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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>We gain</th>
<th>We risk</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Productivity</td>
<td>1. Time lost communicating</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Access to more sources</td>
<td>2. Duplication of effort</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Research validation</td>
<td>3. Increasing uncertainty</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Personal validation</td>
<td>4. Personal invalidation</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Sense of altruism</td>
<td>5. Sense of antagonism</td>
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<td>6. Stylistic disagreements</td>
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<td>7. Loss of control</td>
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<td>8. Priority manipulation</td>
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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?

Truth:

Artifacts Produced:

Record

Artifacts Found:

Search

store/share

"what" data

Claims Known:

Parse

"how/why" data

Evidence Considered:

Select & Incorporate

Belief:

Infer & Resolve

store/share
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
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
• 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
• If you do not feel that you are giving more than your fair share, you are probably not giving enough

• Contribution = importance \times \text{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?
Liars do exist...

Three solution strategies:

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
Summary

• 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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