

Chapter 6

Convening, Empowering, and Integrating Relevant and Affected Actors

Abstract

This chapter explores how conveners can use stakeholder analysis to bring together and align relevant and affected actors in cocreation partnerships. Next, it considers how conveners can deal with the limits to the inclusion of all relevant and affected actors. Reflections on the relation between inclusion and exclusion of actors are followed by a discussion of how conveners can empower weak, vulnerable, and inexperienced participants. Empowered actors must be motivated to participate in complex and demanding cocreation processes. The key motivator is to be found in the efforts of conveners and facilitators to clarify, strengthen, and create resource interdependence between the participants. The last section looks at the emergence of different kinds of conflicts and the role of conveners and facilitators in mediating conflicts that threaten to jeopardize the cocreation process.

Keywords: Convening actors; stakeholder analysis; empowerment; effective participation; integration; conflict mediation

Convening Relevant and Affected Actors to Participate in Cocreation of Public Solutions

Once a collaborative process for cocreating SDG solutions has been enabled by platforms and/or designed in ways that will allow sustained interaction, change-makers will have to identify potential participants and motivate them to join the collaborative endeavor – i.e., they must convene the actors who will cocreate sustainability solutions. The salience of the problems and goals in question, their resonance with local agendas and experiences, and the way they are framed by local conveners are important factors for getting the attention of potential

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participants and arousing their interest in participating in cocreation. However, it is not enough to broadcast good and noble intentions to cocreate solutions to one or more important SDGs; the conveners will have to work hard to proactively mobilize and commit local actors and get them on board.

The conveners themselves may constitute a small group of actors who know each other well and share the commitment and urge to solve pressing problems. They may even have worked together on a previous occasion. Sometimes there is just one single brave and passionate convener calling for collective action and hoping that other actors will join in. No matter how many conveners there are, the big question is: who to invite into the cocreation partnership? The simple answer is that they should aim to bring together relevant and affected actors. The relevant actors are those public, private, and third sector actors who possess important knowledge, skills, and resources, and thus can contribute to understanding the problem and designing and implementing a solution. The affected actors are those who, in addition to skills and resources, have valuable experiences with existing problems and solutions or will feel the impact of new solutions, and thus can help to identify local needs.

Conveners may want to put together a dream team of actors with different knowledge, skills, and resources. Like a sports coach, they want to select a team consisting of players each of whom possesses much-needed competences and together have all that is needed to succeed. Hence, if you want to convene a partnership for transition to sustainable farming based on new and varied crops, organic fertilizers, and improved irrigation, you may want to recruit actors with insights into local traditions and conditions, agricultural visions and ideas, updated scientific knowledge, connections to local farmers, and access to funding and finance. Actors infused with creativity, courage, stamina, and collaborative spirit will be valuable additions to the team. The list of required resources, skills, and human qualities varies from case to case. Hence, the main rule for conveners is to let the problem or challenge at hand define who the relevant and affected actors are. A careful problem analysis and a survey of possible solutions will help to determine the type of resource- and skill-bearing actors that are needed to establish a winning team that successfully solves the problem at hand.

Some actors will be obvious participants and may not require much persuasion as they are highly interested in participating, but the group of relevant and affected actors possessing the skills and resources to ensure goal attainment extends beyond the more limited group of self-selected actors. So the question remains: who else to invite? Stakeholder analysis is a useful tool in answering this question. It aims to identify relevant and affected actors, map their interrelationships, and discover higher-level agendas and goals that may attract important actors and create a partnership between them. The analysis may be boiled down to three crucial analytical steps (see Eden & Ackermann, 1998; Ackermann & Eden, 2011; Bryson, Patton, & Bowman, 2011, but in particular Bryson, Cunningham, & Lokkesmoe, 2002).

The first step simply lists local stakeholders, including regional, national, and international stakeholders with a local presence, using the “power versus interest

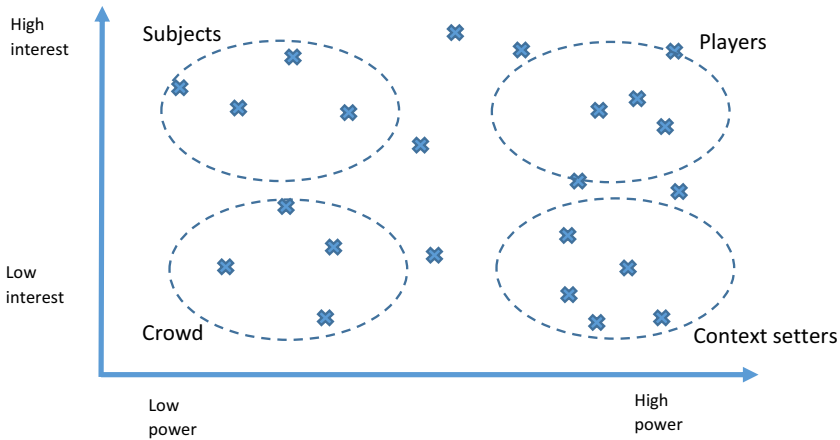


Fig. 6.1. Power Versus Interest Grid. *Source:* Adapted from Bryson et al. (2002, p. 572).

grid” shown in Fig. 6.1 to array the stakeholders according to their varying degrees of interest in solving the problem at hand and varying degrees of formal or informal power and influence that enables them to do something to solve the problem.

