



When Researchers Disagree: Facilitating Helpful, Respectful Collaboration

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Why am I presenting this topic?

- Collaboration is important
- Collaboration is often done poorly
- I know the theory, research, and practice of collaboration
 - Theory is called “concurrency” or “parallel computation,” a part of computer science
 - Research is within social sciences; I follow it
 - I’ve supervised several hundred team efforts
 - Many sizes, durations, and organizational styles

> What is “collaboration”

- Sharing of effort between 2+ parties under the hope that each party benefits from the others’ involvement
- Involves
 - Coordinating who does what
 - Expressing your findings to others
 - Understanding others’ expressed findings
- Hope: benefit outweighs effort

> Collaboration, Pro and Co

We gain

1. Productivity
2. Access to more sources
3. Research validation
4. Personal validation
5. Sense of altruism

We risk

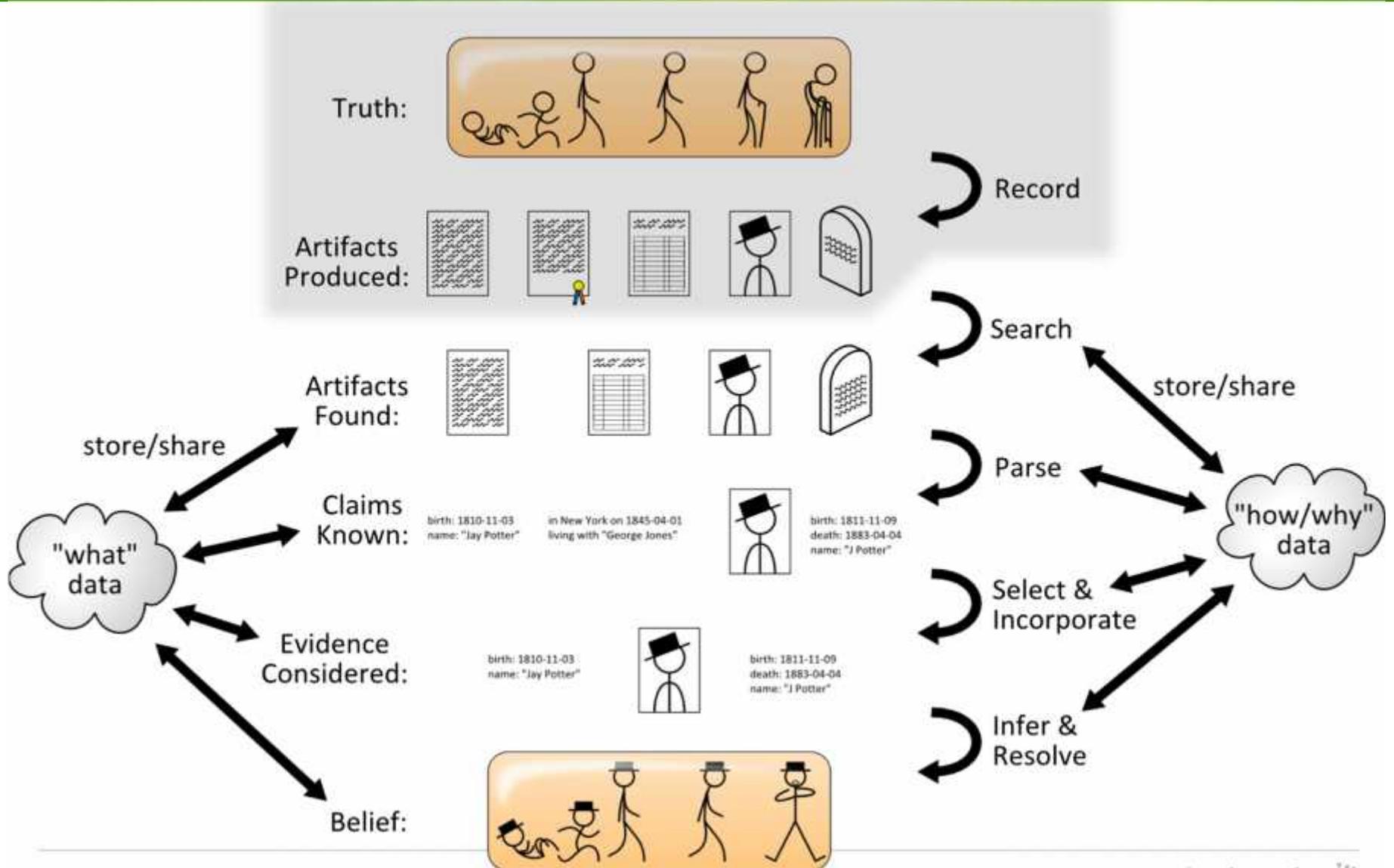
1. Time lost communicating
2. Duplication of effort
3. Increasing uncertainty
4. Personal invalidation
5. Sense of antagonism
6. Stylistic disagreements
7. Loss of control
8. Priority manipulation

