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Collaboration Life Cycle:

Communicating Knowledge and Expertise for Getting In, Getting On, and Getting Out

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

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in Communication

by

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ABBREVIATED VITA OF DAJUNG WOO
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Cross-Boundary Collaboration
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Organizational and Vocational Socialization
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ABSTRACT

Collaboration Life Cycle:

Communicating Knowledge and Expertise for Getting In, Getting On, and Getting Out

by

DaJung Woo

Gaining access to diverse knowledge and expertise is often the primary motivation for collaboration among different professionals and organizations. Extant approaches have focused on communication dynamics *during* collaborative processes—where participants have already accepted the value of one another's knowledge/expertise—and narrowly presumed *transfer-integration* as the successful outcome of collaboration. I argue that gaining a more complete understanding of collaboration requires investigating how collaborators' knowledge/expertise are differently implicated in their communicative efforts to break in, maintain, and leave collaboration. Further, conceptualizing collaboration as a *cyclic process* adds complexity to current theories by considering how collaborators' communication impacts and is impacted by their previous and/or future collaboration. I support these arguments by providing evidence from field studies of long-range regional planning, which involves collaboration among various organizations to bring diverse inputs for envisioning the distant future of their region. Through a set of three studies focusing on different components of a collaboration life cycle (the beginning, middle, and end), the findings reveal communicative dynamics that enable and constrain productive engagements among diverse organizations with distinct knowledge/expertise.

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> Urban planning is *not* like a product development framework where somebody is saying, 'whatever it is I will market it,' 'whatever it is I will make the code for it,' and 'whatever the code is for I will put in a physical package,' and 'whatever the package is, we will give it a color and a design.' You can't segment things that way when planning for a region, because everything overlaps and requires a much more fluid dynamic. When you develop a plan to build a campus or something like that, it has a hundred of different authors and it has a lot of different expectations.
>
> –Brandon, Urban Planner/A Research Participant

When you get in the car to go to work in the morning, it is likely that you know the best route to get to work in the shortest amount of time. But, it is unlikely that you know or think about which sections of the road are within the same or different jurisdictions, why traffic signs are located where they are, or how many different organizations were involved in making of the parking garage in front of your office. Anyone can be an expert of his/her living environment because of the firsthand experience of using the built infrastructure every day; but when we look at the highways, parks, and bus stops, we cannot even begin to imagine the complicated organizing processes and coordination efforts that it took to conceptualize, plan, and build them. As Brandon's quote—which is not meant to undermine the complexities of collaboration that it takes for product development but used to highlight the different nature of the organizing processes—suggests, urban planning relies on close and dynamic collaboration among numerous entities that have different visions for the environment. The diversity of contributors to urban planning is contrasted with the seamlessness of the collaboration outcome (i.e., the urban environment), which highlights the importance of fluidity in the organizing process.

Research in the last few decades has shown, however, why this type of interorganizational collaboration process can be far from fluid and seamless. Organizations'

unequal power and status; conflicting interests; or different levels of commitment and satisfaction, among others, can be sources of communicative challenges in various aspects of the collaboration process. In spite of the potential difficulties, organizations choose to work together because they realize that their acting alone will not be enough to address the problem at hand and that their activities are interdependent with those of other organizational partners. The fact that each organization can only apprehend and specialize in a small section of the larger problem forces organizations to join efforts and pool resources to achieve a greater level of accomplishments than what they can do alone.

Among many types of resources that organizations might exchange during collaboration—including monetary, material, or human resources—sharing knowledge and expertise involves arguably the most challenging *communicative* efforts. *Knowledge* is differentiated from *information* in that it is "information made meaningful and valuable with respect to evaluation and action" (Kuhn, 2014, p. 482); *expertise* is specialized knowledge that is established in social interactions and an outcome of communicative acts between actors (Treem & Leonardi, 2017). That is, both knowledge and expertise have values and meanings attached by the local communities in which they are embedded *in practice*. This makes communication among organizations across functional and sectoral boundaries more complex and problematic because overcoming knowledge barriers while working toward the same goal requires far more than simple transactions of information.

Consequently, scholars across related fields have sought to understand how to facilitate various aspects of knowledge- and expertise-sharing processes, including the search, transfer, and transformation (e.g., Bechky, 2003; Carlile, 2002; Hansen, 1999). Yet, much of what is known about this topic is based on a cognitive perspective that views

expertise as property of individuals (Treem, 2012), as well as the assumption that moving knowledge from one source to another (i.e., knowledge transfer) and integrating them with existing knowledge determines the success of cross-boundary collaboration (e.g., Atgote, Ingram, Levine, & Moreland, 2000; Okhuysen & Eisenhardt, 2002). I argue that there are several reasons why the overemphasis on knowledge transfer and integration is problematic, and suggest how we might expand our thinking about knowledge- and expertise-sharing communication in the context of interorganizational collaboration.

First, various knowledge- and expertise-sharing activities do not always lead to or are aimed at transferring and integrating knowledge; they can simply result in one's acknowledgement and enhanced understanding of a given topic, without adopting the knowledge and practice as part of his/hers. For instance, an academic or professional conference provides a forum in which attendees are exposed to the most current research and practice in the field. While active knowledge- and expertise-sharing activities are expected to occur in this context, creating new knowledge is not the primary purpose. In another example, a brainstorming session in which the best idea is picked as a solution does not necessarily involve transferring and integrating ideas—although participants may well build on one another's idea and come up with new knowledge in both settings. Overemphasis on the transfer and integration may undermine other processes and outcomes of knowledge-/expertise-sharing communication that can advance our understanding of the topic.

Second, scholars have overlooked the fact that working across boundaries can present bigger challenges even before knowledge sharing and transfer can occur. When individuals who represent diverse functional fields or organizations gather and engage in

discussions, it is not their knowledge or expertise itself that crosses the boundaries; it is the *people* whose practices are enacted by their knowledge and expertise that must communicatively cross the boundaries and engage with others who may have little to no understanding or appreciation about their field. When the value of a certain domain is not recognized by other actors (even if they developed interpersonal relationships and trust), communication *about* the knowledge—as opposed to communication *of* the knowledge—will become necessary to gain acceptance and respect as credible sources to further the working relationships, including explaining of why, how, and how much their knowledge and expertise matter in achieving the collaborative goals. A quote from one of the participants for this dissertation project captures this point:

> While we (urban planners) think planning is really important…we are not afforded the respect that an engineer has [laugh]. You've chosen this field for your research, which is great because we all think it's the best thing ever. But, it's always a fight for respect and for validation that what we do is important.
>
> -Marianna, Urban Planner

While the extant research provides insights about how knowledge itself gets communicated, represented, and coordinated in collaboration settings (e.g., Barley, Leonardi, & Bailey, 2012; Hollingshead, Brandon, Yoon, & Gupta, 2011; Kellogg, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2006), little is known about how people communicate *about* and *with* their knowledge and expertise when trying to work across professional and organizational boundaries.

Third, studying knowledge transfer and integration often presumes that there are some connections or alliances that have been established between/among individuals, groups, or organizations. This is because, in order for researchers to examine knowledge transfer and integration, they need to choose contexts that make it easy to identify where

knowledge/expertise is located (e.g., workgroups or teams within an organization); how the knowledge/expertise moves from one place to another; and for what purpose(s) the shared knowledge/expertise become integrated. Thus, the emphasis on knowledge transfer and integration has directed scholarly attention to intraorganizational contexts or already-existing networks of actors that are aware of their interdependence and/or mutual benefits of working together (i.e., what happens *during* collaboration). This left questions regarding the problems of knowledge- and expertise-sharing when there are no preexisting relationships to enable the process or when partnerships come apart, underexplored. If the key reason for organizing collaboration is sharing valuable resources, like knowledge and expertise, we need to gain a fuller understanding of how knowledge-/expertise-sharing impacts and is impacted by the ways in which collaboration gets formed, sustained, and finished.

Considering these shortcomings of knowledge transfer-integration framework, the primary objective that drives this dissertation is to direct scholarly attention to other important communicative processes *around* knowledge-/expertise-sharing in collaboration. Collaboration occurs at various levels, but this dissertation is about newly developed interorganizational collaboration as it aims to move beyond a single organizational boundary or preexisting networks. Given the increasing complexities of social, technical, and environmental issues, as well as blurry organizational boundaries (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2005): (a) new partnerships between/among organizations constantly emerge, and (b) competitive advantages of knowledge/expertise no longer come from keeping them internally, but by strategically sharing with appropriate others. Yet, we do not know well how organizations (i.e., individuals who represent them) communicate *with* and *about* their knowledge/expertise to initiate, maintain, or leave collaboration with other organizations.

Thus, in exploring interorganizational collaboration, the focus of this dissertation is *not* on what happens to shared knowledge, but on how organizations strategically share knowledge/expertise to facilitate the process of collaboration.

I begin this introductory chapter by laying out the research agenda for this dissertation project. Specifically, I discuss four types or categories of knowledge-/expertise-sharing based on *temporal* (long- versus short-term) and *knowledge domain status* (insider versus outsider) dimensions. I propose this novel, two-dimensional framework as a way to make systematic comparisons and theoretical distinctions between different collaboration processes (e.g., comparing how knowledge/expertise is shared in urban planning versus product development processes, as Brandon attempted to describe in the opening quote), drawing on typologies used to characterize the four categories from existing literature. Then, I propose three broad research questions to achieve the research objectives mentioned above, and I close this chapter by providing an overview of this dissertation.

A. Four Categories of Knowledge-/Expertise-Sharing in Collaboration

Just as knowledge[1] is assumed to come in many shapes and forms, communication aimed at sharing knowledge/expertise can occur in various ways. Even though knowledge-/expertise-sharing is not the only communicative activity in collaboration, in most cases, collaborative activities are often organized primarily to explore, evaluate, and/or then resolve differences in various actors' knowledge/expertise to address a shared problem (Gray, 1989). I use *temporal* and *knowledge domain status* dimensions to propose a novel framework to conceptualize the process of knowledge-sharing as dynamic and

[1] Because I define *expertise* broadly as specialized *knowledge* used or performed by individuals with expert status in their social settings—which can be anyone—I do not consider knowledge- and expertise-sharing processes as separate or theoretically distinct.

multidimensional, and to distinguish different types of communicative mechanisms that facilitate the process. In the discussion below, I use the term *participants* to refer to those who are involved in varying types of collaboration, which can be individuals, work groups, and organizations, as I draw on previous studies that have been conducted at various levels of analyses and the discussion is relevant to all levels—even though this dissertation focuses on knowledge-/expertise-sharing between/among diverse organizations.

Time is an important dimension to consider because how collaboration is temporally organized (short-term versus long-term collaboration; STC and LTC hereafter) can have important implications on knowledge-sharing activities in terms of the focal problem, interaction, member abilities, and trust (Table 1). First, STC is often organized to solve well-defined, specified, and visualize-able focal problems, so that participants can share knowledge/expertise to achieve the objective in a limited period of time. LTC can focus on those problems, too, but is more often organized to address problems that are difficult to define and conceptualize in concrete ways (e.g., messy or wicked problems), requiring more time for participants to engage in knowledge-sharing through open-ended and iterative approaches until arriving at an agreeable solution/outcome. Relevant examples can be a collaboration for planning a fundraising event (STC) versus one that is organized to address health risks of toxic waste (LTC).

Second, in STC, interactions are likely to occur on an as-needed basis and/or highly task-oriented because of the time crunch, whereas LTC allows the time for engaging in a series of ongoing, regular, and recurring interactions that do not have to focus on immediate tasks. Third, STC tends to involve and rely on participants with requisite abilities to contribute to the project due to the urgency to capitalize on the diversity of

knowledge/expertise, whereas LTC can allow participants to deal with uncertainties and/or changes as to who becomes involved, to what extent, and why. Fourth and lastly, how trust develops is likely to be different. In STC, participants need to assume each other's trustworthiness ("swift trust") in order to act quickly and compensate for the limitations of working with one another only for a short period of time (Meyerson, Weick, & Kramer, 1996). By contrast, in LTC, people can take time to gradually realize and decide who can be trusted with what; even if some trust existed initially, through interactions and relational development over time, some may lose or further strengthen the trust (Williams, 2001).

Table 1. Distinction between *Short-Term* Versus *Long-Term* Knowledge Sharing

Criteria	Short-term	Long-term
Focal problem	Well-defined, specified, and visualize-able	Difficult to define, specify, or visualize due to complexity, messiness, and ambiguity
Interaction	As-needed, episodic	Ongoing, regular, recurrent
Member ability (actual and perceived)	Members tend to enter the context with requisite knowledge and skills and are often aware of other members' functional areas	Requisite abilities are often unknown; when members enter the context with requisite abilities they may have to get recognized and validated as to how it contributes to the outcome goal
Trust	Swift trust	Develops over time

Note: These criteria are proposed to conceptually distinguish knowledge-/expertise-sharing based on general characteristics or tendencies of LTC and STC processes and are not meant to argue that all LTC and STC must occur in these ways.

The second dimension concerns whether/how participants' *knowledge domain status* changes through knowledge-sharing interactions in collaboration (becoming an *insider* versus staying as an *outsider*). Insider/outsider status is relevant to the boundaries marked by differences in knowledge/expertise domains, and can be irrelevant to one's position in terms of actual organizational, inclusionary, or physical boundaries (c.f., Menon & Pfeffer, 2003; Stamper & Masterson, 2002; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). So, when collaborative participants from different knowledge domains interact, they are *insiders* of their own

domain but *outsiders* of others' expertise areas—even if they are within the same organization—with potential to become insiders of others' domains through working together.

Instead of assuming some amalgamation of shared knowledge (i.e., knowledge transfer and integration) as a result of collaborative engagements, I use this dimension to capture the different levels of changes that happen in one's knowledge structure (Table 2). Kuhn and Corman (2003) define knowledge structure as a schema that gets formed by experience in a given context, which allows people to produce and interpret relevant information. If one's initial knowledge structure changes during/after collaboration in a way that enhances his/her ability to interpret ideas shared by and create information that can be interpreted by an expert of a different field, he/she can be said to have gained an insider knowledge in the other expert's domain. By contrast, if one's knowledge structure remains the same after engaging with experts of different domains—i.e., the way he/she produces or interprets information and performs tasks does not change—the person maintains outsider status. This distinction allows researchers to consider and differentiate situations in which knowledge transfer-integration is failed or not intended in collaboration, from contexts in which it is expected to occur.

Table 2. Distinction between *Insider* versus *Outsider* Knowledge Domain Status

Criteria	Insider	Outsider
Changes in knowledge structure as a result of engaging in knowledge-/expertise-sharing	*Yes* → Adopts a part of others' knowledge as his/her own; knowledge structure and practice is adjusted or enhanced; gains others' perspective.	*No* → One's knowledge structure remains the same; may gain some understanding about other's knowledge domain but in ways that do not change his/her practice.

Becoming an *insider* through knowledge-/expertise-sharing indicates participants' adoption/integration of others' knowledge as part of their own, which allows them to make sense of a given situation or information from others' perspectives. If *perspective-taking* (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995) refers to the activity or process of collaborative interactions, becoming an insider refers to one's status within the boundary of others' domain(s) as a result of developing the ability to take others' perspectives and work together fluently. Like perspective-taking, becoming insiders is relative to the expertise of others with whom people interact. That is, when two people from two different domains work together, they do not take the perspective of or become insiders of a single actor's or some unifying domain, but of *one another's* domains; for example, X may (or may not) become an insider of Y's field and vice versa, instead of both X and Y becoming insiders of Y's domain or a third area Z.

Importantly, the insider boundary is *not* marked explicitly by or mutually agreed among collaborators. Similar to perspective-taking, people may rely on stereotypes and other inferential heuristics to guess what others know—beyond what others have shared with them—which can result in errors and biases. Therefore, one may think that he or she gained an insider status of another's field, but it may be that he or she does not fully understand the complexities of the field and is still perceived as outsiders by others. One way to recognize collaborators' insider status in one another's domains is by the way they are able to engage in and accomplish interdependent tasks through fluid interactions, which indicates that ideas from distinctive domains have been integrated and the knowledge barriers have been resolved. Then, a prerequisite of becoming an insider of others' domains is having work experiences with someone from different domains where they must exchange and integrate their knowledge/expertise. Gaining insider status in others' domain, however,

does not necessarily mean that the collaborator will be able to fully function as an expert of the domain because they will likely need credentials and practical skills, such as certification or accreditation.

Alternatively, collaboration participants can remain *outsiders* and not adopt others' knowledge or perspectives—whether they did not intend to or failed to gain insider status. Working together as outsiders, however, can help participants become better aware of others' fields without understanding how the knowledge/expertise fits within their knowledge structure or having the ability to take others' perspectives. For example, when task dependency is low and participants take charge of tasks in which they specialize, the communication among collaborators is unlikely to involve integrating different knowledge and expertise because it is not necessary to carry out their responsibilities, and they are likely to remain as outsiders of one another's fields. However, their interactions can increase participants' general awareness of others' expertise areas because learning about other knowledge domains does not necessitate acquiring the knowledge.

Based on the temporal and knowledge status dimensions discussed thus far, I briefly describe the four categories of knowledge-/expertise-sharing and what kinds of communication can be expected and is most important in each of the four settings (Table 3).

Table 3. Four Categories of Knowledge-/Expertise-Sharing in Collaboration

Time / Status	Short-term	Long-term
Become an insider	Knowledge *adjustment* and *transformation* (e.g., new product development processes)	Knowledge *acquisition* and *internalization* (e.g., new member socialization)
Stay as outsider	Knowledge *representation* and *standardization* (e.g., boundary objects used in product designing; as conceptualized by Star, 1989)	RQs for this dissertation

1. Category One: Becoming *Insiders* in *Short-Term* Process.

This category has received much attention in organizational studies, if not most frequently studied. A common setting that previous studies have examined is new product development or innovation teams, in which participants work toward specific goals for a limited amount of time by intimately mixing diverse ideas through episodic knowledge-/expertise-sharing interactions. In this category, *adjusting* and *transforming* knowledge is critical because the tasks involved in this type of collaboration often requires resolving knowledge barriers beyond developing a shared language, so as to integrate the diverse ideas for a tangible outcome. As Bechky (2003) observed, as participants learn how others' knowledge fits within the context of their own work, they can *adjust* their understanding of 'how things get done' and then transform their perspective; consequently, they can gain insider status in others' knowledge domains and become competent in working with one another.

2. Category Two: Becoming *Insiders* in *Long-Term* Process.

This category depicts participants adopting others' knowledge, which then becomes embedded in their practice through ongoing interactions over a long period of time. The processes that occur in this category include knowledge *acquisition* and *internalization*.[2] Previous studies have rarely examined knowledge-sharing that occurs in long-term collaboration *per se*, but relevant literature can provide insights into this process. One such area of research is socialization in work groups and organizations (Myers, 2011). As new

[2] Nanoka and Takuchi (1995) use the term *internalization* to explain the process of embodying *explicit* knowledge into *tacit* knowledge, and call the conversion process from *tacit* to *tacit* knowledge *socialization*. Since I do not differentiate the types or forms of knowledge, both terms are relevant to this second category of becoming insider in long-term knowledge-sharing.

members join an organization, they gain knowledge about the work context (e.g., functional and normative knowledge) through interacting with incumbents (i.e., knowledge acquisition). Over time, they make the knowledge into their own and become assimilated into the organizational setting with the ability to perform as contributing members and experts of their domain (i.e., knowledge internalization). Another example is mergers and acquisitions, which provides organizations and their members with opportunities to gain access to different knowledge base. Interactions immediately following an acquisition might involve one-way knowledge transfer from the acquirer to the acquired, but over time, the organizational members can develop a reciprocal process of sharing knowledge (Bresman, Birkinshaw, & Nobel, 1999) and become insiders of one another's organizational knowledge and practices. Compared to the first category (i.e., knowledge adjustment and transformation), this context involves participants' full integration/assimilation of the shared knowledge/expertise, so that they are able to engage in the practice much like the person who shared them initially.

3. Category Three: Staying as *Outsiders* in *Short-Term* Process.

The third category reflects when participants engage in short-term collaboration for a specific purpose, such as designing engineering for automobiles (Barley et al., 2012), without becoming insiders of others' knowledge domains. The processes that facilitate this type of knowledge-sharing is knowledge *representation* and *standardization* through the use of boundary objects (Star, 1989). Objects, such as drawings and graphs, allow experts from different knowledge domains to work together without developing a shared understanding, because they enable ideas to be conveyed and adapted to local needs while maintaining a common identity across domains. Because diverse knowledge and expertise get represented

and standardized in mutually understandable ways, participants do not need to change their understanding and perspectives to make sense of other's practice. As Timmermans (2016) explains, "Boundary objects reflect neither a consensus nor a top-down imposition of requirements on others" (p. 4). However, boundary objects act as "anchors or bridges, *however temporary*" [emphasis added] (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 414), and they do not sustain collaborative activities for a long period of time.

4. Category Four: Staying as *Outsiders* in *Long-Term* Process.

This least well-understood category depicts contexts in which participants engage in long-term collaboration without adopting others' knowledge or transforming their own. An example of this can be an advisory committee for environmental policy- and decision-making regarding waste management (Vasseur et al., 1997). This type of committees is often organized to convene representatives of multiple groups and organizations with diverse points of views, so that participants can brainstorm and exchange ideas to address complex problems and/or make recommendations through recurring meetings over time. In this setting, participants' resource and goal dependence is high (i.e., the diversity of knowledge/expertise is crucial to improve policy-making), but task interdependence is the lowest compared to the other three categories of collaboration discussed above. That is, knowledge-/expertise-sharing that occurs in an advisory committee does not require the same level of integration or transformation through communication *of* knowledge/expertise as compared to new product development contexts; and transforming one another's knowledge and perspective may defeat the very purpose of the committee—thus, staying as outsides is acceptable and desirable. Nevertheless, those with outsider status still can and must acknowledge others' abilities to contribute to the collaborative outcomes in order for

the communication to be fluid and for their long-term relationship to be maintained. In other words, learning and adopting *of* one another's knowledge may not be necessary, but perceived legitimacy and appreciation for others' domains through communication *about* one another's knowledge/expertise seems crucial so that participants can accept one another as collaborative partners. This type of interactions can allow participants to "agree to disagree" in contentious situations.[3]

Using this two-dimensional framework helps to understand what communicative mechanisms can be expected in each of the four categories of knowledge-/expertise-sharing contexts. Synthesizing the extant literature according to this framework also helps to reveal that there is limited understanding about the fourth category—how collaboration that does not require much communication *of* knowledge (i.e., participants can stay as outsiders) occurs for a long period of time. Motivated to fill the void and further advance this line of research, this dissertation asks three broad research questions regarding *long-term outsider* collaboration among multiple organizations.

B. Research Questions

Collaboration is an organized *process*—rather than a single action or event—which is expected to develop and/or change over time (Lewis, 2006). As collaboration progresses, how knowledge and expertise is communicated also can change; and, long-term collaboration will likely go through a wider range or scale of changes compared to short-term processes. For example, as discussed earlier, short-term or temporary collaboration often involves participants with prerequisite abilities and focuses on task-oriented

[3] One needs to know enough about others to agree about existing differences between/among them.

interactions to achieve the objective in a short period of time; by contrast, long-term collaboration allows for having loose and dynamic membership boundaries where participants can get accepted for their potential contribution through communication over time—even if others did not realize their relevance and/or abilities initially—which would be inefficient in short-term processes. Accordingly, a wider variety of communicative behaviors and strategies can be expected in long-term contexts (e.g., task-oriented, relational, and political) as well as how they may impact the collaboration process over time. The *outsider* dimension adds complexity to this context because participating organizations' goal will not be getting others to adopt or integrate their knowledge/expertise; instead, their communication may focus on getting organizational partners to realize the value of, appreciate, or be impressed by their knowledge/expertise so as to develop and strengthen their long-term relationships.

One way to understand the process of collaboration is in terms of its beginning, middle, and end components. Lewis (2006) explains that "collaboration features characteristics of the beginning, middle, and end of the activity" (p. 220) and that conceptualizing collaboration as a *process* requires thinking about how collaborative activities occur differently at those various points along the process—especially because certain communicative behaviors are expected at particular points of collaboration to move the process forward. Similar arguments have been made for developing and using stage models, and many have criticized this approach for depicting a given topic in a linear fashion and not capturing its complexities sufficiently. Nevertheless, investigating any given process in terms of its sequential components provides researchers with useful heuristics to focus on and gain in-depth understandings about different aspects of the process; and to also

gain a fuller understanding about the topic by covering the overall process, especially when the theory is not fully developed. In fact, any process that involves human communication efforts have a beginning, middle, and end that is more or less distinctively marked and with different kinds of sub-stages involved within each. For example, Tuckman's (1965) theory of group development includes *forming* and *storming* at the beginning, which prepares group members to develop norms and perform their tasks (i.e., *norming* and *performing*), and the process ends by *adjourning*. Also, several models of project management depict the process along the pattern of *initiation*, *execution* (or development), and *termination* (Pinto & Prescott, 1988).

Even though this dissertation is not aimed at developing a stage model of knowledge-/expertise-sharing in collaboration *per se*, I do investigate the three major components of the collaborative process separately with specific focus on critical aspects of each. By doing so, I am able to examine and develop a local understanding of how the ways in which organizational partners communicate their knowledge and expertise are implicated in each component. Also, as mentioned earlier, previous research has focused on the middle component or once after a collaboration is formed and ready to involve specific tasks (e.g., existing collaborative networks or inter-team collaboration within an organization); thus, by exploring all three major components of the same collaboration (i.e., how it begins, how it is sustained, and how it ends), the findings of this dissertation will contribute to developing a fuller understanding of knowledge-/expertise-sharing in the overall *process* of *interorganizational* collaboration. The title of this dissertation "collaboration life cycle"[4] reflects this objective.

[4] I use *life cycle* as a general construct that reflects changes in the overall process of collaboration, from its birth/beginning to its death/end—similar to how it is used in *project life cycle*.

1. Research Question One

A central question in initiating interorganizational collaboration is regarding *who should participate*. To address the focal problem that is highly complex and difficult to define in long-term collaboration, it is crucial to involve organizations with the expertise that can help achieve the goal from a variety of perspectives and to build in "sufficient requisite variety" (Ashby, 1960, as cited in Gray, 1985); yet, the same reason can also make it difficult to determine the membership boundary and identify potential collaborators. Gray (1985) proposed that the greater degree of recognized interdependence among those who have interest in the focal problem, the greater the likelihood of initiating collaboration. Accordingly, the way organizations share and communicate *about* their knowledge and expertise will be aimed at getting others to accept their relevance, right to participate, and potential contribution to the collaborative goals—as opposed to sharing the knowledge/expertise itself.

This type of communication would require organizations to have a delicate balance between demonstrating the value of their knowledge/expertise—so that it is reasonably attractive to their potential partners—and being careful to not be seen as a threat. As there has been little empirical investigation on this beginning process of interorganizational collaboration, the first research question (to explored in Chapter III) asks how/through which processes knowledge-/expertise-sharing occurs so that collaboration can be initiated. I explore this question specifically from the perspective of organizations that desire to get involved in an ongoing collaboration, so as to better understand the strategic nature of organizational communication in sharing knowledge/expertise.

2. Research Question Two

Once collaboration is initiated, various organizations accept one another as collaborative partners (i.e., accepted outsiders) and start engaging in dynamic interactions, including making important decisions together. The key question to consider in this "middle" component of collaboration is regarding how the differences among participants can be constructively managed (Gray, 1989). Recognition of interdependence does not guarantee a fluid collaborative process, and even if organizations agreed on conceptualizing the focal problem in a certain way in the beginning, the multifaceted nature of the issue can bring out the fundamental differences in the diverse knowledge domains in interactions *during* collaboration. And, clashes of ideas, disagreements about the direction of collaboration, and/or different perceived priorities among organizational partners can cause tensions and complications. This may be more problematic in outsider collaboration than insider collaboration, since the different knowledge/expertise are not to be mixed to create a tangible outcome like a brand-new product, but shared and coordinated so that their differences can advance the overall quality of the solution(s) to an ambiguous focal problem. The concern is then how organizational partners can work through their differences, foster productive engagements, and continue to capitalize on the diversity of knowledge/expertise over a long period time without falling apart or compromising the quality of collaboration.

To explore this question, I focus on the role of *conveners*. Conveners have important responsibilities in interorganizational collaboration because they have the authority to bring relevant groups and organizations together, organize various collaborative activities, and shape the process to a certain extent (Wood & Gray, 1991). Scholarly and popular literature offers suggestions for ideal convening practices, but little empirical research shows how

conveners actually carry out their responsibilities to set up collaboration in different contexts. Conveners' practices, specifically in terms of *what they do with* and *about* the diversity of knowledge/expertise that is available, are likely to impact the way in which long-term collaboration is sustained. Taken together, in Chapter IV, I frame conveners' practices as *tension management* (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016) and investigate how they deal with tensions inherent in organizing for long-term outsider collaboration, as well as their consequences on shaping the collaborative environment in the "middle" of the process. Even though knowledge-/expertise-sharing *per se* is not used as the central theoretical focus in this chapter, the findings provide implications for embracing the clashes of ideas shared by diverse organizational partners through *appreciation* of one another's knowledge/expertise domains (to be discussed in the final chapter).

