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Pandemic Collaborative Governance Facilitation: A First Look at COVID-19's Impact on Collaborative Governance

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Pandemic Collaborative Governance Facilitation:
A First Look at COVID-19's Impact on Collaborative Governance

by

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I. Research Question

What can we learn from how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Collaborative Governance Facilitation?

II. Introduction & Background

The onset of Covid-19 upended American society as the severity of the virus, and uncertainty around transmission, mitigation, and treatment, caused large-scale shutdowns. This was quickly followed by most of the world pivoting to remote or distance models to continue working. Schools went remote, people worked from home, doctors and counselors engaged in teletherapy, and restaurants offered contactless pick-up. In the first three months of 2020, Zoom jumped from 10 to 300 million users per day (Vailshery, 2022). Zoom's popularity made it an internationally recognized platform for remote connections and meetings both professionally and personally.

As our knowledge about the virus has grown and vaccines have become available, many aspects of remote services have continued, especially the use of Zoom. The ability to connect people across geographic divides, give access to people with health or mobility issues, or provide convenience to individuals with significant time constraints, has proven Zoom to be a powerful and much-needed tool. However, Zoom and teleconnections are not without challenges. Being physically present with others allows for rapport and engagement that is not duplicated on a small screen, where participant faces can be reduced to the size of a postage stamp. One cannot turn to their seatmate and make an aside, go to lunch with a coworker, or have a physical connection with others through a handshake or shoulder touch. Increased accessibility may have come at the expense of presence and genuine human connection.

This paper researches how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted Collaborative Governance[1] (CG) facilitation. While Online Dispute Resolution[2] (ODR) already existed in the realm of Alternative Dispute Resolution[3] (ADR), it was woefully underutilized; participants and practitioners alike overwhelmingly preferred face-to-face engagement. As COVID-19 surged across the globe, this fledgling form of mediation suddenly became the primary way of doing business. This unexpected eruption of virtual services is what makes this research study so timely, as it serves to help shed light on this rapidly expanding field.

III. Existing Literature

The dramatic change in how the world engaged in business practices during COVID-19 also significantly impacted the ADR field. Some work has already been done to assess the pandemic's impact on various areas of ADR, such as Family Dispute Resolution (FDR). The article "Remote Family Dispute Resolution Services for COVID and Post-COVID Times: Client and Practitioner Perspectives," from Victoria Australia, found that mediators felt it was more difficult to engage their clients in the remote FDR process fully (Heard, G., Bickerdike, A., & Opoku, S. 2022). The clients' reflections highlighted both positive and negative outcomes of the new remote format. The major positive themes emerging from client reflections included better accessibility and efficiency of services and reduced anxiety and emotion when utilizing services. They also felt that the remote approach created more agency, less conflict, and better outcomes

[1] This investigation defines CG as a governing process that involves governmental organizations, businesses, community members, and other relevant interest groups (such as non-profits or unions) to generate more inclusive and effective outcomes (such as policy recommendations) then could be achieved without the perspectives of the whole group.

[2] This investigation defines ODR as a branch of ADR that utilizes technology as a means to conduct the ADR process. It ranges from ADR processes entirely done by chat or email software, to live video calls like Zoom and Skype.

[3] This investigation defines ADR as any process that aims to resolve a conflict or reach an agreement outside of official league avenues with the support of a neutral third party. All participants must be willingly involved in the process.

than would have occurred with in-person FDR (pp. 299-231). However, clients struggled with limits to privacy and confidentiality, particularly if there were children in the home. The lack of visual communication, as most of the remote FDR work was conducted via phone, also proved difficult for some clients. One purpose of the current study is to address the gap between the Heard et al. research, which focused on phone facilitations, and the trend during COVID-19 of using Zoom as the primary remote FDR delivery system.

As ODR services have been in use for over 20 years, there is literature from before the COVID-19 pandemic on the effects of ODR. For example, the 2006 study "Mediating in your Pajamas: The Benefits and Challenges for ODR Practitioners" found that online mediation participants can be more emotionally elevated (less calm) and thus, less likely to be cooperative than in-person clients (Raines, 2006). However, as this study focused on ODR services that did not have a video or face-to-face component, it cannot speak to the larger impacts of the pandemic. Given this, its findings are not as applicable to most mediators today.

