Managing \textit{(the power differential in)} Scientific Collaborations as a Student or Postdoc

Naledi Saul
Director, Office of Career & Professional Development
Collaborating: What’s the Problem?

**Collaboration:** When 2 or more people decide to work together to achieve common or complementary goals that benefits all parties.

1. Collaborations are common
2. Collaborations are considered important & valuable
3. Collaborations are complex
4. Everyone has their own perspective on how to manage a collaboration...because everyone learned in their own *(different)* lab

When everyone operates slightly differently when doing a complex, important and common thing...

*The result is inefficiency, misunderstandings and difficulties.*
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Agenda: What you need to know

3 things we want you to be able do by the end of this session...

1. **Identify criteria to assess the ‘health’ or functionality of your collaboration**

2. Discuss the impact of power on collaborations and discuss strategies to proactively manage unequal relationships

3. Recognize red flags in collaborations and know steps to address them skillfully
## The Management & Relationships: Assess your scientific collaboration

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### Preempting Discord: Prenuptial Agreements for Scientists.
By Howard Gadlin, NIH Ombudsman, and Kevin Jessar, NIH Associate Ombudsman

### The Team Science Toolkit: Enhancing Research Collaboration Through Online Knowledge Sharing.
Amanda Vogel, Et Al.

### Collaborations: With all good intentions.

### Women in Global Science: Advancing Academic Careers through International Collaboration.
Kathrin Zippel

### International Research Collaborations: Much to be Gained, Many Ways to Get in Trouble.
Melissa S. Anderson and Nicholas H. Steneck

### Collaborative Agreement Template.
Teamscience.nih.gov

### Structures of Scientific Collaboration.
Wesley Shrum, Joel Genuth, Ivan Chompaloy
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<td>❑ How will notes be kept? Who will keep them?</td>
<td>❑ How will you negotiate the development of new collaborations and spin-off projects, if any?</td>
<td>❑ What's the timeline and key milestones for work (When is the project over?)</td>
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<td>❑ How and by whom will media inquiries be handled?</td>
<td>❑ Who will write any progress reports and final reports?</td>
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It’s improbable that you will answer all of these questions at the beginning of the collaboration. You’ll address them incrementally throughout the duration. But it’s important that you know them by the end.
Think, Pair, Share:
What are 10 (management & relationship) questions to answer at the beginning?

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1. **Think** of a current or previous collaboration

2. **Review** the priority questions: how many of these aspects did you determine within the first 30 days?

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Agenda: What you need to know

3 things we want you to be able do by the end of this session...

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2. Discuss the impact of power on collaborations and discuss strategies to proactively manage unequal relationships

- The Science
- The (Project) Management
- The Relationships
A basic theory of power, and why it matters to students and postdocs
John French & Bertram Raven: 2 social psychologists who argued that there are 6 bases of power:

1. Legitimate:
2. Referent:
3. Expert:
4. Reward:
5. Coercive:
6. Informational:

Source: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_56.htm
John French & Bertram Raven: 2 social psychologists who argued that there are 6 bases of power:

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<td>Your reputation: Your perceived worthiness and right to others' respect.</td>
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<td>3. Expert:</td>
<td>Your level of knowledge and skill in a particular area.</td>
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<td>4. Reward:</td>
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Source: [https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_56.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_56.htm)
So, think of this as a ‘power rainbow’.
To explain why this theory matters to you as a student or postdoc…

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Each of the 6 bases of power more naturally lie on the side of the senior scientist in the collaboration:
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1. **Title, Tenure, Reputation** *(Legitimate, Referent)*
2. **Expertise** *(Referent, Expertise)*
3. **Resources: funding, contacts, time, attention** *(Rewards, Coercive, Informational)*
4. **Ability to fire** *(Rewards, Coercive)*
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Junior members who wish to manage the pull of the power differential need to proactively and incrementally strengthen their position:

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6. Strategy: Identify timelines & milestones to assess the health of the relationship (Informational)
7. Strategy: Respond to red flag moments (Informational)
8. Strategy: Create a paper trail (Informational)
And the kicker is: the more ‘parts of the rainbow’ you cultivate, the stronger your position if and when issues arise:

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2. Expertise (Referent, Expertise)
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Senior Scientist

1. Funding (Rewards, Coercive)
2. Identify allies (Legitimate, Referent)
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4. Developing your own reputation (Referent, Expertise)
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For example, if something like this happened....

Senior Scientist

Trainee
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...a student/postdoc would probably want to take a number of proactive steps:

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Note the difference in the amount of work this involves for the senior scientist vs. a junior scientist. This is the power of power.

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What’s Your Strategy?
*Take proactive & incremental steps to neutralize power differentials in collaborations*

Senior Scientist

Think, Pair, Share:
What one incremental step will you take to change the balance the power dynamic?

1. Title, Tenure, Reputation *(Legitimate, Referent)*
2. Expertise *(Referent, Expertise)*
3. Resources: funding, contacts, time, attention *(Rewards, Coercive, Informational)*
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3. Recognize red flags in collaborations and know steps to address them skillfully
What are common red flags in collaborations?