3. Research Question Three

The last research question, which will be explored in Chapter V, is regarding how long-term outsider collaboration comes to an end, specifically when the collaboration has a predetermined termination point (e.g., completion of planned collaborative activities) and involves a cyclical process (e.g., recurring projects). Long-term collaboration provides organizations with opportunities to develop trusting and potentially long-lasting relationships through recurrent interactions over time. Of course, dynamic membership changes can be expected along the process, and not every organization that joined the collaboration at the beginning will stay until the very end; but, those that remain throughout the entire process of collaboration are the subject of discussion in this chapter. In interorganizational collaboration among *outsiders*, where participants do not adopt or internalize the shared knowledge/expertise, organizations are likely to have relied on one

another to perform some specialized tasks or provide expert suggestions. As the collaboration process comes to an end, if participating organizations perceive continued interdependence, they may try to further the relationships with an intention to collaborate again in the future.

As I will argue, the current literature provides little explanations for what communicative behaviors and strategies can be expected when interorganizational collaboration comes to an end and is expected to recur, since previous research has (a) focused on individual-level or intra-organizational exit processes, and (b) assumed that the "ending" is permanent and the leavers are not expected to return/re-connect. Thus, with an aim to develop a grounded understanding about the ending process of *long-term outsider* collaboration, the third research question asks: How do organizations prepare to leave collaboration when they intend (or not) to set the stage for their re-entry into the collaboration in the future? The findings will provide implications of strategically maintaining relationships developed through long-term outsider collaboration in increasing opportunities for continued knowledge-/expertise-sharing after the collaboration ends.

C. Overview of the Dissertation

This chapter is followed by an overview of my field study on interorganizational collaboration in urban planning. Then, the following three chapters (Chapter III, IV, and V) explore each of three research questions, which reads like three separate manuscripts. As previously discussed, that each component of collaboration—beginning, middle, and end—involves distinct processes and behaviors, warrants reviews of different bodies of literature and separate discussions of theoretical and practical implications for each research question. I believe that this setup will also help readers follow the rationale and methodological

decisions made for exploring each research question and interpret findings accordingly. The final chapter (Chapter VI), however, zooms out from individual chapters and synthesizes the findings from the three chapters, discusses how they help us question and theorize about communicating knowledge/expertise in *long-term outsider* collaboration, and provide propositions to guide future research.

I begin this dissertation with a hope that readers will develop appreciation for all the complex collaborative efforts made by many professionals from diverse organizations dedicated to serving the public and improving our living environment.

II. Field Study Overview

> "(Urban planners) partner with communities to help them become wonderful places to live, work, grow up, and play. They help decide what kinds of building should go where, where new parks might be needed, and what areas in the community are in need of changes to make them better places to be"
> –Jillian, Urban Planner (American Planning Association, 2016)

> "(Urban planners) work with municipalities, counties, regions, and major organizations and constituents to better understand a variety of planning-related issues; some are typical like housing, water, transportation…while others are a little out of ordinary like workforce development. Think of like making a pizza for seven of your friends, each with different likes and dislikes. Everyone has to come together to discuss the options and determine how to put all the toppings on in a way that makes each individual happy."
> -Erin, Urban Planner (American Planning Association, 2016)

Urban planning—also referred to as *regional planning* or *planning* in short—is a field engaged social, economic, technical, and political processes for analyzing and designing the urban environment. Planning requires experts of various domains (e.g., environment, transportation, and business development) to constantly work with others because developing a regional environment means taking all aspects of human life into consideration. Thus, it is difficult to *not* observe some collaborative activities in this field. As Jillian's quote implies, collaboration in regional planning has one clear goal: making the regional environment a better place to live. Yet, working toward this goal gets incredibly complicated because those involved can have vastly different ideas and visions for what makes a good place to live. Importantly, as indicated in Erin's pizza-making metaphor, the diversity of ideas shared by multiple entities are, like pizza toppings, to be organized in such a way that preserves the differences and satisfies everyone involved in developing the place.

Urban planners can be found at various types of organizations, such as governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and private consulting firms. For this field

research, I chose to focus on Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)—federally mandated and funded organizations that play an important role in regional planning. MPOs exist in every urban area with a population greater than 50,000 in the United States to serve their region by convening various entities that have interests in contributing to the development of the region. Urban planners who work at MPOs engage in a number of different collaborative projects, and one of them which meets the criteria for this dissertation project (i.e., long-term and outsider collaboration) is *long-range regional transportation planning project*.[5] Every MPO is required to develop a long-range plan to guide future planning activities for the next 20 to 25 years through organizing a highly inclusive and extensive collaboration process. This project is developed and updated every four years, which is often referred to as "long-range planning cycle" by urban planners.

This makes for an ideal context for exploring long-term collaboration among outsiders. First, it involves the characteristics of *long-term* collaboration as discussed earlier, including: a complex focal problem that is difficult to define and visualize (i.e., building a good region); ongoing and regular interactions through recurrent meetings that are not always task-oriented (e.g., some workshops are organized for relationship-building purposes); and participating entities do not (or cannot) always know or trust others' abilities in the beginning, since the process is open to anyone's involvement. Second, it is *outsider* collaboration in that the ideas gathered from collaborative engagements do not lead to transformation or adjustment of participants' knowledge/expertise (as described in the pizza-making metaphor above). Indeed, informant interviews with organizational representatives

[5] Different regions label this same project with slightly different names, including "MTP" (Metropolitan Transportation Plan), "LRP" (Long-Range Regional Plan), or "RTP" (Regional Transportation Plan).

revealed their *outsider* status as they often reported that, while they are generally aware of what other organizational partners do, they do not know how others' knowledge/expertise is developed or can be applied in the context of their own work.

A. Research Sites

Among over 400 MPOs in metropolitan regions of the United States, I conducted field research in two different regions—one in the Southwestern United States and one in the West Coast of the United States—to examine their MPOs' collaborative processes for long-range regional planning. The two sites are referred to as "Region A" and "Region B" for anonymity. They were chosen for their similarities as well as their differences, so that the data from the two regions could be examined in several different ways.

The most important similarity between Region A and B is that MPOs in both regions organize the same type of long-range planning project, with the same collaborative objectives and under the same federal guidelines. Also important is the similar challenges experienced by both regions in terms of collaborating across various sectoral, functional, and organizational boundaries—such as identifying legitimate potential partners and moving collaboration into a mutually agreeable direction. These similarities allowed me to combine the data collected from the two regions and analyze the practices of organizations that have been involved in either of the two regions' long-range planning.

Some of the differences between Region A and B are described below as I contextualize each of the two sites and provide descriptions of their regional characteristics. The benefits of conducting research in two sites with regional differences were that, first, it increased the diversity of my sample. Because each region was dealing with different issues related to urban planning, the types of organizations involved varied across the two sites.

For example, due to an emphasis on environmental issues in Region B, conservation organizations were actively involved in the planning process, whereas Region A did not involve any organizations focusing on the same topic. By combining data from the two sites, I was able to examine practices of more diverse types organizations with a wider variety of expertise than if I relied on data gathered from a single case. Second, the regional differences allowed for a comparative case study approach. Even though the two MPOs in Region A and B shared similar planning protocols, the outcomes of their collaboration were divergent in some respects (see Chapter IV). Through comparative analyses of the two regions' MPOs' convening practices and their consequences, I was able to examine why and how different outcomes are observed.

1. Region A

Region A is a four-county area that covers over 20 cities in various sizes in the Southwestern United States. As in most metropolitan areas in the United States, Region A's MPO functions are carried out by the region's Council of Government (COG). A COG is a "multi-service entity with state- and locally-defined boundaries that delivers a variety of federal, state, and local problems" (National Association of Regional Councils, 2013). COGs were conceived in the 1960s with a mission of consensus-building within and problem-solving for their regions. While Region A's COG is the entity that houses MPO functions, in practice, COG and MPO are considered separate divisions with two different groups of staff within a single entity (thus, I refer to the MPO throughout this dissertation). Nevertheless, having the COG behind MPO activities seems to give the planning staff some level of authority—as opposed to being a separate organization with MPO functions only—and assists smooth engagements with municipalities.

Even though Region A is the largest region in the state with an estimated population of 900,000, the planning staff explained that their MPO is on the small side—compared to MPOs in other metropolitan areas in the country—with 15 staff members in total. The staff often mentioned that they usually have more projects than what they can manage simultaneously, indicating their perceived lack of resources. Irrespective of the region's political climate which has become more liberal in the last decade or so, the residents tend to be conservative when it comes to urban growth and developments, at least from the MPO staff's point of view. Therefore, community organizations and neighborhood associations often enter the collaborative planning process to voice their oppositions to the MPO's regional plans that focus on growing the region as opposed to maintaining existing lands.

Another regional characteristic to note is the low level of education. The state in which Region A is located ranked near the bottom in a recent national report on educational achievement.[6] Many planning professionals from Region A attributed the lack of public participation and interest in the collaborative regional planning process to this factor, and explained that one of their biggest challenges is to motivate diverse constituents to learn about the planning process and get more actively involved in it. This may also be related to my observation that Region A's MPO does not seem to get the same level of public pressure or influence to shape the planning process (although it does exist), appearing to be smoother compared to planning processes in metropolitan areas with higher levels of education and public involvement, such as in Region B.

[6] The report is not cited to protect anonymity but available upon request.

2. Region B

Region B is a much larger metropolitan area compared to Region A. It includes nine counties and encompass over 100 cities in the West Coast of the United States. Region B had a unique situation as it was one of few regions in the country with two separate organizations working on regional planning—one playing the COG role and the other performing MPO functions. This was an outcome of a political incident in the region's history which divided the procedures and functions of a single entity into two. The COG focused on connecting with local governments and land use issues, and the MPO handled transportation and funding-related issues in regional planning. In the most recent long-range planning cycle, however, new legislation as well as a new planning technology brought the two entities' work together closely, as the procedural changes required considering land use and transportation issues simultaneously. During my field research, the COG and MPO were going through a merger, becoming a similar situation as in Region A. Thus, I refer to Region B's MPO in this dissertation without addressing its different functions from the COG, since the distinction is not theoretically meaningful for the purpose of this research.

Region B's MPO is considered one of the leading planning organizations in the nation for its high level of technological sophistication in planning analyses and the high caliber of its planning staff. Also, given the region's size, the MPO is one of the largest with over 100 staff across various divisions. Based on informant interviews with those in leadership positions, I identified approximately 25 planning staff in the MPO who organize and facilitate the long-range planning process. Some key words that describe this MPO's vision and goals are *smart growth* and *innovative planning*. Considering this region's liberal

and progressive social and political climate, residents are generally supportive of this direction and urban developments.

In contrast to Region A, the level of education in Region B is very high. Two of the largest cities in this region were among the top 10 most educated cities in the United States in a recently published report. Region B's constituencies seem, overall, more familiar with urban issues and what role planning plays in the region and motivated to engage, compared to those of Region A. Many stakeholder groups/organizations in this region are also well-informed about where to find resources they need to get involved in and closely monitor the MPO's planning activities. Given the region's push toward smart growth, groups and organizations that focus on issues such as conservation and social equity to minimize the negative impacts of urban sprawl are important part of regional planning. With a high level of interest to participate in and influence planning-related decisions from various groups and organizations, the collaborative process often gets highly contentious. The MPO has been sued by its stakeholder groups that tried to pressure the MPO staff to consider and incorporate their interest areas more explicitly in the planning process. Nonetheless, Region B is frequently cited as "best place to live" in popular literature, which indicates a high quality of the urban environment.

B. Data Collection and Analysis

As a newcomer to urban planning, conducting field research allowed me to first gain a breadth of understanding about the field (e.g., a range of practices, different types of planning projects, and social structure of the profession) from observing urban planners' work and naturally interacting with key informants in the two sites. And then, I was able to seek a depth of understanding about the specific area of investigation (i.e., knowledge-

/expertise-sharing in long-range regional planning process) by asking relevant questions in in-depth interviews and gathering organizational artifacts that can further inform the data analyses. I entered Region A and B when the two MPOs were wrapping up their four-year project cycle (i.e., during the last quarter of the fourth year) and continued the research until they were a few months into the following cycle (i.e., during the first quarter of the first year in a new collaboration cycle). This timing allowed me to ask participants to reflect on their experiences in the previous cycle and to discuss their expectation and preparation for the following cycle.

I spent a little over half of the year collecting data[7] through three major types of methods. I conducted *nonparticipant observations* for approximatively 20 hours at various committee meetings, informative workshops, and MPO staff meetings, where I took field notes and recorded some parts of the conversations upon attendees' permission. I conducted observations at the beginning of my field study to get into the setting by familiarizing myself with social norms, relationships, and typical practices involved in collaborative planning *in situ*. Then, I conducted a total of 110 in-depth, face-to-face *interviews*, which includes 37 urban planners at the two regions' MPOs and 73 individuals who represent 40 different groups and organizations[8] across various sectors. Lastly, I gathered *documents* that provide

[7] There were two phases of data collection (spent four months for each phase), plus approximately a two-month-long preparation period before the first phase and a two-month-long gap after the first phase and before the second phase (for scheduling additional site visits and conducting initial data analyses); thus, a total of one year was spent for the entire research process.

[8] I use the term *group* throughout this dissertation to refer to a collection of professionals from the same field—rather than the same organization—who participated in the collaborative planning process as a single entity. For instance, a group of public health specialists worked with urban planners at MPO to share their expertise in the health sector; in this case, they represent their sector rather than their organizations. Both *groups* and *organizations* are equally considered participants in the planning process, thus no distinctions are made between the two.

written or visualized information about the long-range planning project (e.g., brochure, reports, and committee bylaws) as well as *artifacts* that reflect organizational strategies for getting involved in the collaboration process. Among these different types of the data, interviews were used as the primary data and the other two as supplemental data to triangulate the findings. I provide detailed descriptions of how I collected the data (e.g., interview protocols) and analyzed them to answer the specific research question in each of the following three chapters' *methodology* sections (see Table 4 on the next page for a summary overview).

Important to note here is the *level of analysis*. In exploring *all* three research questions, my goal was to understand *organizational*-level communication practices and strategies for "getting in, getting on, and getting out of" (the title of this dissertation) interorganizational collaboration.[9] Scholars who examine organizational-level practices often focus on structural aspects, such as company-wide policies and firms' resource capacities. However, *communicating* knowledge and expertise, above all, occurs between people (Empson, 2001), especially in collaboration where representatives from multiple organizations get together to discuss, negotiate, and make decisions about shared issues—whether it occurs face-to-face or through other means. Organizational capacities and structures certainly enable and restrict how the representatives engage with others, which can be understood through individual reports about their experiences of participating in interorganizational collaboration and not by analyzing their organizational systems.

[9] Some may consider this an *interorganizational-level* analysis because organizational practices are aimed at working collaboratively with other organizations, and to distinguish it from research on intra-organizational processes. I consider both appropriate.

Table 4. Research Design Overview

	Chapter III	Chapter IV	Chapter V
Research Questions	- How do organizations, whose goal is to initiate collaboration with other organizations, communicate their knowledge and expertise so that they are seen as potential partners?	- What are the kinds of tensions does long-term outsider collaboration generate? - How do conveners manage the tensions, and what are the consequences of their tension management practices?	- How do organizations prepare for their exit to set the stage for their re-entry in interorganizational collaboration? - If/when organizations do not intend to re-enter, how do they make sense of their exit?
Participants	- Organizations that have recently attempted to get involved in long-range planning - MPO urban planners who identified and convened different organizations	- Organizations that have been involved in long-range planning - MPO urban planners who organize the collaborative process	- Organizations that stayed involved until the end of the collaboration cycle
Case Comparison	No (collapsed data from the two sites)	Yes (comparative study of Region A and B)	No (collapsed data from the two sites)
Primary Data	- 62 interviews with representatives of 12 different organizations - Artifacts obtained from the 12 organizations - Interviews with 31 urban planners who reported on the 12 organizations' participation and their interactions	**Region A:** - Interviews with 14 MPO urban planners - Interviews with 38 individuals who represent 14 groups/organizations **Region B:** - Interviews with 23 MPO urban planners - Interviews with 35 individuals who represent 24 groups/organizations	- Interviews with 51 individuals who represent 10* different organizations (*Of the 10, six have re-entered collaboration in the next cycle and four did not)
Analysis	- Categorized 12 organizations based on how successful they were in their initiation efforts (high vs. low success) by analyzing urban planners' reports on them - Analyzed interview data with organizational representatives (grounded theory) to identify approaches used to initiate collaboration; compared them between the two categories of organizations	- Identified three types of tensions common in both cases (cross-case analysis) - Analyzed how conveners in the two cases managed the tensions (within-case analysis) - Linked the tension management to different characteristics of collaborative environment in the two cases (comparative analysis)	- Analyzed organizational representatives' reports on how they prepared for exit (grounded theory) - Compared the practices of organizations that re-entered versus did not re-enter the next collaboration cycle

I use a concrete example to illustrate that using individual-level data (i.e., interviews with individuals who represent various organizations that are and/or have been part of collaboration) can effectively reveal organizational- or interorganizational-level communication practices in collaboration. Consider two individuals, A and B, collaborating on a research project. They are researchers from University A and University B, respectively. Their collaboration is *interorganizational* if (a) they chose to work together *because of* their organizational membership in the two specific institutions; (b) decisions made or advocated by A and B represent their institutions' preferences rather than their individual choices; and (c) A and B's work on the project directly benefits and is supported/constrained by their institutions. That is, when A and B work together in this context, their *organizations'* identities and values get enacted rather than their individual identities, and their communicative behaviors are likely to represent their organizations' norms and practices. In another scenario, if the joint project was motivated by A and B's friendship and they happened to be working at the University A and B (i.e., their research ideas and practices will not change based on where they work), the collaboration can be said to occur at the individual-level.

The individuals I interviewed—urban planners and representatives of organizations that are and/or have been part of the long-range regional planning process—participated in the collaboration precisely because (i) they represented certain organizations that were seen as necessary or important to accomplish the shared goals, and (ii) they desired to develop relationships with other organizations—rather than with the specific individuals who happened to represent those organizations. In other words, the individuals *without* their membership and identification with their organizations would not have been part of the

collaborative regional planning process. Also, the inputs they shared with other collaborators and decisions they supported reflected their organizations' interests and priorities, rather than their personal preferences. Some interviewee expressed that their personal values did not always align with their organizational interests or needs, but they still acted on the latter. For example, a MPO planner shared her data with a stakeholder group because of the MPO's responsibility to be transparent as a federally-funded agency, even though she felt reluctant to do so. Lastly, the representatives' participation directly benefitted their organizations (e.g., increasing legitimacy, reputation, and resources) and not themselves as individuals—although they could have earned indirect benefits, such as opportunities to advance their careers and make personal/professional connections.

To ensure that I capture organizational-level practices and strategies when collecting and analyzing the interview data, I made the following efforts consciously. First, I tried to recruit more than one representative from a single group/organization that participated in the long-range planning collaboration, and then find commonalities across the interviewees' reports. Since people from the same organization shared consistent reports, I did not encounter any significant discrepancies. Second, in the limited cases in which I could not interview more than one individual from the same organization (four out of 38 different organizations participated in this study, thus 10.5%), I ensured that the person has firsthand experiences participating in interorganizational collaboration processes and is in a position (e.g., director) to understand and discuss his/her organization's perspective, vision, and directions. Third, I asked interviewees more questions about their organizational history, goals, and practices rather than their personal views and experiences, and asked them to compare *if* their organizational and personal views differ and why.

III. *Getting In*: Breaking into Collaboration with Expertise

A. Introduction

Addressing complicated contemporary issues requires more and more interdependence among groups and organizations from various sectors (Bator & Stohl, 2011). Working across organizational boundaries offers opportunities for resource acquisition (Hardy, Phillips, & Lawrence, 2003; Hsieh, Kimsey, & Buehring, 2013), catalyzing critical social changes (Taylor & Doerfel, 2003), and being better prepared for an uncertain future and emergency situations (Kapucu, 2006). Yet, differences in goals, capacities, culture, and expertise—among others—also bring many challenges in interorganizational processes. For example, building a collaborative environment can be difficult when organizations desire to collaborate but have to compete for resources (Doerfel & Taylor, 2004). Building trust between organizations can also be challenging, if organizations have a suspicion that others will act opportunistically (Gulati & Nickerson, 2008).

As this topic has received increasing attention, the extensive body of literature has yielded rich theoretical and practical understanding about issues that occur *during* collaboration. In other words, we know much about what happens after different groups of experts and organizations have already joined forces for some mutual benefits. Conceptualizing collaboration as a process requires researchers to consider its beginning, middle, and end (see Lewis, 2006) as each requires different communicative practices. However, there is limited understanding about how collaboration begins, and I argue that it

is because what we consider as a "beginning" of collaboration can cause confusion and needs clarification.

Some scholars argue that the "early stages" of collaboration require much more efforts for organizations to develop shared norms and understanding about the purpose of working together (Vangen & Huxham, 2003) than later processes. Some even go as far as to say that the decisions made at the "beginning" of collaboration can be a determining factor in future development and success of the collaboration (Doz & Hamel, 1998). Yet, scholars often do not specify what they mean by "early stages" or "beginning"; what is clear, though, is that these labels refer to after organizations came together and are ready to embark on some collaborative endeavor.

In order for organizations to come together and start engaging in interactions aimed at furthering their collaborative goals, however, something has to initiate the mutual agreement and communication that collaboration is a good option among others. Organizations' trying to agree on the purpose of collaboration is what happens in the *beginning* process of an *already-formed collaboration*; but even before that, organizations must deal with issues like identifying who the partners are or considering whether to spend resources to participate in collaboration. This distinction is important as the two stages require qualitatively different communicative efforts to move collaboration forward.

I refer to the pre-collaboration process as an "embryonic stage" of collaboration. Embryo is an offspring that is in the process of initial development (the stage before it is referred to as fetus) and has not yet been born or hatched. Applying this to collaboration, this is the stage when there is a potential that can lead to collaboration, but it is unclear yet. About two-thirds of all human embryos fail to develop successfully (Coger, 2010), and

similarly, the embryonic stage of collaboration involves much uncertainty as to whether the initial interactions will actually develop into a collaboration or not.

The study reported in this chapter seeks to explore communication processes by which different groups and organizations come into collaboration in the embryonic stage. Specifically, I take the perspective of new organizations that have not been (active) part of some existing collaboration but desire to "break in" ("initiators"). Through a field study of two public sector organizations and their recently established collaborative relationships (i.e., total 12 groups from various sectors), I explore how the initiators communicate their potential to be valuable contributors.

The findings of the study make several key implications. First, they challenge the idealized notion that collaborative opportunities are realized through mutual consents (Keyton, Ford, & Smith, 2008). As I will discuss later in this chapter, it is common that organizations with more interest in collaboration, who may not yet be seen as relevant by their target organization, will need to negotiate their entry into collaborative relationships. Second, the findings of this study help theorize the embryonic stage of interorganizational collaboration; specifically, I build a process model that delineates communicative practices leading to (un)successful initiation of collaboration. Third, in discussing the model, I argue for a shift of focus in collaboration research from communication *of* knowledge/expertise to communication *about* them; to initiate collaboration, communication is focused more on showing the relevance and value of knowledge and expertise (i.e., what *about* the expertise is important to accomplish collaborative goals?) rather than on exchanging knowledge/expertise itself. Finally, practical implications are provided for groups that are seeking to build new collaborative relationships on how to effectively communicate their

interest, as well as for groups that are frequently approached by external groups on how to determine potential values of involving them into an existing process.

B. When Initiating Collaboration is Problematic

Most people in groups and organizations recognize the importance of working collaboratively with others. Some become aware of the need for or benefit of collaboration on their own and/or through voluntary interactions with their existing partners (Shumate et al., 2005), and then mutually create joint opportunities. Others realize it involuntarily through external influences, mandates, or other environmental exigencies, such as donor-driven coalitions (Cooper & Shumate, 2012). In the former, communication in the embryonic stage of collaboration is likely to be more personal and less institutionalized than the latter context which focuses on meeting pre-established goals (Van de Ven & Walker, 1984).

In both cases, however, *the need for others* is clear from the outset of collaboration. In the former, organizations may have already benefited from the same relationship in the past and believe that continuing the collaboration will bring more advantages (Gulati, 1995); or perhaps maintaining the relationship itself can be a strategic move for managing legitimacy (Hardy & Philip, 1998). In the latter, groups and organizations understand the necessity of their interdependence for gaining resources and/or making sense of the given tasks (e.g., Barbour & James, 2015). Then, *initiating* collaboration in both contexts is not so problematic--even though their communication *during* collaboration becomes complicated--because participants are aware (a) who they want or need to work with, and (b) why the particular partners are needed.

The remaining question, which the present study is designed to explore, is regarding how organizations might initiate collaboration if/when others do *not* recognize the necessity of working with them. Contemporary organizations are generally expected to be open to engage with others in the increasingly boundary-permeating and well-connected communicative environment (Stohl, Etter, Banghart, & Woo, 2015); but, committing to collaborative relationships with others whose values are not recognized is risky (Haas, 2010). Thus, organizations that want to "break in" and be recognized as potential collaborators ("initiators") need more than legitimacy as perceived in their environment (Suchman, 1995). Initiators have to communicatively negotiate with and motivate their target organizations to see why/how they can be relied upon and for what types of resources (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003).

A type of communicative resource that has become highly desirable and critical for organizational success in the uncertain and knowledge-intensive environment is *expertise* (Treem & Leonardi, 2016). Exchanging knowledge and expertise, both internally and externally, is a communicatively difficult enterprise (Kuhn & Porter, 2011); but once it is accomplished, it is believed to bring many advantages (e.g., Argote, Ingram, Levine, & Moreland, 2000; Szulanski, 1996). To convince target organizations of their value and to ultimately break into collaboration with them, initiators may offer their unique expertise as a negotiation tool. However, existing research provides limited explanations to understand how initiators might engage in such communicative negotiation practices, and under what conditions it will lead to (un)successful initiation of collaborative relationships.

There are two main reasons for the limitation. First, most studies on knowledge/expertise-sharing explore existing collaboration with well-defined membership

boundaries (e.g., Barbour & James, 2015; Barley, 2015; Bechky, 2006). For example, Barley's (2015) study examines weather researchers' existing collaboration with various external organizations who have already made a contractual commitment to do joint work. Therefore, whether/how the researchers and their partners communicated their knowledge/expertise to convince one another of the need for their collaboration is not explored. Second, as the following discussion will delve into, there are competing explanations in the current literature about whether external knowledge from initiators would be valued or unappreciated by their target organizations. *Externality* of knowledge, in this context, means in terms of functional, sectoral boundaries as well as physical organizational distance.

C. The Value of External Knowledge and Expertise

When initiators present their knowledge and expertise to break into collaborative relationships with others, the target organizations may easily perceive its value. According to Menon and Pfeffer (2003), organizations often prefer knowledge obtained from outsiders to their internal resource due to its scarcity. To many organizations, externally shared expertise can seem more special, unique, and valuable for expanding organizational knowledge base (Bierly, Damanpour, & Santoro, 2009) or accelerating innovation (Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke, & West, 2006). This is contrasted with the fact that internal knowledge is believed to be more readily available and sharable whenever it is needed—although it is often not true (Szulanski, 1996). Further, organizational leaders tend to scrutinize internally shared knowledge more rigorously—thus flaws are more easily found—than when they receive the same knowledge from external experts (Menon & Pfeffer, 2003).

From this theoretical point of view, initiators' communicative attempts at using their expertise for breaking into collaboration should be effective, at least initially.

Yet, compelling theoretical arguments have also been made to explain why target organizations might avoid or resist initiators' knowledge and expertise. First of all, engaging in external knowledge sharing will cost target organizations time and energy for outcomes that may be minimally or not beneficial to them (Haas, 2010). Similarly, it is difficult for target organizations to fully trust initiators and determine whether their motivation is genuine or opportunistic (Gulati & Nikerson, 2008). Moreover, they may be concerned that relying on initiators' expertise will take some resource control away from them (Van de Ven & Walker, 1984). As such, some organizations are said to have "Not Invented Here" (NIH) symdrome—a term that describes organizations' bias toward ingroup knowledge, and suspicion about the value of or even resistance against externally shared knowledge (see Antons & Piller, 2015, and Hansen, 2009 for reviews). Given that knowledge and expertise are situated and communicatively constructed in local contexts (Kuhn & Porter, 2011; Treem, 2012), it is perhaps not so surprising to observe such a belief about superiority of internal knowledge. From this vantage point, initiators will have huge communicative hurdles to overcome in their attempts at breaking into collaboration.