The power versus interest grid permits the conveners to identify four types of actors: (1) *subjects* who have a high interest in solving the problem, but little power and influence; (2) *crowd* actors who neither are interested in problem-solving nor have any power; (3) *players* who both have interest in problem-solving and lots of power; and (4) *context setters* who also have power but little interest in the problem. In order to ensure effective and successful cocreation, conveners must seek to form an alliance between players, context setters, and subjects. The players are both motivated for and capable of driving change, but they need to engage with context setters in order secure funding and supportive regulation and they need to involve actors from the group of subjects to make sure that the solution is feasible and targets real needs.

The second step consists in establishing which actors are related to and influence other actors. As indicated in Fig. 6.2, where the arrows signify influence, this analysis seeks to identify clusters or networks of actors that are intensely related to each other and more or less separated from other clusters. It also allows identification of central actors who tend to influence other actors.

Conveners of cocreation should aim to recruit and connect actors from different clusters or networks in order to mobilize a broad set of resources and prevent conflicts between different interest coalitions. They should also make sure that the cocreation partnership they are trying to form includes some of the central actors capable of influencing other actors in the field.

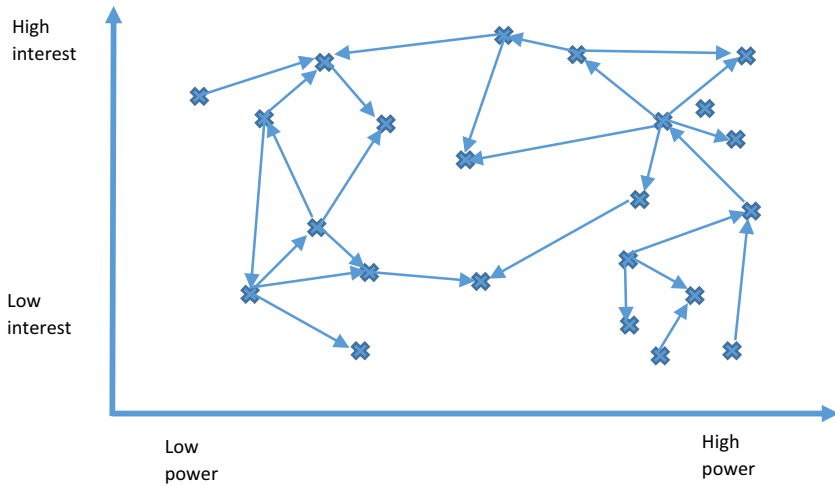


Fig. 6.2. Stakeholder Influence Analysis. *Source:* Adapted from Bryson et al. (2002, p. 574).

The final step in stakeholder analysis is to identify the different goals of the stakeholders. This move is important since interests formulated as goals tend to drive action. Each of the stakeholders will typically subscribe to a number of different goals in relation to the problem at hand and, typically, there will be many shared and overlapping goals. By linking these shared and overlapping goals into a set of higher-level goals and agendas, it becomes possible to construct a common ground for bringing together a diversity of actors into joint action.

It is good idea to spend time doing a proper stakeholder analysis to recruit the “right” actors in the cocreation partnership. However, if there is a shortage of time and resources, the formal and somewhat demanding stakeholder analysis presented above may be skipped in favor of a more intuitive approach that asks three basic questions:

- (1) How can we create a broad alliance between actors who are interested in solving the problem, have the means to do it, and can influence the context?
- (2) Who are the central actors and how can we involve them in cocreation?
- (3) How can we formulate a broad agenda and some broadly defined goals that are shared by most if not all of the actors that we want to recruit?

Even a brief, informal chat among the conveners to reflect on these three questions will help ensure that key actors are linked by a common purpose that will help to trigger cocreated change.

New research confirms the value of stakeholder analysis for identifying and linking actors to drive toward sustainability. Kismartini, Roziqin, Purnaweni,

Prabawani, and Kamil (2020) used the power-interest grid to investigate the participation of key stakeholder associated with Indonesia's Special Economic Zone policies and its relationship to environmental concerns. The analysis finds that without inclusion of both interested and powerful actors, the prospects for policy implementation would be limited. Another study using the power-interest grid to study women empowerment in India found that wide inclusion of communities and networks was paramount for success (Wakunuma & Jiya, 2019).

Coping With the Limits to Inclusion

While stakeholder analysis is indeed a useful tool for populating partnerships for the cocreation of SDG solutions, it may produce a very long list of potential participants that are all deemed relevant, affected, and perhaps even central to the endeavor. Studies show that cocreation thrives on inclusion (Wakunuma & Jiya, 2019). Additional actors may bring fresh ideas and extra resources to the table and will become part of an alliance supporting the implementation of new solutions. Nevertheless, there are limits to inclusion.

