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Building and using the theory of collaborative advantage

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BUILDING AND USING THE THEORY OF COLLABORATIVE ADVANTAGE

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we introduce the *Theory of Collaborative Advantage* - a practice based theory about the management of collaborations which focuses on the potential for collaborative advantage arising out of inter-organizational partnerships. We start with a brief introduction on how the theory is built, how it is structured and what its purpose is. We then provide some conceptual examples which aim to illustrate the theory's contribution to knowledge, both theoretical and practical, about the management of collaboration in practice.

A THEME BASED THEORY OF COLLABORATION

The development of the theory of collaborative advantage (TCA) is an ongoing endeavor that began in 1989. It has emerged out of research from very many and varied types of collaborative situations and involved individuals whose roles have ranged from heading up major partnerships to representing organizations that are involved as members. The types of collaborations have ranged from dyads to international networks, have been concerned with almost every aspect of the public and not-for-profit sectors and have included PPPs that also span the commercial sector. They have addressed a wide range of areas including health, education, anti poverty, substance abuse, community development and planning, careers development, policing, economic development and many more.

The TCA is a practice based theory about the management of collaborations; it is derived from research involving practitioners on matters that are of genuine concern to them and over which they need to act. Also, it is structured in overlapping *themes* representing issues identified by practitioners as causing anxiety or reward. It seeks to depict what underpins the

anxiety and reward in each area. While the focus is firmly on the impact of these themes on the practice of collaboration, the themes also include topics deemed important from policy considerations.

Collaborations are conceptualized as paradoxical in nature with inherent contradictions and mutually exclusive elements caused by inevitable differences between partners; differences that contain the very potential for collaborative advantage. Viz, the theory is also structured around a tension between *Collaborative Advantage* - the synergy that can be created through joint working - and *Collaborative Inertia* - the tendency for collaborative activities to be frustratingly slow to produce output or uncomfortably conflict ridden.

Contribution to knowledge is made through identifying and describing the complexity that underlies collaborative situations and the resulting challenges that are intrinsic to them. In this sense, implications for practice are regarded as an integral part of the theoretical conceptualizations and are presented in a non-prescriptive manner that informs both theory and practice. The idiosyncratic nature of actual collaborative situations is thus recognized as is the idea that there are practical tensions between positive and negative sides to alternative ways of managing. To that end, the TCA provides conceptualizations and frameworks that can be used as "handles to support reflective practice".

This chapter provides brief overviews of four of these conceptualizations and frameworks relating to goals, trust, culture and leadership. We introduce different ways of conceptualizing the issues, tensions and challenges that underpin collaboration in practice and identify issues that need to be managed if collaboration is to yield advantage rather than inertia. In conclusion, we indicate how these four "themes" integrate with others that have not been

included in this chapter, to provide an overall sense of the theory and practice of collaborative advantage (Huxham and Vangen 2005).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

Managing Goals

Agreement between partners on joint goals for a collaboration is usually seen as a requirement for success; the presumption is that collaboration goals cannot be enacted unless they are explicitly acknowledged by all partners (Agranoff and McGuire 2001; Ansell and Gash 2008). Goal congruence is therefore essential as it allows greater alignment between partners' goals and the joint goal for the collaboration, which in turn increases partners' commitment to it. Nevertheless, the reliance on congruent goals in collaborative contexts is problematic. In most situations, diversity of expertise and resources is essential to gaining truly synergistic advantage from collaborating and this, in turn, implies diversity of partners' goals. We can therefore locate a "goals paradox" which suggests that both congruence and diversity in goals influence success in collaboration. At the most basic level, this paradox suggests that congruence and diversity is in tension; goal congruence can make partners reluctant to cooperate and share information (Provan and Kenis, 2008) while goal diversity leads partners to seek different and sometimes conflicting outcomes (Ansell and Gash 2008; Agranoff and McGuire 2001).

It is possible to unpack the complexity that underpins this problematic through conceptualizing genuine goals for the collaboration as existing, if at all, in an entanglement of other, variously characterized goals that are both real and imagined. Our research suggests that goals that influence the actions and directions of a collaboration differ in type over six

dimensions: level, origin, authenticity, relevance, content and overtness as illustrated in figure x.1 below. A brief elaboration on each of these follows below.