Given these competing arguments about the (un)known value of external knowledge and expertise, research suggests how organizations might use internal organizational strategies to deal with this problem. On one hand, if organizations are hesitant to rely on external expertise, they can maximize internal resources by developing mechanisms for effectively identifying ("who knows what"), sharing, storing, or retrieving their members' explicit and tacit knowledge (e.g., Brandon & Hollingshead, 2004; Yuan, Fulk, Monge, &

Contractor, 2010). On the other hand, if organizations need or desire to be more receptive of external knowledge, they can foster a culture that allows a fluid flow of ideas (David & Fahey, 2000), increase absorptive capacity (Szulanski, 1996), or use technology to increase visibility (Leonardi, 2015) beyond the organizational boundary. Granted, these are not mutually exclusive and organizations can utilize all the strategies to capitalize on both internal and external knowledge/expertise.

Yet, such strategies are valuable only from the perspective of organizations that wish to control where knowledge comes from. In other words, we do not know what can be done from the perspectives of external organizations that wish to convince others to accept their expertise. How can initiators, whose goal is to develop collaborative relationships with other organizations, communicate their knowledge and expertise so that the target organizations will see them as potential partners rather than being suspicious and/or resistant? Further, why might (or might not) such communicative practices lead to successful initiation of collaboration?

D. Methodology

1. Background

To explore the two primary research questions, I conducted a year-long field study in two metropolitan areas--one in the Southwestern United States and one in the West Coast of the United States--and followed the work of urban planners ("planners" in short, hereafter) at Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) in respective regions. MPOs exist in urban regions with a population greater than 50,000 to convene various local organizations for transportation and land use planning activities. Among many different projects of MPO

planners, long-range regional planning (LRP) makes an ideal context to focus for the purpose of this study.

LRP is a project intended to provide planning visions and directions for the next 20-25 years, which includes how the region should grow and what specific developments should be in place to support the growth. Due to its broad conceptualization and impacts, many groups outside of MPO approach planners with their feedback and ideas as a way to get involved in the LRP process. Participation in LRP does not offer the groups any direct or tangible benefits; but, they are motivated to gain legitimacy in their environment, and/or more often, simply due to a heightened sense of citizenship and desire to contribute.

For this study, I focused on communication between MPO planners and external groups and organizations that were new to or had not been an active part of, but wanted to get involved in the LRP process ("initiators"). Initiators' communication with planners is crucial in that planners, as conveners of existing collaboration for LRP, determine who to bring together for what specific purposes. The two MPOs I studied in two geographically different regions shared similar organizational practices for their LRP processes. But, because they engaged with a different mix of external groups and organizations, collecting data from the two sites allowed me to increase the rigor of the findings by identifying commonalities across a diverse set of initiators. In the analysis, I collapsed the data and did not make regional distinctions between the two MPOs.

2. Data Collection

During the field study, I collected multiple types of data from the research sites, including in-depth interviews, informative documents and organizational artifacts, and field notes from nonparticipant observations at planning meetings and workshops. The primary

data for the present study were collected via semi-structured interviews with MPO planners (n = 31) and three to nine representatives from 11 different external groups and organizations who were labeled as initiators (n = 62), for a total of 93 interviews. I identified the initiators through snowball sampling by asking planners to provide names of key contacts from the groups and organizations with whom they started engaging during the recent LRP process. After planners referred to key individuals, I contacted and interviewed them, and asked them to refer to other members of their organizations that were active part of the initiation efforts. During the snowball sampling process a twelfth entity—property rights organization—was identified as an initiator, but due to the difficulty of getting in touch with the main organizers, I could not interview them in person; instead, I collected reports about the organization's involvement, such as journal articles and testimonials from people who were present when the property rights activists interacted with planners.

Prior to conducting one-on-one, face-to-face interviews, I organized two sets of semi-structured interview protocols for MPO planners and initiators. Both protocols included questions regarding interviewees' background (e.g., work history, education, and knowledge/expertise required to be successful at their jobs) and their understanding of LRP (e.g., "Could you describe the LRP in your own words, including its purpose, scope, and status?"). In the protocol developed for planners, I focused on their engagement with and evaluations of initiators. Specifically, I asked planners to describe the following: (a) which external groups have approached them, why, and how; (b) to what extent they engaged with the external groups; and (c) how they evaluate the groups' approach, involvement, and contribution, if any.

In the protocol prepared for initiators, I focused on their motivation, strategy, and involvement. I asked specific questions including: (a) why they contacted planners and what they think about the MPO's work; (b) what efforts they made to communicate their motivation and/or interests; (c) whether, how, and to what extent they became involved in the LRP process. I probed for specific examples of memorable interactions or critical incidents that they believe contributed to initiating collaboration, or challenges they faced and how they might approach differently in the future. I recorded all the interviews and transcribed them verbatim, which resulted in 1,300 single-spaced pages of document.

3. Data Analysis

After data collection was completed, I analyzed the interview data with two aims. The first was to examine the extent to which initiators were successful in developing collaborative relationships with planners, and second, to understand how they were able to do so through communication. To do so, I engaged in three stages of data analysis. The first stage was aimed at classifying the 12 external groups/initiators in terms of their level of success in breaking into collaborative relationships with MPO planners. To determine initiators' relative success, I followed the method used by Edmondson, Bohmer, and Pisano (2001) and computed a *collaborative initiation success index*.

To calculate the index, I turned to planners' interview data and analyzed how they evaluated the initiators. This way, I could rely on the perspective of planners who interacted with all the groups in the same region, rather than using initiators' evaluation of their own practice. I read through planners' interview transcripts with a research assistant and calculated each initiator group's *sum of ranks* on the three criteria: (a) the number of planners who voluntarily named the group when asked about "which external group they

collaborate with"; (b) the level of contribution to LRP on a one to three scale, with one being no to minimal contribution and three being a high level of contribution affecting some changes in the LRP process and outcome; (c) the extent of interactions--whether their communication was a one-time event or regular engagements. The analysts separately coded each planner's interview and ranked the initiators, and then compared the results. The difference was less than 18% and resolved through extensive discussion. As a result, the 12 initiators were ranked within their respective region (i.e., six initiators in each of the two regions), with the sums of ranks ranging from three (if ranked first on all three criteria) to 18 (if ranked sixth on all three criteria). After listing the groups according to their index, I classified the five highest as successful or high success, and the five lowest as unsuccessful or low success (see Table 5). To reflect the step changes in the success index I ignored the two middle cases, following Edmondson et al. (2001).

The second stage of analysis was aimed at examining and comparing communication practices used by high versus low success groups to break into collaboration. I began by conducting within-case analyses of the five groups and organizations in the high-success category and open-coded specific activities in which they engaged to initiate collaboration. Then, through across-case analyses, I found similar patterns across successful initiators. I repeated the same process with groups and organizations in the less successful category, and compared the practices between the two categories. This stage resulted in five communicative activities that emerged in both categories but were qualitatively different: framing, evaluating, justifying, establishing expertise; and suggesting.

Table 5. Participants and Collaboration Success Index

Sorted by collaboration success except the planners

Groups	Number of Interviews Conducted	Organization Type	Region	Collaboration Success Index *(Sum of Ranks)*	Collaboration Success Level *(High/Low)*	Example of Planners' Quotes on the Groups Involved
Urban planners	15	Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)	A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Urban planners	16		B			
Local government staff	9	Public agency	B	3	High	"...local government staff come to our workshops, and they get it (what we are trying to do) ...when we shared the planning analysis results, they wanted to see more emphasis in certain areas, so we did the scenario analysis process...those discussions we had with them allowed us to evaluate the scenarios effectively." (Planner-B #5)
Communication specialists	7	Public & Private consulting firm	A	4	High	"We meet with them every week pretty much…and create a lot of the content for public workshops and go through what questions we need answered." (Planner-A #2)
Environmentalists	3	Nonprofit organization	A	7	High	"We tried to project environmentally friendly growth plans, but we aren't trained in the subject area. But these folks actually know the stuff super well. They know about 30 different categories when we may know 10-15 of them." (Planner-A #10)
Social justice advocates	3	Nonprofit organization	A	7	High	"They were given an official seat to develop one of the four major planning scenarios…they get heavily involved… it is an interesting relationship because we know they will try to sue us, but we want them to sue us because that's their right." (Planner-A #12)
Transportation Engineers	6	Public agency	B	7	High	"When DOT doesn't get along with other agencies, we still make sure we have a good relationship. We meet regularly to ensure the projects are running smoothly." (Planner-B #9)
Business developers	4	For-profit organization	B	9	—	"I've gotten regular feedback from developers whether what we are doing is possible…you can't always get that information (what kinds of market-based decisions are being made) from planners. We have to make sure we are in touch with reality." (Planner-B #6)
City Engineers	8	Public agency	B	12	—	"Planner X worked with engineers when he was putting together the systems guide...it was painful for him because the perspectives are so different. A planner might say it would be beneficial to slow down the traffic, and an engineer will say, "What!?" (Planner-B #5)
Policy makers	7	Public agency	A	13	Low	"We do planning analysis and make suggestions, 'Be careful, this might have unintended consequences.' But they don't want to hear that. They want the policy to go through because it's popular, and they believe that it's the best thing for their city." (Planner-A #9)
Transportation modelers	8	Public agency	A	14	Low	"We had a hard time trying to be on the same page…modelers focus on engineering side and are black-and-white, asking 'Is it going to be X or Y?' and we are like, 'Well, there's kind of a range of things…' The tension just grew and grew." (Planner-A #1)
Public health specialists	3	Nonprofit & public agency	B	16	Low	"...health has this very specific way of doing an intervention and using measurable outcome...when I think about impacting public health, I think more about the built environment and how it's designed...it would be good to agree on strategies but it would be difficult... I still have no idea what we can do together." (Planner-B #8)
Community members	4	Residents	B	16	Low	"The public engagement committee exists but haven't had meetings in years...they only met on an ad-hoc basis…it was never formally dissolved. It isn't a good state." (Planner #10)
Property rights activists	0	Activist group (Tea Party)	A	18	Low	"There was a strong presence of property rights activists with a high level of aggression to the point that we had to call security…when somebody is yelling and screaming, or trying to physically attack, it is difficult to have a conversation." (Planner-A #7)
Interviews total: 93						

The third and final stage of analysis started by combing through the data to describe the overall communication process, as the previous stage suggested that initiators' communication involved a series of communication practices. To do so, I engaged in an iterative process of constant comparison between the identified communication activities and the data to arrange them based on the order in which they occurred. Then, I grouped the practices into two major categories: criticism and suggestion. This stage resulted in process models describing the communicative practices of successful and unsuccessful initiators (see Table 6 and 7 for examples).

E. Findings: Strategic Criticism

Two primary categories of communicative practices emerged in the data: *criticism* and *suggestions*. Successful initiators first communicated their criticism of the current LRP process through three specific activities: *framing* of the problem; *evaluating* the project; and *justifying* the evaluation. Then, the criticism was followed by the initiators' suggestions, which involved *expertizing* their ideas for improving the existing collaboration and differentiating their expertise. External groups and organizations in the *successful* category engaged in these practices which led to convincing urban planners of their potential value and need for participation (Figure 1), whereas practices of those in the *unsuccessful* category led urban planners to believe that collaborating is not a viable option (Figure 2). In what follows, I define and describe each aspect of the process model and how it contributed to initiators' breaking into collaboration by comparing examples from successful and unsuccessful cases.

Table 6. Examples of Strategic Criticism Used by High Success Groups

Criticism			Suggestion	
Framing	Evaluation	Justification	Expertization	Differentiation
[Learning about planners' interests and adopting one to frame their agenda] "We met with the staff early to find out how they were grappling with the challenging issues…(as a result) we knew that there was an affinity for conservation and innovative mindset, so we started going that way" (Environmental group)	**[Challenging a specific aspect of the project based on a reasonable criterion]** "The planners liked the planning option A, but as engineers, I would have to say, 'No, it is not efficient and doesn't meet the state guideline, which says that we have to have at least this wide road first to make it happen." (Transportation engineers)	**[Rationalizing negative evaluation]** "They (planners) might find us to be pesky…but, we make their jobs easier by helping them tell their story in a way that resonates with the public. What does that do if the residents can't understand it?...That's why I fight to stay in meetings and say, 'This is my role (to critique)!'" (Communication specialist)	**[Providing concrete, feasible steps for "what to do"]** "(In order to improve the current practice) organize public meetings at times and in places that are accessible to community members, with childcare and translation…we have grassroots groups that work with thousand residents, so they (planners) can fund these groups to do it" (Social justice advocates)	**[Showing unique position or expertise for "how to" apply the previously shared suggestions]** "We are, as city-level people, in a position to understand our city's needs, but we can also start thinking about implementing the plan because we have focused on the similar issues for our own city planning before" (Local government staff)

Table 7. Examples from Data Characterizing Unsuccessful Criticism

Criticism			Suggestion	
Framing	Evaluation	Justification	Expertization	Differentiation
[Framing the issue as something anyone can do; i.e., downplaying the target organization's work] "Planning happens to all of us every single day. You plan in your own household, then you know it. You want to buy a new car and figure out where you are going to get the money…That's planning, and it's the way you live. In that sense, I have done planning my whole life" (Policy maker)	**[Evaluating without concrete criteria or evidence, but based on speculations and biased assumptions]** "Their opposition was based on the conviction that planners use methods that force members of the public to unwittingly endorse a predetermined outcome…planners reported that the property rights activists' participation is illegitimate and thought that their action was on behalf of national Tea Party groups." (Based on a written report about property rights activists' communication) **[Target organization's perspective]** "If someone was opposed to transit or something, we would go more into the nuances of their concerns, but we couldn't possibly engage with them (property rights activists) productively"		**[Sharing suggestions that are not specific, seem impractical or ideal without demonstrating how they can help implement]** "(When we see the plan) we are more likely to say, 'Well, you can put more housing in this area.' Because that makes more sense to us, and we tested that in our statistical model and confirmed that it works a lot better…but the planner was like, 'I don't believe anything the tool says.'" (Transportation modeler) **[Target organization's perspective]** "We GET the results, but given the sensitivity of the political process on these kinds of decisions, we just have to have a filter for that…(despite what the model shows) the region's political structure says, no, you can't do that."	

Figure 1. Successful Initiators' Communication Process Model: Strategic Criticism

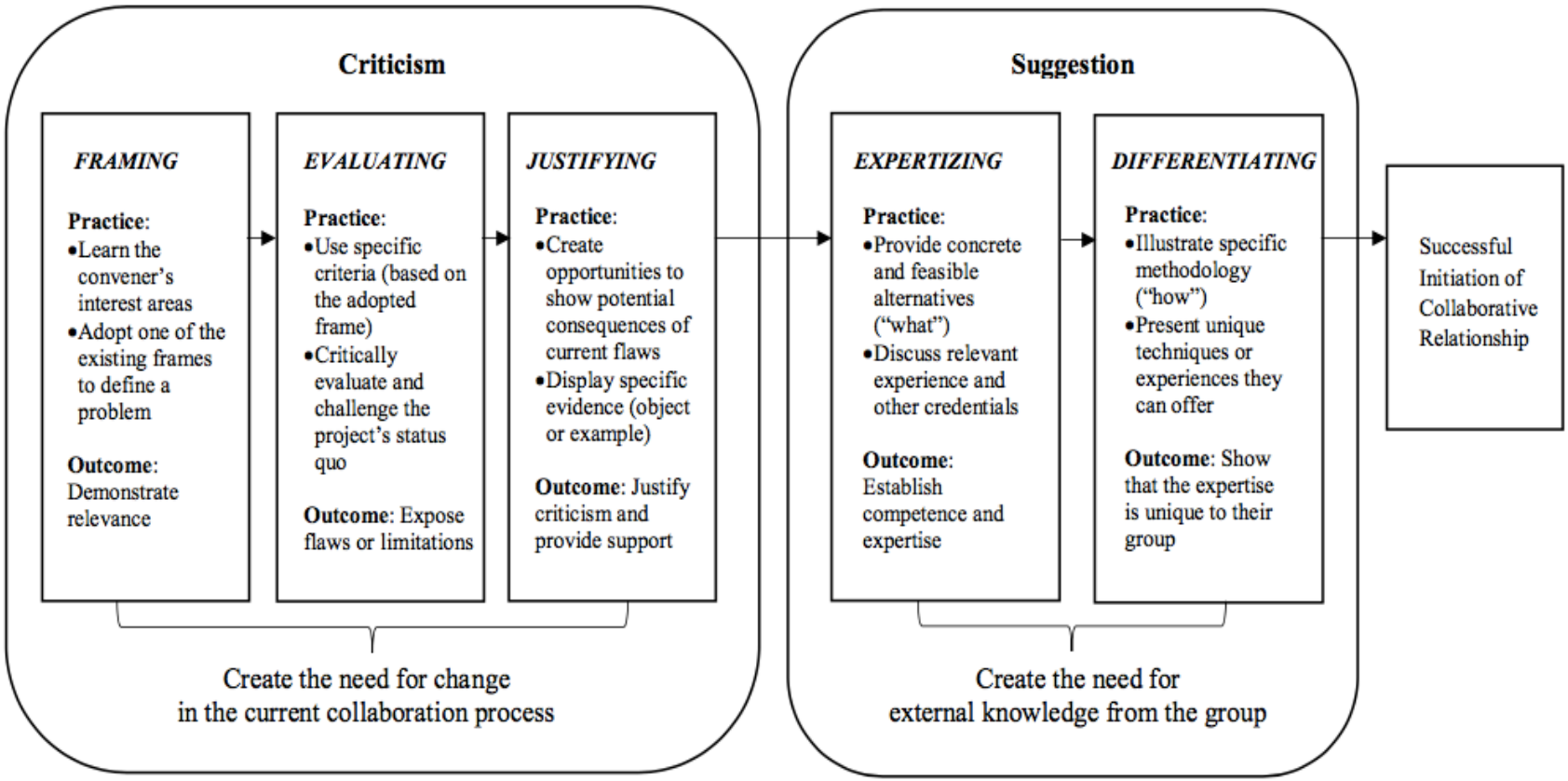
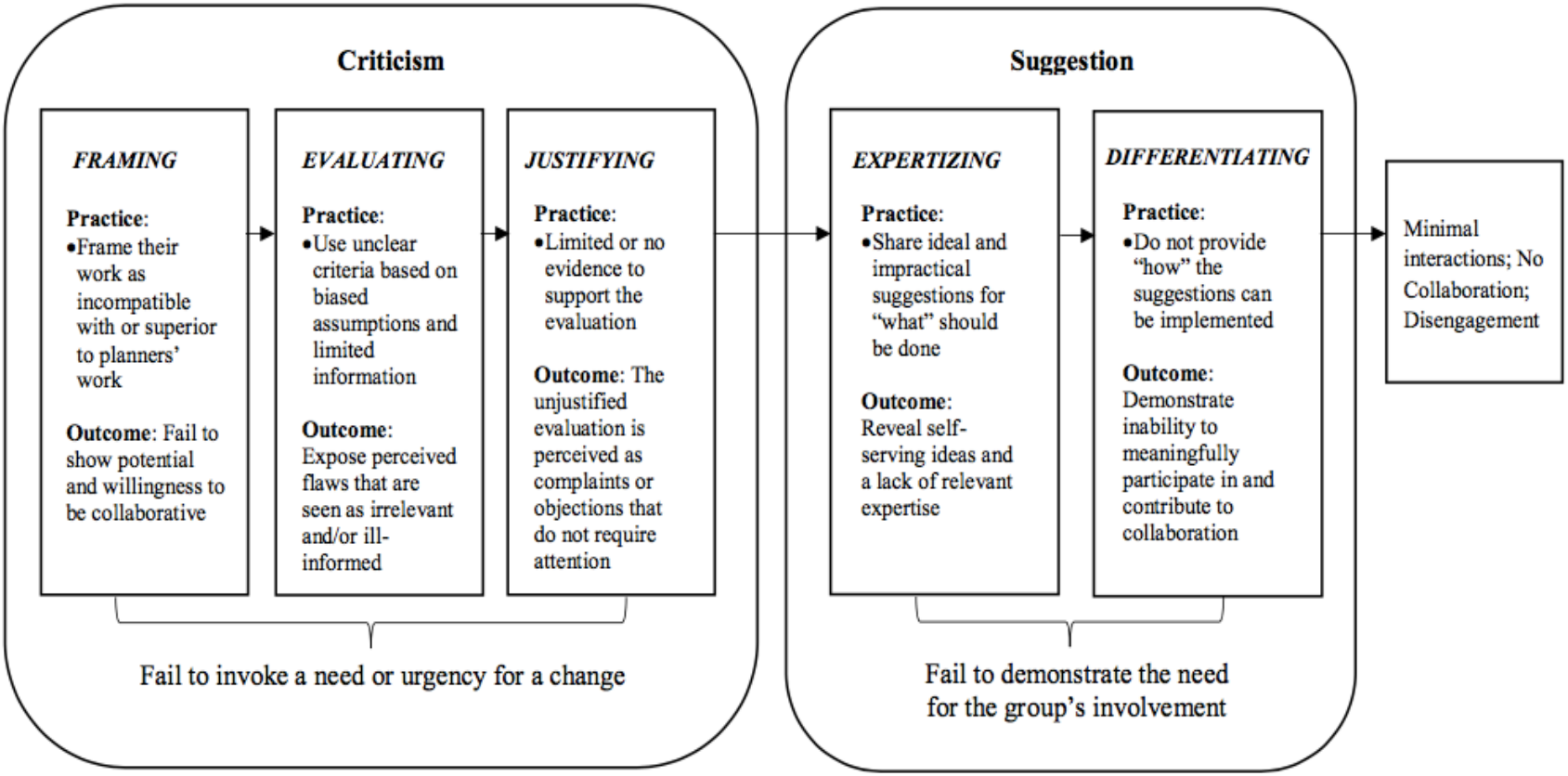


Figure 2. Unsuccessful Initiators' Communication Process



1. Criticism

Initiators in both successful and unsuccessful categories reported that their motivation for approaching urban planners was because they saw problems in LRP that they believed need to be improved. As such, their initial communication with planners involved criticism of the current LRP practices. By definition, criticism is "the expression of disapproval of someone or something on the basis of perceived faults or mistakes" (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). It is somewhat counterintuitive to observe such communication from groups that want to build collaborative relationships with planners, because it can potentially be risky due to the fact that the criticism (a) is unsolicited negative feedback, and (b) comes from groups that planners do not trust or whose expertise has not been validated. Indeed, not all criticism contributed to breaking into collaboration; the groups in the *successful* category followed the sequence of three distinct but interrelated communicative activities in their criticism—framing, evaluating, and justifying—whereas those in the *unsuccessful* category did not effectively follow these steps.

a. Framing

Initiators' perceived limitations in or complaints about the LRP were intentionally framed in such a way that reflect their choices regarding how to grab planners' attention and how to demonstrate their relevance to the collaborative project (Cooper & Shumate, 2012; Putnam & Stohl, 1996). To do so, successful initiators researched and learned about planners' key interest areas and priorities, and then adopted one of them to frame their own agenda. The issues that initiators wanted to put forward did not always align with planners' interests, in which case they used planners' frame to fit their agenda.

For example, a social justice advocacy group framed social equity in an environmental policy frame, because they realized that environment was one of the key issues planners were trying to tackle. A representative from this group admitted, "To be frank, our motivation for creating a more just society is not so we have an environmentally better planet…that's a great side effect, but not our primary goal; but you have to tailor your conversation to planners." Another successful initiator, local government staff, presented their interest in working closely with residents with a "big picture" frame. Their main concern was that the LRP lacked mechanisms to effectively incorporate residents' voices. To direct planners' attention to this issue, one representative from this group told planners, "It is important to step outside of a 30,000 foot-level view," because he had learned that planners' day-to-day tasks focused on analyzing micro-level data and that planning staff desired to involve more activities that help them directly connect with residents. His group's framing of 'bringing local people's voices' as 'not missing the big picture'—even though that is not necessarily how the group usually characterizes their own work—successfully convinced planners that the group's interest is connected to the overall goals of the LRP.

While successful initiators demonstrated their relevance effectively through adopting frames within planners' interest areas, groups in the unsuccessful category did not make such accommodative efforts. Instead, they framed their goals as personal-emotional issue or even incompatible with those of planners. For example, a leader of a local community organization explained that her group opposed one of the LRP projects to develop areas near an Indian reservation because, "I came here to battle with sprawl. I don't want sprawl and have great sympathy with the Native Americans…so I inserted myself (to participate in) anything I read or heard about the project." Her group did not consider why the plan was

deemed important by planners in the first place. Another unsuccessful group, transportation modelers, framed their job as conflicting with that of planners by explicitly stating, "The purpose of modeling is *not* to make planners and their constituencies happy." One modeler explained, rather cynically, that statistical modeling is to ensure that the LRP will be a worthwhile project, but he often finds that it is *not* the case. He said, "The purpose of the models is to anger someone who probably didn't plan an efficient project in the first place. In this way, unsuccessful initiators failed to show how their interests and goals may be meaningfully related to those of planners.

b. Evaluation

Once initiators demonstrated their relevance by presenting their broad agenda framed in terms of planners' interests, they shared their evaluations of the LRP. As stated earlier, the groups in both successful and unsuccessful categories were motivated by their perceived limitations of and dissatisfaction with the LRP, thus their evaluations were overall negative. However, how they communicated the negative assessments were contrasted between groups in the two categories.

Successful initiators critically challenged the planning project by using specific criteria, which they developed based on how they framed their issue of focus. For example, an environmental group, who framed its interest in terms of "innovative and responsible planning," evaluated the current LRP in terms of "systematic integration of conservation in planning." Their evaluation letter, which was sent to planners prior to face-to-face meeting, states that the LRP fails to identify tangible and innovative strategies to integrate conservation in all stages of planning activities. The environmental experts also pointed out that the main reason for such failure is because there is not anyone responsible for

conservation issues in the collaboration process. In this way, successful initiators had clear, relevant, and reasonable criteria for their evaluation, which exposed specific flaws or limitations in the LRP.

By contrast, unsuccessful initiators used unclear (or no) criteria based on misinformation or biased assumptions for their negative evaluation, which urban planners found unhelpful, difficult to agree to, or take seriously. Policy makers, for instance, often expressed their complaints about the LRP, and one participant said, "I tell them (planners) over and over again, 'This plan doesn't work for us, and your theory doesn't apply to us…we don't need the new facility that your plan shows we should build." A transportation modeler, also from the unsuccessful category, explained that the LRP is non-scientific and has limitations based on his assumption that "planners are like advocacy group who plans for products based on what their local constituencies want to see." As in both examples, unsuccessful initiators either rejected the LRP entirely or disapproved the effectiveness of planners' work without pointing to a specific standard or assumption that they believe the LRP is violating. Such communicative practices exposed flaws that planners viewed irrelevant or ill-informed. For example, one urban planner reacted to policy makers' negative evaluation by stating, "They are much more concerned with short-term expedients, which might lead to an outcome that is not good in the long run."

c. Justification

While using specific criteria for evaluation helped to effectively direct planners' attention to limitations of LRP, providing justification for the criticism was crucial in making it reasonable and thus easily acceptable to planners. To share their justification, successful initiators utilized concrete evidence which functioned as boundary objects

(Barley et al., 2012). By using such explicit evidence, they showed potential consequences and implications of the flaws they found in the current LRP. For example, in addition to the formal evaluation letter, the aforementioned environmentalists used a color-coded map to show how the LRP will impact the conservation areas. A representative from the environmental group described why she believes the map was effective in rationalizing their evaluation:

> These are areas of water recharge and carbon storage [pointing to white space in the map]…this is just a blank space in the map that planners use, but it has different colors in our map…we said (to planners), "You may see blank space where you can build a new road, but we see colors…(for example) the road will be impacting the farmland (pointing to a green-colored space in the map).

Further, the environmentalists also supported their argument by explaining that the same approach (i.e., systematic integration of conservation in decision making) has been adopted by other similar organizations. This, together with their use of color-coded map, provided reasonable support for the environmentalists' criticism, and in turn, helped planners understand a topic about which they have little specialized knowledge. Similarly, social justice advocates created and used an "evaluation report card" as a tool to share their justified criticism (see Figure 3). The report card shows letter grades (C- or lower) for each of the evaluation criteria and reasons for such low grades. Overall, initiators' preparation for and communication of *justification* helped their criticism focus on the project-specific matters through reasonable processes rather than unwarranted confrontations or attacks.

On the contrary, unsuccessful initiators' communication did not involve solid evidence for justifying their criticism; instead, it revealed their negative attitudes and emotional reactions as opposed to thoughtful and well-intentioned criticism. Often, because

their evaluations were not based on specific criteria to begin with, they could not properly justify their negative evaluation. For example, a member of a local community organization

Figure 3. Social Justice Advocates' Grade Report Card

Interim Report Card
ABC Social Equity Advocates

Does Metropolitan Planning Organization make the grade?