First, there is a *coordination challenge*. Both logistic coordination and internal communication tend to become more difficult when the number of actors increases. Finding a suitable time where everybody can meet gets harder, the meeting facilities must be bigger, digital meetings get more complex, giving everybody a chance to speak and be heard becomes challenging, and the risk that some participants fail to receive important information increases.

Second, there is the *conflict challenge*. An increasing number of participants means that there are more opinions, interests, and veto points to take into account when trying to get the actors to agree on a joint solution. As such, highly inclusive networks and partnerships with a large number of actors may have difficulties realizing their collaborative advantage due to the rise of conflicts and tensions that create stalemates.

Third, there is the *troubling actor challenge*. In all collaboration, there is the thorny question about whether to include or exclude actors who are known to be very loud, arrogant, and antagonistic. Is it best to include such actors in order to integrate and neutralize them and prevent them from causing havoc from the outside, or is it better to exclude them so that they do not spoil the collaborative process and block decision-making on the inside?

Conveners must deal with all of these challenges. The coordination challenge can be dealt with by operating with different levels of participation. Some actors may form part of the inner circle of entrepreneurial actors who are driving the cocreation process forward and participating in all activities. A larger group of involved actors may play an active role and participate in plenary meetings in most or all of the crucial stages of the cocreation process. An even wider group of interested actors may be recruited as participants in work groups aiming to tackle a particular problem on an ad hoc basis. Finally, all relevant and affected actors may be continuously informed about important activities and perhaps consulted about key issues. Here, digital technologies that facilitate online participation may be particularly useful. Distinguishing different levels of more or less intense participation helps to facilitate the participation of a relatively large number of

actors without having too many participants in the cockpit where problems are defined and solutions designed and tested. Fig. 6.3 shows how different groups of people can be members of different spheres of more or less intense participation.

Cocreation arenas with different levels of participation are inclusive because they allow large numbers of actors to participate, but they are also exclusive as some actors are excluded from the inner circle. Getting acceptance of this arrangement from all those who want to participate requires a high level of transparency and a steady stream of communication from the inside out. The participants in the outer spheres of participation may not need information about everything, but should be informed of all major decisions and events.

The conflict challenge may be dealt with by creating an early agreement about the problem definition and the overall goals. By creating a common ground for solving the problems, later conflicts and tensions can be reduced to minor disagreements about the means and tools. Should major conflicts arise, mediation and conflict resolution is called for and if that is not enough, the conflicting parties may be separated through process design that places the combatants in different meetings, work groups, etc. (O'Toole, 1997). Finally, if segregation does not work either, the last option is to exclude the most uncompromising actor(s) from the joint decision-making process.

The troubling actor challenge poses a real dilemma as both inclusion and exclusion may turn out to be the right or wrong solution and a third option hardly exists. Nevertheless, conveners may try to involve a loud, arrogant, and antagonizing actor in either an internal working group where the damage caused by

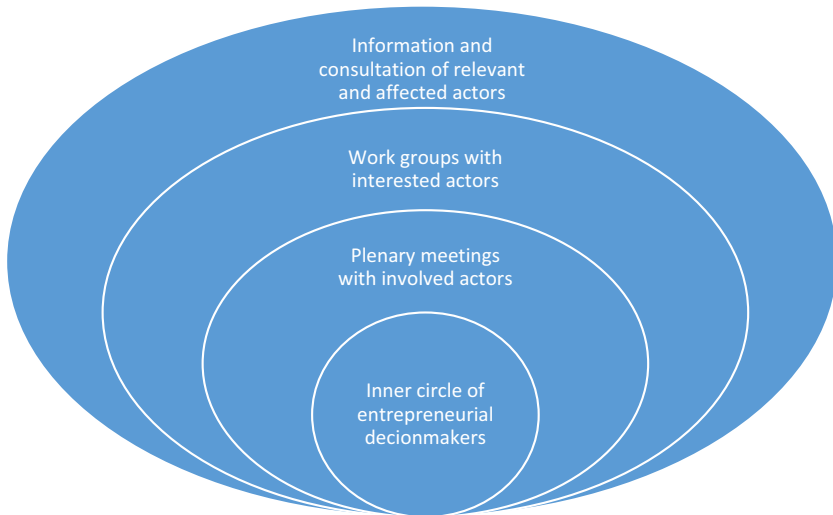


Fig. 6.3. Different Spheres of More or Less Intense Participation.

Source: Adapted from Straus (2002).

abrasive behavior is limited and manageable or an external advisory board where blunt and critical comments can be tolerated because there is no obligation to follow suit. Such a tentative “third option” seeks to reduce the risk of including troublesome actors by including them on a limited basis (see also, Johnston, Hicks, Nan, & Auer, 2011).

Until now we have discussed inclusion and exclusion of actors as if it was a discretionary decision of the conveners alone. However, there are many examples of self-exclusion. Strong public, private, or third sector actors might want to go it alone because they believe other actors will weigh them down and make progress slow. Civil society actors may fear that their independency will be compromised by working closely together with state actors and private companies. Small organizations may not have enough staff to engage in cocreation. Citizens may be too busy or suspect that they will not have much influence. Finally, actors with limited resources or status may fear to be steamrolled by the stronger actors in a partnership. Since self-exclusion deprives the cocreation arena of valuable perspectives, the conveners must work hard to persuade reluctant actors to join the network or partnership. They may not get on board from the beginning, but may be drawn in later on when they can see that cocreation matters.

This brings us to the last point: inclusion and exclusion of relevant and affected actors in cocreation arenas is dynamic. Participants may come and go. In fact, they may not need to participate in all phases of the cocreation process. Some actors may be more useful in the design phase where input is needed to define the problem, whereas other actors may contribute to the implementation of new solutions or help to evaluate outcomes. Straus (2002) recommends using a “process map” that clearly specifies which actors should participate in which part of the cocreation process. Some actors may even be persuaded to participate in cocreation if they can see that they do not have to be part of the entire process. That being said, it is important to have a core group of actors who participate throughout the cocreation process in order to ensure continuity and progression and keep the focus on the overall goals.

Empowering Actors to Secure Effective Participation

Cocreation aims to make use of the different experiences, ideas, and resources of the participating actors to create innovative and pragmatic solutions. Managing and exploiting the differences between public, private, and third sector actors, including different groups of citizens, presuppose that all these actors can participate effectively in the sense of understanding the agenda, introducing themselves, flagging their competences, grasping the main points from presentations, engaging in debates, believing in their own ability to influence decisions, and maintaining a close connection with the group or organization they represent. This presupposition of effective participation does not always hold in reality as key social, political, and economic resources are unevenly distributed across the participating actors due to a combination of socioeconomic inequalities, differences in social and political group status, and varying experiences with

participation in the past. Actors may be strong in many personal respects, while lacking the experience, knowledge, and resources necessary for effective participation in cocreation. In order to level the playing field and give all actors a fair chance of being heard and influencing joint decisions, the conveners must seek to empower the weaker actors and remind the stronger actors that they may marginalize or scare off less resourceful participants if they fail to make room for their valuable contributions. To avoid marginalization and defection, stronger actors must also learn to restrain themselves and curb their temptation to muscle their way through joint decisions. In other words, conveners must use different tools to address and mitigate resource asymmetries in order to facilitate effective participation and fruitful collaboration.

Empowerment is a capacity-building activity that aims to enable actors to “gain mastery over their affairs” (Rappaport, 1987). It refers to actions, interventions, and conditions that enable individual or collective actors to achieve a desirable outcome such as effective participation that allows them to have influence over the results of cocreation (Hölscher et al., 2019; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Empowerment strategies may operate at the societal, group, or participant level. Let us take a brief look at the different empowerment strategies while paying special attention to participant-level strategies.

Building capacities for effective participation by means of empowering weaker actors requires social and political action at a *societal level*. Most important strategy for societal empowerment is the persistent attempt to reduce socioeconomic inequalities by means of enhancing shared prosperity, creating jobs in an inclusive labor market, and building social welfare systems that can help cover basic social needs. Economic crises tend to enhance social inequalities while access to jobs is a key to enhancing social equality. Social welfare programs help to cover basic needs and enable people to look ahead and become involved in activities aiming to build a better world. If they are tax-financed, they may have a large redistributive effect. Other important empowerment strategies at the societal level are the efforts to extend civil, political, and social rights through political reforms and to remove group status hierarchies based on tradition, religion, gender, ethnicity, prejudice, etc. Empowerment is strengthened by improving the formal and informal conditions for speaking up, organizing action, expressing new ideas, and improving the livelihood of poor segments of the population. Finally, we should never forget that (civil) war or local acts or threats of violence may deprive particular sections of the population of a voice either because they are fleeing from unsafe conditions or feel intimidated. Hence, peace-keeping efforts are a crucial societal empowerment strategy (Williams, 2013). It goes without say that local conveners of cocreation cannot use these societal-level strategies to empower the participants in a particular partnership. Not only do these strategies only produce effects over the long term, but they are also typically a matter for national government. The local partnership may, however, pursue and realize SDGs that support one or more of these societal empowerment strategies.

Group level empowerment strategies may be pursued by regional or local governments and gain support from local conveners of cocreation. An important

strategy involves efforts to recognize communities and groups and raise their status in public discourse. Community-raising efforts may include celebration of local culture, festivals displaying local music, historical accounts revealing the origins of local people and customs, and establishment of cultural hubs, centers, and consciousness-raising activities. Another important strategy is to support the self-organization of local communities and the creation of self-help groups by offering advice about establishing and running community organizations, creating meeting spaces and training local leaders (Suguna, 2006). A study of women's empowerment in India shows that involvement in local self-help groups enabled women to have a voice in community affairs and enabled them to tackle problems such as the lack of drinking water and electricity and access to health services (Umashankar, 2006). A final strategy is to devolve the responsibility for public tasks to local communities and groups to improve their self-confidence and build local governance capacities. While local conveners can neither initiate nor drive these group-level empowerment strategies, they may persuade local or regional governments, or perhaps international donor organizations, to run empowerment projects targeting local communities and groups.

Participant-level empowerment strategies can be deployed at will by local conveners and facilitators to ensure effective participation in cocreation partnerships. An overview of the many different strategies is provided in [Table 6.1](#).

Conveners and facilitators using one or more of these empowerment strategies to ensure effective participation for all the involved actors face the challenge that intentional empowerment strategies may unintentionally disempower some of the participants. For example, inviting a group of less resourceful, vulnerable, or inexperienced participants to a premeeting taking place in an official government building or in the headquarters of a large international donor organization may disempower the participants by bringing them into a formal and foreign setting that oozes of power or wealth and thus make some of them feel uncomfortable and alienated.

Another paradox in relation to empowerment of participants in cocreation processes is that, in some cases, the stronger actors have to be “disempowered” relative to the weaker actors in order to level the playing field and enhance effective participation. The disempowerment of the stronger actors does not involve stripping them of their knowledge, competences, and resources that eventually will benefit the cocreation process. Instead, it involves changing the rules and procedures governing interaction in cocreation arenas so that the stronger actors are forced to restrain their exercise of power and give more room for weaker actors to express their opinions and influence decisions. There are many facilitation tricks that aim to disempower the stronger actors relative to the weaker actors and they all tend to disrupt the standard format of meetings where people sit around the same table and the most resourceful actors dominate discussions. One trick is to begin a discussion with a silent brainstorm where all participants think about an answer to a question and some of the weaker actors get to report their ideas before the rest of the participants are asked whether they have additional input. Another trick is to make a round in plenary discussions so that everybody has an equal opportunity to speak and be heard. A third trick is to

Table 6.1. Overview of Participant-Level Empowerment Strategies.

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- *Collaborative platforms* may provide access to relevant information, advice and knowledge, and perhaps offer online or face-to-face training sessions that prepare local actors for collaborative work in a particular area
 - *A premeeting* with weak, vulnerable, or inexperienced participants can help bringing them up to speed with what is going to happen in the meeting and informing them how they can contribute to the process
 - *A postmeeting* with the same group of actors will help them to debrief and create an opportunity for answering questions about future meetings and actions and responding to eventual frustrations
 - *Trust building* through the creation of spaces for informal social interaction where participants get to know each other on a more personal basis, use of presentation rounds that allow participants to gauge each other's beliefs and intentions, and formation of joint rules that prevent opportunistic action will make less resourceful, vulnerable, or inexperienced participants more comfortable with participating
 - *Facilitation of meetings* that gives everybody a chance to speak up and encourages discussions in small breakout groups where the participants feel more secure and where the risk of internal exclusion or sidelining is mitigated
 - *High speed information sharing* in the initiation phase helps level the playing field by providing the participants with the same basic knowledge about problems and possible solutions
 - *Mentoring* that pairs weaker, more vulnerable, or less experienced participants with stronger, confident, and knowledgeable actors can pass on valuable skills, tips, and tricks that support effective participation
 - *Selective activation* that prior to a meeting or event solicits a small and easily provided input from a passive and insecure participant may give them a positive experience that leads to more active participation
 - *Distributive leadership* that lets disempowered actors solve small yet important tasks, applauds their achievement, and encourages them to do more will serve to raise their self-confidence and efficacy
 - *Frame reflection* allows all participants to comment on and evaluate the way that the collaborative process is framed, organized, and conducted in order to ensure that everybody feels comfortable with the procedures.
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use walk-and-talk to elicit ideas from small groups with a well-balanced composition or simply to hold meetings while walking through a town or rural area and where either problems and/or possible solutions become visible. A last trick is to make joint decisions by creating a “solution gallery” where all the different actors can walk around and look at the different solutions displayed on the wall and add their evaluative comments and perhaps cast votes prioritizing the solutions they like the most.

Fostering Collaborative Relations Through Motivation and Integration of Actors

Once the relevant and affected actors have been identified and effective participation is ensured through empowerment of the weaker actors and ‘disempowerment’ of the stronger, the key question becomes how to motivate and integrate the participants in order to spur collaboration and joint problem-solving. Most actors will be motivated to participate by the noble cause and the anticipation of the gains flowing from solutions to pressing problems. Still, the participating actors need to be convinced that they can do more by working together than working in parallel or going it alone. In fostering collaboration, the clarification, strengthening, and perhaps even creation of resource interdependencies are of great importance (Kooiman, 1993). Interdependence refers to the actors’ recognition that they are dependent on each other’s resources, competences, knowledge, support, etc., in order to carry out a particular task or solve a problem. A private contractor aiming to introduce fractioned garbage collection in a major city needs financial support from the municipality and perhaps an investor, technical support from experts and industrial designers, and input from local citizens and neighborhoods to judge feasibility and gain support for implementation. Local citizens aiming to fight hunger by planting crops and buying livestock financed by microloans need backing from community leaders, financial institutions, public authorities, and international donor organizations. The government of Sao Paulo must solicit ideas, resources and support from civil society organizations, residential representatives, local businesses, and urban planning experts in order to find ways of legalizing Favelas and getting the residents to pay for water and electricity. Finally, an international NGO aiming to reduce plastic pollution in the Indian Ocean needs permissions from public authorities, scientific knowledge possessed by marine biologists and oceanographers, ideas and willingness to change behavior from fishermen’s organizations, operational support from regulatory agencies controlling rivers spilling out into the ocean and business firms interested in the circular economy. None of the public, private or third sector entrepreneurs can go it alone. Hence, they will all be looking for additional leverage and collaborative advantage (Huxham & Vangen, 2013).

While changemakers aiming to spur cocreation of SDG solutions may have a keen eye for mutual resource dependencies, the actors that they want to engage in collaborative problem-solving may not have any understanding of the need to

exchange or pool resources in order to change the world for the better. This situation calls for:

Clarification of the mutual relations of resource dependence by means of pitching the need to solve a pressing problem to relevant and affected actors and asking them to help map the resources and competences that are present in the room and are needed to solve the problem at hand. Such a clarification of resource interdependencies may identify resources and competences that are uniquely possessed by single actors, shared by several actors or not possessed by any of the participating actors, thus generating a need to recruit additional participants.

Strengthening of resource interdependence either by storytelling that aims to rehearse past examples of successful collaboration and demonstrate how in the present situation the special contribution of different actors can help produce desirable outcomes that none of the actors could deliver on their own, or by encouraging some of the participating actors to specialize in what they do best now that they have access to resources and competences held by other actors.

Creation of resource interdependence by means of rewarding collaborative problem-solving either by making the formation of a partnership based on interdependency and risk-sharing a condition for getting access to public funding or by making acceptance of cocreated solutions dependent on the active contribution and support from relevant and affected actors.

Clarifying, strengthening, and creating resource interdependence between different actors helps to motivate them to exchange or pool their resources by means of sharing information, coordinating actions, and working together to define problems and design and implement solutions (Sørensen & Torfing, 2009). In short, interdependence is the key to spurring collaboration.

This conclusion should not lead us to believe that interdependence is the only driver of collaboration in the early phases of cocreation. In addition to societal factors, such as turbulence that calls for new and stable solutions alleviating the stress felt by social and political actors, and institutional factors, such as traditions of collaboration and platforms that attract people and make it easy for them to collaborate, there are three things that conveners and facilitators can do to spur collaboration.

First, they can *build trust* between the participants and in the fairness and efficiency of the collaborative process (Vangen & Huxham, 2003). The former is basically a matter of spurring social interaction between the participants so that they get to know each other, understand each other's reasons for participating, and slowly begin to trust that the other participants are prepared to collaborate, share their knowledge and resources, and respect the outcomes of joint deliberation. The latter is very much a question of involving the participants in defining the set of rules, norms, and procedures that helps to overcome power asymmetries, find and implement fair solutions, and share the benefits they produce and the prestige and honor of having produced them.

Second, they can aim to produce *hedonistic effects* by ensuring that the participants get positive feedback from participating in collaborative interaction (Tuunanen, Lintula, & Auvinen, 2019). Hedonistic effects can be obtained by

letting the participants use their skills and competences and become recognized for their contributions, giving everybody the possibility to express and assert themselves, staging creative processes that generate new exciting insights and ideas, and spurring transformational learning and personal growth based on empowerment. Hence, the more the initial encounter with collaboration can foster enjoyment among the participants, the more attractive it will be for them to participate.

Last, yet importantly, they can go for *small wins* that harvest low-hanging fruits in the early phase of collaboration (Termeer & Metze, 2019). Achieving and celebrating small wins helps to demonstrate the positive value and impact of collaboration and creates enjoyment and fulfillment among the participants. It may also attract important actors that the conveners had failed to recruit in the first round because they were skeptical about the possibilities of bringing about the change needed.

Mediating and Mitigating Conflicts

Despite persistent attempts to motivate and integrate actors participating in cocreation processes, conflicts will eventually emerge. Conflicts are struggles or contests between two or more actors who mobilize and apply different means of power to gain the upper hand, enhance their influence, and ultimately defeat the opponent (Himes, 1980). The means of power deployed in conflict stretch from soft measures to harder strategies, thus ranging from appeals to common values, to persuasion based on different combinations of argumentation and manipulation, to bribes and neutralizing concessions, and finally to disobedience, propaganda, provocation, protest, threats, and acts of violence.

Collaboration and conflict are inseparable elements of cocreation. Actors may collaborate nicely with each other to find a solution to problems such as persistent malnutrition, the suppression of ethnic minorities, or the degradation of nature before suddenly finding themselves in conflict with each other. The conflict may start as a simple disagreement about something important. If the actors cannot agree to disagree, leave the issue aside and move on; the disagreement may develop into a conflict where at least one actor perceives that some other actor frustrates a key concern of hers (Thomas, 1992).

Disagreements and conflicts are inevitable since there is no rational, correct, or perfect solution to complex problems that are characterized by unclear and uncertain problem diagnoses, inherent goals conflicts, and lack of well-tested standard solutions. The actors are collaborating and trying to make joint decisions in a terrain that is full of paradoxes, dilemmas, and hard choices. Neither arguments based on reason, passionate appeals to core values, nor the integrity of scientific expertise will manage to produce unanimous consent and thus leave open a space of dissent, disagreement, and conflict (Laclau, 1990).

Some conflicts are rooted in differences of opinion or judgment and may be constructive because they force the involved actors to reconsider their positions or revise and sharpen their arguments. This process tends to stimulate mutual

learning and may improve performance and spur creative problem-solving (De Dreu, 1997). Other conflicts are rooted in diverging identities, basic beliefs, or socioeconomic interests and may undermine attempts to construct a common ground for joint problem-solving and actionable solutions. Such potentially destructive conflicts cannot be prevented because they are inherent to cocreation processes. It is dangerous to try to avoid or suppress them since that might create intolerable tensions and dormant volcanoes may explode and cause havoc later on, and they cannot be resolved unless they are superficial and created by misunderstandings and miscommunication that can be cleared up. As such, conveners and facilitators are left with no choice but to engage in conflict mediation.

The immediate goal of conflict mediation is to reduce tensions and turn antagonistic conflicts in which the conflicting parties view each other as “enemies” to be defeated into agonistic conflicts between “adversaries” who compete for influence, but play for the same team. The final goal of conflict mediation is to foster some kind of accommodation, compromise, or agreement between the conflicting actors (DeChurch & Marks, 2001). In so doing, the conveners and facilitators become mediators who intervene in conflicts in order to create a settlement.

If one of the conflicting parties is not overly frustrated by what appears to be a strong concern of the other party, conflict mediators may opt for an *accommodation* strategy. Here the conflict mediator tries to get the least frustrated party to satisfy the other party’s wish in order to keep the peace, break a deadlock, and proceed with the joint effort to solve a pressing problem. Accommodation is a loose/win solution as the accommodating party loses and the accommodated party wins. Because of the asymmetrical distribution of costs and benefits, the conflict mediators may consider using side-payments to compensate the loser. Promising the accommodating actor some fringe benefit or a stronger influence on a particular matter often helps this type of conflict mediation along.

An illustrative example comes from land protection in the state of Colorado in the United States. Population growth in the state was exerting increased pressure on open land, farm land, and wild life habitat, thus strengthening popular demands for state-wide land protection. However, this demand was countered by strong political concerns about maintaining private property rights, preserving the ability to find local solutions and preventing “overregulation” of land use. The conflict was solved through accommodation as the politicians approved the establishment of a Trust financed by a dedicated funding mechanism that enabled local governments and nonprofit land protection organizations to purchase, enhance, and protect land (Steelman, 2010).

If the key concerns of the conflicting actors are mutually exclusive and none of them is prepared to accommodate the other’s concern, conflict mediators may try to strike a *compromise* through a bargaining process in which the conflict mediator play the role of a neutral arbiter. The conflict mediators will meet with each of the actors separately and with all of them together in order to explore the possibility that the actors will meet each other half-way and accept a compromise obtained through give-and-take bargaining. Since both of the actors will have to make concessions, compromise formation is a lose-lose solution. Both parties

have to give up something. However, if more protracted deliberations are ruled out due to severe time constraints, compromise formation between the combatants provides a good alternative to brokering an agreement.

A good example of conflict resolution based on compromise comes from the protection of an endangered species, the desert tortoise, in the state of Nevada in the United States. Housing development in the region around Las Vegas was threatening the habitat of the desert tortoise and environmental groups successfully listed the tortoise as an endangered species. This status led to a halt of any further development on potential tortoise habitat. The conflict between developers and environmentalists was ultimately resolved by setting aside high-quality tortoise habitat while allowing development on lands of lesser habitat quality. Both parties had to compromise to reach a workable solution (Ansell, 2011).

If the positions of the conflicting actors are not totally steadfast, or are conditioned on facts, norms, and understandings that are questionable, conflict mediators may aim to settle the conflict through an *agreement*. Agreement is here defined, not as the presence of a shared opinion, but as the active process of coming to a mutual decision that is satisfactory to all parties. Getting conflicting actors to reach an agreement on a contentious matter requires that the conflict mediator find a way of changing the perspectives of the conflicting actors through a reframing of the problem. If the actors can come to see the problem from a new and joint perspective, there is a good chance that they might find a new way of thinking about their goals, ideas, and preferred strategies that either makes them change their views or creates a synthesis between what previously appeared to be mutually exclusive opinions. Agreement is a win-win solution that can be obtained through joint fact finding missions, perspective exchange, or reframing.

An interesting example of conflict mediation through the fostering of agreement based on reframing comes from the Blackfoot watershed in the state of Montana in the United States. Ranchers and environmentalists were at odds about the future development of the watershed. However, after a period of conflict, leaders from both sides came together and reframed the conception of their relationship to one another by stressing their common commitment to the place where they both lived. This reframing allowed the development of a joint strategy for both protecting and using the watershed. Thus, their roles were transformed from adversaries to neighbors (Weber, 2009).

Alignment of public, private, and third sector actors participating in a co-creation process can be viewed as an attempt to foster an early agreement. It involves the creation of a common problem definition, formulation of some overall goals and a joint vision, and efforts to encourage the participants to adjust their interests, strategies, and actions so that they are consistent with the common agenda. A common experience is that alignment is stimulated by external opposition and threats to the collective endeavor and goal attainment of the participating actors. Enemies aiming to prevent or block the cocreation of particular SDG solutions will tend to have the unintended effect of getting the participants to close ranks and align themselves vis-à-vis the antagonizing force (Laclau, 1990). Reference to “an external enemy” trying to undermine and ruin it

all and stop progress helps to rally and unify the actors in cocreation by providing a common lens through which they gauge their own aspirations.

It is no easy task to act as a conflict mediator who aims to resolve disputes in a cocreation arena. As a conflict mediator, you are often involved in the conflict or have particular sympathies that you have to conceal to do the job. In addition, you may need a particular mindset that basically tells you that a solution to the problem exists, but just hasn't been found yet. Finally, on the more practical level, conflict mediators may benefit from following the recommendations listed in [Table 6.2](#).

The challenge when seeking to mediate or settle conflicts in cocreation arenas is to avoid creating situations where one or more actors will lose face by openly going against their own stated preferences and interests. Changing one's position is in itself painful, but it is doubly painful if it happens in public and the actor who is making a concession is scorned by those she claims to represent. To avoid that from happening, three conditions for successful conflict mediation must be met. First, the cocreation arena must provide a learning environment in which all ideas, positions, and interests are considered as provisional and contingent on available knowledge and input, thus being open to revision. Second, plenary

Table 6.2. Behavioral Recommendations for Conflict Mediators.

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- (1) Choose the time and place carefully to create a situation where the conflicting actors are receptive, relaxed, and open to mediation
 - (2) Do not do act until you have calmed down if you are upset or agitated
 - (3) Pay attention to your nonverbal messages and use your body language to signal openness and avoid defensiveness
 - (4) Always try to agree on something whether it is the overall or more specific goals, basic values, the strategy, concrete methods, or some important facts
 - (5) Restate the issue, as you see it, and ask for feedback from the conflicting parties
 - (6) Ask the conflicting parties what they feel about the issue and ask them not to second-guess each other
 - (7) Listen actively by paraphrasing what the other person says and create space for corrections
 - (8) Examine your part in the conflict by considering how something you may have done has contributed to it
 - (9) Ban generalizations such as “you always...,” or “I never...” from the conversation and encourage the actors to stick to the issue at hand
 - (10) Brainstorm possible solutions and choose the best alternative that gets support from the conflicting parties.
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Source: Adapted from IFAA Strategy (1976).

discussions should be based on the Chatman House rule that says that after the meeting the participants are free to refer to information provided or points and opinions expressed during the meeting, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the source(s) of what has been said may be revealed. In addition to this condition, it goes without saying that separate meetings devoted to conflict mediation should take place behind closed doors to create a safe environment for the conflicting parties. Finally, successful conflict mediation based on accommodation, compromise, or agreement should be praised by the other participants in the cocreation partnership because it bears witness to the willingness of the conflicting parties to work hard in order not to let emerging conflicts stand in the way of overall goal attainment.

Admittedly, some conflicts are hard to solve and mediation will only result in a temporary cease-fire. Actors that are not involved in the dispute may be tiptoeing around, afraid that the combatants will clash again, and bring the cocreation process to a premature halt. Conflict mediators may try to ease the tensions by segmenting the decision-making process, thus avoiding direct confrontations. If that does not work either, exclusion of the conflicting actors maybe the last option, although it may also seriously damage the cocreation process.

On a final note, however, we should remember that most conflicts are constructive in the sense that they prompt clarification, search for new solutions, and joint learning based on argumentation, revision, and integration. Follett (2011) provides a trivial but illustrative example of constructive conflict: in a library, in one of the smaller rooms, someone wanted the window open, while others wanted it shut. After a short deliberation, they all agreed to open the window in the next room where nobody was sitting.

Conclusion

Platforms create the possibility of convening relevant and affected actors to cocreate sustainability solutions. Convenors should make use of stakeholder analysis to identify those who have a keen interest in solving problem and those who have the power to achieve those solutions. This analysis can help conveners identify overlapping goals that may allow them to build effective alliances and provide insights into how to handle areas of fundamental conflict. Sometimes the number of relevant and affected actors will exceed the capacity to conduct effective discussions and collaborations. In such cases, the solution may be to think of and organize cocreation in terms of more or less intensive spheres of stakeholder engagement. This strategy addresses the limits to inclusion by allowing the participation of a large number of stakeholders while allowing cocreation processes to be more manageable. Ideally, cocreation aims to engage stakeholders on an equal footing for joint problem-solving. To ensure effective participation, actors who lack experience, knowledge, and resources need to be empowered while simultaneously channeling the power of stronger actors into constructive dialogue. To enable empowered actors to invest in sustained processes of creative problem-solving, conveners need to clarify, strengthen, and

create interdependencies between the actors. Only stakeholders who recognize the need to exchange and share knowledge, ideas, and resources will be fully prepared to cocreate sustainability solutions. Even when stakeholders recognize their interdependence, conflicts are bound to arise, leaving conveners with the important task of mitigating conflicts by exploring strategies for accommodation, compromise, and agreement.