



Evaluation Data Report

Coalitions and Alliances Working Group

Meeting Three: November 4-6, 2010

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Coalitions and Alliances Working Group Evaluation Data Report

Background

NIMBioS Working Groups are chosen to focus on major scientific questions at the interface between biology and mathematics. NIMBioS is particularly interested in questions that integrate diverse fields, require synthesis at multiple scales, and/or make use of or require development of new mathematical/computational approaches. NIMBioS Working Groups are relatively small (10-12 participants, with a maximum of 15), focus on a well-defined topic, and have well-defined goals and metrics of success. Working Groups will typically meet 2-3 times over a two-year period, with each meeting lasting 3-5 days; however, the number of participants, number of meetings, and duration of each meeting is flexible, depending on the needs and goals of the group.

The first meeting of the Coalitions and Alliances Working Group brought together anthropologists, biologists, mathematicians, and physicists to identify the most promising ways for building a testable quantitative theory of coalition formation. The meeting facilitated work on feedback between human behavior and emerging infectious disease risk. The group is employing a network motif to organize research combined with cross-cutting themes. The network motif organizes research themes to within nodes (e.g., countries, regions, or localities), on edges or pathways between nodes, and as a complex system. Cross-cutting themes include uncertainty and learning and computational issues.

At the second meeting of the Coalition and Alliances Working Group, progress continued building a testable quantitative theory of coalition formation. The working group clarified its definition of "prediction" in terms of the group's objective, which is to build models that can predict disease risk under alternative management strategies and policies. The group has also identified a modeling framework that is applicable to local, regional, national, and international scales.

The third meeting started with progress reports on several projects initiated earlier. Specifically, the group discussed a review paper on the theory of coalition and alliances, a project on modeling reciprocity networks, and a project on estimating individual and coalitionary strengths from observations of agonistic interactions and using these estimates to make predictions about individual and coalitionary aggressive behavior. Then several new and returning members of the group described some of their projects dealing with coalitionary decisions in Barbary macaques, chimpanzees, and humans. For the second half of the meeting, the participants split into two subgroups. One subgroup worked on an outline of a methodological paper discussing challenges of empirical work on coalitions and alliances and advancing some ways of answering these challenges. The participants agreed on Feb.14, 2010, as a deadline for having a good draft of the manuscript. The other group was exploring most fruitful directions for joint theoretical work. The discussion focused on theoretical attempts to understand partible paternity, on the

dynamics of fission of Yanomamo villages, and on ways to improve the predicting ability of existing coalitionary models. The group as a whole did not see an immediate need for another meeting but the members will work on finishing various projects.

Evaluation Design

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation of the meeting was both formative and summative in nature, in that the data collected from participants was intended to both gain feedback from participants about the quality of the current meeting and also to inform future meetings. The evaluation framework was guided by Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Evaluation model for training and learning programs (Kirkpatrick, 1994¹). Several questions constituted the foundation for the evaluation:

1. Were participants satisfied with the Working Group overall?
2. How do participants feel about the format of the meetings?
3. How do participants feel about the content of the meetings?
4. Do participants feel they have a good understanding about the work being done by other subgroups within the group?
5. Do participants feel they gained a better understanding of how the work of the various subgroups will tie together to reach the Working Group's goals?
6. How do the research collaborations happening in this working group differ from participants' other research collaborations?
7. How do participants communicate between meetings?
8. Do participants feel they have a good idea of what their continuing contribution will be within the group?

Evaluation Procedures

The final instrument was hosted online via the University of Tennessee's online survey host mrlInterview. Links to the survey were sent to seven Working Group participants on November 8, 2010. Reminder emails were sent to non-responding participants on November 15 and 19, 2010. By November 26, 2010, seven participants had given their feedback, for a response rate of 100%.

¹ From Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1994). *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

Evaluation Data

Respondent Satisfaction

Table 1. Respondent satisfaction with content and format of the working group

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Strongly dissatisfied
The amount of effort spent on working group activities	71%	29%	-	-	-
The adherence of meetings to schedules	86%	14%	-	-	-
Utilization of time during meetings	86%	14%	-	-	-
Organization of the meetings	100%	-	-	-	-
The diversity of disciplinary expertise of the participants	100%	-	-	-	-
The level of task productivity of participants	71%	29%	-	-	-
The quality of participant ideas and discussions	100%	-	-	-	-
Overall satisfaction level with the working group	100%	-	-	-	-

Figure 1. Respondent views of group progress



Respondent comments about progress toward goals:

“It could be better....but I think we're making as much progress as can be reasonably expected for such busy people. I think at least some of us (the more

regular participants) know one another well enough now that we're likely to extend collaboration well beyond the last meeting of the working group.”

“This particular group had met twice before I was invited to participate. It is not yet certain what my participation will do to the 'progress' toward the goals of the Working Group.”

Understanding of Group Function

Table 2. Respondent understanding of group function

As a result of participating in this meeting, I have a better understanding of:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The work being accomplished by the other subgroups within the Working Group	71%	29%	-	-	-
How the work of the various subgroups will tie together for the working group's publication(s) and/or product(s)	100%	-	-	-	-

Figure 2. Respondent understanding of what is expected of them before the next meeting



Respondent comments about expectations:

“I hope we have more meetings.”