For: _____
Subject _____

D

Overall Grade

Community Power……D
Investment without Displacement……C-
Affordable Housing……..C
Transportation Justice……...F
Quality Jobs……..C-
Safe and Healthy Communities……C-

Objective	Grade	Evaluation of Current Plan	How to get an "A"
Ensure community decision	D	Progress: Needs improvement:	Act on community input…; schedule public hearings…
Protect vulnerable communities from gentrification and displacement	C-	Progress: Needs improvement:	Use an appropriate method to measure the risk of displacement
Build and preserve affordable housing	C	Progress: Needs improvement:	Award funds to jurisdictions that produce their fair share of both low- and moderate-income housing…
…	…	…	…

believed that planners used population projections that were questionable and too steep. His reason for such an argument was not based on some demonstrable evidence, but he explained, "From my view, the population growth has really slowed down…I would like to see a steady population growth in our region in the future." When external groups attempted to criticize the LRP this way, planners considered it unfounded, ill-intentioned, not urgent and worthwhile to engage. Planners also viewed such unjustified criticism as simple complaints that will disappear as the LRP progresses.

In sum, the three distinct but sequentially-connected activities—framing, evaluating, and justifying—constitute a communicative practice of *criticism* in the proposed model. Criticism that eventually led to external groups' breaking into collaboration with urban

planners was framed in relation to the planners' interest areas, based on specific criteria, and properly justified through concrete evidence. In this way, successful initiators were able to not only garner planners' attention and prove their relevance, but also create and effectively demonstrate the need for changes in certain areas of LRP ("there is a problem for which something needs to be done differently"). By contrast, unsuccessful initiators failed to invoke such an urgency or need, as their criticism was not properly framed, based on unclear or no standards, and not justified. As a result, unsuccessful initiators were seen by planners as noise, threats, or opponents who demand changes that are neither relevant nor important.

2. Suggestion

For successful initiators, creating the need for a change through criticism was the first step toward getting their potential value recognized. When they were successful at developing criticism, planners felt that not only did an important problem exist, but they wanted that problem to be solved. Establishing a problem, though, did not inevitably lead planners to ask initiators to join the collaboration. To be able to break into the collaboration, initiators had to position themselves as uniquely able to solve the problems they had convinced the planners that were in need of solving. To do this, they began to share *suggestions* as the potential "problem-solver." In sharing their ideas for resolving the issues, successful initiators demonstrated their *expertise* and *uniqueness* of it to convince planners of the need for their involvement. Unsuccessful initiators, however, failed to prove to the planners that they can meaningfully participate in and contribute to the LRP process.

a. Expertization

I use the term *expertization* to describe how successful initiators presented their suggestions and established expertise. To expertize means to give an expert opinion on a given topic (Oxford Dictionaries, n. d.), usually after conducting a careful study (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, n.d.). Successful initiators shared suggestions in ways that demonstrated their thoughtful analyses by providing tangible and feasible alternatives to the current LRP practices ("*what* should be done"), and also validating their relevant experiences. Planners were aware that the proposed alternatives were not the only option for addressing the problem that initiators revealed through their criticism; however, seeing that the external groups and organizations have already analyzed the implications of their suggestion *and* have the abilities to implement it made it an appealing option.

For example, transportation engineers criticized the LPR for being too "visionary" and lacking clarity, and shared their expert suggestions for what specific steps need to be taken to resolve the issue. One engineer summarized how he expertized his suggestion:

> I said to planners, "All we need to do is to add another lane right here." And they said, "Wouldn't it affect the low-income areas?" So we said, "Our design standard shows that this is a much safer option, and here is all the engineering data we've gathered to prove it which goes back 40 years."

As shown, planners questioned the engineer's recommendation initially, but he was able to demonstrate his credential and confidence in his suggestion by using the engineering safety guideline and relevant research. Using tangible data, however, was not always necessary for expertization. In the case of local government staff, they shared expert opinion about designing effective public meetings by sharing testimonials from their previous experiences. Their criticism was that planners often organized meetings "too loosely" which made it difficult to get people interested and actively participate. They suggested planners to think

through, for example, what maps to show and what the order of things should be in those meetings. In these successful cases of expertization, planners started seeing these external groups as experts and admitted that they do not have the same expertise (e.g., "They certainly know more about X than we do"). This way, initiators proved that they were not just critics who problematize the LRP and demand changes, but potential collaborators who could contribute their expertise.

By contrast, unsuccessful initiators shared ideal and impractical suggestions on what they believed planners should do to improve LRP, which often revealed their self-serving ideas. For example, a policy maker criticized planners for ineffectively dealing with a group of people who strongly opposed a new public transit development project in their neighborhood. He said, "They should have gone back to the community and said, 'Look, we are going to shut down these,' then they would have stopped the whole thing (protesting)." This suggestion, from planners' perspective, was not only an ineffective but also unethical idea which was based on the policy maker's one-sided view. A planner responded to this recommendation by stating:

> They (policy makers) say that to be liked by people because they are running for office and trying hard to get re-elected…(but) we strive to do a good job hearing people who are hard to hear and don't have a strong voice, and representing people who don't have a lot of money.

In a similar but more extreme case, a property rights organization shared their demand—as opposed to expert suggestions—which was that the whole process of LRP must be stopped altogether. This suggestion stemmed from their framing of regional planning activities as attempts to control their property rights. Their approach did not offer any alternatives that could provide some basis for potential negotiation for improving the LRP in mutually agreeable ways. Rather, it revealed their illogical thinking and hostility toward

planners. Planners reported that the communicative behaviors of the property rights activists became too disruptive and frustrating, and they had to make efforts to actively avoid and disengage with them. Eventually, the activists stopped appearing at meetings which signaled that they gave up their demand. In this way, unsuccessful initiators' communication of suggestions revealed self-centered goals and a lack of relevant expertise to become a contributor in the collaborative process.

b. Differentiation

Through expertization, successful initiators established competence and expertise by articulating "what should be done" to improve LRP. But, this meant that planners had an option to take the suggestion and choose partners on their own to implement the solution (e.g., consultants or internal staff). Therefore, external groups needed to demonstrate why their specific involvement was necessary—not that of any other groups with similar expertise—in order to break into collaboration. Through this final communicative activity in the proposed model ("differentiation"), successful initiators presented methodologies ("how to" implement the proposed suggestion) in a way that showed their uniqueness, so that planners could see why involving them in the LRP would be necessary.

To illustrate, I return to the previously mentioned example of social justice advocates who used a grade report card as a communication tool (Figure 3). In addition to providing letter grades and justification to present their criticism, they included a column labeled "How to get an A," which describes some concrete actions that need to be taken to make LRP more socially equitable. This strategically crafted section of the document mentions a methodological tool that social equity advocates have developed. Specifically, they suggested that planners use an appropriate measurement for the risk of displacement, so that

the LRP can better protect vulnerable communities from gentrification. Although the report card itself did not go into details about the measurement, social justice advocates stated in an interview how they offered the method to planners and said, "(To adopt these methods) you don't need to hire some outside consultant. You've got us—we've been working on this for a while and can help you build capacity to get this going." By demonstrating the uniqueness of their approach, initiators convinced planners of their value.

In contrast to successful initiators' differentiation, unsuccessful initiators did not provide any specific ideas for how their suggestion can be implemented. Therefore, their suggestion did not seem practical, valuable, or special enough for planners to pay attention. More often, planners fundamentally disagreed with the suggestions provided by unsuccessful initiators, as observed in the property rights organization's example earlier. In another example, the local community organization's objection to LRP was perceived to be "unfounded" and simply based on "fear of changes" by planners, as they did not demonstrate how they can contribute to improving the LRP other than disrupting the process. Since planners dealt with objections from many groups, they shared a belief that anyone can object and complain about LRP, but not everyone can meaningfully discuss how it can be done better. This belief explains why differentiating suggestions as unique is particularly important to be seen as potential collaborators rather than opponents. One planner spoke about why he finds it difficult to engage with groups that merely object their work without ideas for "what" and "how to" improve: "Somebody (groups like the community organization) can come and try to kill a project with $50 and an opposition, when somebody (planners) has been working on a project for ten years."

In sum, groups that were successful at breaking into collaboration with planners first shared *criticism* to invoke a problem and create a need for a change in the LRP, and then offered *suggestions* for alternative practices/methods as the experts in their domain to demonstrate the need for their involvement as collaborative partners. By contrast, groups that were unsuccessful at collaborating with planners demanded a change that was seen irrelevant or unnecessary, and further demonstrated their incompetence by sharing unrealistic or no suggestions.

F. Discussion

This study makes three primary theoretical contributions. The first is demonstrating the embryonic stage of interorganizational collaboration, which differs from the *beginning of* collaboration where participants start to discuss, for example, shared mission (Heath & Sias, 1999). This study examined how collaboration comes to exist when groups have not yet realized the need or value of working with one another. The results showed that organizations are not equal in their interests and motivation (Keyton et al., 2008), and those with more desire to "break in" collaboration with others (i.e., initiators) need to make proactive communicative efforts comparable to courtship. Exploring the pre-collaboration process helps to reveal how organizations plan their communication strategically (Barley, 2015) to create the need for their participation and demonstrate their commitment and potential contribution, rather than passively waiting for collaborative opportunities to emerge. This process is precarious in that it may not lead to actual collaboration, whereas the beginning of collaboration (i.e., once after organizations agree to collaborate) will likely lead to continued collaborative communication.

The second theoretical contribution is developing a communicative model of strategic criticism that describes a two-step process (criticism-suggestion) through which initiators can persuade collaboration conveners of their potential value. I use the term *strategic criticism* to describe and highlight how initiators shared criticism intentionally to invoke an external stimuli to which collaboration conveners must pay attention. As discussed earlier in this chapter, organizations may welcome external expertise for its scarcity, or resist it because they prefer internally available expertise. If initiators want to persuade others to recognize the value of their expertise, criticizing seems to be a counterintuitive choice that can potentially encourage resistance--especially because it is unsolicited negative evaluation. However, initiators strategically criticized the current collaboration project to expose flaws in a rational manner (i.e., showing how relying on internal knowledge is not enough), so that they can maximize the perceived scarcity and superiority of their expertise. One group in my sample in the unsuccessful category (public health specialists) shows a good example of why criticism is a necessary practice before providing suggestions. As the health specialists did not share any criticism of LRP, planners viewed their ideas non-imperative or unnecessary—albeit good—to adopt at that time.

The third contribution is shifting the theoretical focus from *communication of* knowledge to *communication about* knowledge in collaboration research. When individuals or organizations engage with others to find collaborative opportunities without having previous relationships or understanding of what they can do, the communication needs to demonstrate the potential value of their expertise; thus, focusing on *what about* knowledge will be valuable in the context of collaboration (e.g., my knowledge in environmental protection can help improve X). Past research has yielded rich understanding about how

people with different backgrounds can exchange and transfer their knowledge/expertise by overcoming semantic, syntactic, or pragmatic differences (see Carlile, 2004). Yet, since actors in the pre-collaboration stage are not yet utilizing their expertise for specific tasks, communication of knowledge (e.g., explaining different theoretical traditions in environmental sciences) will likely overwhelm potential collaboration partners and make it difficult to see the value of the knowledge. Thus, by uncovering how demonstrating the relevance, legitimacy, and uniqueness of their expertise led to successful initiation of collaboration, the findings of the study provide empirical evidence for the importance of communication *about* knowledge in the embryonic stage of collaboration.

This study also suggests several practical implications for initiators as well as organizations that try to make decisions regarding which external groups to choose as collaborative partners. First, initiators need to be informed about broader issues about which their target organization is concerned, in addition to their specific interest area. Without social justice advocates' familiarity with environmental issues, they would not have been able to frame their interest in a way that garnered planners' attention. This necessitates some anticipatory work (Barley, 2015), and they might also consider externalizing the value of their knowledge by using boundary objects. Given that target organizations are not cognizant of what impact the external knowledge can make—let alone understanding what they are—using tangible materials can help them process the shared information through visualization. Not *all* successful initiators in my sample utilized boundary objects, but those who did were all successful at building collaborative relationships with planners (e.g., social justice advocates' report card and environmentalists' color-coded map). Lastly, initiators' strategic criticism will be important in terms of lowering uncertainties for target

organizations regarding what role(s) they can play. This will be especially critical if the target organization tends to be approached frequently by external organizations.

Organizations that often deal with external entities that want to collaborate with them need to be aware that external knowledge/expertise can be a double-edged sword; external knowledge providers can help make more informed decisions, but also can be a source of influence as they may selectively present information or put a subtle emphasis on favored solutions (Haas, 2010). However, to the extent that external groups and organizations demonstrate their relevance to and understanding of some existing issues, paying attention to their strategic criticism might be worthwhile—regardless of whether it leads to actual collaboration or not. In general, it is not wise for organizations to disregard others' feedback because they do not see any concerns. As Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) argue, organizations often do not know what problems to solve until they know the answer. When initiators offer their expert suggestions, organizations are able to see problems they did not know existed and consider improving their practice, by either accepting the initiators as collaborators or seeking others' solutions. Organizations can request additional information from external groups to help determine whether involving external experts will be the right approach or not, such as considering if/why their expertise is unique compared to others that can offer similar solutions and how it might influence their organizational decisions.

This study explored a novel context—interorganizational collaboration in urban planning—that has not received attention in the literature. Because urban planning is a public process, planners are used to responding to "external shocks" when unknown external groups share feedback on or express opposition to their work (van Burren & Gerrits, 2008). Also, for planners and their practices are motivated by the broader goal of the society, they

are generally open to the possibility of external groups' involvement if the groups prove their right to participate. However, organizations in the private sector may be more cautious of engaging with external groups and prioritize profit motives. Future research can examine whether/how similar or different communicative strategies may be required to initiate partnerships in various collaboration contexts (e.g., for-profit versus public processes, collaboration among organizations versus teams within a single organization) as compared to this study's findings. Another limitation of the study is related to the possibility that the groups and organizations categorized as "unsuccessful" in the analysis may achieve success in working with urban planners in the next planning cycle four years later. The categorization was an appropriate analytic decision because this study intended to capture the initiators' success in breaking into collaboration with planners immediately following their strategic criticism. A future follow-up study in four or more years later could reveal that what was considered unsuccessful strategic criticism may have contributed to "planting collaboration seeds for the future," as one participant put it, and led to some unintended collaborative opportunities.

IV. *Getting On*: Convening for Tension-Based Collaboration

A. Introduction

Researchers have long recognized that tensions are an inherent aspect of organizational life, from getting socialized into professions (Olufowote, 2015) to managing work-life balance on the job (Putnam, Myers, & Gailliard, 2014). Communication scholars, in particular, have taken the perspective that individuals have agency to communicatively respond to and manage tensions in such ways that can lead to constructive outcomes as reframing, transcendence, and reflective practices (e.g., Barge, Lee, Maddux, Nabring, & Townsend, 2008; Gibbs, 2009; Woo, Putnam, & Riforgiate, 2017). Thus, scholars view tensions and contradictions as not only ordinary, but also opportunities for change (Panayiotou, Kassinis, & Putnam, 2017) and innovation (Smith & Tushman, 2005), if managed properly.

This burgeoning body of literature has focused on individual-level communicative tension management in organizations, with a few exceptions (e.g., Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Stohl & Cheney, 2001). Employees' attempts to navigate tensions in constructing self-identity in light of competing expectations show a good example of individual-level tension management (Larson & Pepper, 2003). A possible explanation for the focus on individuals' communication is that existing studies often examine tensions that occur in a single organizational boundary, such as intra-organizational change (Jian, 2007); examining individual organizational members' different reactions to the same organizational tensions allows researchers to understand why such differences are observed and how they might influence certain organizational outcomes. These studies have contributed to theorizing tension management as patterns of individual

responses to tensions become identified (see Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016 for an extensive review); for example, selecting one of seemingly opposite choices often lead to negative consequences (e.g., withdrawal) whereas oscillating between the two options leads to more fruitful situations (Tracy, 2004).

In this line of research, organizations are often painted as having little control over when and how tensions emerge. Studies do identify and describe specific organizational processes or institutional structures to the extent that they cause, trigger, or reveal certain types of tensions to which individuals respond, such as superior-equal role dialectics in healthcare teams (Apker, Propp, & Ford, 2005), but how organizations might actively engage in practices to manage and shape the tensions is not well understood. If we take the perspective that tensions and contradictions are normal and form building blocks of organizational life (Putnam & Boys, 2006) and that organizations learn and evolve over time through the iterative process of actions and reflection (Edmondson, 2002), it is reasonable to imagine an active role that organizations might play in setting up tensions in different ways based on their beliefs about or experiences with tensions. Thus, without understanding how organizational-level activities may shape and/or interact with individual members' experience with tensions, we cannot gain a full picture of organizational tensions and their implications.

Therefore, the study reported in this chapter is premised on the idea that, as much as individual organizational members manage tensions through language which constitute their unique experience (Bakhtin, 1981), organizations (i.e., those in charge of organizing) are likely to do the same through organizing practices intended for dealing with tensions in certain ways. Further, I argue that organizations do so not only reactively (i.e., responding to

tensions as they result from some incidents), but also proactively as they organize for future interactions among the members. To examine this point empirically, I present a study of interorganizational collaboration and how those in charge of organizing the process—*conveners* who bring together relevant groups and facilitate the collaborative process (Wood & Gray, 1991)—manage tensions in their organizational communication practices. I use a comparative study of collaborative urban planning processes in two metropolitan regions to show how conveners' different approaches to tensions (i.e., practices intended for resolving/minimizing tensions versus practices intended for encouraging/maintaining tensions) lead to different outcomes.

The findings of this study will contribute to organizational tension and interorganizational collaboration literature. First, this study will reveal what/how specific organizing activities have potential for capitalizing on tensions in collaboration, as well as the consequences of (not) utilizing such practices. If tensions are viewed as productive forces, especially in organizing collective participatory processes (Koschmann & Laster, 2011), tension management theories can inform and be informed by understanding what/how organizations can do willingly to create an environment in which tensions can be sustained. Second, by revealing three general types of tensions that are inherent in convening for interorganizational collaboration (i.e., regarding *who* participants, for *what* purposes, and *how* to engage), the findings help to theorize how these tensions provide *tensile strength* necessary for dynamic interactions and generating a diversity of inputs to achieve collaborative goals.

B. Literature Review

Tensions occur as organizational members face uncomfortable situations in which they feel compelled to make choices between seemingly opposite and inconsistent options (Fairhurst, Cooren, & Cahill, 2002). For example, working parents may feel the need to focus on their work versus family life because it seems difficult to have both. Despite the negative connotations of tensions as struggles, organizational communication scholars have argued for embracing tensions and contradictions as natural occurrences in human organizing processes (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). Drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin's work (1981), scholars often examine the interplay between dialectical tensions that push and pull, and how individuals' actions, interactions, and meanings in the midst of contradictions constitute their experiences. From this view, tensions do not necessarily become overt conflicts or neatly negotiated at a specific point, but are an ongoing process that plays out in different ways.

What is important to understand, then, is not that tensions exist and may cause feelings or anxiety or clashes of ideas, but how people can communicatively respond to them (Tracy, 2004) so as to make the best of their given situations. Putnam et al.'s (2016) recent metatheoretical work shows three categories of tension management in which people commonly engage. First, *either-or* approach treats dialectical tensions as independent of one another, which invokes defensive reactions as people select one option over the other or even withdraw from the situation. Second, *both-and* approach treats tensions as interdependent and allows for more productive reactions, such as paradoxical thinking, integrating, or vacillating between opposite options. The most productive of the three is *more-than* approach, which moves beyond the given options by reframing the tension-based

situation in a new light; transcending and creating third spaces; engaging in dialogue and reflective practice; and connecting the opposites to make the them mutually beneficial. For example, when faced with a superior-equal occupational status contradiction within a healthcare team, nurses can reframe it as a team harmony and make polite requests to those at lower-ranks as opposed to giving orders (Apker et al., 2005).

Some limited research has shown how *either-or* and *both-and* approaches might play out at the organizational-level, which has similar implications to those used by individuals. For example, *either-or* practices are evident in how companies focus on exploration (i.e., improving and building on existing routines) or exploitation (i.e., developing a new/different trajectory)—or separate them—for their innovation and/or adaptation (Gupta, Smith, & Shalley, 2006), when they may well be interdependent and simultaneously achievable. This often increases power imbalances as organizations prefer one over the other and distribute resources accordingly (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Putnam 2015). *Both-and* practices are more common as organizations attempt to find a balance or compromise between seemingly opposite options, such as developing workplace flexibility policies to manage work-life tensions. However, this approach can turn into *either-or* situation if organizational members' communication and use of such policies fails to keep the balance and rather reinforces the splitting of work-life (Kirby & Krone, 2002; Putnam et al., 2004).

Yet, little empirical evidence exists to show how organizations might attempt to use *more-than* approaches through their practices. While embracing tensions, chaos, and disorder by appreciating differences and generating diverse perspectives is an appealing and theoretically sound notion, organizations, by definition, are entities that attempt arrange activities systematically so as to achieve an order from disorder and meet their goals

(Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). Environmental factors, such as institutional pressures and resource issues (e.g., deadlines), might also make it difficult for organizations to remain open or continue to engage with tensions in creative ways (Lammers & Barbour, 2006). For example, most organizations use some socialization tactics to reduce newcomers' experience of role uncertainty and facilitate their efficient transition into contributing members (Morrison, 2002), rather than letting them navigate organizational tensions and explore different options for themselves. This does not mean what organizations do to achieve an order will result in an orderly environment; in fact, organizational decisions and formal processes are often based on "rational myth" and can lead to unintended consequences (Fairhurst et al., 2002; Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Given the well-recognized benefits of *more-than* approaches to tensions and little empirical research on the tension management practice at the organizational-level, the remaining question is whether organizations can promote tensions through their practices that are intended for achieving an order to some extent—and if so, how they can do it and what outcomes can be expected. One relevant example is strategically crafting an organizational goal or mission statement ambiguously so that it allows for multiple interpretations and possibilities (Eisenberg, 1984). Yet, this example represents one-way and somewhat static communication between organizations and their members, and does not show how it is dynamically intertwined with recurring micro-level organizational communication practices. Therefore, this chapter seeks to explore what it means for organizations to embrace tensions and how they can incorporate *more-than* approaches into their concrete, ongoing organizational communication activities.

I explore this question beyond a single organizational boundary and examine interorganizational collaboration, which involves a heightened level of tensions as multiple groups with different interests, goals, and practices try to work together (Lewis, Isbell, & Koschmann, 2010). In this setting, the organizing entity is the conveners of the collaboration who bring together relevant groups and gather diverse inputs to move toward the collective goals (Wood & Gray, 1991). Although it is not always the case, interorganizational collaboration is often voluntary as groups desire to achieve a goal that they cannot accomplish alone. As Koschmann and Laster (2011) found in their study of community organizing, tensions can help sustain participation and generate energy necessary for dynamic interactions and productive relationships among participating groups. Studies that show benefits of tensions, like this, depict the generative energy as a resulting property of the setting in which participants communicatively respond to emerging tensions and reconstitute the social context. In other words, organizers would not be able to foresee the benefits of tensions but only through reflecting on past experiences.

Taken together, the study reported in this chapter has three major goals. The first is to identify tensions inherent in convening processes for interorganizational collaboration, which may be proactively managed with an intention to shape the collaborative environment in certain ways. The second is to explore what conveners do in their practices to manage the tensions differently—specifically, when they embrace tensions versus when they do not. The third is to examine outcomes of the different practices on interorganizational collaboration. In what follows, I report on a study of two interorganizational collaboration cases, in which the conveners of one setting valued and promoted tensions through their practices, whereas the conveners of the other setting attempted to avoid tensions when engaging in the same

practices. Despite the theorists' treatment of tensions as productive forces, the latter case is not uncommon; many practitioners view tensions and paradoxes as potential sources of struggle or failure, as evident from popular business literature (e.g., Cancialosi, 2014; Dood & Favaro, 2006; Goddard & Pierre, 2016) suggesting minimizing tensions or choosing the "right tension" (*either-or*), or finding the right balance or a compromise (*both-and*).

C. Methodology

1. Background

I conducted a year-long field study of urban planning processes in two metropolitan regions in the United States, which I will refer to as "Region A" and "Region B" for anonymity. As a federal regulation, every metropolitan area is required to have long-range planning in place to aid future housing and transportation developments. The long-term planning project is carried out by the respective region's urban planning organization, and those who work for this organization are typically referred to as "planners."

Long-range urban planning is aimed at building a good community and improving residents' quality of life. This fits the definition of *wicked problem* or *messy problems*, which is characterized by high uncertainty and complexity, and requires organizations across traditional boundaries to engage in collaborative decision making and problem solving (Calton & Payne, 2003; Hardy, Lawrence, & Phillips, 2006). Planners, as conveners of the interorganizational collaboration, work with various groups in the region who wish to get involved in the planning process. While planners are federally mandated to have a certain amount of public participation, they can make decisions on how to organize the participatory and collaborative process; with whom they want to work more or less closely; and how they use the inputs and resources gathered from their interorganizational

engagements. This collaborative planning process is inevitably tension-filled as participants have different ideas about what a good community should look like, and there are no right or wrong answers.

For this study, I chose a comparative design and examined planners' convening practices at two different urban planning organizations—one in Region A and the other in Region B. While there were some regional differences regarding what specific challenges they dealt with, such as population growth or air quality issues, the two planning organizations had the same organizational processes and characteristics for their long-range planning. The four categories in which they share similarities are: (a) organizational type; (b) objectives; (c) federal guidelines; and (d) collaboration tool (see Table 8 for descriptions). The two comparable cases provided an opportunity for me to examine the common tensions that planners face in their organizing practices, how they manage the tensions in similar or different ways, and how the tension management might lead to different outcomes.

Table 8. Shared Descriptives between Region A and Region B

Characteristics	Planning Organizations in Region A and B
Organizational type and context	Federally mandated and funded urban planning organizations that engage in long-range planning activities
Objectives	Planning for the region's future housing and transportation developments in a way that helps to improve sustainability, livability (i.e., quality of life), health and safety, and economic growth through gathering diverse inputs and perspective from a broad cross section of the public
Federal guidelines	Same requirements for gathering and integrating public inputs on planning priorities and potential impacts of the long-range plan
Collaboration tool	Same microsimulation technology for data analysis and sharing

2. Data Collection

During my field research in Region A and B, I used multiple methods to understand planners' regular practices and their interactions with interorganizational collaboration participants, which helped to triangulate the findings. Those methods included observations at decision-making meetings (approximately 20 hours) and collecting various documents, but the primary method for this study was in-depth, semi-structured interviews (n = 110). In Region A, I interviewed 14 planners, which included everyone involved in the long-range planning from the planning organization, and 38 individuals who represent 14 groups that are part of the collaborative process. Region B has a higher population than Region A, thus a bigger planning organization with more staff. In Region B, I interviewed 23 planners and 35 individuals who represent 24 groups. The participants of interorganizational collaboration came from various sectors (i.e., government, non-government, and for-profit) with different interests, including computer programming, transportation engineering, business development, Native Indian culture, health, civil rights, law, and environment.

During the interviews, I asked the same set of questions to planners and representatives of collaborating organizations about their backgrounds, goals, and practices. Specifically, for planners, I asked for detailed descriptions of their role as conveners, their thoughts on what makes good conveners, and rationale, as well as questions about challenges and rewards they find in the collaborative process. Importantly, I asked what they did in particularly challenging situations through specific examples and the outcomes, and followed-up with a request to reflect on the experience, such as "Would you have done anything differently?" and "Why do you think that is the best way to deal with the situation?" To get at the organizational-level approaches to tensions, I made sure to clarify

whether their actions and decisions in those situations were based on their personal preference or expected as part of the planning organizations' norms. By finding commonalities across planners' responses to these questions, I could gather descriptions and narratives of convening practices that represent their organization's tension management. In the interviews with representatives of collaborating organizations, I asked questions regarding their working dynamics and interactions with planners, thoughts on and evaluation of planners' work, and their level of involvement and contributions. All 110 interviews were recorded, anonymized, and transcribed verbatim.

3. Data Analysis

The data analysis process involved three major stages, each aimed at addressing the three research goals. In the first stage, I analyzed planners' interview transcripts from both Region A and B to understand common tensions inherent in convening for interorganizational collaboration. To do so, I conducted open-coding to capture different types of work that planners described (e.g., forming committees, sending out information and updates) and what decisions they made when engaging in those practices. By comparing planners' (i.e., conveners') accounts to those of collaboration participants, I found three categories that subsume the open codes, which are determining (a) who should be involved in the interorganizational collaboration; (b) what the collaboration should focus on; (c) how, or in what formats, collaborating groups engage and interact. The tensions that emerged within each of the three categories included *experience* versus *expertise*, *process* versus *outcome*, and *formal* versus *informal* (see Table 9 for examples).

