; but we were surprised to see that when we began the dissemination process, both for conference abstracts and articles, all sorts of consternation arose. Several untenured faculty felt that we "owed" them the opportunity to be published with us though they had not participated in the conceptualization or construction of the particular work. Others felt we were "hogging" the data and that they should get an opportunity to write from it. We still are not certain about the meaning of all the confusion since no one was jumping forward to write anything but us. We did include several of the other team members in various efforts, but we now look with sadness on a huge amount of data that was never mined to its depth after we moved on to other projects. It was a major lost opportunity for the project and other members of the research team.

In order to make a difference, it is important not to lose sight of the purpose of the research when dissemination time comes. It is essential to get your findings out to others, not to get stuck with internal dynamics about who writes what. If you can maintain the focus on the reason for the research, you will be able to move forward in the creative process of dissemination. We have learned that regardless of our level of participation in a project we can help to shape the discussion about what was learned because many times others in the projects are not comfortable carving out how to share information. In service of the findings, we have even shaped articles and presentations for others. This is not to suggest that we are willing to do the work for others, but we are willing to get ideas started without the need to be identified as co-authors, especially when we think findings can really contribute to increased quality of practice. It is important to know when you are choosing to do that as opposed to being manipulated into doing the work of others.

Conclusion: Achieving Collaboration Rather Than a Cold War

Even with the best intentions and care in enacting a collaborative process among researchers, some challenges will always exist because much of what the researcher does remains outside his or her control. We offer the following musings as words to the wise for those considering engaging in team-based research. We think they have potential for creating productive collaborations rather than cold wars.

Even when there is a cold war, there are great opportunities to learn from the warring parties. Any researcher will leave a difficult project experience as a fuller, more sophisticated research practitioner when consciousness about roles, needs, and processes are critically analyzed away from the heat of the situation. We do not typically like to use war metaphors to describe team experiences, but we intentionally use "cold war" now. The reason is that war is about power and we want to be clear here – power is something we may have glossed over in our earlier, rather naive meanderings about collaboration, but we have no intentions of doing that again. There are substantial power dynamics at play in team-based research, dynamics that one should never ignore or flee from. Recognizing and managing the power dynamics that accrue due to gender, discipline, university status, research design, and methods will always be needed in team-based research.

As we reflect on the narrative of our experiences, we are somewhat surprised to recognize how negative we may sound at times about our history with the collaboration process. We suspect that like some of our collaborative colleagues, our feelings may have gotten hurt along the way, and sometimes that hurt was intentional. But most of the time we believe it was not intentional at all. Collaboration is what happens when people bring their passion, their identities, their reputations, and their disciplinary cultures together. It is inevitable that there are strong feelings and perceptions when that happens. Clashes will happen. In fact, clashes should happen in order to achieve a better state due to the synergy of group. When collaboration works, the process and the product are much better than what could be achieved alone.

Similarly, we all bring our identities to the process and we stake our reputations on what happens. Funding sources stake their reputations too. Therefore, it is hard at times to meet everyone's needs in the collaboration. But at other times, the creative energy that can occur when everyone joins their passion for the project into a truly collaborative venture is worth repeating again and again and again. We hope some of our ruminations will serve to be useful when confronting similar situations, just as they have been useful to us when we continue to agree to participate in team projects. As for our current collaboration, we literally describe it as "play" when our minds meet and the ideas flow. That keeps us going through the tough times. That makes it all worthwhile.

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