Research has also been published on the effects of COVID-19 on more generalized ADR services. Conducted during the height of the pandemic, *Conflict Resolution in the Virtual World: The Impact of COVID-19 on New Ways of Doing Business* used a survey to investigate the positive and negative impacts of the pandemic on ADR practitioners, and specifically examined the impact on business platforms and technology use (Petzold-Bradley, E., Tutdea, N., & Sabala, G., 2021). It found that almost half of the practitioners felt more than a moderate impact on their business. This impact was mainly caused by increased cases and feeling less connection and engagement with their clients. In response to the question, "What do you consider to be the benefits of online dispute resolution" most practitioners selected answers around increased convenience and accessibility for clients (p. 22).

While the findings from the above studies provide valuable insight into the emerging effects of COVID-19 on the ADR world, there is a conspicuous lack of investigation into how the pandemic affected long-term, multi-party processes. The dynamics of this type of work require unique strategies and often have different goals than two-party meditations or negotiations, which are generally more focused on resolving an issue than generating a product. Essentially, a two-party mediation typically involves problem-solving an issue with two distinct sides. An example would be two co-workers in an office dispute or a marital dispute. However, a multi-party CG project usually involves navigating the views of many stakeholders in an effort to create policy, project recommendations, or next steps that all stakeholders can agree on.

Projects like the William D. Ruckelshaus Center report, *Evaluation of the Regional Structures and Organizational Processes: Supporting a Community-led Approach to Salmon Recovery in the Upper Columbia Basin*, offer glimpses into the impact of the pandemic on more extensive, multi-stakeholder facilitation processes (Stenovec, M., Page, C., Shulman, P., Counihan, M., & Murphy, A., 2021). The report evaluated a CG process that began before the pandemic and ended shortly after its onset. The participants of the CG projects were interviewed about their experience throughout the process, and many voiced concerns that the pandemic limited opportunities for trust and relationship building. The report explained that "..interviews expressed concerns about the loss of opportunities for informal interactions and other relationship-building avenues limited by the virtual setting" (p. 28). While the study included a limited sample, these participants' experiences were taken into consideration when drafting the questions used in this study.

IV. Methodology

A. Participant Demographics

The participants in this study are all CG facilitators working in the greater Pacific Northwest, as there is somewhat of a concentration of CG work in the Western United States. This geographic concentration also served to limit the variables that might impact the study participants' experiences. Potential participants were identified for recruitment if they were registered as public policy mediators or facilitators with the National Policy Consensus Center [4] (NPCC) or the William D, Ruckelshaus Center[5] (WDRC). The NPCC is the largest and most well-known organization to contract with public policy mediations and facilitators in the state of Oregon, so their database provides an extensive list of experienced and practicing professionals. Like the NPCC, the WDRC is a well-known organization that contacts public policy mediations and facilitators in the greater Pacific Northwest.

Unlike CG facilitation participants and organizers, facilitators have more experience with these processes and are required to objectively reflect on processes and relationships within facilitations in order to generate the best possible outcome in their projects. Their extensive experience and critical approach to facilitation made them well-equipped to speak critically about changes they experienced in facilitation during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is why they were the demographic selected for this study. Additionally, while study participants' ages and years of practice varied, they all started practicing before March 2020, as this study required reflection on pre-pandemic conditions. The six participants included in this study spanned five companies, offered equal male and female-identifying perspectives, and collectively represented roughly 130 years of CG experience.

[4] https://www.pdx.edu/policy-consensus-center/
[5] https://ruckelshauscenter.wsu.edu/

B. Procedures and Confidentiality

Once this study was approved by PSU's Institutional Review Board on February 14th, 2023, the recruitment process began. When recruited for this study, all participants were sent the standard confidentiality agreement provided by PSU with the appropriate project-specific modifications. (A copy of this consent form can be found in Appendix A.) The recruitment material explained that, if they were willing to participate in the study, they needed to check the "I consent" box and sign their name at the bottom of the form. Participants then emailed their completed form to the researcher, and once received, the scheduling process of the focus group began. As outlined in the Informed Consent document, participants had the option to withdraw from the study for any reason at any time. In addition, while the six participants knew the identities of their fellow participants, all participants were represented in the data by a randomly assigned number which was not disclosed to anyone besides the researcher.