The second stage of analysis was aimed at identifying how planners managed the tensions through their convening practices, and if there were any differences in Region A

and B. I went back to the data and conducted selective coding by flagging specific communicative activities that are connected to how each of the tensions played out in the collaboration. For example, I considered what planners did to focus on *process* versus *outcomes* as they discussed their plans for future meetings, and what collaboration participants thought about it. From this process, I identified five practices that correspond to the three tensions: (1) defining experts; (2) identity work; (3) anticipatory work; (4) information sharing; (5) organizing meetings. The first two practices are related to the *experience—expertise* tension, the third and fourth with *process—outcome*, and the fifth with *formal—informal.*

All the tensions and convening practices were present in both Region A and B, but differences emerged between the two cases in how planners managed the tensions through their practices. Therefore, the second stage of analysis continued as I compared the data from the two cases by paying attention to how planners rationalized their intensions behind each of the five practices differently. This allowed me to examine planners' different orientations to tensions—whether they preferred to choose one option over the other, both, or did not limit their practices based on the two options (i.e., *more-than* approach). For example, one planner's statement, "We are hesitant to involve advocates because they are biased," represents *either-or* approach to *experience—expertise* tension (i.e., preferring unbiased expertise in determining who should participate), whereas another planner saying, "Anyone has the right to share inputs and get involved, even if that means he or she will sue us," represents *more-than* approach to the same tension (i.e., open to involving anyone without specific expectations or requirements for who participates).

The third stage of analysis involved examining the outcome of conveners' different tension management. To determine what factors are meaningful to consider in this context for understanding the impact of tensions, I analyzed documents (e.g., brochures) and the planning organizations' websites and learned about the objectives of interorganizational collaboration. This way, I could understand whether/to what extent different ways of managing tensions help planners achieve (or hinder them from achieving) the collaborative objectives. I found that both regions' planning organizations aimed to gather as much and diverse inputs as possible from a broad cross-section of the public, so as to inform the planning activities and make the plan visible to a wide range of constituencies.

To examine and compare how planners in Region A and B are doing in relation to this objective, I considered three factors: (a) diversity of interorganizational collaboration participants; (b) groupthink; and (c) planners' readiness. Table 10 shows how these concepts are chosen and operationalized, as well as the coding outcomes compared between Region A and B. Based on these criteria, I determined that Region B's planning organization was achieving the objective better than Region A, overall. I went back to the data one last time to connect and make sense of the different tension management practices and the different outcomes in the two regions. Guided by DiBenigno and Kellog's (2014) visualization technique for showing their comparative study results, I illustrated the two regions' overall tension management process and outcome in Figure 4.

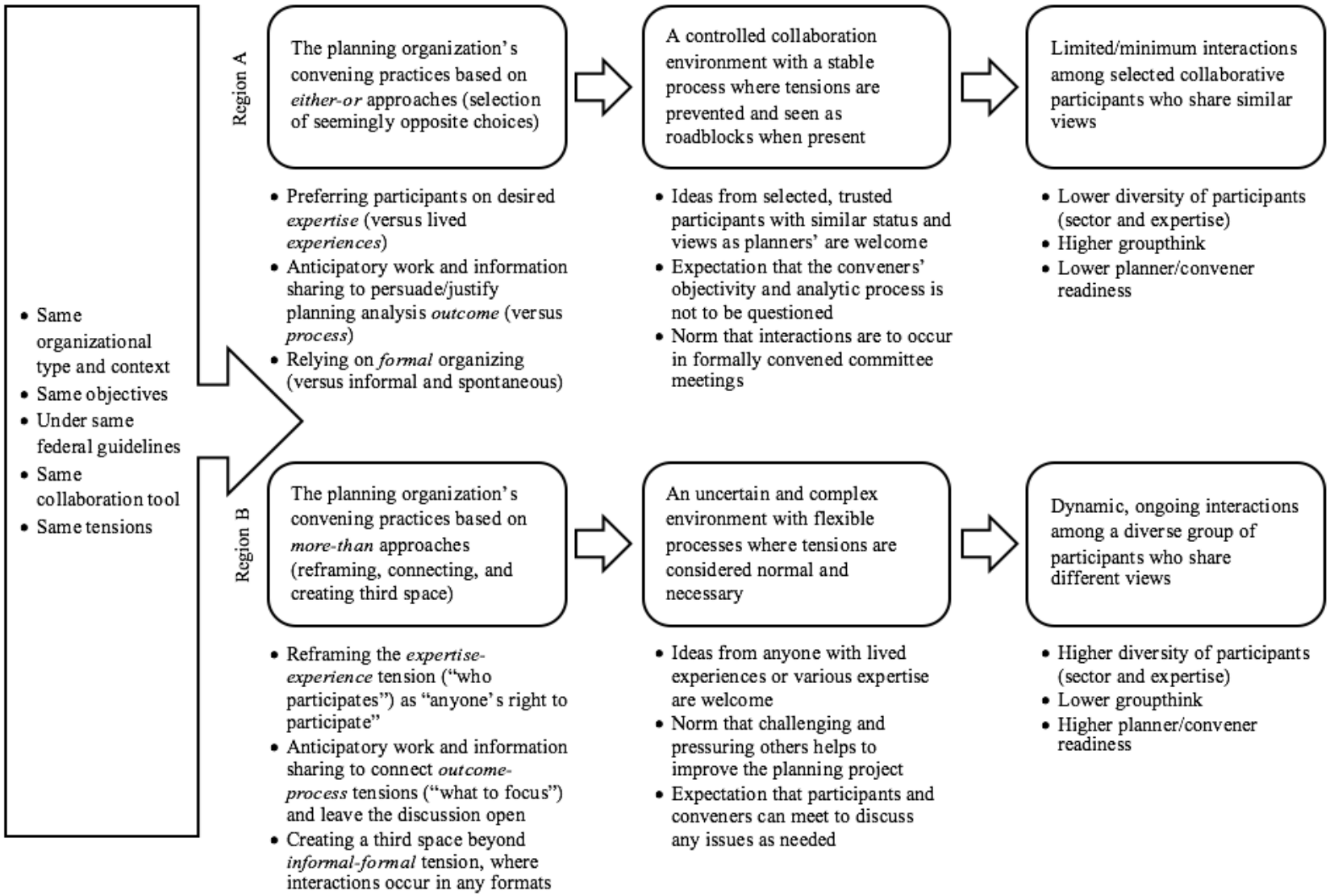
Table 9. Examples Illustrating Tensions Emerged in the Data

Tension Domain	Opposite Poles	Planner's Quotes
Who participates?	Experience	The data guys are very separate from what happens (in people's real life experiences) or how things work on the ground with policy influences and so forth (Cara, Region B)
	Expertise	(The data-driven work) is a state of the art methodology that is constantly being developed and fine-tuned. It's one of the best analytic tools that is used internationally and widely accepted by other organizations. I mean, you can't just sit there and make guesses. (Jeanine, Region A)
What for?	Process	Our community is concerned that this regional planning can lead to a loss of local control. Some people even believe that the planners are trying to tell the local jurisdictions what they can or cannot do, which is not true. So, when they see a certain output (of planning analysis), and the numbers are big and don't resonate with local practices, they are like, "Oh, look, they are trying to force a thousand housing units in our community. Where and how did they get this number?" People are now asking what they considered for their analysis to get the outcome they are presenting. (Derrick, Region B)
	Outcome	An average person is often looking for a particular answer to a particular question. Summarizing the 40-page document about the analytic process would be nice to know, but what they *need* to know is whether it makes sense to move the bust stop over there instead of here, or whether they should build a highway or not. So, you need a knowledgeable person (i.e., a planner) to do the analysis and process the information a few times, and interpret the outputs and share them (with collaborating groups). (Maya, Region A)
How to engage?	Informal	We're open to, and we always say (to collaborating organizations), "If you want to talk about the data, we're happy to talk about it whenever." And if I say something wrong, I call them the next day and say, "You know, when I said X this other day, that was actually wrong. It's actually Y." That kind of conversations happens a lot. (Anne, Region B)
	Formal	We have a planning board made up of elected officials, and have them nominate someone (for the citizens advisory committee). It hasn't been so successful and we are trying to reform the committee…maybe we can include interest groups that have not been on this committee and have quarterly meetings to discuss…(Chuck, Region A)

Table 10. How Planning Organizations are Achieving Interorganizational Collaboration Objectives: Coding Result Comparison

Criteria	Definition & Rationale	Operationalization	Region A	Region B
Structural and Functional Diversity	**Definition**: The extent to which collaboration participants differ in terms of their organization's sector and functional expertise **Rationale**: The more structurally and functionally diverse the participants are, the more the value of input sharing increases (Cummings, 2004).	*Structural* diversity: Percentage of collaborators who work in different organizational sectors (i.e., not in government sector)	17.6%	**48%**
		Functional diversity: Percentage of collaborators who have different expertise (i.e., non-experts in urban planning)	29.4%	**32%**
Groupthink (Kramer & Dougherty, 2013)	**Definition**: The degree to which collaborative participants have the same opinion about a particular issue **Rationale**: The lower the level of groupthink, the better the planning organization is doing at involving diverse participants with different perspectives.	Percentage of stakeholders who express same views and agreements as planners on a specific issue—in this case, the newly adopted data analytic tool. **Coding procedure**: I worked with two research assistants and coded each participating organization's opinion on the tool using one through three scale (1 = different opinion, 2 = neutral, 3 = same opinion as planners'), and then calculated the percentage of the organizations that are coded as three.	**41.6%**	24.2%
Planner readiness	**Definition**: The extent to which planners (conveners) are prepared and willing to engage directly with external organizations that are part of the collaboration process **Rationale**: The higher planners' readiness is, the more dynamic interorganizational collaboration process is, as collaboration participants can easily find opportunities to approach the conveners (planners) and interact with them to discuss issues or gain information; for example, lower planners' readiness can mean that there is a designated staff who engage with the collaborative participants and/or they simply play the role to moderate discussions.	*Planners' preparedness*: Percentage of urban planners who (have) directly engage(d) with interorganizational collaboration participants **Coding procedure**: I coded each planner based on their descriptions of their experience interacting with outside organizations (1 = yes, have worked with them directly, or 2 = no, have not), and then calculated the percentage of the planners who are coded as one.	57.1%	**66.7%**
		Planners' attitude towards interorganizational collaboration: Percentage of urban planners who express positive attitude toward engaging with collaborative participants **Coding procedure**: I worked with two research assistants and coded each planner's interview data to capture their attitude by using one through three scale (1 = negative attitude such as reluctance or hesitation, 2 = neutral or no explicit expression, 3 = positive attitude such as willingness, enthusiasm, or acceptance that it is an important part of their routine work), and then calculated the percentage of planners who are coded as three.	30.8%	**73.3%**

Figure 4: Comparison of Interorganizational Collaboration Process and Outcome in Region A and B



D. Findings

The data analysis revealed three types of tensions common in planners' convening practices in Region A and B; but, differences were identified in how they managed the tensions through a set of key organizational communication practices. Planners in Region A attempted to control and prevent the tensions from arising through practices that preferred one option over the other. On the other hand, planners in Region B promoted the tensions by engaging in practices that remained open to both seemingly opposite options and letting the interplay of the two create more messiness throughout the collaborative process. As a result, Region A had a well-controlled collaborative environment, which made the convening process seem neatly organized and smooth; yet, it limited gathering diverse inputs. The opposite was the case for Region B, as the collaboration process seemed messy but involved a variety of organizations that worked comfortably through differences in their ideas.

1. Tension One: Who participates? Experience versus expertise

The first tension is related to planners' understanding of and decisions about who the (potential) participants of the interorganizational collaboration should be. Although conveners are not necessarily gatekeepers, planners have agency to determine with whom they wish to keep minimal contact or work together more closely for specific purposes in their collaborative efforts. Most planners recognized that any individuals or groups with *lived experiences* in the region can voice their thoughts about and should be able to get involved in the planning process; but, an oppositional tension arose when some planners differentiated *experience* from objective *expertise* obtained from professional training and believed that people with *expertise* are more effective contributors. This tension existed in

both regions, but two communicative practices revealed differences in planners' approaches to this tension in Region A and B.

a. Defining Experts

Planners in both regions acknowledged that experts' participation in the planning process was helpful in advancing planning activities through offering unique knowledge and experiences that they do not have. However, planners in Region A had a narrow definition of who "experts" were, and preferred incorporating the narrowly defined expertise into the planning activities over inputs from groups whose experiences do not fit their definition of expertise. Specifically, they believed that experts were those who did not communicate their ideas with emotion and/or have an agenda that went against the current planning vision put forward by decision makers.

For example, advocacy groups worked actively to build connections with their respective region's planning organizations, and most of them have professional backgrounds in public policy or their specific interest area (e.g., education, environment, or social equity). While they were biased toward their goals, advocates were an important part of the region's political and social systems due to their impacts on key decision making processes. Planners in Region A, however, believed that engaging with advocacy groups "raises a lot of questions if it is an appropriate thing" due to their emotional reactions, and assumed that "advocacy groups do not want to see the development (included in the current regional plan) happen because of their agenda." Therefore, Region A's planning organization preferred to select experts whom they viewed as relevant and qualified for their collaboration, such as the region's well-established business developers, and seek their involvement. By avoiding interacting with "biased advocates," they ignored the fact that they are working with groups

that may well be as biased as advocates—biased in that they were chosen for their support for the current planning directions.

By selecting groups with narrowly defined expertise and limiting participation of those with relevant experiences that do not fit their understanding of expertise, planners in Region A attempted to prevent the tension between the two from emerging and complicating their collaboration process. By contrast, planners in Region B did not have preconceived ideas of what expertise should look like in order to contribute to the planning process. The planners explained that those with any experience in the region could be experts in their own rights and should have the right to participate in the process, even if they are biased and do not have the same visions as the planning professionals'. One planner's quote illustrates this approach:

> Working with those groups (e.g., advocacy groups) is very interesting, because they are adversary in the sense that one of those groups will very likely sue us--and if they sue us, it's very expensive and complicated. On the other hand, we want them to have the right to sue us because, if we're carrying our duties in a way that is in conflict with the law or harming the environment unnecessarily—or whatever their basis is for the lawsuit—they are entitled to sue us.

This way, planners in Region B reframed participants' *expertise—experience* tension as *exercising the right to participate* in the open collaboration process. Therefore, they were not concerned about *who* participates; instead, they focused on and valued what the participating groups had to say about the current regional plan. For not having specific criteria or expectations for who should participate, they even welcomed involvement of groups that strongly oppose the regional plans. This practice reflected their acceptance of the tension, which emerges from diverse—often conflicting—ideas shared by collaboration participants with different expertise and experience, as necessary to do their job well.

b. Identity Work

The *expertise—experience* tension was managed differently also based on planners' identity work. Identity work is an ongoing social and communicative negotiation process by which people construct a sense of self that they view appropriate in a given context (Watson, 2008); for example, professionals in prestigious occupations, such as physicians, engage in defensive mechanisms to uphold their roles (Bisel, Zanin, Rozzell, Risley-Baird, & Rygaard, 2016). The analyses showed that planners' management of the *expertise—experience* tension was related to how they attempt to construct their professional identities as planning professionals and conveners.

Planners in Region A viewed themselves and sought to maintain their identity as objective data scientists. Further, they wanted to be trusted and respected by their stakeholders for their data-driven work that is unquestionable. These desires translated into their practices as conveners. To construct and communicate the "objective" identity, they believed that it is important to be selective about who they keep in their collaboration network. Thus, the planners preferred to involve other professionals who share such "objective" identities as well as who understand the importance of data-based practices One planner mentioned that it is "a dangerous place to go" to involve groups who do not have those qualities, because it would hurt their efforts to communicate that they have "rigor and neutrality" and to protect their identity as a "respected and unbiased group of data analysts." In this way, the planners' identity work also reflected their preference for and selection of *expertise* over *experience* regarding who to (and not to) involve in the collaborative process.

On the other hand, planners in Region B constructed their identity realistically by admitting that their work can involve errors and biases, and wanted to be trusted for their

openness to criticism and willingness to make changes to their work based on collaborators' inputs. For example, when a nonprofit group asked questions about planning data, they were overwhelmed by the planners' explanations and said, "Oh my gosh, that is a lot. We trust you." John, a planner who was in the meeting, responded, "Well, don't trust us just because it's complicated!" The planners accepted that they cannot work alone to develop a rigorous regional plan and tried to communicate their identity based on the idea of approachability. A head planner, Dylan, described the time when one advocacy group came to his team to negotiate their entry into the planning process. The group made efforts to gain credibility and increase the possibility to get involved by explaining how they know Dylan's current collaborator. Dylan responded to the group, "It doesn't matter who you are, you don't need to know someone to get involved."

In this way, planners in Region B were not concerned about protecting their positive identity by limiting who participates in their collaboration. Instead, they tried to construct a realistic identity and embraced the fact that they may gain a negative reputation when/if the shortcomings of their work are revealed by collaboration participants. Hence, they reframed the *expertise—experience* tension as necessary sources to help spot errors and improve the planning project, which requires a variety of perspectives, experiences, and expertise. Through such reframing, the planners communicated their identity as conveners who prioritize the quality of the regional plan over their reputation.

2. Tension Two: What is it for? Process versus outcome

The second tension in planners' practices as conveners is regarding for which specific purpose their interorganizational collaboration is organized. The federal guideline for public engagement describes broadly that planners should demonstrate efforts to

consider inputs from various groups. Given that planners have limited time to engage with numerous entities for a number of different issues, they have a choice to focus on a specific activity when they convene for collaboration. As described previously, planners' main role--besides convening--is working with data (i.e., collecting and analyzing traffic and socioeconomic data), which is used to draw tentative conclusions about what developments are needed for the region's future. All planners agreed that it is crucial to hear feedback on their data analysis *outcomes*, so that they can consider all possible implications and adjust the outputs as needed; but, an oppositional tension arose when some planners disagreed about discussing the *process* of their data analyses. Planners in Region A chose to focus on the outcomes, whereas planners in Region B did not have a particular emphasis and discussed any aspects of their work, from data collection to analysis outputs. This difference was observed in the two following practices.

a. Anticipatory Work

Barley (2015) coined this term to conceptualize how data scientists' anticipation of their future communication with other professionals shape the way they go about their routine work. Planners engaged in this practice, as their work as conveners involves preparing discussion materials for their future interactions with collaborating organizations. But, planners in Region A and B anticipated different things. In Region A, planners expected to focus on receiving feedback on their data *outputs*, and therefore, engaged in work to best summarize the outcome of their work and its implications in understandable ways. Such an expectation was due to their belief that the mechanism for data analyses is too complicated for people to understand, as well as their confidence about the rigor of their data processing techniques. Thus, the planners did not see the need for discussing the

process with groups that do not have special knowledge about data science. Zack, a planner from Region A, explained this point:

> The reality of it is, it will be rare that people actually care about the details of the planning analysis process. Especially when you are talking with people who don't have time or interest to dig into the technical details, they really just want to know, "What does this mean for me?" So, I've used the analysis results as a tool to tell a story…as long as you establish that you did it as objectively as possible, people aren't really that interested in the underlying details.

Planners' (Region A) anticipation that their interactions will focus on making sense of the data *outputs*—and that some may accept or object them—shaped their work in several ways. Most importantly, increasing understandability and acceptability of the outputs were important criteria for preparing for collaboration. To meet the criteria, the planners consulted with local practitioners during their data analysis to understand where they see the future growth is going, what is or is not allowed to happen, and so forth, for "reality check." Also, they trained their staff and consultants to communicate the outputs with caution to prevent potential resistance; for instance, planners reminded the staff that they should say, "Based on today's plans and policies, the data outputs show that the likely future will look like this," instead of saying, "The planning organization wants the region to grow in this way." Lastly, even though the planners conducted analyses individually (e.g., each person working with different type of data, such as geographic and traffic accident data), they worked together afterwards to check, "Does this make sense?" and create a coherent story to assist participants with understanding the outputs.

In this way, planners in Region A focused on communicating the *outcomes* and not the *process* of their work (i.e., *either-or* approach) when convening for collaboration, which shaped their work to produce convincing representations of their data outputs. This is

contrasted with Region B's planners' anticipation that participants can question, challenge, or want to discuss any aspects of their work—despite their lack of knowledge about the subject—including data collection, analysis process, and outputs. Thus, instead of focusing on and preparing to explain a specific area of their work, they planned to show the fundamental principle behind their data-driven work. The planners expected that doing so will give participants a baseline understanding necessary to bring relevant inputs from various viewpoints, unlike Region A planners' beliefs that it would overwhelm the collaborators and unnecessarily complicate the process.

Such anticipation encouraged the planners (Region B) to work closely with a team of communication experts, to consider what needs to be explained for non-experts to understand data-driven planning work, and then to create presentation materials. A planner, Sammie, described "puzzle pieces" that were resulted from this anticipatory work:

> We created "puzzle pieces" which represent and visualize eight key inputs for our analysis to show what factors we were considering for a broader audience…this simple but data-driven explanations were the best available approach we could take. But, in the end, even if your inputs are totally clear and outputs are clear, some people are always going to be questioning and disagreeing.

As Sammie's quote suggests, the planners in Region B, despite their careful preparation of the materials, did not expect that collaboration participants will find them understandable or acceptable. Their anticipatory work was not carried out with the intent to increase confidence and attachment about the data-driven work they prepared to share, as it was the case for Region A; instead, planners in Region B fully anticipated the possibilities that they would have to modify the data analysis and/or outputs based on the feedback they receive. Therefore, the planners also prepared to reveal mistakes explicitly, for example, through

marking them in the data and making buttons to easily visualize where the errors are for when collaborators ask about them.

b. Information Sharing

Planners in both cases were open to sharing their information and made every effort to be transparent. But, similar to their having agency to determine who they want to simply listen and who they wish to actively involve in their collaborative network (i.e., the first tension regarding *who* participates), planners can decide which information they make available at all times or upon requests; either way, they are complying with the law by sharing the information and knowledge that they produce as a public service. The ways in which planners made such decisions on how to share which types of information with collaboration participants, of course, were aligned with their anticipatory work practices.

In Region A, planners' information sharing was focused on data analysis outputs. Whether it is at presentations or on their website, the planners mainly shared visualized data outputs as well as supporting materials to help explain the results for collaborating groups. When it comes to raw data and information about their analytic processes, the planners preferred to share them through high-level summaries at collaboration meetings and workshops. The main reason was, as mentioned earlier, that it would be too overwhelming for non-experts to process all the technical information; but, it was also partly that the planners considered such information as their intellectual properties and tried to protect them in some ways. They were, of course, open to share when collaborators ask for them, but they wanted to ensure that the information will be used for meaningful purposes first. For instance, Kelly (planner) recalled when a group of university students came to her team and asked for raw data and some analytic reports. Kelly was hesitant at first because she was

unsure of what the students will do with the data, but shared the requested information anyway. She later expressed to her manager her reluctance to share information when people, including collaborating organizations, request them without specifying their plans or having well-thought-out ideas for how they will be used.

In this way, planners in Region A viewed their collaboration participants (and the public in general) as the audience for their data *outputs* and desired to have some control over how they share other information. Kelly's narrative was contrasted with the experience of planners in Region B in a similar situation. Brad (planner) described when a group of nonprofit organization members and university researchers showed much discontent about the current regional plan's environmental implications. One day, when a graduate student working for the group came to Brad's office to get more information, Brad let the student "plug on an external hard drive and get all of the data files" so that the group could "have a deep dive into the data," conduct their own analyses, or double-check the outputs. Brad said, "They calculated some new things, wrote papers that got published in academic journals, but they seem somewhat odd and misguided." He added, "But, that's not my position to judge; even though I didn't find it interesting or valuable, someone found it useful and it helped someone's academic career. So that was overall a positive experience." Like this, planners in Region B made any information available to any groups without hesitation, even if they believed it would not lead to something helpful to them.

In sum, through anticipatory work and information sharing practices, planners in Region A managed the *process—outcome* tension by choosing the *outcome* (i.e., *either-or* approach). On the other hand, planners in Region B managed the same tension through preparing to discuss and sharing information regarding both *process—outcome*, and more

(e.g., raw data and explaining the underlying principles); this way, they treated both options equally valuable and enacted open communication processes to find opportunities to reimagine their work and improve the regional plan based on collaboration participants' inputs (i.e., *more-than* approach; Putnam et al., 2016). Consequently, collaboration participants in Region A rarely commented on or challenged the analytic processes, but had options to either (a) accept the data outputs as they are or (b) disapprove the outputs. On the contrary, collaborating organizations in Region B could take the data, re-do the analysis—provided that they have the abilities to do so—, and share completely different outputs with planners as alternative options for planners to consider.

3. Tension Three: How to engage? Formal versus informal

The third tension is related to how (i.e., in what formats or settings) collaborative interactions occurred. In the same way that planners can choose when they have public hearings and how to structure them (e.g., a simple question--answer format or open house style), it is up to the planners—the conveners—how they organize for their collaborating organizations to meet and interact. One difference is that, while planners are required to hold a certain number of public hearings (i.e., every region has the same amount of public interactions proportionate to its population), collaboration meetings can happen as (in)frequently as they desire or are able to handle, since it is not under the same regulation. Because urban planning involves a bureaucratic process with many rules and a clear hierarchy of authority, planners are generally used to organizing through formal mechanisms for decision making activities, such as committees and advisory boards. But, a tension arose when planners also found themselves informally engaging with groups in unstructured and

spontaneous ways. Planners in Region A and B were different in how they tried to manage this tension, mainly through their practices for arranging meetings.

a. Arranging Meetings

Arranging formal meetings helps to shape the interactions that occur among participants to some extent. For example, the convener (or chairperson) can create a list of attendees, provide a meeting agenda, and decide on a specific time when the meeting starts and ends. Of course, the interactions are not entirely predictable as the meeting structure is not the only factor that affects how meetings unfold; but, it gives the conveners some level of control and predictability. Planners in Region A preferred this option and wanted to limit their interorganizational interactions to formally convened meeting contexts. The planners had a long list of different committees for specific purposes, but they explained that when committee meetings have low attendance, discussions would become unproductive and the reasons for having the committees unclear. A quote from Jim, a planner in Region A who is in charge of convening a citizens advisory committee, illustrates this point:

> Members of the advisory committee had been on that committee for a very long time, and it was sometimes hard to bring them together…over time, things started to break down a little and the process wasn't effective for getting inputs from them…we are not sure what to do about it; we don't want to just throw the idea out and consider the committee dissolved. Maybe we can update the membership and call meetings every month or quarter.

In my interviews with two members of this committee, I learned that the committee has not met for almost two years and the members thought that the planners have dissolved the committee. One member speculated that her strong opposition to a plan, which happened a few years ago, may have frustrated the planners and caused the discontinuation. Regardless, this showed that, in Region A, planners' preference for organizing formal

meetings (i.e., *either-or* approach) limited the way in which interorganizational collaboration could occur. When committee meetings are not organized by the planners, the participants did not think to share their ideas through informal interactions because formal committees have been the primary way for them to engage with planners and other groups in the region. When some, who are not part of any committee, tried to informally approach planners, that often ended as a one-time event; for example, as explained earlier, when advocacy groups asked planners to discuss an issue with them, planners believed that the groups are not appropriate to become part of an existing committee do to their strong position and biases.

By contrast, planners in Region B did not limit how they engage with collaborating organizations. Formal committees were certainly one of many ways that the planners used to arrange meetings with their participants. But, the planners also embraced informal, spontaneous, and unexpected meetings, whether it was with a new group trying to enter the collaboration process or existing participants who wanted to discuss specific issues more in-depth. The graduate student who came to ask for information is a relevant example here. In another example, one planner—Terry—recalled the time when his team met with an advocacy group who wanted to discuss details of their data analyses, which was unplanned and felt out of the blue. Terry explained that he could have avoided the meeting for having to give a lot of background explanations to the group in order for the meeting to be fruitful; but, he still attended meeting because he believed that "there shouldn't be a higher barrier of entry for someone to engage with us."

In sum, the tension regarding *how* planners engage with collaboration participants (i.e., *formal—informal*) was managed differently in Region A and B through their practices

for arranging meetings. Planners in Region A preferred formal meetings (i.e., *either-or* approach) and relied on committees to convene for their interorganizational collaboration. When informal and/or spontaneous meetings happened, they felt uncomfortable and considered them interruptions to their regular work. This revealed that they separated their work space as conveners (i.e., formal committee meetings) from their job as planning professionals. On the other hand, planners in Region B embraced various opportunities to engage with collaborating groups, including formal/informal, planned/unanticipated, and short/long meetings. This practice reflected their *more-than* approach as it created space for ongoing interactions and dialogues, where different inputs and ideas continued to emerge and improve the planning process. The planners accepted the meetings in various formats as their work space where their role as conveners and planning professionals merge and interact.

4. Outcomes of Tension Management

a. Region A: A controlled collaborative environment

Through *either-or* approaches to tensions that emerge in their convening practices, planners in Region A attempted to prevent additional tensions in the collaborative process. Consequently, the planners created and maintained a controlled collaboration environment, where *who* participates, *what* to discuss, and *how* to engage was clear and did not fluctuate often. When tensions did occur (e.g., people attempted to bring alternative perspectives on their analytic process or want to see different outputs as options), the planners deemed those incidents as "roadblocks" and attributed them to their failure to organize effectively or convince participants of their ideas. As my data analysis results (Table 10) showed, in Region A, (a) the sectoral and functional diversity of the collaborating organizations was

low; (b) the level of groupthink was high; (c) the number of planners in the planning organization who directly engage with participants was low (i.e., a few designated planners work as conveners while others focus on analytic tasks); and (d) the planners showed reluctance and hesitation toward interorganizational collaboration.