1. A red flag is a sign something is wrong.

1. The Science

2. The Project Management

3. The Relationships

...this is a complex organism
What are common red flags in collaborations?

1. A red flag is a sign something is wrong.
2. Many complex things are successfully managed by focusing on the red flags

- Pediatric physiology & disease states
- Physics of an Internal Combustion Engine
- Scientific Collaborations

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What are common red flags in collaborations?

1. A red flag is a sign something is wrong.
2. Many complex things are successfully managed by focusing on the red flags.
3. When you see a red flag, time is of the essence & usually involves outside help.
### Red flags students & postdocs should look for in a scientific collaboration

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<td>- Collaborators whose goals are in conflict with yours</td>
<td>- Collaborators who don't fulfill or operate outside their stated role</td>
<td>- Collaborators who change previously agreed-upon decisions, particularly without notice or explanation</td>
<td>- Collaborators who slow down processes (e.g. or sit on your work)</td>
<td>- Collaborators who share or modify your work without your permission</td>
<td>- Collaborators who demonstrate lack of respect: bullying behaviors, statements that make you uncomfortable, etc.</td>
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<td>- Collaborators who seem uninterested or unengaged</td>
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<td>- Collaborators who avoid making decisions</td>
<td>- Collaborators who seem to obfuscate or fail to communicate</td>
<td>- Collaborators who share or modify your work without your permission</td>
<td>- Collaborators who say untrue things or accuse you of untrue things</td>
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<td>- Collaborators who cannot agree on key decisions (e.g., authorship, journal to publish in, timeline, etc.)</td>
<td>- Collaborators who seem to have a distinctly different communication style than yours</td>
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<td>- Collaborators who repeatedly insist you misunderstood them</td>
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<td>- Collaborators who share or modify your work without your permission</td>
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Trust but verify:
With whom do you check in and check out your red flag?

If any of these appear to be happening, you need to ‘check in’ for verification.

If all three say you’re wrong, you might be wrong.
Why not just figure it out yourself?

1. Because the solution will probably be complex
2. Because the solution will be a negotiation over time involving a feedback loop
3. Because you probably won’t have the skills or clout to fix the situation
4. Because it’s inefficient, and time is of the essence
5. Because you will probably be perplexed, angry and tired at a time when you need to be rational, strategic and focused
6. Because the consequences for you if you get this wrong can be career/life changing
7. Because you don’t have to
Mentors, Allies & Unknown Entities, oh my!

Mentors & Allies & Unknown Entities

- **Mentors:** Individuals who you have proof have helped your advance your work or your career

- **Allies:** FSAP, Student Health, Ombuds, Care Advocate, Postdoc Union, Office of Postdoc Affairs, etc.

- **Unknown Entities:** Faculty, department chairs, staff, etc.…..

You’re going to have to talk to someone…..
Mentors, Allies & Unknown Entities, oh my!

For Mentors & Allies

- Don’t tell story chronologically, unless asked to do so. **Pick themes instead and identify the main issue**
- Rather than accusations, focus on information gathering
- Give them the abstract first: “I realize I’m unfamiliar with the process of deciding who is first author,” or “I’d like some advice about how to consider my contribution to a paper that was recently submitted”
- Ask for advice, perspective…particularly how others have handled such situations

Discuss symptoms.
Ask for their perspective on diagnosis
Mentors, Allies & Unknown Entities, oh my!

For Mentors & Allies

“I’d appreciate your advice about a situation in a collaboration I’m a part of. I’ve discussed it with my PI, but I would also appreciate an outside perspective. Could we talk for about 15 minutes?“

Thank you for meeting with me.

In my collaboration, there was a verbal agreement between all parties that I would be first author; yesterday in a meeting, another postdoc was mentioned.

I’m not sure how to approach this. I’m looking for advice.
Mentors, Allies & Unknown Entities, oh my!

For Allies in particular
(Student Health, Faculty Staff Assistance Program, Care Advocate, Ombuds, Postdoc Union, Office of Postdoctoral Scholars, etc.)

It’s okay to ask and clarify how they can help you before you disclose

How do you work with students/postdocs who are experiencing difficulties in their labs?
Mentors, Allies & Unknown Entities, oh my!

For Allies in particular
(Student Health, Faculty Staff Assistance Program, Care Advocate, Ombuds, Postdoc Union, Office of Postdoctoral Scholars, etc.)

It’s also okay to ask who they are obligated to (or would) share your conversation with.

I’d like to come in for a consult on a situation I’m finding difficult in my lab.

But first, could you share what level of confidentiality your office offers? Are you a mandated reporter or required to report anything we might discuss with anyone else?
Mentors, Allies & Unknowns, oh my!

Always go to mentors and allies first.
What we’ve covered today….

1. **Identified criteria** to assess the ‘health’ or functionality of your collaboration
2. **Discussed the impact of power** on collaborations and discuss strategies to proactively manage unequal relationships
3. **Helped you to recognize red flags** in collaborations and know steps to address them skillfully
Managing Scientific Collaborations as a Student or Postdoc

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