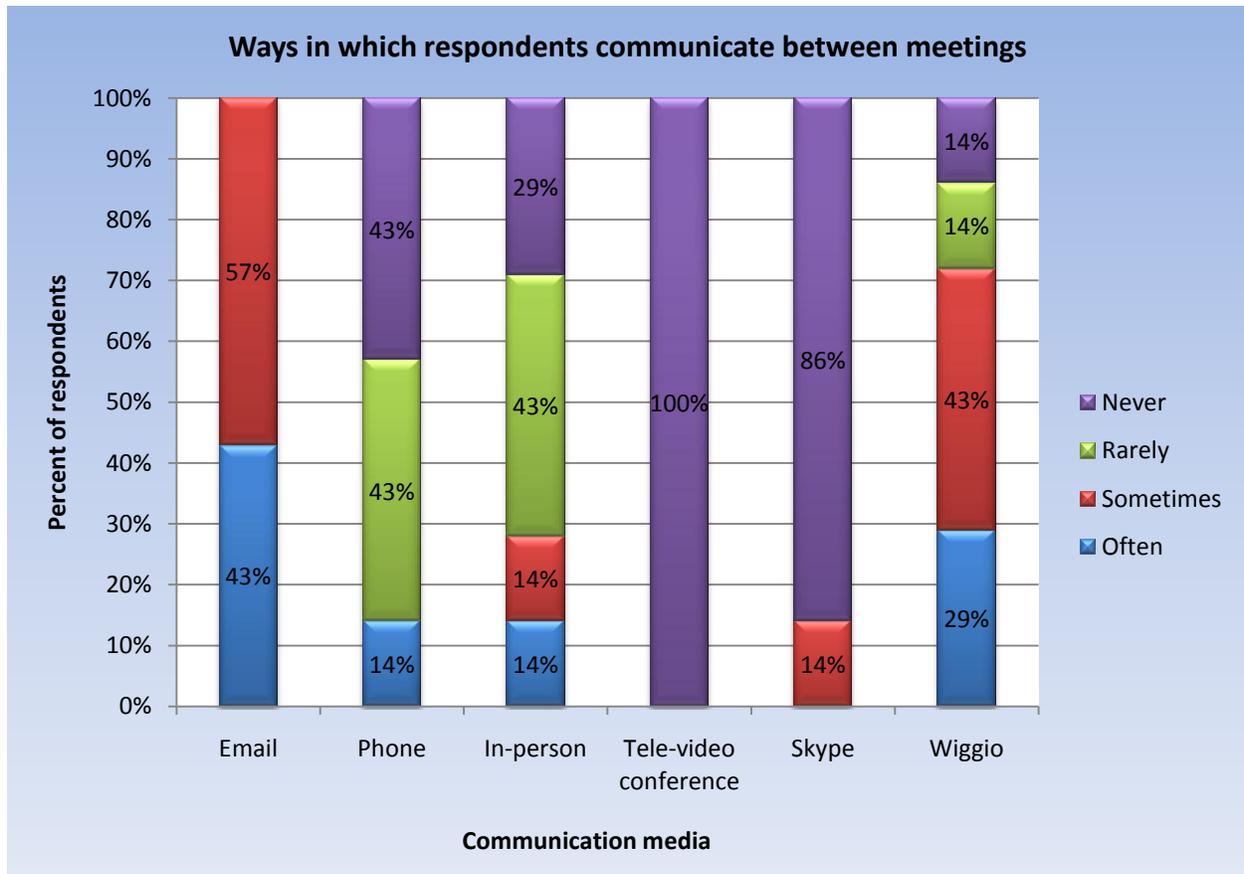
Uniqueness of Working Group Collaborations

Table 3. Ways in which working group research collaborations differ from participants' other collaborations

	Very different	Slightly different	Not different
Disciplinary topics involved	14%	86%	-
Research methods used	43%	57%	-
Scientific questions addressed	29%	71%	-
Academic conferences at which research is presented	20%	80%	-
Competitive grants applied for	20%	60%	20%
Journals targeted for publication	14%	86%	-

Respondent Communication

Figure 3. Ways respondents communicate



Additional Comments about Working Group

“Awesome. Great new ideas and data. Hope to get some very interesting papers out of several collaborative efforts. Sergey Gavrilets and Frans de Waal are really good at keeping everyone on task and in good humor.”

“This was one of the most intellectually provocative meetings I've participated in.”

Appendix

List of Participants

Participants

Last name	First name	Institution
Barrett	Louise	University of Lethbridge
Bissonnette	Annie	University of Zurich University of Gottingen
Chagnon	Napoleon	University of Michigan Ann Arbor
*de Waal	Frans	Emory University
Flinn	Mark	University of Missouri Columbia
*Gavrilets	Sergey	University of Tennessee Knoxville
Gravner	Janko	University of California Davis
Mesterton-Gibbons	Mike	Florida State University
Perry	Susan	University of California Los Angeles

* Organizer