The outcomes are supported by the fact that collaboration participants in Region A relied on the planners' practices and developed somewhat passive attitudes. For example, they rarely commented on the planners' data-driven work but accepted the outputs as facts, possibly because they were not adequately informed about the analytic process, trusted that planners' work is objective and unquestionable, or they already had the same line of thinking or beliefs as planners. One representative from a Native American community planning agency said, "I vaguely remember what the process was like…I gave the planner some of my data that might have gone into their analysis (which led to the outputs I received), but that's all I really know." Some even considered planners as "advisors." When/if they were not satisfied with planners' ideas, they rationalized that it is due to an inherent challenge in the given issue and not something that planners could have fixed. Further, if collaboration participants wanted to have more engagements, they would wait for planners' formal invitation to meetings. A local community organization leader said, "I haven't talked to them for a while, but if they ask me to come, I am always willing to be part of it."

On one hand, this well-controlled collaborative environment in Region A made the conveners' job smooth and less complicated. Also, having developed and maintaining such a positive professional identity and reputation helped to enhance the planners' sense of pride. On the other hand, when opposite options (i.e., groups without objective expertise tried to

get involved; challenge or ask about the analytic process; or request informal interactions) emerged as an alternative, it quickly became a source of stress and a noise that planners tried to resolve or remove. This way, the planners continued to prefer their *either-or* approaches to tensions, which became normalized in their practices. While it did not cause any explicit harm to the planning process, the use of *either-or* approaches contributed to defeating the purpose of interorganizational collaboration, which is to gather diverse inputs from a broad cross-section of the public.

b. Region B: A messy, dynamic, and unpredictable collaborative environment

Through convening practices that considered both oppositional tensions as well as possibilities for additional tensions (i.e., *more-than* approach), planners in Region B dealt with higher complexities, messiness, and unpredictability in their collaborative process. Their approaches to the tensions reflected their expectation to not have control over how the collaboration unfolds; instead, they reframed the *expertise—experience* tension as "anyone's right to participate," connected the *process—outcome* tension to make both valuable and discussions open to any emerging topics related to planning, and created a third space where collaboration meetings could happen in any formats at any time. Consequently, their planning process was highly iterative and constantly evolving, as the inputs gathered from collaborators helped revise and reimagine the planning activities. For example, the planning organization decided to add a new process where collaborators bring their own alternative plans to the one originally proposed by the planners. After collective discussions and evaluation of proposed alternatives, the planners admitted that the one proposed by a nonprofit organization is superior to theirs in terms of minimizing environmental impacts. Accordingly, my data analysis (Table 10) showed that, in Region B, (a) the sectoral and

functional diversity of the collaboration participants was high; (b) the level of groupthink was low; (c) the number of planners who directly engage with participants was high (i.e., anyone in the planning staff is ready and open to engage); and (d) the planners showed willingness and positive attitude toward interorganizational collaboration.

Unlike collaboration participants in Region A, who relied on the planners and their convening practices, those in Region B took critical looks at planners' work and pressured them to rethink various aspects of the planning processes and outcomes. Moreover, instead of seeing the planners as advisors or information providers, the participants often communicated their doubts about the planners' objectivity, claimed their own expertise areas, and wanted the planners to adopt their suggestions; and, the planners would be receptive of this approach. For instance, a leader of a civil rights organization described such an incident:

> (When we brought our ideas and challenged their plan) the decision makers (of the planning organization) were like, 'Well, we don't know enough about displacement, so how are we supposed to know how bad it is and what are the solutions that will work?' and they said that they will have a special forum about the topic. We think that even the idea of having that kind of forum was a response to heavy pressure that our group was putting on. An even bigger impact was that we were involved in helping to organize the forum so that it is inclusive of residents who are experiencing displacements, rather than relying on planners who may cherry-pick people.

This quote is one of many examples that show how planners were responsive to the collaborating groups' ideas and flexible to adapt to their expectations to improve the existing process. The planners accepted that such uncertainties and chaos are a normal and necessary aspect of their job as conveners, also to develop rigorous and innovative regional plan. Even when tensions caused delays and added responsibilities, they did not see the tensions as disruptive or stressful; instead, they remained calm—somewhat nonchalant—and tried to

keep the tensions going through more discussions, rather than resolving them through selecting a preferred option.

In sum, the planners' *more-than* approaches in Region B set up the collaborative environment where tensions are encouraged and embraced. In managing tensions, their goal was focused on the region's successful and innovative planning, instead of keeping harmony among the collaboration participants or maintaining a certain professional identity for themselves. The *more-than* approaches reflected the planners' primary principle in their convening practices, which is "expecting the unexpected."

E. Discussion

The findings of this study revealed three types of tensions inherent in convening for open, voluntary interorganizational collaboration, which are related to *who* participates (experts—experience), *what* to focus (process—outcome), and *how* to engage (formal—informal). The comparative analysis showed that the tensions are managed differently through how conveners engage in key communicative practices (i.e., defining experts; identity work; anticipatory work; information sharing; arranging meetings); in turn, conveners' practices shape the collaborative environment with different levels of tolerance for tensions and room for dynamic interactions among diverse participants. Specifically, conveners' *either-or* approaches lead to a tension-controlled (Region A) and *more-than* approaches lead to tension-based collaborative environment (Region B).

This study makes two primary contributions to the tension management and interorganizational collaboration literature. The first is demonstrating organizational-level tension management practices, and specifically, *more-than* approaches. Important to note here is that, even though the analytic process involved exploring the individual planners'

practices first, I scaled up the findings to the organizational-level and presented common approaches used by planners in each of the two planning organizations. The benefits of moving beyond the oppositional forces and rethinking tensions in individuals' communicative experiences are well-documented in previous studies (e.g., Gibbs, 2009; Woo et al., 2017); but, this study explored whether/how organizations might intentionally use *more-than* approaches to capitalize on the productive forces generated from tensions. As the findings showed, conveners of interorganizational collaboration in Region B (i.e., the primary organizing entity) willingly promoted tensions by not trying to control how collaboration should be organized and unfold. As a result, the collaboration process was much more complex and unpredictable in Region B, compared to Region A where planners adopted *either-or* approaches; however, they were better at achieving the objective of interorganizational collaboration, which is gathering diverse inputs through often challenging discussions without breaking collaboration. This reveals that organizations, when they appreciate the value of communicative tensions and the benefits for a specific goal (e.g., improving the quality of life in the region), are capable of engaging in organizational practices to set up their process for dynamic tensions to play out.

The planners' practices in Region B based on *more-than* approaches are theoretically differentiated from organizational *responses to tensions* emerging during collaboration in that they are *proactive* tension management rather than reactive. Reactive tension management, such as engaging in dialogues *when* and *if* tensions emerge during collaboration, is important as they reconstitute and/or reinforce the existing social infrastructure (Barge, 2006; Koschmann & Laster, 2011). But, this study focused on the role of conveners in proactively shaping the collaborative environment, when they do not yet

know what types of tensions they may face during their forthcoming collaborative engagements. A proactive approach focuses on managing *structural* tensions (e.g., codifying decision-making processes) to guide future collaborative interactions. However, as the findings showed, conveners manage the structural tensions (i.e., collaboration membership, agenda, and meeting formats) through communicative practices, such as identity work and information sharing. Further, how they manage structural tensions are likely to have impacts on how other tensions emerge during collaborative interactions. For example, if conveners choose to discuss the outcomes of the project and not the process (i.e., *either-or* approach in Region A), it may direct participating organizations' attention to concerns outside of the collaboration and think about how the end product may affect their own situation (i.e., us versus them), whereas providing an open environment--in which discussions on the process, outcome, and more are valued--may encourage participants to engage in the *relational* tension (see Lewis et al., 2010) between focusing on the collaboration itself and being concerned about individual organizational goals. Thus, the sources of tensions that occur during collaboration are likely to be a combination of the structure (i.e., how conveners proactively manage structural tensions and set up the process) and ongoing communication.

The second contribution is developing a novel framework to theorize why/how promoting and maintaining tensions is beneficial for open, participatory, and collaborative processes (Figure 5). Researchers and practitioners alike have recognized that tensions stimulate collaborative activities and energy necessary to sustain participation (Davey, 2017; Koschmann & Laster, 2011); yet, this argument for tension-based collaboration has lacked a theoretical lens to conceptualize the phenomena. I use a metaphorical term *tensile strength* to describe the benefits that tensions bring to collaboration, specifically when diverse inputs

are necessary to address a complex problem. Tensile strength is found in a specific type of construction of elements, called *tensile structure*, which does not require bending or compression of the materials used but only tensions that come from pulling the materials into different directions (see Figure 6). This type of construction engineering is commonly used for architectures with tent-shaped ceilings.

Using this concept as a metaphor, consider a hexagon as a visual representation of a project that requires participants' inputs (Figure 5-a), such as urban planning. Each of the six sides of the hexagon represents each of the oppositional poles in the three tensions in convening for collaboration (i.e., *expertise—experience*; *process—outcome*; and *formal—informal*). When all the sides are pulled into opposite directions and stay in that way (i.e., tensions emerge and are maintained), room is created for participants' collaborative engagements and inputs (Figure 5-b). However, if the convener uses an *either-or* approach to one of the three tensions, the side collapses and the particular tension is lost; as a result, the room for collaborative engagements is reduced (Figure 5-c). When all the tensions are managed through *either-or* approaches, the project collapses, loses its tensile strength, and little to no room for participant inputs is left (Figure 5-d); in this environment, the conveners control the process so much so that the participants' interactions can do little to influence the project, and the meaning of collaboration is lost.

As such, tensile strength is conceptualized as a necessary element of collaboration that creates space for active participation and dynamic interactions for generating inputs necessary for advancing the project. To maintain tensile strength, it requires conveners' tension management practices to sustain tensions through *more-than* approaches. *Both-and*

Figure 5: Visualization of Tensile Strength in Collaboration

**The hexagon represents a project in which participants' inputs are necessary for addressing a problem*

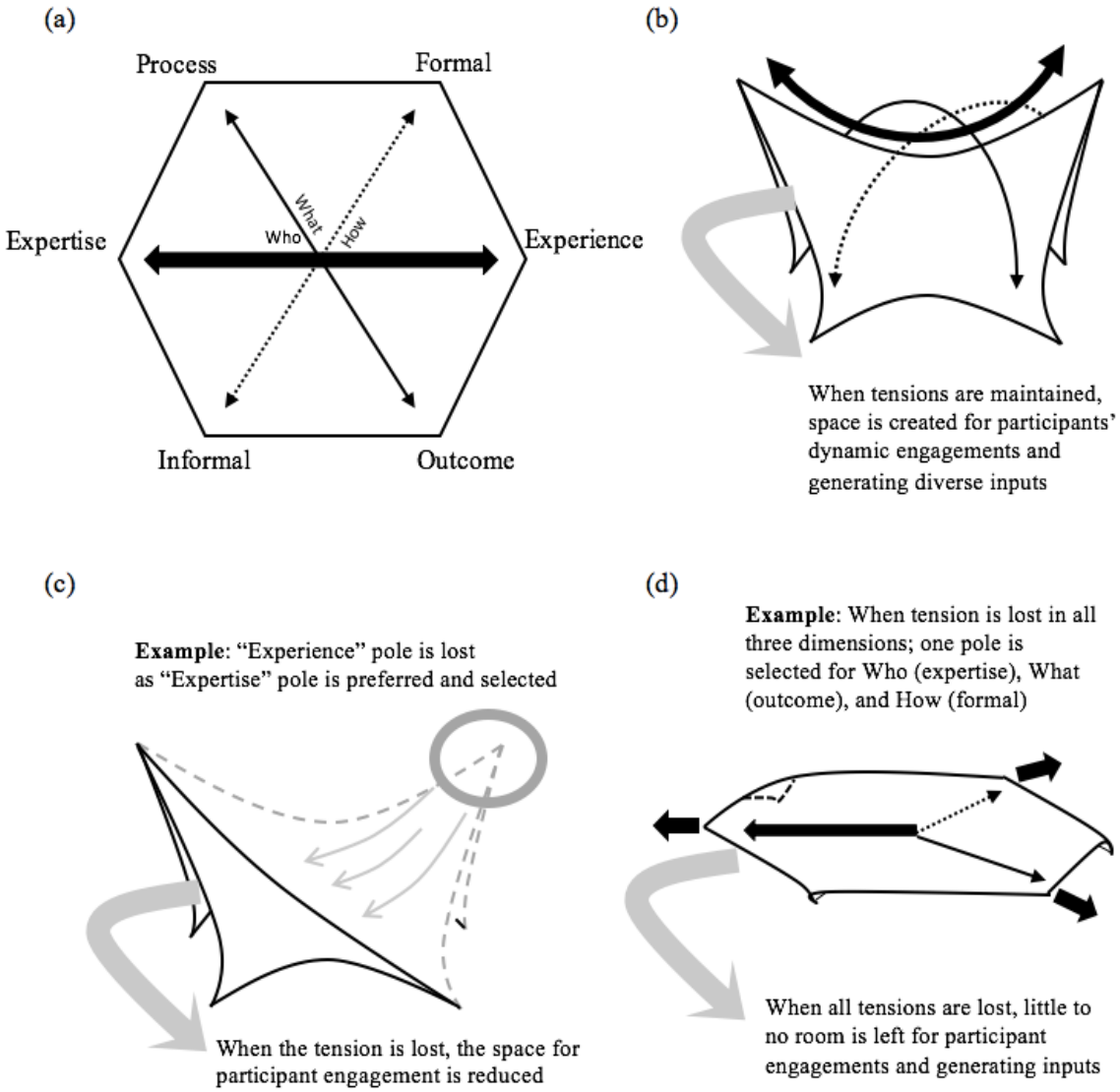
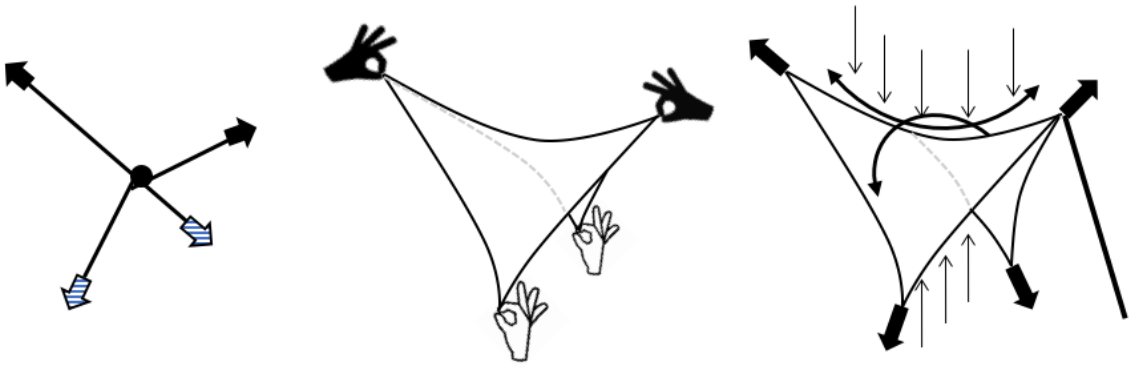


Figure 6: Illustration of Tensile Structure



approaches can also hold the tensions by integrating, balancing, or oscillating between opposite options; but, *more-than* approaches are likely to allow more possibilities for the interplay between the opposites as well as newly emerging tensions from it (Putnam et al., 2016).

Practically, this study provides implications for the role of conveners and their communication. Wood and Gray (1991) explains that conveners' role is to identify and bring relevant groups of stakeholders together. The authors list a few qualifications that planners need to have in order to achieve such goals. For example, conveners need to be perceived by stakeholders that they are unbiased, have power and authority to organize the domain (i.e., expertise). This helps to explain why planners in Region A were hesitant to adopt *more-than* approaches and tried to control the collaborative environment by maintaining their "objective" identity and being careful about whom they involve, among other practices. The findings of this study, however, encourage conveners to rethink how they might manage structural tensions through communication, especially if their goal is to have dynamic interactions and gather diverse inputs from participants. While it is important to demonstrate

the ability and credibility to convene as unbiased professionals, being honest about potential limitations and biases in their work, as well as encouraging participants to share inputs on how they can perform better as conveners may help achieve rigorous outcomes from the collaboration, as seen in Region B's case. Controlling and preventing tensions by adopting *either-or* approach is tempting as it helps lower uncertainties and complexities; but, in the long-run, conveners can lose the opportunity to gain *tensile strength* and the collaboration may break easily, when tensions do emerge unexpectedly and there is little capacity to collectively and productively navigate the tension.

Although this study advances our understanding of tensions in interorganizational collaboration and conveners' tension management practices, it is not without limitations. First, my analytical scheme used three major criteria to consider how the two regions' planning organizations are achieving the objectives of collaboration (i.e., diversity, groupthink, and planners' readiness). While it was important to apply the same standard that captures key aspects of planners' work to compare the two cases, it may have left out other goals unique to each case. Even though *either-or* approaches used by the planning organization in Region A led to their less-successfully meeting the objective of including diverse inputs from a broad cross-section of the region, their tension management strategy may have achieved some other goals unique to the region's history and culture. For example, there may have traditionally been more pressure from the decision makers (e.g., elected officials), thus planners in Region A could have been expected to control the tensions and resistance to facilitate the political process through *either-or* approaches.

Another limitation, which opens an opportunity for future research, is that this study focused on conveners' practices and did not consider how collaboration participants may

engage in communicative tension management. It is possible that collaborating organizations are cognizant of the tensions and how conveners attempt to manage the tensions, and try to influence how tensions play out during the collaboration process. For instance, if one organization was aware that planners in Region A selected expertise in the *expertise—experience* tension related to *who* participates, they may have communicated their inputs in a way that demonstrates expertise and meets the planners' expectations to get more involved. Future research can examine the interaction or interplay between conveners' and participants' tension management, and how that affects the collaboration process and outcomes.

Finally, future studies can further advance our understanding of tensions in collaboration by theorizing about the threshold level; that is, *how much* of tension contributes to productively facilitating collaborative projects and how much is considered "too much" tension that might rather hinder the process. Even though dynamic and sustained engagements are important for keeping the participation level high and generating alternative ideas, if participants are so far away from one another's ideas and they cannot come to a tangible conclusion, it may eventually lead to lowered motivation to engage. Therefore, I suspect an inverted U-shaped effect of tensions on collaboration, and future studies can empirically examine this point.

In closing, this chapter examined the ways in which collaboration conveners manage tensions as they bring together different groups and organizations to work on a "messy" problem (Calton & Payne, 2003). As the findings of the study showed, addressing messy problems might require messy processes in which tensions can continue to play, different ideas keep clashing, and new tensions and ideas emerge from the messiness. The conveners

have an important role in proactively managing tensions and setting up the environment in which it becomes natural to collaborative participants that, without the tensions they face, "working together is pointless." (Davey, 2017).

V. *Getting Out*: With Hopes to Collaborate Again in the Future

A. Introduction

Leaving or ending relationships with friends, partners, or organizations is a difficult communicative act, whether it is voluntary or involuntary. Indirect or implicit communicative behaviors can motivate the ending of or disengagement from membership or relationships, such as a lack of peer support or avoidance (Cox, 1999); but it also involves messages or rituals that communicatively mark the closure and mutually understand the exit, such as participating in a graduation ceremony or saying to an employer, "I resign." When such explicit communication is missing, it can create confusion regarding the status of the friendship or organizational membership. In organizations with a formal membership boundary (e.g., employment contract), there is more clarity if/when membership status is lost, compared to organizational settings without an explicit boundary; for instance, if an employee is absent in the workplace for two weeks without notice, he or she may become automatically unqualified to claim his/her membership.

A context in which the process of leaving can become problematic is open, voluntary collaboration among multiple organizations. This form of collaboration is temporarily organized to address a multifaceted problem, which involves a set of communicative processes where representatives of several primary organizations work interdependently (Keyton, Ford, & Smith, 2008; Stohl & Walker, 2002). The success of such interorganizational collaboration depends on "people's willingness to work together voluntarily, to share resources, and to take action in the absence of formal authority or market incentives" (Koschmann, 2012, p. 62). Due to the volitional nature of participation, fuzzy membership boundaries, and dynamic network structures (Cooper & Shumate, 2012),

organizations' exit from the collaboration is expected to occur at various points; yet, leaving organizations are often negatively characterized as free-riders or having a lack of commitment (Koschmann, 2012).

Aside from those unfavorable cases in which organizational partners leave in the middle of collaboration without contributing or communicating their rationale, interorganizational collaboration is a communicative process that involves ending—as much as it involves a beginning (Lewis, 2006). Especially when collaboration is organized around a defined focal problem in a form of a temporary project with a predetermined timeline, organizations' exit from the process at the end of the "project life cycle" (Pinto & Prescott, 1988) can be expected as a natural phenomenon—much like temporary employees leaving an organization after fulfilling their duties as promised in employment contracts. However, how interorganizational collaboration comes to an end through what/how communicative practices has received little scholarly attention.

This chapter aims to explore how organizations navigate and prepare for their exit from interorganizational collaboration as they approach the end of the collaboration project. The study reported here looks specifically at a project where the joint efforts involve a cyclical process (i.e., organized regularly to address the same primary issue), thus organizations have the potential to return to the collaboration in the future. This makes an interesting context for and adds complexity to the study for two main reasons. First, unlike individuals' organizational exit experience (Jablin, 2001) or organizational "death" or decline (Sutton, 1983) in which the process of leaving leads to permanent loss of membership or identity, this kind of project allows for observing organizations' strategic behaviors as they prepare for their exit with an eye toward future and attempt to set the stage

for their re-entry. Second, as organizations communicatively navigate, signal, and/or make sense of their exit differently based on their intention/plans to re-enter, studying this type of project can provide an opportunity to compare the different organizational practices for leaving collaboration.

I begin this chapter by discussing the existing literature on organizational exit and how it informs and limits our understanding of the exit process in interorganizational collaboration. Then, I describe field research on interorganizational collaboration in urban planning—specifically, a long-range regional transportation project that is convened by metropolitan planning organizations and updated every four years through a cyclical process. Based on my analysis of 10 different organizations' cases, all of which have been involved in the collaboration project, I present my findings that show strategies used by organizations that did versus did not intend to re-enter the collaboration in the future. This study offers empirical contributions to conceptualize organizational exit in interorganizational collaboration as a crucial stage that can have direct impacts on organizations' future collaborative opportunities.

B. Literature Review

Scholarly interests in the process of leaving or exiting in organizational contexts seemed to peak in the 1980s until early 2000, perhaps due to the economic downturn that affected the global economy during that time period. Organizational researchers have examined the process of organizational exit primarily at two levels of analyses. The first is *organizational-level* studies that examine organizational death or decline, which refers to events such as bankruptcy, downsizing, or site closure. As much as organizational growth and success is considered natural and expected, organizational death or decline is also a

natural and predictable phase of the organizational life cycle (Sutton, 1983). This line of research primarily looks at the private sector and has focused on what factors influence organizational exit decisions (Anderson & Tushman, 2001); how internal organizational members cope with the process collectively (Harris & Sutton, 1986); managing external stakeholders' responses to organizational death (Kolarska & Aldrich, 1980); organizational strategies for effectively dealing with the death/decline and minimizing the potentially negative impacts (Burgelman, 1996), among other topics.

The second is *individual-level* studies which explore the experiences of individuals leaving their organizations. Jablin (2001) included organizational disengagement and exit as part of his stage model of organizational socialization, explicitly recognizing it as a critical period in which a series of communicative behaviors occurs and impacts the individuals and other organizational members. Researchers have focused on employees' voluntary and involuntary exits and tried to understand predictors of turnover (Feeley & Barnett, 1997); how organizational members navigate job transitions (Kramer, 1994); the ways in which coworkers attempt to encourage their peers to exit voluntarily (Cox, 1999); and employers' communication during the dismissal process (Cox & Kramer, 1995). Davis and Myers's study (2012) added to the literature by theorizing *planned departure* or *planned exit*, which is neither voluntary nor involuntary, and not affected or caused by market or organizational conditions; rather, it is a result of fixed factors, such as graduation or a completion of a project.

Both organizational- and individual-level research on exit have a common underlying assumption: that the leavers (i.e., dying organizations or leaving individuals) are not likely to plan, desire, or have opportunities to return to the environment from which they

are departing. Extant literature has focused on organizational contexts with rigid boundaries and formal structures (e.g., for-profit companies, academic institutions) where the process of leaving often requires serious, high-stake decision-making, and explicit communication to announce the exit. In such contexts, retracting exit decisions is not a viable option or possibility, and organizational strategies and individuals' communicative behaviors during the exit process are not likely to be concerned with their re-entry into the same context, at least in the near future. For example, when an academic department goes through a "death" process and makes a decision to place tenured faculty in other departments or let go untenured faculty (Sutton, 1987), it does not involve thinking about how things might be if/when the department potentially could "revive" in the future.

Whereas individual- and intraorganizational-level exit processes rarely involve considering the potential to return to the same environment—although there do exist some examples, such as people who participate in volunteer programs and seasonally-organized entities (e.g., political campaign offices and organizing committees for festivals)—interorganizational-level organizing, specifically *interorganizational collaboration*, can involve possibilities for participants' return as it comes to an end. Due to its loose structure, fuzzy membership boundaries, and voluntary process, organizations can *want* to and will likely to be *able to* re-enter the collaboration after their exit, if they make efforts to do so in communication with others involved.

Thus, I focus on interorganizational collaboration to develop an understanding of organizations' strategic practices to set the stage for their re-entry in the future. Considering a wide range of collaborative arrangements between/among organizations that are formed for different purposes (e.g., Atouba & Shumate, 2010; Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002;

Stuart, 2000; Walker & Stohl, 2012), I consider interorganizational collaboration with the following set of four characteristics to set the scope of this study: it (a) is not market-driven; (b) is organized to accomplish a defined project; (c) follows a predetermined timeline, including a specified end date; and (d) involves a cyclical process. An example can be working groups under the International Olympic Committee, whose members include representatives of multiple countries and organizations and whose work is organized around the Olympic Games that happen every four years. At the end of this type of cyclic collaboration process, we can expect that some organizations will intend to re-enter the collaboration in the next cycle while some others will not.

Members of such interorganizational collaborations can be said to face *planned departure* or *planned exit* as a result of reaching the end of project cycle (Davis & Myers, 2012). Similar to individuals with time-limited memberships having to leave organizations (e.g., expatriates, long-term religious missions, or positions with mandatory retirement ages), organizations enter the collaboration with an expectation to leave at a specific point but may feel reluctant about the loss of membership and wish to stay/return. However, different from those individuals' experiences is that the roles played by the organizations in collaboration cannot be easily replaced by successors after their exit; thus, organizations' desire to re-enter the collaboration can be justified. Likewise, the strategies suggested by organizational death/decline literature are not likely to apply in interorganizational collaboration settings. For instance, whereas employees can have social gatherings to collectively grieve, cope with, or strategize their organizational death/decline (Harris & Sutton, 1986), interorganizational collaboration participants have different goals, interests, and processes.

In sum, the existing research has focused on communicative behaviors and strategies during exit processes either at individual- or intraorganizational-levels where the potential for re-entry is low. To further this literature and understand how participants' desire for returning to the environment they are leaving may affect their communication efforts, I present a study of interorgnaizational collaboration to explore the following research questions: "How do organizations prepare for their exit to set the stage for their re-entry in interorganizational collaboration? If/when organizations do not desire or intend to re-enter, how do they make sense of their exit from collaboration?"

C. Methodology

1. Research Context

To explore the research questions, I conducted a field study of interorganizational collaboration context that involves the four characteristics discussed earlier. The context is a long-range regional transportation planning (LRTP) project that is organized by a federally funded government agency called Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO). In the United States, every region with more than 50,000 residents is required to develop LRTP through an open, participatory process to create a vision for and guide future transportation developments in the next 20 or 25 years. Some regions label their project with a unique name for each LRTP cycle; for example, the MPO that serves Denver, Colorado, calls their most recent LRTP "2040 Metro Vision Regional Transportation Plan" which was completed in April, 2017. Urban planners working for MPOs convene various stakeholder groups and organizations to collaborate on their region's LRTP, and are required to update it every four years (i.e., "LRTP cycle"). Because any public entities or individuals can participate in this

process, those involved in the previous project cycle can re-enter the next LRTP cycle if they wish.

Out of the more than 400 MPOs in the United States I chose two (one in a Western state and the other in a Southwestern state) for in-depth explorations of the LRTP context based on recommendations of a key informant who is an expert in urban planning. By examining two regions with similar collaboration processes but in different sizes and cultures, I aimed to capture a diversity of organizations and their experiences of participating in the LRTP process. Importantly, the two regions' MPOs shared a similar timeline in their collaboration cycles. When I first entered the research sites, the collaboration was coming to an end as both MPOs were in their final quarter of the 4-year LRTP cycle (referred to as the "previous cycle" in this chapter. By the time I finished the research, the participants and urban planners were entering and "gearing up" for the following LRTP cycle (see Figure 7 for the visualization of field research timeline in relation to the project cycles). For this study, the data from the two sites are combined to explore and compare the exit experiences of the organizations that have stayed or left the collaboration after participating in the previous project cycle.