C. Approach and Analysis

This study used a focus group of six people to collect data, as the generative process of a focus group provided a space to begin hearing general experiences and themes from CG facilitation practitioners. Using a focus group of roughly five to seven people allows for a diversity of experiences without becoming overwhelming for participants or unwieldy for the researcher to facilitate smoothly (Krueger, 2015). The short research duration was not conducive to a large sample size, as quality qualitative analysis and coding take time. The focus group was conducted via Zoom, as this method allows for flexible scheduling while still providing online face-to-face interactions that help create connections in the interview space. The existing literature, and the research noted in the literature view of this paper, were used to draft the focus group questions (Please see Appendix B for the full list of prepared questions).

This study used a qualitative approach, which borrows from Grounded Theory and Phenomenological methodologies, to identify emerging trends in CG Facilitator's practice and experiences in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. As this study aimed to discover emergent themes and patterns, a qualitative approach was the best fit for the data. However, unlike a true Grounded Theory study, this research was not intended to generate a substantive theory. Instead, it aimed to identify how CG facilitation was (and is) impacted by the phenomenon of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Given the nature of interpretivist research traditions and the exploratory character of this study, a primarily inductive approach[6] was used to analyze the data. Open-coding[7] and thematic analysis[8] allowed for full consideration of the data to identify themes and their relationships to one another. While some deductive analysis was also used, emphasis was placed on inductive methods to ensure that this study's findings were as closely rooted in the data as possible.

V. Data Analysis & Findings

This section is divided into eight general categories or sub-sections to organize the general findings of this study. They are as follows: A) Assessment Phase, B) Pace & Product, C) Equity & Demographic Differences, D) Building Relationships, E) Navigating Hostility, F) Clients & Cost, G) Facilitator Style, and H) Working in Hybrid. The sub-sections' order was selected to create the best possible narrative flow of findings. Therefore, the order in which findings are presented does not indicate the strength or significance of that particular finding in relation to the others. In addition, the provided sub-sections are general categories, so

[6] For the purpose of this investigation, inductive research refers to the method of forming general conclusions based on pattern recognition from specific observations. When compared to deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning is considered "bottom-up" and deductive reasoning "top-down."
[7] For the purpose of this investigation, open coding refers to the Grounded Theory tool of organizing data into concepts or "codes" to identify emergent patterns or themes to better understand the phenomenon in question.
[8] For the purpose of this investigation, thematic analysis refers to a method of analyzing qualitative data where researchers differentiate patterns in the data to derive themes and meaning.

connections to their themes may occur throughout the discussion of research findings, not exclusively in its designated area.

It is important to acknowledge that the focus group's attention, and therefore many of the findings, center on CG Zoom facilitation more than the impact of COVID-19 as a whole. This is because the most notable change to CG facilitations during COVID-19 was the evolution of Zoom as both a tool and platform for facilitation. Previously, in-person meetings were the primary form of GC interaction with conference calls utilized occasionally. However, because the pandemic generated the transition to Zoom facilitation, the trends identified in this research cannot be accurately attributed to the Zoom environment alone. As time progresses, virtual CG facilitations will be conducted outside the context of COVID-19, so distinguishing the impacts of Zoom and the pandemic will become feasible. At this time, however, this study cannot discriminate between the two variables.

A. Assessment Phase

At the onset of the discussion, all of the facilitators agreed that they did not anticipate how successful Zoom facilitation would be, particularly during the assessment phase of a collaboration governance project. The one-on-one nature of the interviews that typically dominate the assessment phase could be carried out so smoothly via Zoom that all five of the firms represented in the focus group reported they have continued to conduct the assessment phase[9] mostly, if not entirely, virtually – even if many alternative dispute and conflict resolution practices have returned to face-to-face meetings. The benefits reported by the group that make Zoom so functional for assessments are the same benefits appreciated by most Zoom users:

[9] The first step in most CG processes is the "Conflict Assessment and Process Design" phase (Silverberg, 2021). During this phase, the facilitator will collect information about the conflict, typically through discussions and interviews with the parties involved, to help the facilitator better understand the issue and judge if CG is the best tool for addressing the conflict.

meetings are easier to coordinate because there is no commute time or expenses of travel. Pre-covid, if someone was unable to meet in person, the assessment interview would have had to take place over the phone. The facilitators with experiences using this method all expressed that the face-to-face component of Zoom makes it a far better tool, and they will be using it instead of phone calls unless absolutely necessary. In fact, the group of facilitators felt that the face-to-face component of Zoom is so critical for the success of a CG project, that many of them now include a requirement that all of the project participants commit to having their cameras on during the process. All of the facilitators agreed that without the ability to (at the very least) see people's faces, the CG process is not possible.

The conceptualization of Zoom as a powerful new tool in the facilitator's toolbox is consistent with how it was discussed outside of the assessment phase. The key difference is that, while Zoom "revolutionized" the assessment phase for all study participants, the benefits and drawbacks of the tool during the meeting process change depending on the facilitator's style and the demographics participating in the CG process. (See subsections C. and G. for details.)

B. Pace & Product

Five of the six participants reported that projects facilitated during the pandemic seemed to move at a quicker pace than their pre-covid counterparts. The study participants attributed this difference to a range of factors, such as cutting down on time spent transitioning after meeting breaks and side conversations. The facilitators also noted that, because people often had Zoom meetings scheduled back-to-back, there was a sense of focus and urgency to address the task at

> "When you're in person and you call a break, it can be five to ten more minutes until the animals come back to their seat, the herding of the cats getting them back to the table, or even longer sometimes."

Figure 1: Pace Quote

hand and move on. One participant explained that "people have a lot shorter tolerance for long meetings as opposed to being in person." Several facilitators also noted that, while the process may be completed faster via Zoom, the final products seemed slightly less comprehensive and methodical than the results of fully in-person CG projects prior to the pandemic. One facilitator commented that doing projects completely remote doesn't mean the process was done poorly, however, "it doesn't mean it couldn't have been done better." This remark holds significance, as it prompts consideration of best practices that are somewhat undefined for remote CG work, and also identifies what different process delivery systems may have broader impacts on client and practitioner goals.

C. Equity & Demographic Differences

Moreover, project pace seemed to be slower during the pandemic for the facilitator who works the most with rural communities. The facilitators who work with Indigenous nations also noted that the project pace was slower on projects that heavily involved this group. One comment about Zoom was how it makes it easier for people to access meetings as it takes the travel/lodging component out of the equation. However, for communities with limited access to tech and poor wifi access, Zoom meetings represented a lack of equity. Not only did rural and native populations have reduced access to the tech and wifi strength necessary to easily access Zoom, but these limitations meant those participants did not have the same opportunities to become comfortable with the Zoom experience. These challenges meant that facilitations with rural and Native demographics moved at a slower pace.

> …… a lot of times we end up working with tribes on projects. And if you know much if you've been on any reservations, not all reservations have broadband Internet or WiFi or WiFi data plans on their phones, so it's not always accessible. And that's a key group of folks, especially if there's community members and or tribal government involved that you need to have as part of the engagement process.

These tech challenges also could contribute to a diminished sense of empowerment. For the populations experiencing tech barriers, it changed the power balance during the meeting for the stakeholder who was struggling with their screen freezing or having to turn off their screen in order for their mic to work.

D. Building Relationships

Regardless of the population(s) facilitators work with, they all agreed that breakout rooms were essential to the success of pandemic facilitation. "One key piece that you missed in a Zoom meeting is the time in the breaks, and the lunch, and the time where people get to know each other," one facilitator explained. Without the opportunities to build personal rapport during meeting breaks, lunches, and happy hours, facilitators found they needed to intentionally generate opportunities for project members to build connections. Some of the facilitators felt they could replicate relationship-building moments with small group breakout room sessions.

"I think the breakout rooms are vital for individual connections between people or interpersonal connections."
"The breakout rooms seem to be the place where people make more of that kind of connection because it's a smaller group, usually, and they can have a little more semi-intimate conversation. But with the larger groups, I don't think we're seeing as much relationship building between participants as we would otherwise."
"At the first meeting, I said, I want to put you all into breakout rooms. And people were looking like, oh, you're kidding, right? I could tell that the agency folks didn't want to do it. And I said, here's what I'm going to do. When the meeting is over, I'm going to open the breakout rooms. And if you want to go and join in a conversation, you may, but I'm not going to force you to. And they all did. And they all came back and they were like, thank you so much for providing that space."

Figure 2: Three Breakout Room Quotes

E. Navigating Hostility

Breakout rooms also proved useful during pandemic facilitation when navigating the intense emotions and hostility that can arise during CG processes. A breakout room offers the facilitator a way to remove someone from the meeting room to discuss with them separately. The facilitators also reported that these intense emotions played out differently in pandemic facilitations than they did pre-covid, most notably when dealing with hostility. They explained that, if a participant became angry, they had less power to derail a meeting or have their anger color the facilitation process because they were literally not in the same space as the other CG meeting participants. One facilitator went on to observe that because people can leave a Zoom meeting much easier than walking out of an in-person meeting, "where we've had people … leave the meeting, and frankly, that has been useful because not everybody notices that they left. Whereas, had it been in person and they had stormed out, it would have taken hours to unwind that toxicity. Yet, online, half the people were like, 'Oh, I didn't even notice that he left.' " However, nearly all of the facilitators felt this was a two-sided coin because it takes longer to de-escalate people online than it does in person. "I feel like it's taken longer to take the hostile people, to bring them along and out of the hostility online," explained one facilitator. Overall, the facilitators agreed that, generally, there are more resources to deal with strong emotions in-person, such as being able to shift in the room or discreetly pulling someone aside to talk during a break. It isn't that the remote environment doesn't have tools, such as breakout rooms, to manage these issues, but it may take longer for them to be addressed effectively. This, in turn, can make the overcoming hostility and relationship-building stage of the CG process take longer than it might in person.

It is worth clarifying that these observations are different than the themes identified in "Mediating in your Pajamas: The Benefits and Challenges for ODR Practitioners," as this research found a correlation between the hostility of mediation participants and online processes. None of the participants in the current research study noted a definitive increase or decrease in the amount or severity of hostility they experienced during virtual CG projects.

Interestingly, however, some of the participants did identify a pattern between how emotionally elevated or hostile an individual meeting participant was and whether they had their own Zoom image visible to themselves. One facilitator went on to note that "we know a number of our clients that [turn on the Zoom setting to hide your own face], and I think they are the ones that seem to have a little bit more active facial stuff than others. They don't see themselves. They don't see that reflection of what they're showing others." Another went on to speculate if people's hostility can be "reduced because [they're] aware of how [they're] being present, how people are seeing [them]? Does that shift [their] emotion and how [they] handle [themselves] in a meeting? It probably does." After all, " You don't want to come across looking like a crazy person or maybe over-exuberant either … You're not as aware of that when you can't see your own face at all."

F. Clients & Cost

The results of Petzold-Bradley's 2021 study on the pandemic's effect on ODR practitioners, documented a distinct increase in clientele during the pandemic. This is very different from what facilitators reported during the focus group. One facilitator explained "During the pandemic, we almost had to convince clients that you can continue working …we don't have to just throw everything out. We can keep going." This contradiction shows that Zoom

brought new possibilities of success to a process that had previously considered face-to-face as a requirement for engagement.

One noticeable difference in CG facilitations during COVID-19 was the reduced cost to the client. All participants agreed that using Zoom instead of in-person facilitation was significantly less expensive than the cost of travel, lodging, and food, for multiple people over many sessions. One participant estimated the process, while not inexpensive in any form, was potentially 10 times more affordable in a remote format. This financial benefit did not apply to hybrid negotiations though, despite clients anticipating that it would. During a hybrid model, the expense of having staff at multiple locations magnified the cost. The question post-pandemic is: will the possibility of lower-cost facilitations make this service more accessible to more groups of people and create new opportunities for both clients and CG providers? More time will need to pass before these questions can be answered conclusively; however, one participant noted that it did feel like cost differences have opened up new opportunities for engagement.

G. Facilitator Style

All of the facilitators agreed that the remote environment impacted their ability to facilitate these processes. One participant explained, "[w]ith an in-person conversation, you have much more opportunity for give and take, and you can pick up on the timing of things better than you can when you're online." However, while some facilitators felt the tools offered in Zoom paired well with their facilitation style, others' experience with the shift was much more incompatible with their usual methods.

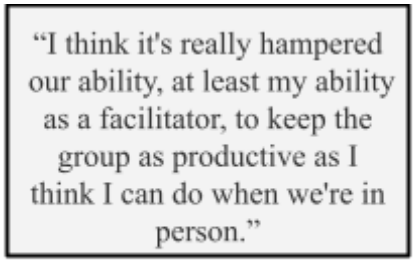

Figure 3: Facilitator Style Quote

Two components of a facilitator's style were identified during the focus group as the key indicators of if Zoom facilitation is likely to feel

equally successful as in-person methods. The first is the facilitator's primary method for non-verbal communication reading. Facilitators who instinctively rely more on face-reading to judge non-verbal cues expressed much greater satisfaction with their ability to manage the Zoom process. In fact, one study participant went as far as to say that Zoom actually made reading people easier because their faces are consistently and clearly visible throughout meetings. In contrast, the facilitators who instinctively use more body reading to discern non-verbal cues felt they were more successful working in the in-person environment.

The second component of a facilitator's style is how much they physically interact with the space when facilitating. The facilitators who indicated they liked to use lots of physical tools while working, such as Post-it notes and flip charts, also expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to use interactive tools in Zoom. One participant opined, "For me being in person, it's like, 'Oh, this is so fun. I get to work with flip charts, and we can have sticky notes, and we are getting to be funny, and all that.' " They went on to comment, "I know [other facilitators] is different because I've attended some of [their] trainings and [they] are really good at charting and doing it online." In addition, the ability to stay productive was easier the more engagement and participation facilitators received from the CG participants, so the population the facilitator is working with is also significant.

H. Working in Hybrid

As the focus group conversation progressed, it became explicitly clear that hybrid models were not well-liked by any of the participants. Some people preferred hybrid over Zoom, while others did not. However, everyone agreed that hybrid was particularly problematic, and no participant chose it as their first choice between service delivery models. As one participant shared:

> I find it really difficult when I'm working with a group, and I usually do a U-shaped table so I can kind of see the group and work with them. If the people who are on Zoom are behind me, I'm constantly trying to do a 360, trying to see everybody, and it's easy to forget the people who are online. And so, I think it becomes a bit of an equity issue, too, in terms of participation. Definitely hybrid would be very low on my list.

In contrast, in-person delivery was selected as the first choice of all but one participant. Even that participant noted that they would at least want to start with an in-person meeting prior to using any other models. When ranking the models in order of most to least preferred, the facilitators who ranked hybrid last felt much more strongly about their last choice than those who put all virtual last.

VI. Conclusion

A. Going Forward

Numerous areas have emerged from this study as promising avenues for further investigation and practical application. This section suggests a few key areas for continued study, but the themes identified by this research may begin to lay the starting foundation for work in many more areas not addressed below. Nevertheless, the following recommendations may prove particularly prudent for continued investigators to consider. For example, because of the benefits people found in talking to one another in the field, a larger study incorporating more geographic diversity may be extremely beneficial to understanding best practices for CG practitioners. In addition, given that all participants agreed that, without the ability to see people's faces the CG process is not possible, continued examination of this area, and its potential implications, is needed.

It would also be beneficial to consider the issues raised during the focus group surrounding the limits of Zoom when working with Indigenous tribes with elements of cross-cultural communication theory, specifically Edward Hall's distinctions between high and

low-context communication[10] (Shofner, 2021). Given that Zoom is a low-context communication environment, it can create barriers to effective communication for demographics who are high-context communicators, such as the Native tribes (Pratt & Pratt, 2017). This circles back to the question of what it means to provide easier access. Zoom, as a medium, favors low-context communicators. So, during the pandemic, remote facilitations did not move forward as seamlessly when stakeholders were from high-context communication populations as the medium was limiting the message. Just because Zoom makes communication more accessible for some groups does not mean this is a universal experience, and it would be negligent if further investigations don't seriously consider the systemic disadvantages that may be perpetuated by predominantly remote practices.

Another emerging pattern that would be prudent for future studies is the speculated connection between someone seeing themselves and how emotionally elevated they are during a CG process. All of the facilitators who participated in this study expressed an interest in learning more about how these two factors impact one another, so any research in this area would likely be eagerly anticipated by practitioners. In addition, there have been psychological studies that investigate the impact of seeing ourselves on our communication (Katz, 2020), so this literature could lay a foundation for further CG-specific research.

B. Study Limitations

The emerging themes of this report are intended to be used as a foundation for future studies on the evolution of CG facilitations. Study participants were limited to the greater Pacific Northwest area and served populations in that specific area. The sample size (of facilitators) was

[10] For the purpose of this investigation, high-context communication refers to communication that relies heavily on non-verbal or contextual information to convey messages. These contextual elements may include, but are not limited to, facial expression, body language, tone of voice, and the physical positions of individuals in connection to one another. In contrast, low-context communication relies most heavily on explicit verbal communication.

small; therefore more research is necessary before the results can be confidently extrapolated to the larger population. The participants were an even mix of male and female-identifying professionals. However, research that focuses on one gender may offer additional insights that tap into the potential impacts of gender identity on pandemic facilitation processes. In addition, while the facilitators worked with Indigenous and diverse populations, they themselves were all white. This bears additional investigation to determine why there were not any people of color within the facilitators who volunteered to participate, and how their input might have impacted the results. Time constraints were also limiting. The study was a single interview without a follow-up session to reflect on the results and analysis. A second interview might have resulted in additional information being drawn out and elaborated on.

C. Research Impacts

1. Impacts on Study Participants:

One unintended benefit of this research was the opportunity for participants to build relationships amongst themselves and learn from each other's experiences. Like most professions, CG facilitators were responding in the moment during COVID-19 and did not have many opportunities to process the experience with peers. The research process allowed these professionals to reflect back with colleagues in a way they had not done before and they indicated they learned from the group engagement and narrative. Connections they made expanded their understanding of the field and validated their experiences. The participants were also very engaged in hearing about others' perspectives. In addition, they expressed enthusiasm for future research into ideas and topics raised during the discussion.

2. Impacts on Practitioners & Discourse:

There are, of course, no guarantees for how this research will impact larger audiences; however, the following are some ways it may be beneficial to other CG practitioners. First, just as hearing shared experiences was validating for the practitioners who participated in the study, learning the experiences of other professionals is likely to be of interest to CG practitioners who did not participate in this study. Other practitioners may be validated, empowered, encouraged, or inspired by their colleagues' experiences and reflections. The COVID-19 experience was isolating for many professionals, including CG facilitators. Having the opportunity to hear a group of facilitators' reflections and experiences with mediation during COVID-19 may help other practitioners to reflect upon and process their own experiences. There has also been very little research that attempts to synthesize new learning in light of the pandemic in the CG field, making this study a valuable addition to developing discourse. In fact, because the conceptualization of CG is an emergent area of practice and study, all work focusing on it specifically serves to bolster CG discourse and practices.

3. Impacts on the Researcher:

By conducting this research, I have developed my understanding of what CG work looks like, both as an overall process and as an individual experience for the facilitators conducting these projects. I have expanded my professional network by establishing valuable connections with CG practitioners. The recruitment phase of this research led me to become much more cognizant of the many programs and firms that offer CG services, and the opportunity to engage in thoughtful and professional discussions with field experts has not only expanded my knowledge, but also helped me develop personal connections. Acknowledging these impacts is significant because it reminds us that qualitative research has the capacity to build connections

with people beyond the functions of that particular research. Relationships built during a research process do not end with the completion of the study. Recognizing the ripple effects of conducting qualitative research is important for researchers and participants alike, and should not be overlooked when considering the impacts of researchers, whatever they may be.

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VIII. Appendix

A. Focus Group Consent Form

Consent to Participate in Research

Project Title:	"What can we learn from how Collaborative Governance Facilitation was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?"
Population:	Pre-pandemic Public Policy Facilitators in the Pacific Northwest
Researcher:	Amelia Webb, Conflict Resolution
	Portland State University
Researcher Contact:	webbam@pdx.edu / (503)-924-9695

You are being asked to take part in a research study. The box below shows the main facts you need to know about this research to decide whether you wish to participate. Look over this information carefully and ask questions about anything you do not understand before making your decision.

Key Information for You to Consider

- **Voluntary Consent**. You are being asked to volunteer for a research study. It is up to you whether you choose to involve yourself or not. There is no penalty if you choose not to join in or decide to stop.
- **Purpose**. This research serves to begin filling the gap in Conflict Resolution literature regarding the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on collaborative governance facilitation.
- **Duration.** It is expected that your part will involve one 90-minute focus group in April, and potentially responding to an email in May if the research team seeks permission to quote you directly in the final report.
- **Procedures and Activities.** You will be asked to participate in a focus group and potentially provide feedback on emerging focus group trends. All participants are asked not to discuss the conversations from the focus group with people outside of the research process.
- **Risks.** Confidentiality may be compromised as fellow focus group participants are not bound by any legal agreements to keep the discussions private. However, all participants are asked to keep the focus group discussions private out of respect for their colleges and the research process. Another possible risk or discomfort from taking part in this study includes the potential for already knowing some of the other focus group members, given the specific demographic of this study.
- **Benefits**. Some of the benefits you may expect include engaging with colleagues on a topic of mutual interest and contributing to your field's body of literature.
- **Options.** Instead of taking part in this study, you could suggest other likely participants or decline to participate.

What happens to the information collected? Information collected from you for this research will be used to help identify emerging themes concerning how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted collaborative governance facilitation.

How will I and my information be protected? We will take measures to protect your privacy. This includes having all participant's contributions be confidential. Physical materials, such as the Zoom recording, will only be available to researchers. In the final report, all participants' contributions will be anonymous, unless specific permissions are obtained for individual quotes. Despite taking steps to protect your privacy, we can never fully guarantee that your privacy will be protected.

What if I want to stop being in this research? You do not have to take part in this study, but if you do, you may stop at any time. You have the right to choose not to join in any study activity or completely stop your participation at any point without penalty. Your decision whether or not to take part in research will not affect your relationship with the researchers or Portland State University.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research? There is no cost to participating in this research beyond your time.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research? You will not be paid to participate in this study.

Who can answer my questions about this research?
If you have questions or concerns, contact the research team at:

Amelia Webb, Student Researcher
Portland State University
Phone: (503)-924-9695 Email: webbam@pdx.edu

Who can I speak to about my rights as a research participant? The Portland State University Institutional Review Board ("IRB") is overseeing this research. The IRB is a group of people who review research studies to ensure the rights and welfare of the people who participate in research are protected. The Office of Research Integrity is the office at Portland State University that supports the IRB. If you have questions about your rights, or wish to speak with someone other than the research team, you may contact:

Office of Research Integrity
PO Box 751
Portland, OR 97207-0751
Phone: (503) 725-5484
Toll-Free: 1 (877) 480-4400
Email: psuirb@pdx.edu

Consent Statement: I have had the chance to read and think about the information in this form. I have asked any questions I have, and I can make a decision about my participation. I understand that I can ask additional questions anytime while I take part in the research.

□ I agree to take part in this study
□ I do not agree to take part in this study

B. Prepared Focus Group Topics

Overall Inquiry:

- In your role as a facilitator, what elements lead to an effective facilitation?
    - Did this change during the course of the pandemic?
- How would you compare your overall experience facilitating before and during the pandemic?

Topics to Consider Before and During the Pandemic:

1. **Communication**
    - ★ with clients
    - ★ with participants
    - ○ between participants

2. **Process & Procedures**
    - ★ overall project pace
    - ★ pace of individual meetings
    - ★ effectiveness of your facilitation tools
        - ■ If there was a difference, what about your methods changed?
    - ○ (if applicable) process evaluation responses from participants throughout the facilitation process

3. **Relationships**
    - ★ between participants
    - ○ between the client and the participants
    - ○ between yourself and the participants

Additional Reflection:

- What did you correctly anticipate about pandemic facilitation?
- Did something about pandemic facilitation surprise you?

C. Additional Resources

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