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Paradoxes of Collaborating with the Enemy

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Abstract

The nature of relationships between environmental stakeholders is changing. Increasingly, different types of cooperative relationships - green alliances - are emerging between former adversaries to promote corporate environmentalism through economic and market incentives as well as sociopolitical reforms. Green alliances are collaborative partnerships between environmental stakeholders temporarily or permanently formed to pursue mutually beneficial ecological goals. While green alliances offer several significant benefits to partnering organizations, these cooperative relations also pose significant challenges to participants. In particular, as green alliances can jeopardize the social order and threaten the strategic positions of environmental stakeholders, they require creativity, foresight, patience, and management savvy from those who lead or catalyze these collaborative initiatives. Bringing together stakeholders with divergent interests is challenging and requires a paradigm shift in how environmental stakeholders view their sociopolitical roles and relationships with one another. In particular, green alliances require that environmental stakeholders adopt a new leadership paradigm that includes beliefs, values, and behaviors that will move parties to and through the collaborative process. Collaborative leadership in green alliances is defined as the process of initiating, facilitating, and sustaining collaborative initiatives among stakeholders for addressing environmental sustainability issues. However, in order for environmental leaders to adopt a collaborative leadership role requires a rethinking of their existing ideas about how to assemble, motivate, and sustain working relationships among stakeholders and partners. Specifically, we argue that adopting this new leadership paradigm creates a set of "paradoxes" that environmental stakeholders must resolve before they can move forward successfully. Our workshop presentation will focus on the following preliminary list of paradoxes that we have derived from existing literature and current case research being conducted by the authors.

- How can collaboration exist in the midst of conflict?
- How can leaders collaborate while leading?
- When specific environmental goals compromise an ecosystem, are sustainable solutions possible? Can a leader's technical expertise conflict with sustaining the collaboration?
- How can credit be shared among partners? Can green alliance successes lead to weakening of each stakeholder from the perspectives of broader constituencies?
- If leadership is shared, who will take responsibility for the leadership?
- Can a stakeholder's ability to convince others to collaborate stem, in part, from that same stakeholder's coercive power?
- Does collaboration result in compromise solutions?

Using the grounded theory approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998), contributions from workshop participants will be integrated into Chrislip and Larson's (1994) collaborative leadership framework to generate a collaborative leadership framework for green alliances and research propositions for future research.