2. Data Collection

During my field research, I conducted in-depth and face-to-face interviews with 51 individuals who represent 10 different organizations that participated in the previous LRTP cycle as collaborators, as well as 37 urban planners who work at MPOs to gain conveners' perspectives as additional data (87 interviews in total; see Table 11 for the participant profile). Most of the interviewees were identified by lead urban planners during initial

Figure 7. Visualization of Data Collection Timeline

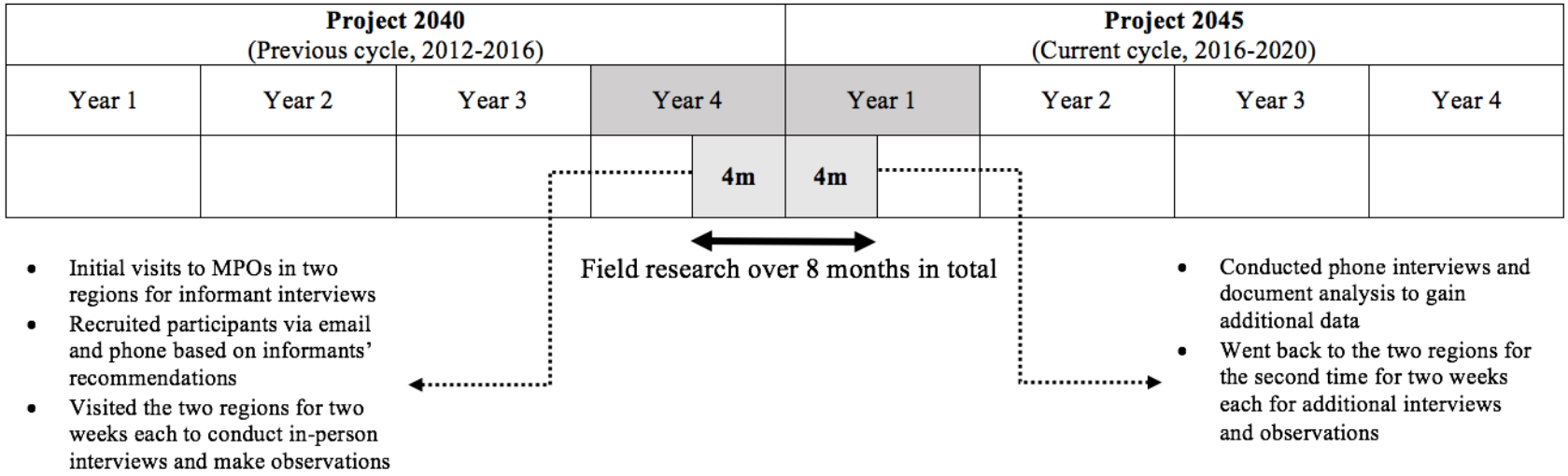


Table 11. Participants' Re-entry Status

#	Organization Category	Type	Re-entry (Y/N)	Number of Interviews
1	Association of local government representatives	Governmental organization	Y	32*
2	Environmental conservation	Nonprofit organization	Y	3
3	National research laboratory	Private organization	Y	1
4	Department of health	Governmental organization	Y	3
5	Community health clinic	Nonprofit organization	Y	1
6	Social equity advocacy	Nonprofit organization	Y	5
7	Neighborhood association	Nonprofit organization	N	2
8	Administrative agency	Governmental organization	N	2
9	Public safety education and research	Nonprofit organization	N	1
10	Community health policy advocacy	Nonprofit organization	N	1
	Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO)	Federally funded government agency (Convener)	N/A	37
			Total number of interviews	88
*One to three representatives from each of the 13 county offices within the region that the MPOs serve				

informant interviews, and about 10 percent of the participants were recruited through interviewees' referrals. In-depth interviews provided opportunities for individuals to reflect on their experience as they neared the end of the LRTP cycle and are thinking ahead about their participation in the next cycle. All the interviews were audio-taped and ranged between 50 and 80 minutes. In addition to interviews, I also collected organizational artifacts, email correspondence, and field notes from various meetings (e.g., workshops, decision-making meetings, and staff get-together) to which I was invited to attend by the interviewees. These additional data were used to triangulate the findings.

Interviews were guided by semi-structured protocols, which provided some standardization across the interviews and allowed to gain additional insights from participants' unique experiences and perspectives. I began every interview by asking, "Could you describe your background, your organization's work history and its relation to LRTP?" and "What does your organization do when not working on LRTP-related

activities?" To explore the research questions specifically, I asked organizational representatives to reflect on their experiences in the previous LRTP cycle and whether/why/how they intend to re-enter as they approached the end of the collaboration. For organizations that were planning for re-entry, I asked them about their expectations for the following LRTP cycle, how they prepared for it, and what has helped their transition. For organizations that did not intend to re-enter the collaboration, I asked follow-up questions about their reasons and future plans. In interviews with urban planners, I asked about their role as conveners, communication and relationships with/among organizational partners, and which organizations they expect will return or not, and why.

3. Data Analysis

As mentioned above, the data I collected from two different sites were combined for their similarities in the collaboration processes, including the timeline. More importantly, region-specific factors (e.g., prominent topics of discussion) did not seem to make theoretical differences in how organizations prepared for their exit from LRTP. To analyze the interview data with 51 organizational representatives, I treated each of the 10 organizations that they represent as individual cases and used them as the unit of analysis. I conducted within-case analysis (Yin, 2014) for each of the 10 organizations with an aim to gain a deep understanding of each organization's practices and approaches to their exit and post-exit. As a result, I categorized the 10 organizations into two categories: (1) organizations that participated in the previous LRTP cycle and re-entered the following cycle (n = 6); and (2) organizations that participated in the previous LRTP process but are no longer part of the current project cycle (n = 4).

After conducting within-case analyses of the 10 organizations and categorizing them, I went back to data to examine common organizational activities or communicative strategies in each of the two categories (re-entered versus did not re-enter). To do so, I read the interview transcripts with organizational representatives, inductively coded what their organizations did to set the stage for future re-entry (or not) until no new theme emerged, and compared them across organizations within the same category to find common themes. When there was more than one interviewee from the same organization, I found consistency in how they reported their organizations' activities. The common themes found for each of the two categories then were tested against additional data—interviews with urban planners and various organizational documents—for consistency and validity through triangulation. For example, if an organization reported to have worked on a side project with urban planners to keep their connections to the MPO between LRTP cycles, I examined planners' accounts about the organization and whether/how they described the same activity.

D. Findings

I present the findings in two sections with each addressing a research question in order. First, based on the analysis of data from organizations that exited from the collaboration for the previous LRTP cycle and then returned to the following project cycle, I present three strategies they commonly used to re-enter the collaboration. Second, the analysis of data from organizations that participated in the previous collaboration cycle but did not return to the current LRTP cycle reveals two ways by which they communicatively made sense of their exit.

1. Exit Strategies for Setting the Stage for Re-Entry

Between the exit phase of the LRTP process (generally the last quarter of the last year in the four-year cycle) and the ramp-up phase of the following LRTP cycle (second year into the project cycle), there are few activities and interactions among organizational partners and urban planners. This is when urban planners write up the outcomes of the collaboration efforts and put together a final report to submit to their executive board. Most organizations that participated in the previous LRTP collaboration stated that they shift their focus and work on other projects during this time. But, organizations that returned to the collaboration for the following cycle reported the following four strategies they used—in addition to working on other projects—to increase opportunities for re-entry in the future collaboration as they neared the exit phase of the RTP cycle.

a. Overlapping Members in Other Relevant Processes

To re-enter the collaboration in the next LRTP cycle, it was important for organizations to stay connected to and informed about the various activities of the MPOs as well as other organizations in the same region during the transitional period between project cycles. One way by which organizations tried to do so was placing their members in other ongoing processes that are organized by urban planners at MPOs, such as informal working groups and advisory committees for other planning projects (e.g., short-term transportation planning projects). Through their participation in the previous LRTP cycle, organizations had become familiar with what possibilities they have in terms of other similar open, participatory, and ongoing processes in which their work has some relevance. The one or two organizational members who joined those groups then played a brokering role by

reporting back to their organization the knowledge and information they gained, which helped them prepare for re-entry into collaboration for the next LRTP cycle in various ways.

For example, a local congestion management agency had one of their technical managers (Tim) voluntarily participate in a statistical modeling working group, in which urban planners from the region's MPO as well as other local organizations are members. The group has existed since a few decades ago, according to Tim, and it is voluntarily organized by rotating chairs among its members. While this working group does not have a direct connection to LRTP, they meet regularly and share ideas and best practices, which keeps the members informed about what other organizations and the MPO are doing in preparation for the next LRTP cycle. Tim explained:

> (Participating in the group allows us) to be aware of what the MPO is doing from a technical perspective. Whether it's about how they will be updating the regional travel model or surveying (to gather and analyze transportation data for future LRTP), and other things they are working on… We try to keep up. If other organizations are doing something innovative, we would ask them to present about that, so we are not behind.

Through the knowledge and information that Tim's organization gained from his participation in this working group, they were able to compare which analytic techniques are superior, how they may update their own models to meet or go beyond the MPO's standard, and which methodology may be preferred in the next LRTP cycle.

Similarly, a nonprofit organization that focuses on environmental conservation used this strategy and had their member (Becky) sit on an ongoing advisory committee, which is organized by the MPO for improving planning scenario performance measures. From the committee meetings, Becky's organization learned what measurement tools are (or are not) used by other organizations and identified their niche in the future LRTP process, which is proposing a metric that better captures environmental impacts of planning scenarios. In

addition, Becky's organization naturally became familiar with the MPO's other practices by being part of the ongoing committee, including funding processes. Her organization then attempted to "plant collaboration seeds" by informing their members and affiliates about the opportunity and mobilizing their action to request funding for conservation, so that their chances of gaining resources to facilitate re-entry and involvement in the next LRTP collaboration is increased. Becky stated, "This is not something we were invited to do, but just a proactive way we try to insert ourselves into the process."

Overlapping members in relevant processes in this way was most beneficial in that, even if the working groups and committees are not directly related to the LRTP when the organizational members joined, there is a possibility that they become a part of the LRTP process when the right time comes. If the discussion becomes relevant to the LRTP, urban planners at MPOs, as conveners, are likely to turn to existing groups and committees rather than organizing a brand-new entity for the same purpose. For instance, a local community development organization had two members (Cameron and Tori) in a planning analysis working group. Tori explained this group's activity and transition into the LRTP process:

> (The purpose of the working group was) To meet regularly and just talk about what projects were happening and partially to get more awareness for the projects so people in the region could know about them and coordinate information, if needed…and then the group sort of evolved into a focus group for the LRTP process. When the MPO needed to focus on the LRTP, the working group was a natural transition to talk about the relevant issues. We would have done other things to get involved into the process no matter what, but the fact that we were already part of the working group was helpful.

b. Starting a Side Collaboration Project with Conveners

Another way for organizations to maintain connections to MPO was initiating a side collaboration project with urban planners. Compared to the previous strategy of overlapping

members in other processes, which allowed organizations to network and share knowledge/information with both MPO planners and other organizations that are either past or potential future collaborators, this approach was aimed specifically at building deeper and lasting relationships with urban planners. Urban planners at MPOs, as conveners of collaboration for LRTP, play a crucial role in setting the direction for and shaping the collaborative structure and processes in each project cycle. When urban planners recognize the value and urgency of some issues, they are likely to be more open to participation of the organizations that can help address those issues in the LRTP process.

The fact that organizations participated in the previous LRTP cycle is an indicator that planners recognized the importance of their areas of expertise; however, it was not guaranteed that the issues will have the same weight in the next LRTP cycle. Therefore, organizations tried to remind urban planners of the importance of continued attention to their focus areas; show why it is so closely related to urban planning and the role of MPO; and initiate a side project to address the issues with planners, so that they can develop a close working relationship during the time when LRTP-related processes are not active. Below, I present two examples of a formal and an informal collaboration which was initiated by organizations that tried to keep and strengthen their connections with MPO planners.

The first example is a formal collaboration between public health professionals from the State Department of Health (DOH) and urban planners at a MPO. An informant explained to me that urban planning is ultimately for improving public health and safety in the living environment, but the two fields have diverged a lot as they became more specialized and compartmentalized. Even though the topic of health is implicitly embedded throughout the LRTP process (e.g., planners consider accident and pedestrian fatality rates),

the work of urban planners and health professionals are separate (e.g., how they collect and analyze data), and health organizations have not been a part of the collaborative planning process until recently. While urban planners recognized that they needed to engage more with health experts, it was not until when the professional staff from DOH hosted regular meetings in their office and invited the planners that they started discussing actionable steps for joint efforts to make positive impacts on their region. One of the ideas that came out of the discussions was applying for funding from a national funding agency to formalize their project to integrate some aspects of public health and urban planning processes. When this team received the funding, their commitment to developing a close working relationship and bringing systematic changes to the region's planning process became officially solidified. As this success story is spread throughout the region and recognized as a crucial movement, the DOH's re-entry into the following LRTP cycle was not only smooth and accepted, but also expected.

The second example is an informal collaboration between a community health clinic and MPO planners. After being a part of the active phase of the previous LRTP cycle, the lead coordinator from the health clinic (Pete) was working on a different project with other community organizations to address struggles in rural/agricultural communities. Pete decided to invite an urban planner from the MPO (Jin) to one of the field trips as the part of the project, but without expecting Jin's formal involvement. Pete recalled, "Jin has little expertise in community health and didn't know why I invited him…I just said that he will learn a lot." The purpose was simply to keep the planner informed about the significance of addressing community health in regional planning so that the MPO would incorporate the

topic explicitly in future LRTP. Pete described the field trip experience with Jin as the following:

> (During the trip) we visited rural community centers and listened to their stories, how they are dealing with getting clean water and labor rights…we started our day around seven in the morning and toward the end of the day, we met with researchers who are working to influence policies…after a long day we were back at the hotel, and I said to Jin while we were eating dinner, "I bet your head is about ready to explode (laugh)." And he was sitting there, going, "Yeah I learned a lot today." And I said, "Do you know why I brought you here now?" Jin then lifts his head and goes, "I do public health, don't I?"

Even though Jin did not become formally involved in the project with Pete, he recognized that regional planning is inseparable from public health issues from this experience and continued informal conversations with Pete. Indeed, in a one-on-one interview with Jin, he stated that health planning is becoming a bigger topic in the "planning world." As informants frequently expressed, urban planning is related to numerous different areas; but, the reason many organizations are not involved in the LRTP process is because urban planners often do not know what many of those organizations do. So, Pete's organization accomplished the goal of helping planners realize what community health is about and why it is urgent to consider the topic seriously in the regional planning by involving Jin in the collaborative project as an informal observer. As the topic of health has become increasingly recognized as a prominent issue by urban planners in the region, this strategy naturally increased opportunities for Pete's organization to re-enter the collaboration and become a part of the LRTP process.

c. Maintaining Coalition Membership

The third strategy that organizations used to set the stage for re-entry into collaboration is keeping membership in their coalition by which they entered the previous

project cycle. In the data, I identified two major coalitions that focus on environmental protection and social equity, respectively. The coalitions were voluntarily formed by leading nonprofit organizations in the region that specialize in the topics, with a primary purpose of breaking in the LRTP process by joining efforts with other nonprofit organizations that work for similar causes and strengthening their voices. In other words, a number of organizations collaborated to enter and act as one entity in a bigger collaboration for the regional planning project. After the LRTP cycle ended, member organizations had an option to disengage and leave the coalitions; however, despite some level of dissatisfaction with being part of the coalitions, they kept the membership because a single organization's effort alone would not be enough to re-enter the collaboration for the next LRTP cycle. This approach is differentiated from the first two strategies in that it does not involve interactions with urban planners at MPOs. Below, I present the social equity coalition's case below to illustrate this strategy.

For years, many small to large nonprofit and community organizations with a mission to fight against social injustice have had an interest in getting involved in their region's LRTP process. Two project cycles ago, representatives from several of those organizations attended a public hearing that was organized by the region's MPO. During the meeting, the organizational members noticed one another as they exchanged questions and comments, and realized that they needed to formally organize a coalition to work toward their shared goals. The initiative was led by a nonprofit organization that is made up of civil rights attorneys with resources to devote to the collaborative efforts, and more than 20 different organizations voluntarily joined the coalition. In the next LRTP cycle, the coalition

emerged as the only group that specializes in social equity and one of the largest collaborators of the MPO.

Despite their success, member organizations had internal challenges due to power imbalances. Smaller community organizations, in particular, faced a dilemma because while being part of the coalition gives them opportunities to participate in the LRTP process, they became dependent on the leading organizations' resources and the coalition's activities sometimes did not align with their individual organization's goals. Yanni, the director of a small community youth organization, described the dilemma:

> Groups like mine rely on volunteers when we need to build strategies and attend collaboration meetings... We rely on the leading organizations to help us with the technical stuff when we work with the MPO, because our volunteers can't even sit through a meeting and understand what's happening…as a coalition, we sort of pick and choose what we're going to get involved in, and they are not always interesting to my organization and we have to compromise.

Another challenge was sharing credit for the success of the coalition among member organizations and affiliates. Even though every member organization's contribution was necessary to enter the collaboration in the previous LRTP cycle and accomplish their goals, who takes credit for which aspects of the success was a sensitive issue, as it is important for building organizational legitimacy and increasing visibility in the region. Meg, a representative of the leading organization explained the complexity of such situations:

> When we accomplished our goals in the previous LRTP cycle and made big impacts, one of our partners took the credit even though they didn't fund us. They did fund some groups who were in the coalition, but it did not benefit the coalition's work as a whole. So when you have all these groups working together, it is a very complicated story…it's like academics dealing with the author order in a big project. It is a nightmare.

Despite the dissatisfaction that comes from internal dynamics and tensions within the coalition, maintaining coalition membership provided the member organizations with access

to activities that could lead to re-entry into the next LRTP collaboration. Representatives of member organizations reported that sharing information about what opportunities are coming up and brainstorming how to tackle critical issues with other coalition members was crucial for preparing for entry into the next project cycle. For example, Yanni explained, "The coalition leaders went to a meeting with the MPO one day, and they realized the meeting was a better fit for us to attend. So they told the urban planners, 'You need to meet with our coalition members.'" According to Yanni, opportunities like this would not come to her organization without being a part of the coalition. Thus, coalition member organizations considered that there are more benefits of keeping membership, which is leaving the door open for them to get involved in the LRTP process again, than the cost of dealing with the challenges as described above.

2. Not Setting the Stage for Re-Entry: Making Sense of the Exit

Unlike the organizations that made efforts to set the stage for re-entry and did participate in the collaboration again for the next LRTP cycle, there were four organizations that exited from the previous collaboration and did not return. Given their interest, passion, and expertise for issues that are closely related to regional planning—such as property rights, public transit, and safety education—those organizations had a desire to get involved in the LRTP. Further, the representatives of the organizations believed that their inputs and contribution would be valuable for advancing future regional planning processes. Yet, they did not lay the same groundwork for re-entry but made sense of their exit through *blaming* and *redirecting attention*.

a. Blaming

Organizations that exited from the LRTP collaboration used blaming as a strategy as they prepare for exit and made sense of why they did not make efforts to return. Through blaming, they pointed to limitations of the planning process or the urban planners' practices; specifically, data analysis suggests *information overload* as the main attribution in those organization's blaming strategy. Participating in the collaboration for regional planning requires sifting through a large amount of data for reviews and evaluations, much of which are provided by the MPO. One organizational representative's comments capture the overwhelming experience with the information during the previous LRTP cycle:

> If you want to download a table of something you can do that on the MPO's website. But, all of the information is being presented in kind of like, "Here it is. Here's a bunch of numbers." It has no perspective, it doesn't say anything about what it means. If you go to one of these websites or workshops, you will get bored really quick. The urban planners are probably the only ones around here who really have the time and motivation to look at these kinds of things.

Despite having a plenty of data and information they could use, organizations could not effectively sort out the most important and relevant pieces to assist their work. Also, when organizations gathered to brainstorm ideas for the planning project without involving data, the discussion would go into too many directions and seem to lose focus. Juan, a representative of a public safety education and research institution, described his experience in the first collaboration meeting he attended:

> In the meeting, people weren't really talking about the framework that exists and is already provided by the federal agency that we could utilize. They were talking about all this other stuff, I am thinking, the framework is set and pretty extensive, and it seems silly that we are not at least starting from there and then moving somewhere else. Toward the meeting, I was like, "What the heck are you guys talking about?"

In addition, the collaborative process requires a number of meetings and workshops throughout the project cycle for deliberation and gathering inputs. Laura from a local public transit office stated that it is difficult for many organizations to follow up with all the collaboration meetings, and the process gets very confusing especially because the LRTP is not the only project in which organizations participate. She said, "We often asked, 'Am I going to *this* meeting to discuss this issue, or *that* meeting?' There are so many things going on, and we still don't understand the best points at which we could engage in the process effectively." In this way, organizations attributed their exit from the collaboration to information overload in terms of both structural aspects and content of the collaboration for LRTP.

b. Redirecting Attention

At the same time organizations attributed their exit to external causes (i.e., some aspects of the collaboration process that they viewed ineffective) they re-directed their attention and communication to other projects in which they are getting involved instead of trying to re-enter the LRTP cycle. Similar to communication observed from individuals leaving organizations without returning, focusing on future plans facilitated the leavers' (leaving organizations) identification of post-exit roles (Davis & Myers, 2012). Doing so not only helped the organizations make sense of their exit for themselves, but also assisted other organizations that were also part of the collaboration previously and urban planners at the MPO with understanding why those organizations are not returning.

To illustrate, a neighborhood association in the region was actively involved in the previous LRTP cycle, providing feedback on the regional planning and advocating their agenda. Toward the end of the project cycle, urban planners and other participating

organizations were expecting the neighborhood association's inputs on updated planning scenarios in a meeting; but, the association did not attend the meeting and was not seen from that point on. This created confusion among collaborators and conveners, but informants reported that the association realized that "the regional planning is just all about talking and there is nothing actually happening from it" (blaming)—which is a common perception among the public because long-range planning does not deal with any immediate or short-term changes but is meant to develop a long-term vision—and then moved on to other projects in which they believe that they can make actionable suggestions and implement them.

Exiting from the collaboration and identifying post-exit roles, however, did not necessarily mean that the organizations de-identified with their previous role in the LRTP. For instance, a representative from a public interest organization explained that he has been busy with new political activities in which his organization began to participate after their involvement in the LRTP cycle. But, he stated that he is and can still be a part of the collaboration process in the future, because, in his words, "No one told me that I am off." In an open and participatory interorganizational collaboration process, like LRTP, organizations' exit was not communicatively marked explicitly by conveners or other collaborators, since the participation was voluntary-basis. Rather, organizations' re-directing of their attention and communication to other projects signaled their exit to organizational members and collaborative partners. And, the exit and not returning to the following project cycle did not necessarily mean that they permanently lost the opportunity to collaborate again. In that sense, organizations' exit from the LRTP process left some level of uncertainty among the collaborators and conveners throughout the following project cycle.

E. Discussion

This chapter examined organizational exit in interorganizational collaboration, a context to which little scholarly attention has been paid. Given the prevalence of collaboration in today's organizational environment, there are likely to be as many collaborations that end as there are new ones that begin. The current knowledge of this topic, however, is focused around understanding the patterns or challenges of interorganizational engagements *during* collaboration (e.g., Koschmann, 2012; Lewis, Isbell, & Koschmann, 2010; Shumate, Fulk, & Monge, 2005), which may be different from the activities and behaviors shown during the *ending* of collaboration. This study is among the first to offer empirical analyses of the exit process in this type of organizational process, and the findings showed how organizations engage in strategies to set the stage for their re-entry into the collaboration or make sense of their exit without re-entry. The goal of the study was *not* to examine organizational exit/return in relation to how successful participants were with their participation, but to understand how different organizational strategies or activities can be expected when participants do or do not intend to re-enter by their wills.

Organizations that aimed to participate in the collaboration again used three strategies to set the stage for their re-entry (i.e., *overlapping members*; *initiating a side collaboration with conveners*; *maintaining coalition membership*), all of which focused on keeping and furthering relationships that were developed from previous collaboration. Maintaining connections with both conveners and other organizational partners was crucial for organizations to fill the gap between project cycles when little collaborative activities happened; gain information about the vision, direction, or plans for the next collaboration project cycle; and remind others of their commitment and the importance of their

involvement, so that they can increase opportunities for future involvement. The organizations' communication in using these strategies had long-term orientation rather than short-term or immediate goals, because spending resources to maintain those relationships did not guarantee their re-entry into the collaboration—although making the extra efforts itself, such as engaging in side projects, could have helped with increasing legitimacy in their environment. Nevertheless, their proactive attempts to facilitate future collaboration was a major driving force in their interorganizational communication as the collaboration was coming to an end (Norris-Tirrel & Clay, 2010).

By contrast, organizations without an intention to re-enter the collaboration showed preference for short-term outcomes as they redirected attention to other collaborations in which they can gain more immediate rewards by contributing to implementable activities. *Redirecting attention* helped organizations make sense of and rationalize their exit decision for their members and other collaboration partners, and lower uncertainties about their future plans by identifying post-exit activities. But, it was also inevitable that not making efforts to further the connections and relationships communicated their lack of commitment. Even though not returning to collaboration is not a failure as it is by the organizations' choice, due to the fact that interorganizational collaboration relies on voluntary participation and the organizations have already shown their interest in and relevance to the project by participating in the previous collaboration cycle, they seemed to engage in *blaming* of the collaborative process as a face-saving mechanism. Perhaps the organizations' experience of information overload during collaboration was due to their lack of resources (e.g., low capabilities to process complicated materials or short-staffed to attend collaboration meetings), and they may have been concerned that pointing to such internal cause(s) could

lower their legitimacy or credibility in their social environment. Thus, they may have engaged in blaming for communicatively shielding their limitations from other collaborators and conveners. This face-saving approach is understandable especially because the organizations wanted to leave the possibilities open for their future participation, for there is no formal process that makes their exit permanent or explicit.

Overall, the findings showed that having the possibility and intention to re-enter interorganizational collaboration makes the exit process distinct from the experiences of individuals' planned exit or dying organizations. To theorize this point, I turn to the organizational socialization stage model developed by Jablin (2001). Even though this framework is primarily used to describe individuals' organizational experiences, the stages are relevant to the processes of interorganizational collaboration. Jablin (2001) explained that *anticipatory socialization* phase is crucial in developing expectations about what it is like to obtain organizational membership, and people (un)intentionally gather information about their vocation or workplace to prepare for their entry. In the same way, people engage in communicative efforts to navigate and prepare for their exit. In both individuals' planned exit or organizational death, the exit process requires disengaging and departing from the environment to which they belonged, and facilitating their future socialization and identification in a new environment; that is, the exit is separated from and leads to anticipatory socialization for obtaining new membership.

However, in interorganizational collaboration, the exit process can be said to occur simultaneously as anticipatory socialization ("setting the stage") for their future participation, because how organizations interact, gather information, or strategize during the exit phase of collaboration can have direct impacts on their membership and

participation in future collaboration. Even though the organizations without the intention to re-enter disengaged by re-directing their attention to other projects, their exit is not permanent nor explicitly communicated, and there are possibilities for them to re-connect with organizational partners and conveners in the future (for the same collaboration or in other relevant processes). Thus, those organizations' communication during the exit process can still have a long-term influence on expectations of others and their own members, as well as how likely they will be accepted into future collaboration if/when they attempt to return. For example, if an organization leaves collaboration by overtly placing blame on conveners or other partners to the extent that their relationships with others end on a bad note, their likelihood of being accepted as a collaborator again will be low.

This study provides practical implications for participants and conveners of interorganizational collaboration. Regardless of the primary reasons for participating in collaboration (e.g., building legitimacy, expanding network, or gaining resources), organizations need to keep in mind that it is not just getting the foot in the door or active participation *during* collaboration that matters in achieving their goals. To maximize the opportunities that being part of collaboration can provide, organizations' proactive efforts toward the end of the collaboration can be critical. Even if re-entering the same collaboration context is not the ideal next step, organizations can think about ways to foster the relationships they have built while connected through the collaboration. One interviewee commented on the reasons for his efforts to maintain relationships outside of the collaboration as the following:

> When I call them (urban planners), for example, I am not just a guy from X organization to them; they've seen me sitting in meetings, they've seen me involved, and they've seen me put in time and energy (to work with them for a common goal). It's not that they are giving us millions of dollars or

> anything, but when I have questions about "who do I call? who do I ask about this? Is there a resource?" I can call them. They also think about me when they find some opportunities that I may be interested, like calls for grant proposals. It's human nature (to look out for one another, once the relationship is developed).

Also, conveners of interorganizational collaboration can make efforts to assist participants' exit process and lower uncertainties for themselves. For instance, toward the end of the project cycle, they can add an agenda in a meeting to reflect on their collaboration and gather feedback about the experience. In LRTP, such an activity was missing and only the organizations with motivation to re-enter shared their feedback with urban planners. This left the conveners wondering about other organizations' thoughts and plans. Having an open, reflective discussions can help to gather ideas for improving the collaborative process for the next project cycle as well as understanding whether/why some organizations may try to re-enter or not. Further, given the voluntary nature of participation, conveners' role would be important in ensuring that the same organization's continued involvement does not dominate the collaborative process or create power imbalance which can take away opportunities for other organizations to get involved.

F. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are limitations of this study that open possibilities for future research. The main shortcoming is that it used interviews to explore participants' experiences specifically *toward* and *during* the exit phase of the collaborative project. Consequently, this study focused on organizations that followed through the entire collaboration process, when there may have been ones that prematurely exited by gradually decreasing their levels of participation. Further, it did not examine how participating organizations' experiences at the *beginning* or *during* collaboration may have influenced their exit, or how their attitudes

toward their future exit may have changed over time. As this research was not aimed at building a process model of exit in collaboration but at exploring communicative strategies that organizations used as they approached the end of the collaboration cycle, it was an analytic choice to focus on participants' experiences toward the end.

However, fully understanding organizations' exit from a cyclic collaboration process will require examining more than just the ending phase in future research. Moreland Levine's (1982, 2001) model of socialization in work groups shows how both groups and their members engage in a cyclic process of (a) evaluating one another's rewardingness; (b) changing their levels of commitment; and (c) transitioning their roles (e.g., from new members to full members to marginal members) throughout the membership period. If we consider organizations that participate in a collaborative project as making up a *work group* and apply Moreland and Levine's concepts, organizations that stayed involved until the exit phase and wanted to re-enter future collaboration in this study can be assumed to have evaluated their participation rewarding; been assessed positively by the conveners; and stayed highly committed as full members of the collaboration. By contrast, those that did not re-enter may have played the role as marginal members—if they did not find the collaboration as rewarding as if they participated in other collaborative processes—and decreased their levels of commitment and participation well before they reached the exit phase. Future research can measure the three constructs (i.e., evaluation, commitment, and role transition) to examine participating organizations' turning points throughout a collaborative project cycle, and then investigate how they fluctuate and are related to organizations' exit-related decisions and communicative strategies.

Another limitation—or rather an alternative way to examine the data for future research—is taking regional characteristics into consideration when analyzing the exit process in interorganizational collaboration. As explained in the methodology section, the data I collected from two different regions were combined for this study—a total of 10 organizations that either re-entered or did not re-enter the following collaboration cycle after their exit. Six out of the 10 organizations re-entered, with an equal number of organizations from the two regions (i.e., three from each). However, among the four organizations that *did not* re-enter, three were from the same region (the Southwestern region or "Region A" as introduced in Chapter II) and only one from the other (the West Coast region or "Region B"). This could simply be due to the fact that more organizations from Region A were included in the data for the present study, and/or potential sampling error (inevitable as a result of using snowball sampling involved in naturalistic field research) that the data set did not include *all* organizations that have been part of the LRTP process in the two regions (e.g., there could be more organization(s) that participated and did not re-enter in Region B, about which I, as a researcher, may have not known).

But, it is also possible that there may have been some barriers that existed in Region A for organizations that attempted to maintain their collaborative relationships and/or re-enter the LRTP process, compared to Region B; if this is true, more proactive efforts must have been made by the three organizations that successfully re-entered the collaboration in Region A compared to the other three from Region B. Future research can take a comparative case analysis approach and investigate whether/how regional characteristics, such as cultures of local organizations and their unique working relationships (while the LRTP process is still the same), may have theoretically meaningful impacts on the exit

processes. To clarify, the exit strategies reported in this chapter were common across the two regions and generic ones that would not be significantly affected by regional differences; that said, there could have been unique, region-specific strategies in each of the two regions that the findings of this study did not capture.

G. Conclusion

This study offers empirical contribution to the limited body of literature on organizational exit by exploring the process in interorganizational collaboration—a context in which exit can be complicated due to fuzzy boundaries, voluntary and dynamic membership, and a lack of formal mechanisms to manage the exit process. This chapter shed light on the fact that interorganizational communication in different phases or stages of collaboration is motivated by different organizational goals. Examining the exit process in this context revealed the importance of organizations' proactive efforts for ending collaboration in ways that leave the doors open for their re-entry, which can be just as valuable for some organizations as starting new collaboration. Since collaboration is not a single action but involves a series of processes from beginning to end, with each requiring unique roles, tasks, and activities (Lewis, 2006), scholarly focus on the exit process in this setting is warranted and further research is needed.

VI. Epilogue

I began this dissertation by problematizing the emphasis on knowledge *transfer* and *integration*, as it limits our understanding of communicative implications of knowledge-/expertise-sharing practices. I pointed out that previous research has relied on certain types of collaboration that do not require attention to how people communicate *about* their knowledge/expertise, as opposed to communication *of* them. Thus, the focus of this dissertation project was *not* on the ways by which knowledge/expertise itself gets transferred, translated, or transformed; instead, I explored how people engage in collaboration for a long period of time without adopting others' knowledge/expertise or becoming like one another (i.e., *long-term* collaboration among *outsiders*). I embarked on my field research with this broad question: What makes such collaboration possible, and what are important communicative practices that facilitate the process? In this closing chapter, I reflect on my field research process, synthesize the findings, and then discuss overall implications as well as propositions for future research.

A. Long-Term Collaboration Among Outsiders: A Researcher's View

Urban planning, specifically interorganizational collaboration that is organized for projecting the distant future of a metropolitan region, provided an ideal context for my investigation (see Chapter I for descriptions of how it meets both *long-term* and *outsider* criteria). When I first entered the field as a newcomer, identifying this type of collaboration as a *long-term* process was not difficult; but, I was unsure of how/why it constitutes *outsider* collaboration. As the field study progressed, I was intrigued by how my participants—those who represent various organizations that have been part of the collaboration—described one another. "Smart" is the objective that people frequently used to characterize their

collaborative partners, and I would often hear them say how inspiring it is to be surrounded by and have working relationships with all the "smart people."

One participant's quote below is a perfect example that gave me one of those aha moments that led me to this realization: collaborators' impression (or fascination) about others' abilities is because: (a) they perceive the value of others' knowledge in achieving the collaborative goals, yet (b) they know that they do not have the capacity to understand or adopt the knowledge/expertise themselves.

> There are all these allies, who are planning professionals or academics, like you guys—people who are all very smart. I am very happy to have them do their work. For one, I personally don't have the bandwidth to- I didn't go to planning school, and I don't want to recreate that (planning professionals' knowledge and skills). There are people who can do that work. But, you know, you do have to know what to ask for.
>
> - Chan, Executive Director of Social Equity Advocacy Organization

Reports like above helped me gain confidence that this context indeed represents *outsider* collaboration in the way I conceptualized it Chapter I. Knowledge-/expertise-sharing in this setting occurs in ways that do not change the participants' knowledge domain status from outsiders to insiders; but, by the very process of *not* becoming insiders, collaborative partners continue to perceive their interdependence, desire to maintain the relationships, and stay involved in the long-term collaborative process. Chan explained his frustration in a situation where urban planners did attempt to engage in communication *of* their expertise:

> We were discussing how people want free transit passes for youths, and all the really smart planners were talking about was....they were speaking this very heavy language of planning, policy talk, and acronyms…like, that's great, but it is not the space to (get so technical)…

As collaborative partners engage in discussions as *outsiders* of one another's knowledge domains, reactions like Chan's—resisting information about the

knowledge/expertise itself—were common. And, it was not because they do not value or trust others' expertise, but it was because what they needed to know in order to engage in productive discussions and fulfill their roles was *not* the knowledge/expertise itself. Those with outsider status needed to know enough *about* one another's abilities, as indicated in Chan's saying "...you have to know what to ask for," so that it enables fluid interactions and sustains collaborative processes.

This was true in my position as a field researcher, too.[10] Through my research experience, I certainly learned a lot *about* urban planning—why it exists, who the important players are, and what good/bad planning can do. But, I cannot help them plan for a new business unit or build a bus stop in downtown. I am still an outsider. What made the lightbulb go off in my head was *not* when interviewees started going over details of what the law says about greenhouse gas emission or step-by-step instructions of how to reconstruct a roadway; it was when they described *how* and *what about* those things impact their work and communication, such as its ambiguity in how it is written. What enabled me to continue my research for a year was knowing enough about what planners (their collaborators) care about and the communicative challenges/rewards they find in the work; most importantly, it was the mutual acceptance of and appreciation for outsider perspectives I shared with my participants.

[10] Granted, I was not a collaborator in the same way engineers are collaborators of urban planners (i.e., the degree of interdependence is lower). But, once my participants agreed to let me into their field and share about their work, we established a mutual goal, which is understanding and building new knowledge about their communication processes.

B. Synthesis of Findings and Propositions for Future Research

1. Beginning of Long-Term Outsider Collaboration

Once I confirmed the fit between this urban planning context and my research objectives, I asked: *how did my participants come to know who their collaborative partners are or should be in the first place?* I explored this question in Chapter III and examined communicative processes by which groups and organizations shared their knowledge/expertise to present themselves as potential contributors, and ultimately, get into an existing collaborative process. Based on the findings, I developed a two-part communicative process model of *strategic criticism* that delineates how organizations (a) problematized the current collaboration practice to create room for their participation, and then (b) showed how their knowledge/expertise can contribute to improving the problems to prove their worth.

How does *strategic criticism* relate to *long-term outsider* collaboration? In this type of collaboration, participants are not expected to give out their knowledge/expertise for others to adopt or use; but, they themselves become the primary resources on whom others can rely to perform their expertise and accomplish tasks over an extended period of time. Thus, it is crucial for initiators (i.e., individuals, groups, or organizations that try to join collaboration) to show that their knowledge/expertise is highly relevant to and desirable for achieving the collaborative goal, and that they are committed to contributing to the process through long-term knowledge-/expertise-sharing. Strategic criticism, then, is a communicative mechanism for initiators to successfully demonstrate their *legitimacy* and *commitment*.

Legitimacy is a "generalized perception of assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman, 1995, p.574). In interorganizational collaboration where participants interact across sectoral and/or functional boundaries, establishing legitimacy seems to be a necessary activity at the outset of collaboration, regardless of whether the groups/organizations have developed authority and expert status in their own environment—which would be even more important for initiators who desire to break into collaboration they have not participated previously. For example, when doctors interact with nurses, they try to legitimize their knowledge by bringing their past experiences, despite their higher professional status (Manias & Street, 2000). I argue that this is because the quality and value of knowledge/expertise is not something that is inherent or resides in a group or organization; legitimacy of one's use of knowledge/expertise has to be established through communication to show how it fits into the specific context in which they collaborate. Then, strategic criticism can be conceptualized as metacommunication efforts in which potential collaborative partners communicate *about* the value of their knowledge/expertise so as to establish legitimacy and become as accepted outsiders that can lead to long-term partnerships.

> **Proposition 1.** Those who engage in strategic criticism can break into long-term outsider collaboration by legitimizing their knowledge and expertise, unrelated to legitimacy of their groups or organization.

Collaboration that relies on voluntary participation and long-term relationships requires *commitment* as its central component. Commitment suggests initiators' future orientation and willingness to maintain partnership to achieve the mutual goals, even

through unanticipated problems they may face later (Mohr & Spekman, 1994). And, the longer time frame of a collaboration, the higher level of commitment is required to facilitate the process (Margerum, 2002). When groups and organizations across different fields try to begin long-term collaboration without fully understanding one another's capacities, communicatively demonstrating their commitment (to the objectives and to maintain their involvement) is essential so that they can start working together as outsiders and relying on another--despite the gap between their knowledge and expertise. Even if potential collaborators recognize legitimacy of others' knowledge and expertise, it would not be sufficient to accept them as long-term partners without perceiving some level of commitment. I argue that initiators' use of strategic criticism demonstrates the level of commitment needed to break into collaboration, as it shows their efforts to learn enough about the existing collaboration process, critically evaluate its status and needs, and come up with ways by which they can help improve its limitations (see Chapter III for the full process model). Again, initiators' strategic criticism is not intended to deliver the content of their knowledge/expertise, but to communicate their willingness to offer it for the collaboration purposes.

> **Proposition 2.** Those who engage in strategic criticism can break into long-term outsider collaboration by communicating their commitment to the focal problem and to contribute to the collaborative process.

2. Middle of (or During) Long-Term Outsider Collaboration

As I learned more and more about how groups and organizations collaborate as accepted outsiders, who successfully demonstrated commitment and legitimacy of their expertise, I could not help but ask: *How is this collaboration sustained over time when the*

participants hardly see things in the same way? Granted, the point of this type of collaboration is not to have everyone develop the same perspective; even though some participants used the term "consensus-building" when describing the collaboration process, it is not by becoming similar to one another but by winning[11] some ideas and losing some others. However, considering my participants' reports about how far their views can be on a given issue, I wondered what helps to facilitate the collaborative process and keeps it going without falling apart. I explored this in Chapter IV by focusing on the role of conveners in shaping the collaborative environment. Through a comparative analysis of two long-range planning collaboration cases, I found that conveners' practices that embrace and promote tensions lead to an environment where productive discussions can occur while participants appreciate and are not discouraged by clashes of ideas, whereas convening practices that resolved and prevented tensions lead to a controlled environment in which diverse groups' dynamic engagements are limited and participants consider clashes of ideas as roadblocks.

While establishing legitimacy of knowledge/expertise and recognizing mutual commitment helps to initiate collaboration, it does not guarantee that their long-term relationships and interactions will weather challenging situations, like tensions, *during* collaboration. Participants can accept others' expertise as relevant to the collaborative goals, but if they do not *appreciate* it in its own right, they can easily turn to *defensive mechanism* (see Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016) when their ideas clash and exacerbate the stress caused by not being on the same page. To appreciate means "to recognize the full worth of something" and "to be grateful for something" (Oxford Dictionaries, n.d.). For example, a

[11] Advocacy organizations used the term *winning* to describe when the ideas they advocate are chosen to go into the long-range planning, and *losing* when their ideas do not end up being considered in the collaborative process.

student who is taking a required introductory calculus course may recognize the requirement as legitimate, but he or she may not be grateful for the course content or fully recognize its worth in the scientific community. To appreciate a domain like mathematics, it does not require the expert knowledge and skills either--just like I do not need to know how to how a violin works in order to appreciate classic music. Thus, we can reasonably expect appreciation of different knowledge/expertise in collaboration among outsiders.

Sippings (2007) provides a useful explanation of *knowledge appreciation* to conceptualize it in two ways. One is people's appreciation of others' knowledge/expertise itself as an asset—the gratitude that it is available to help achieve collaborative goals. Second is appreciating the people who can perform the knowledge/expertise, in terms of who they are and what they can do. This distinction is useful to explain that collaborative partners might have appreciation for others' knowledge/expertise domains but may not for the people who represent the domains. As I mentioned in Chapter I, knowledge-/expertise-sharing in collaboration occurs, above all, between people; appreciating collaborative partners' knowledge/expertise on both levels as described by Sippings (2007) seems to be a critical component of collaboration that sheds light on the "human side of dealing with knowledge" (p. 162) in terms of sustaining collaboration among outsiders that can be filled with ongoing tensions (see Chapter IV for the mode of tension-based collaboration). Hence, I argue that collaboration is more likely to be sustained long-term if/when mutual appreciation for one another's knowledge/expertise domains exists—more importantly, if it is *communicated* throughout the collaboration process. When collaborative partners express that they appreciate the different perspectives and ideas—even if they do not agree—the

collaborative environment is more likely to be inviting and participants are more open-minded about sharing knowledge/expertise without worrying about others' judgement.

Proposition 3. Knowledge/expertise appreciation is critical to maintain tension-based long-term collaboration among outsiders.

Going back to the role of conveners in tensions and shaping the collaborative environment, I believe that their practices can help foster or hinder appreciation of diverse knowledge/expertise domains among those involved. For example, if conveners show preference for involving narrowly-defined experts with a set of skills they appreciate (i.e., *expertise—experience* tension; see Chapter IV), as opposed to inviting anyone who has relevant experience, the participants will not be able to appreciate inputs and ideas coming from those who do not share the same expert status as theirs. Conveners can engage in communicative practices that bring diverse groups/organizations together and set up an environment where they can maintain collaborative relationships not *despite* the differences of their knowledge/expertise, but *because of* them. In a collaborative environment where participants can see how the clashes of ideas are an asset, invigorating, and valuable, are they able to achieve a mature level of appreciation for one another's participation and desire to stay involved over a long period of time.

Proposition 4. Collaboration conveners can foster knowledge appreciation through practices that embrace tensions and help participants recognize the differences of knowledge/expertise as resources and asset for the collaboration.

3. End of Long-Term Outsider Collaboration

The interorganizational collaboration I studied has two characteristics that make its ending process theoretically interesting: (a) it has a predetermined exit point and (b) is organized and reoccurs around a four-year project cycle. Regardless of how (un)successful organizations are at achieving their individual and/or collective goals, they must leave the collaboration as the project gets completed and decide whether to participate again in the next project cycle. If organizations do intend to re-enter, it would require different strategies from how they were able to "get in" the first time (strategic criticism) because they are now identified as legitimate collaborative partners who have shared long-term working relationships. In Chapter V, I explored how collaborating organizations prepare for their exit and set the stage for their re-entry; I found that their communication efforts toward the end of the project were focused on maintaining existing relationships with other organizations outside the collaboration so that they have a continuing flow of information that can help them prepare for the next project cycle.

What makes the ending process of *outsider* collaboration different from collaboration in which participants become insiders through collective learning, for example, is that there is little or no risk of losing accumulated or integrated knowledge/expertise. When a project is organized so that participants collectively create a new set of knowledge and information, the end process is likely to involve efforts to store them or transfer to individual organizations to not lose the valuable outcome of their collaboration (Pemsel & Wiewiora, 2013). By contrast, in long-term outsider collaboration, what organizations learn through the collaborative process is who (which organizations) are interested in and committed to similar issues; who has legitimate knowledge/expertise that

they cannot have; and who are trustworthy. That is, it is the relationships that organizations develop through the collaboration that they will find most valuable and try to maintain for future opportunities to engage in knowledge-/expertise-sharing.

> **Proposition 5.** Organizations will find the collaborative relationships they develop the most valuable gain or outcome of participating in long-term outsider collaboration.

When there is an opportunity for organizations to re-enter collaboration, the established relationships can also be important resources to receive information regarding the future project and how others prepare for it, as shown in Chapter V. Yet, maintaining all the relationships can cost organizations resources without guaranteed return. Further, it is uncertain toward the end of collaboration as to which organizations will be committed to engaging in knowledge-/expertise-sharing again in the next project cycle. One group or entity who will be surely returning to future collaboration is *conveners*. Conveners, like urban planners, can be conceptualized as *brokers* who are in the intermediate position and bridge unconnected parts of social systems (Burt, 2004). Scholars have focused on the competitive benefits of being in the broker position (e.g., Fleming, Mingo, & Chen, 2007; Stam, 2010; Zaheer & Bell, 2005), but collaborative conveners as brokers do not necessarily act strategically to take advantage of their position by combining disconnected knowledge. Their role is to identify and bring together organizations that have potential to contribute to the collaboration goal. Due to their central position in the collaboration process, however, they are likely to have the most information about the future project as well as potential participants. Thurs, organizations focusing their efforts in keeping connections with

conveners will likely to have most information that will help them re-enter collaboration in the future.

Proposition 6. Maintaining relationships with conveners will increase opportunities for organizations to re-enter collaboration.

C. Contributions of the Dissertation

In this section, I discuss key theoretical contributions of this dissertation (implications that are specific to each of the three research questions, both theoretically and practically, are discussed in respective chapters). This dissertation contributes to two major bodies of the literature: (1) knowledge sharing, and (2) interorganizational collaboration. Accordingly, this section is organized in two sub-sections, with each addressing how this dissertation advances theories in the two lines of research.

1. Two-Dimensional Framework for Knowledge-/Expertise-Sharing

The first major contribution is offering a novel theoretical framework for differentiating knowledge-/expertise-sharing processes based on two dimensions: *time* (long-term versus short-term) and *knowledge domain status* (becoming insiders versus staying as outsiders). This framework helps to expand the research horizon as it encourages researchers to think beyond transfer-integration as an indicator of successful knowledge-/expertise-sharing and explore a variety of communicative contexts. For example, when people work together but do not intend to become insiders of one another's domains (either in short- or long-term processes), their communication will be qualitatively different from when an integration of diverse knowledge/expertise through becoming insiders is the main goal of interactions. Similarly, the framework opens possibilities for exploring *long-term*

engagements that may or may not lead people to become insiders of one another's domains, instead of focusing on well-defined, relatively short-term collaboration processes in which people are better motivated to take advantage of the shared knowledge/expertise by adopting others' perspectives. Researchers then can investigate what communicative mechanisms facilitate these different processes of knowledge-/expertise-sharing and their outcomes.

This framework also provides a heuristic approach for researchers to identify appropriate theoretical lenses and/or research settings, based on their interest in explicating different types of knowledge-/expertise-sharing processes. For example, it was after I mapped the current literature according to this framework (see Chapter I) that I identified the lack of research on *long-term outsider* collaboration and determined that long-range regional planning would be an appropriate process for investigation. The framework also allows for comparing different categories of knowledge-/expertise-sharing to understand what core communicative processes underlie all four types of knowledge-/expertise-sharing and what are unique mechanisms to each type. For example, a potential research question can be *whether* and *how differently* representing (or externalizing) knowledge/expertise through a use of boundary objects may occur in categories other than short-term outsider collaboration (see Table 3 in Chapter I).

Even though the two dimensions appear to be dichotomous, each represents a dynamic continuum rather than a stable condition. A project or an activity can be conceptualized as relatively long- or short-term (i.e., it involves more or less characteristics of long-/short-term processes as described in Chapter I), and people can have more or less of an insider (or outsider) status depending on the context—rather than neatly classified as one end of the spectrum or the other. Further, a project or an activity that was structured like a

long-term process initially can turn into a short-term process, and someone who was an outsider can gradually gain an insider status, and vice versa. Therefore, researchers can begin their investigation of a specific setting as one category in this two-dimensional framework, and examine how the time and knowledge domain status dimensions might change over time (un)intentionally as participants engage in communicative negotiation of diverse knowledge/expertise. Although my participants maintained their outsider status in one another's areas throughout the duration of my field research, it is possible that they will gain insider knowledge/expertise over time as their relationships develop further and communication patterns change, if investigated more longitudinally.

2. Theorizing Interorganizational Collaboration as a Cyclic Process

The second major contribution is theorizing interorganizational collaboration as a cyclic process, with each cycle involving components of a beginning, a middle, and an end. To say that collaboration is (or can be) *cyclic* means that the same (or similar) collaboration will be repeated in the future—whether it involves the same or different participants. Even though scholars have recognized that collaboration is a process rather than a one-time event or activity, research has not addressed how the (potentially) cyclic nature of collaboration may impact the patterns of communication among organizations. Of course, not all collaboration involves such explicit cycles as in long-range regional planning, where the project is organized every four years with a different project label. But, when organizations come together to collaborate on shared issues for a predetermined period of time, the ending of the collaboration is different from when individuals permanently exit organizations or when organizations go bankrupt, *because of* the possibility that they can come together again in the future to address the same or similar problems.

Several explanations are possible as to why diverse organizations that collaborated once may wish to re-organize and/or re-enter the collaboration to work together again. First, as briefly discussed in Chapter V, if organizations find the processes and/or outcomes of prior collaboration projects rewarding or satisfying, they are likely to desire to collaborate again in a future project (Schwab & Miner, 2008). Second, interorganizational collaboration is usually organized around wicked problems, which are social issues that are difficult to define, structure, or resolve (Rittel & Webber, 1973). It is unlikely that collaborating on a single project is sufficient to address those issues. For that reason, as in urban planning, institutions that convene or support collaboration on wicked problems often involve recurring projects and leave possibilities open for stakeholders to participate (again). Third, it is possible that organizational representatives that participated in collaboration together develop strong interpersonal relationships that they turn to one another for future collaboration, to the extent that it is appropriate to involve the same participants.

As the set of three studies reported in this dissertation demonstrated, theorizing interorganizational collaboration as a cyclic process requires thinking differently about each component of collaboration (i.e., the beginning, middle, and end) than if collaboration is not expected to occur again. In the beginning, or the embryonic phase (Chapter III), organizations that are potential participants of a collaboration need to make proactive communicative efforts to justify, legitimize, and persuade others of their value and contribution, since the collaboration can happen without their involvement. The reason they are willing to make such efforts to "get in," even though the process of "breaking in" can be challenging and takes valuable organizational resources, is partially because they are motivated by the fact that they can build long-term partnerships and be part of collective

efforts that go beyond a single collaboration project. That is, the prospect of becoming part of a cyclic collaboration process, compared to participating in a single collaboration project, can be a source of stronger motivation for organizations to engage in strategic communication and break into collaboration.

In the middle of or during collaboration (Chapter IV), engaging in tensions (as opposed to avoiding or resolving them) can help to sustain the communicative process rather than breaking it, if managed properly. This is partly because the issue at hand is *not* expected to be resolved with a clear answer in a single collaboration cycle, but to be updated and strengthened by diverse ideas generated through cyclic collaborative engagements. Further, the fact that some organizations have developed collaborative relationships from previous cycles (and/or will develop one in the future) can facilitate the negotiation of tensions in decision-making processes. As some participants mentioned during my field research, organizations are often content with "winning some and losing some"; for example, if/when organizational representatives perceive that their organization "won" a decision that they advocated in previous collaboration cycle(s), they are comfortable with other organizations getting what they want in the current cycle. In this way, how organizational partners negotiate tension-based situations can be impacted by the cyclical nature of collaboration, which deserves further investigation.

In the ending phase of collaboration (Chapter V), communication among organizational partners can impact and be impacted by whether they desire to re-enter the collaboration in the future. When organizations do intend to collaborate again on a future project, their exit process happens concurrently with a similar process as anticipatory socialization (Jablin, 2001) since their communication is aimed at reflecting on their

participation in the previous cycle and facilitating their entry into a future collaboration cycle simultaneously. Therefore, communication during the ending phase of a cyclic collaboration process is likely to involve more strategic organizational behaviors compared to collaboration that does not reoccur after closure. In sum, theorizing interorganizational collaboration as a (potentially) cyclic process opens possibilities for examining diverse organizations' communication efforts to join, stay involved, and leave as they engage in reflective practices as well as with an eye toward future opportunities to collaborate again.

D. Limitations of the Dissertation

The field research I presented in this dissertation has several overall limitations to acknowledge, which will help guide future studies in this area (specific limitations that are related to the three research questions are discussed in respective chapters). First, although I was able to observe the tail end of and the initial stage of the four-year long-range urban planning collaboration cycle over a year-long period, I relied on interviews to learn about how organizations became involved in the process initially. Exploring the four-year collaboration cycle in its entirety through a longitudinal study and collecting more observational data could have provided a more complete picture of the collaborative relationship developments among the organizations I studied.

Second, the collaborative urban planning process does not have concrete outcome measures to evaluate the success of the collaborative long-range planning project; for one, the project is about envisioning the future of the region in 25 years, so people will not know how effective the collaborative efforts were in making the place a better place to live until the time comes. Although the goal of this field research was *not* to examine the relationship between knowledge-/expertise-sharing and effectiveness of collaborative projects, future

studies can measure variables, such as participant satisfaction, commitment, and trust through surveys, and then examine how they are related to communicative strategies for initiating, sustaining, and preparing to leave collaboration. Third, this research focused on long-term outsider collaboration, but I could not make direct comparisons with other types of collaborative processes. Future research on this topic can utilize the two-dimensional framework presented in this dissertation for multi-case comparative studies.

E. Concluding Thoughts

This dissertation was about how knowledge-/expertise-sharing happens in the "life" of interorganizational collaboration—how it starts, continues, and ends. After all, organizations and collaboration do not share knowledge and expertise; and one's knowledge and expertise cannot share themselves. It is fundamentally human activity that is accomplished through communication to show legitimacy, commitment, appreciation, and intention to continue collaborative relationships—all these processes require human connections among the people who come together to gives collaboration its "life." I close this dissertation by sharing a quote from a communication specialist, whose organization was involved in long-range regional planning to help improve the participatory process, as it perfectly captures the most important practical implications of my field study:

> No one here goes into the field thinking, "I want to ruin this community." That is *not* why there are differences and contentious situations during this process. They (collaborators) all come from the same place of wanting to help grow really nice places for people to live. They want to improve how bridges connect, where parks go, and all the good stuff. So, trying to bring people together and help humanize the process is what we do. We've done an icebreaker in a meeting where people shared lovely stories about their favorite places in this region. And they've told us, "Thank you so much." One of the women said, "I just feel like we weren't even seeing each other as people, and it was very nice to connect with each other on a personal level." I said: *You guys are all colleagues*! *You work together*!

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