DIMENSIONS	TYPES
Level	The Collaboration, The Organization(s), The Individual(s)
Origin	External Stakeholder(s), Members
Authenticity	Genuine, Pseudo
Relevance	Collaboration Dependent, Collaboration Independent
Content	Collaborative Process , Substantive Purpose
Overtness	Explicit, Unstated, Hidden

Figure x.1: Dimensions of goals

i) level

The first dimension relates to the level at which goals are recognized. It distinguishes between those that are about the collaboration, those that are about organizational purposes and those that individuals wish to achieve. Goals expressed at the collaboration level relate to participants' views of what the collaborating partners aspire to achieve together. They are the public declaration of the sought after collaborative advantage. In contrast, organizational and individual level goals relate to the aspirations for the collaboration of each of the organizations and individuals involved. This distinction thus recognizes that goals at both the organizational and individual levels motivate and influence the actions of those who enact the collaboration in practice.

ii) origin

The goals in the first dimension mostly relate to the concerns of members of the collaboration. However, goals formulated by members are sometimes strongly influenced by the goals of organizations or individuals external to the collaboration. Government is perhaps the most common organizational stakeholder exerting pressure on collaborations and they frequently influence and shape them. Whether collaborations are mandated or constrained by government, nation-wide policies as well as local priorities and interests tend to have an effect on the goals of the collaboration.

iii) authenticity

Goals expressed by members and external stakeholders may be genuine statements about what they aspire to achieve. However, there are many reasons why members may not identify with goals that are nevertheless publicly stated. For example, they may not subscribe to collaboration goals that have been imposed upon them by external pressure, or changes in the situation may have altered the relevance of previously genuine goals. Organizations may, for example, invent a jointly owned substantive goal that satisfies the specifications of a funding provider and which effectively disguises their real aim. Similarly, individuals may invent goals for their organizations to legitimize their own personal involvement in the collaboration. We characterize such possibilities as pseudo goals.

iv) relevance

The identification of specific goals for each of the parties involved as well as the joint purpose is acknowledged as important if the collaboration is to succeed. Recognizing which organizational goals can reasonably be pursued through the collaboration is, however, not always straightforward. Other goals relating to the area remain to be addressed by the

organization alone or perhaps through other collaborations. The fourth dimension thus recognize that it can be hard to distinguish those goals that should or are intended to relate specifically to the collaborative agenda from those that are closely related but not explicitly a part of it.

v) content

Many of the goals expressed by individuals are essentially concerned with what the collaboration is about, such as gaining access to resource and expertise, sharing risk, increasing efficiency, improving co-ordination in service provision and learning. They relate to substantive outcomes and are obviously important in all collaborations. However, participants also – often implicitly – express goals that relate to how the collaboration will be undertaken. These goals can relate to any aspect of collaborative processes so might, for example, relate to modes of communicating, to kinds of relationship between members or to a myriad of other possibilities.

iv) overtness

Finally, goals may be openly discussed and explicitly stated, but there are also many reasons why they may knowingly not be revealed to other participants, even if there is genuine goodwill between partners. Hidden agendas are endemic in collaboration. Deliberate concealing of goals is, however, not the only reason why they may not be clearly stated. In practice, there may be limited opportunities to explicitly discuss all potentially relevant goals in open forum, many goals go unstated even when there is no intent to hide them.

Taken together these dimensions show that goals relevant to collaborations: will relate to aspirations not only for the collaboration but also for the organizations and individuals

involved; may have been generated by those involved but may also have been imposed or suggested by external stakeholders; may be genuine but can also be manufactured to provide a reason for involvement in collaboration; do not always relate to the activities of the collaboration; can relate to substantive or processual concerns; and, do not all appear overtly in the discourse of the collaboration.

It is the interplay between these goals that generates a problematic part of the paradox through producing major obstacles to achieving fully owned agreement of collaboration goals. The reasons for this can be summarized in four key points. First, it is highly unlikely that all the goals will be in harmony. Second, it is highly unlikely that any individual participant will know or understand more than a portion of the goals that are at play. This is a function of the sheer size and complexity of the entanglement, distractions caused by pseudo and independent goals and the masking effect of unstated or hidden goals. Third, differing perceptions on goals can lead to a low degree of mutual understanding even where there is individual knowledge or understanding. Fourth, because the entanglement is in a continuous state of flux as goals change over time, any mutual understanding of each others' goals – and hence any agreement over a collaboration goal – tends to be short lived. This analysis does not challenge the notion that agreement on joint goals for a collaboration is important and desirable but it explains why that is inherently difficult to achieve and so questions the practicality of it as a *requirement* for success.

The goals paradox and the entanglement of goals suggest that there are real challenges associated with the management of goals in collaborations. The goals paradox serves as a reminder that there will be underlying tensions and that managerial responses need to incorporate these. The entanglement suggests that any managerial mechanism seeking to

integrate congruent and diverse goals in collaborations should emphasize the importance of the paradox and its inherent tensions rather than seeking resolutions free of compromises or trade-offs. Accepting the paradox however, does not mean abandoning active management of goals. Rather, the entanglement provides participants with a handle for reflective practice by facilitating the consideration – and hence understanding – of their own and partners' goals. It does not provide normative guidance on how to manage goals but aims to support participants in understanding their collaborative relationships and so allow them to devise their own management strategies (for a fuller account of this conceptual framework, see Vangen and Huxham 2011).

Managing Trust

As with the issue of goals, trust is also seen as a necessary condition for successful collaboration (Lane and Bachmann 1998) yet the reality of many collaborations suggests that trust is frequently weak - if not lacking altogether. This particular paradox then suggests that there is a need to look at how trust can be built and maintained between partners in the context of collaboration.

Thus building can be conceptualized through a loop as depicted in Figure x.2. This argues that two factors are important in initiating a trusting relationship. The first concerns the formation of expectations about the future of the collaboration; these will be based either on reputation or past behavior, or on more formal contracts and agreements (Gulati 1995). Given the difficulties of agreeing aims, as discussed above, this is a non-trivial starting point. The second starting point involves risk taking; partners need to trust each other enough to allow them to take a risk to initiate the collaboration (Gambetta 1998). If both of these initiators are possible, then, the loop argues, trust can be built gradually through starting with some modest

but realistic aims that are likely to be successfully realized. This reinforces trusting attitudes and provides a basis for more ambitious collaboration.
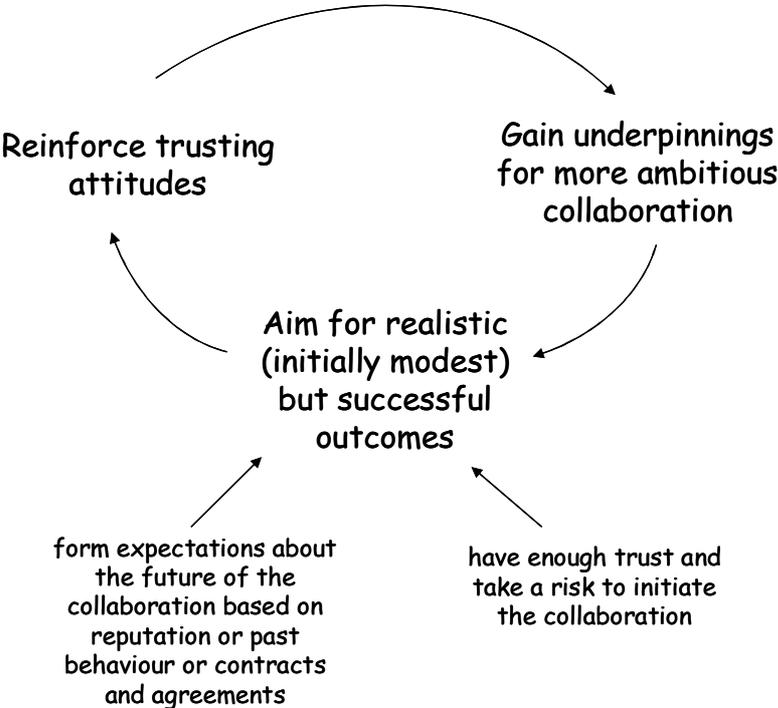

Figure x.2: The trust building loop

This conceptualization of trust building aligns itself well with a "small wins" approach (Bryson 1998) within which trust can be built through mutual experience of advantage gained via successful implementation of low risk initiatives. Trust can be developed over time moving gradually towards initiatives where partners are willing to take greater risks because a high level of trust is present. When risk and uncertainty levels are high, a strategy involving incremental increases in resource commitments may indeed be the preferred strategy. In many situations however, the collaborative advantage aimed for requires the collaborating partners to be more ambitious, and hence adopt a higher risk approach. The small wins approach may for example be in contradiction with the need to address major social issues rapidly or meet the requirements of external funding bodies for demonstrable output. More comprehensive ways of managing trust have different implications for initiating and sustaining the trust building loop. We will elaborate a bit further on this below.

Initiating the trust building loop

a) forming expectations

Two structural features – ambiguity and complexity – that tend to characterize collaborations can act as barriers to the initiation of trust building. Whilst researchers have argued that "explicit" membership where the parties "know and agree on who is involved and in what capacity" is a key definitional element of collaboration, the surprising reality of many situations is the ambiguity about who the partners are. