

Chapter 11.

The role of relationships in co-management

Keri Mills

C/o The Australian National University

***Abstract.** The importance of understanding and fostering the human side of co-management is emphasised. I consider how the role of relationships has been seen in the literature on co-management of protected areas, and in the context of the increasing focus on co-management as a continuing negotiation process. Ideas on measuring success in relationships, in terms of the criteria and methodologies being used, are considered. Approaches to defining and measuring successful relationships vary between writers, but all agree that relationships are of fundamental importance to the functioning of co-management, and could do with much more attention and support.*

11.1 Relationships

Unuhia te rito o te harakeke, kei whea te kōmako e kō?
Whakatairangitia – rere ki uta, rere ki tai
Ui mai koe ki ahau he aha te mea nui o te ao
Māku e kī atu, he tangata, he tangata, he tangata!

Cut out the heart of the flax bush, and where will the kōmako sing?
Proclaim it to the land, proclaim it to the sea.
Ask me ‘What is the greatest thing in the world?’
I will reply ‘It is people, people, people!’¹

‘Relationships’ in this chapter refers to the dynamics and nature of human interactions. The dynamics of relationships involve questions such as how people meet, who meets, how often they meet, how those meetings are organised, and whether the meetings are formal or informal. The nature of relationships refers to the levels of trust, respect, liking, and so on, that are evident in interactions, and also who those relationships are between.

Before tackling the question of what successful co-management relationships look like, it is important to look more closely at what co-management is, and also at the concept of success. We accept, in the area of co-management literature, a vague and shifting definition of what co-management actually is. These definitions usually, but not always, imply the involvement of the State. They vary in terms of the degree of power-sharing necessary to earn the label of co-management, and whether or not this power-sharing needs to be enshrined in formal law and/or policy. This vagueness has its benefits in the flexibility it allows to cover the many degrees and dimensions of power-sharing that do occur in real-life arrangements (Plummer and Fitzgibbon 2004), and its drawbacks in the difficulty it poses for making generalisations and for the use of the word in policy making.

Used carefully, this open definition of co-management is ultimately a good thing, as it provides for a lot of flexibility in a research area that needs to remain adaptive. Its

¹ This is a famous Maori whakatauki, or proverb, of which there are many variations. This version is taken from *New Zealand Curriculum* (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2007:48).

vagueness in terms of structure is also appropriate given the increasing emphasis on the daily functioning, rather than the structural arrangements of co-management. Carlsson and Berkes (2005:65) described the difference as, as ‘a continuous problem-solving process, rather than a fixed state, involving extensive deliberations, negotiation and joint learning’. The recognition of co-management being a process, rather than a structure, has led to increased attention on the role of relationships in co-management, as a focus on the detail of the daily functioning of co-management will inevitably highlight the importance of the people involved, and the way they interact. The success of each is closely linked as well, in that good processes will foster good relationships, and good relationships make any process smoother and better able to reach its goals.

Carlsson and Berkes (2005:69-70) saw co-management as a system of networks between the state and the community, both of which are complex and made up of diverse parts. They argue for a convergence of the ideas of management and governance, so that the layers of rule-making and the complexity of networks and partnerships in co-management can be more fully encompassed. Others have fitted the concept of co-management as a process into different frameworks, ranging from a detailed diagram of the antecedents, elements and outcomes of co-management operating within a context of property rights and environmental factors (Plummer and Fitzgibbon 2004:879) (Figure 11.1), to simpler diagrams of process nesting within socioeconomic system, within an ecological one (Plummer and Armitage 2003:66). These writers, when addressing questions of how to evaluate the success of co-management arrangements, have established separate criteria for the process, socio-economic and ecological systems. The different ideas on how to understand co-management lead to different standards and definitions of success.

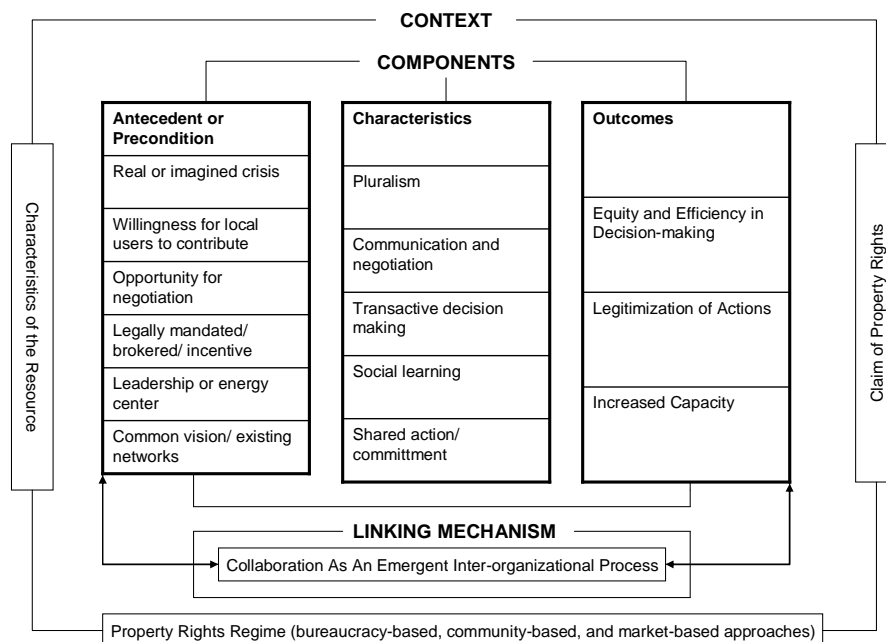


Figure 11.1: Ryan Plummer and John Fitzgibbon’s diagram of the co-management framework, showing the conditions they consider necessary for co-management to proceed, the characteristics of successful co-management, and the outcomes it ideally achieves. After Plummer and Fitzgibbon 2004:879.

11.2 Success

Success, in the co-management literature, is often not explicitly defined, and can sometimes be difficult to infer. Concepts of success are embedded in statements about why co-management is important, and what it is trying to achieve – be it better management in a scientific sense (eliminating barriers to ecological management), the seeking of a better democracy where stakeholders have a greater say, or the delivering of a kind of justice for Indigenous peoples who have thus far been excluded from the control, and the benefits, of protected areas. The different ideas of what the goals of co-management are, necessarily leads to different ideas of what success is. It is also important to recognise the variation in ideas of success according to the vision of particular co-management situations. Bauman and Smyth (2007:xiii) noted that their case studies in protected area partnerships in Australia were shaped by different histories, environments, legal frameworks and capacities, and achieve ‘different kinds of successes’.

Recently, however, some writers have addressed the question of what successful co-management is, looking at how to define, measure and achieve success. Conley and Moote (2003) were one such pair, pressing the point that although it may be possible to create a set of criteria to use in all situations, the influence of the particular evaluator’s value judgments is inevitable. They argued that each case could use its own criteria, as long as those criteria and their weightings are made clear. As an example, they (2003:375-376) outlined ‘typical evaluation criteria’ for some aspects of co-management (process, environmental outcomes and socioeconomic outcomes). Their process criteria cover four main points – that the vision and goals of co-management should be clear and broadly shared; that participation should be diverse and well-networked; that planning and process should be clear, open, and consensus-based; and that decisions should be in keeping with law, and regarded as just. Some of their criteria for socio-economic outcomes are more directly relevant to relationships: that relationships should be built or strengthened, trust increased, knowledge and understanding gained, and there should be an improved ability to resolve disputes.

Within the literature describing co-management as a process, there are advocates of a particular kind of process often referred to as adaptive co-management. In effect it describes an ideal process, which is collaborative and self-adapts to the constantly changing conditions of the natural and social world. Innes and Booher (1999:418) outlined the elements of a successful ‘consensus building process’ as one:

- That is self-organising and evolving;
- That is good at gathering information from the environment;
- That is effective at making connections among participants;
- That is experimental and risk-taking,
- That is able to learn from mistakes made;
- In which information is shared and trusted by all;
- That builds trust and understanding of the shared context; and
- That empowers individuals to act autonomously and in an informed way.

Innes and Booher (1999:414) claimed that, in every instance of consensus-building in their study, stronger interpersonal relationships were established, and greater trust was built. This in turn allowed for better communication and joint problem solving.

Plummer and Armitage (2007) also identified criteria for measuring adaptive co-management. Like Conley and Moote they look at co-management in terms of its process, socioeconomic and ecological components. They use concepts found in resilience theory² to identify criteria for success in each category; once again relationships overlap in the socio-economic and process categories. In the 'process' category this translates to inclusiveness and linkages; effective negotiation and communication, and fair and shared decision-making. All of these lead to social learning and the ability to learn from experience and question all aspects of the co-management process. In terms of the socioeconomic sphere, 'social capital (networks, groups, rules, norms, sanctions; relationships of trust, reciprocity, and exchange)' was listed as a key parameter for evaluation Plummer and Armitage (2007:69).

11.3 Co-management relationships

The emphasis upon the processes of co-management has led to increased emphasis on the role of relationships in this process. Lawrence (2000:264) argued that co-management of Kakadu National Park was 'a continuing, evolving process of dispute resolution, negotiation and compromise', and he advocated the importance of supporting the relationships that sustain this process:

The future success of joint management will be determined not by a commitment to legal and administrative frameworks but through building and maintaining Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationships.

Bauman and Smyth (2007:xiv) identified the importance of

... productive day-to-day, on-ground working relationships and mutual respect between the individuals involved in protected area partnerships between and across all areas of management

as one of their fifteen 'critical success factors. Bauman (2007:47) emphasised the importance of recognizing the 'emotional, procedural and substantive needs of parties in the decision-making process' in the co-management of Nitmiluk National Park. She also noted that many of those involved in co-management identified relationships as the most important part of joint management. Julia Wondolleck and Steven Yaffee (2000:20) argue it is important to 'recognize that partnerships are made up of people not institutions'.

Writers are also raising ideas about what makes these relationships successful. Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000) drew from a wide range of case studies to highlight examples of functioning relationships and how they can be fostered. Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal (1997:14), writers in the management literature, explained the goal of management, seen through the lens of human resources, as being 'to find a way for people to get the job done while feeling good about what they are doing'. Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000:159), referring to collaborative management more specifically, similarly argue that 'collaboration succeeds because projects acknowledge people's needs and deal with them'. They emphasised that although the participants in co-management may represent organisations, ultimately they always remain individuals, with individual wisdoms and prejudices. Wondolleck and Yaffee's study is a particularly detailed look at what makes for successful co-management relationships, and their findings will be dealt with in detail.

² Resilience theory relates to the ability of a system to cope with disturbances; the ability of a system to self-organise, and the capacity to learn and adapt to change.

Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000:159-163) argued that the baggage people hold from past experiences, and the often unsubstantiated presumptions they hold about each other, must be dealt with before effective co-management can occur. This breakdown of preconceptions occurs naturally in the process of negotiating with each other, but it must be given time. They emphasised that the opportunity to socialise informally can be immensely beneficial to creating warm and flexible relationships. Finally they suggest that techniques for fostering co-operation and consensus-building can stop people from adopting inflexible bargaining positions and create space for open-minded negotiation. Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000:163-168) also argued for the importance of building successful relationships, which they describe as honest, sincere, compassionate, committed, understanding, respectful and caring. They pointed out that relationships in co-management often begin with a lack of trust, and this must be dealt with, taking as long as is needed to do so, in order for collaboration to succeed. They also noted the damaging effect that staff turnover can have on co-management efforts, that this must be dealt with either by encouraging long-term staff appointments, or putting in place a thorough mentoring process for incoming staff.

Keeping people inspired was important, making sure they understand the co-management processes and recognizing their efforts. Wondolleck and Yaffee (2000:169) noted that 'a striking characteristic of successful partnerships in our studies was the energy, enthusiasm and optimism of those involved'. Lastly, they (2000:171-172) noted that it was important to stay alert and sensitive to cultural differences in partnerships, which 'add another layer to the people element of a collaborative partnership'. They gave some examples, suggesting that if formal meetings have a negative history for a cultural group, then informal meetings should be held instead. They also suggest that the cultural group should have the opportunity to define the project in a way that suits their own needs.

Among the writers on co-management theory there are some who address the concept of 'social capital'. Social capital writers generally follow the OECD definition of social capital as 'networks together with shared norms, values and understanding that facilitate cooperation within or among groups'. Social capital is seen to assist co-operation in the following way (Pretty and Smith 2004:633):

As social capital lowers the costs of working together, it facilitates cooperation. People have the confidence to invest in collective activities, knowing that others will also do so. They are also less likely to engage in unfettered private actions with negative outcomes, such as resource degradation.

The concept is used rather rigidly, and does not correspond to the definition of relationships that I am using in this paper. Nonetheless, these writers are asking and answering the same questions about the role that people play in the co-management process.

Plummer and Fitzgibbon (2006) used a social capital approach and selected three cases of co-management that are similar in environment and user groups, and attempted to show that greater levels of 'social capital' led to more successful co-management experiences. Successful co-management was seen as meeting the 'elements' of pluralism, communications and negotiations, participatory decision-making, social learning and shared action. They identified indicators for measuring the degree of social capital by considering participation in networks, levels of shared values, understanding and social norms, and stress the importance of trust and reciprocity (2006:51-52).

Plummer and Fitzgibbon (2006:51-59) saw social capital as stemming from three main types of connection, which they labelled 'bonding', 'bridging' and 'linking'. Bonding refers to relationships between members of a subgroup, such as friends.

Bridging covers a greater social distance, across subgroups, such as community members. Linking is a vertical relationship, associated with political leverage and the ability to acquire funds. They argued that the greater the sophistication of connections in co-management, the more successful the arrangements are at meeting the 'elements'.

They saw social capital as going through three stages of development. The first is a very basic stage in which all participants have affinity for those like themselves, and affinity for people in general. The second stage they term the 'formulating' level, which they described as cyclical, as participants discussed issues, identified possible actions and continued to commit to working together. Bonding increases as these actions repeat, and approaches the last stage of social capital, which is marked by the undertaking of shared collective actions and learning. Because of 'the dynamic nature of human relations', social capital at the final stage of development can still be lost and return to earlier phases, or fall apart completely. They call for government officials involved in the co-management process to be trained to be sensitive to the social interactions that are so important to co-management's success.

Although Wondolleck and Yaffee and Plummer and Fitzgibbon addressed relationships very differently, one point they make in common is that relationships are fragile, and damage can be done very easily and irrevocably if trust is broken down. Their arguments support the idea that relationships in co-management deserve greater attention and greater support if partnerships in natural resource management are to succeed.

11.3 Conclusion

It is not my intention to gather a list of criteria for measuring relationship success. I agree with Bauman and Smyth that each co-management situation will have its own vision of success, and with Conley and Moote that particular evaluators will have their own ways of describing it. The emphasis on the fairness of the process, and on fostering the human relationships within it, are actions that both need time. And extra time in a management context is almost certain to require extra money. Given the potential that co-management has, however, of fostering a more inclusive governance system, and harmonious cross-cultural relationships, it surely deserves both.

References

- Agrawal, Arun 1995 Dismantling the divide between indigenous and scientific knowledge. *Development and Change* 26:421-432.
- Agrawal, Arun and Clark Gibson 1999 Enchantment and disenchantment: the role of community in natural resource conservation. *World Development* 27(4):629-649.
- Bauman, Toni 2007 Nitmiluk National Park: joint management as process and balancing interest. In T Bauman and D Smyth 2007 (eds) *Indigenous Partnerships in Protected Area Management in Australia*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Australian Collaboration, Canberra pp.17-70.
- Bauman, Toni and Dermot Smyth 2007 *Indigenous Partnerships in Protected Area Management in Australia*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Australian Collaboration, Canberra.
- Bolman, Lee and Terrence Deal 1997 *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, choice and leadership*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco.
- Carlsson, Lars and Fikret Berkes 2005 Co-management: concepts and methodological implications. *Journal of Environmental Management* 75:65-76.
- Conley, Alexander and Margaret A Moote 2003 Evaluating collaborative natural resource management. *Society and Natural Resources* 16:371-386

- Innes, Judith E and David E Booher 1999 Consensus building and complex adaptive systems: a framework for evaluating collaborative planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 65(4):412-423.
- Lawrence, David 2000 *Kakadu: The Making of a National Park*. The Miegunyah Press at Melbourne University Press.
- Natcher, David C, Susan Davis and Clifford G Hickey 2005 Co-management: managing relationships, not resources. *Human Organization* 64(3):240-250.
- New Zealand Ministry of Education / Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2007 *New Zealand Curriculum*, Learning Media, Wellington <nzcurriculum.tki.org.nz> accessed March 2008.
- Plummer, Ryan and Derek Armitage 2007 A resilience-based framework for evaluating adaptive co-management: Linking ecology, economics and society in a complex world. In *Ecological Economics* 61:62-74.
- Plummer, Ryan and John Fitzgibbon 2004 Co-management of natural resources: a proposed framework. *Environmental Management* 33(6):876-885.
- Plummer, Ryan and John Fitzgibbon 2006 People matter: the importance of social capital in the co-management of natural resources. *Natural Resources Forum* 30:51-62.
- Pretty, Jules, and David Smith 2004 Social capital in biodiversity conservation and management, *Conservation Biology* 18(3):631-38.
- Singleton, Sara 2002 Collaborative environmental planning in the American West: the good, the bad and the ugly. *Environmental Politics* 11(3):54-75.
- Wondolleck, Julia M and Steven L Yaffee 2000 *Making Collaboration Work: Lessons from innovation in natural resource management*. Island Press, Washington DC.

Keri Mills
Doctoral candidate
C/o Resource Management in Asia-Pacific Program
The Australian National University
<keri.mills@anu.edu.au>