1. How do *you* collaborate?
 - Web sites? GEDCOM trading? Mail? Email? Telephone? Face-to-face? ...
 - Make a list
2. Share list with your neighbor
 - Briefly...
3. We'll do more with this after next slide...

› Three “theoretical” views

- What are we sharing?
- How are we sharing it?
- How are we distributing work?

» What are we sharing?



Two Kinds of Collaboration

Shared Memory

- One copy of the data exists
 - Never out-of-sync
- We can both edit it
- Risk: “race condition”
 - We both edit differently
- Solution: locks
 - e.g. Wikipedia, “owned” data
 - Reduces my freedom to edit
 - If I don’t have the lock, why play along?

Message Passing

- Each has own copy of data
 - Never forced to use bad ideas
- We can give each other suggestions
- Risk: too much work
 - Mental effort and time required to use what is sent
- Risk: out-of-sync data
 - You say “change X to Y ” but I don’t have any X to change

Task Allocation Strategies

- How do you decide who does what?
 1. Both do on own
 2. Both do, then compare
 3. Shared to-do list
 4. Divide and conquer
- Each has its own benefits and risks
- If you don't decide, probably a mix of 2 and 3
- Some tools assume particular allocations



No free lunch

- Nothing can make the risks disappear
- But can mitigate the risks, amplify the benefits
 - How to do so is the topic of the rest of this talk
- Rest of talk:
 - 2 general good practices
 - 4 common complaints



Practice 1: Make it pleasant for them

- Collaboration usually thought to provide
 1. Productivity (many hands make light work)
 2. Access to additional resources
- Also try to give
 3. Personal validation: listen to them
 4. Research validation: compliment them
 5. Sense of altruism: thank them
- But *never* lie to them; be genuine or be silent



Practice 2: Give and Take

- If you do not feel that you are giving more than your fair share, you are probably not giving enough
- Contribution = importance × quantity of work
 - I focus on what I find more important than you do
 - And I'm more aware of the amount of work I do
 - Hence, I naturally feel my contribution is larger than you feel it is

➤ Complaint 1: “They won’t give up on X”

- It takes two to have a protracted argument
 - (they say the same thing about you)
- If you notice this problem, usually too late to be worth trying to come to agreement
- Compromise
 - Record statement you agree on (e.g., “the 1850s”)
 - Note each of your opinions (e.g., “Might be 1851-05-02 (*reasons*). Might be 1859-09-13 (*reasons*)”)
- Move on

➤ Complaint 2: “Their research is of low quality”

- Don't try to “fix” *them*
 - Teach if they are willing to learn
- Do they accept your quality improvements?
 - Yes: think of them as an unreliable source (accept but verify)
 - No: back to “won't give up”
- Is their work worse than no work at all?

Complaint 3: “They make things up”

- Liars do exist...
- Three solution strategies:
 1. Coach honesty: praise truths, act like lies never happened. Requires patience.
 2. Ban from community
 - E.g., prisons, mental hospitals, IP blacklists, etc.
 3. Ban from community without their knowledge
 - E.g., give them a sandbox to play in
- None of these works as well as we'd like...

> Complaint 4: “They take but won’t give”

- Be polite and gracious and they might give more in the future
- But is this really a problem?
- Practice thinking kind thoughts of them
 - “maybe this was more work than I thought”
 - “maybe they are having other troubles in life”
- Switch mental model from team to audience

- Understanding Collaboration
 - 5 benefits, 8 risks
 - Many things we could share
 - Two ways to do so (shared data vs messages)
 - Several task distribution strategies
- Tips for good collaboration
 - Help others feel good
 - Give and take
 - Compromise
 - Don't try to fix them
 - Be gracious

Download syllabus materials at RootsTech.org.

› **Thank you!**

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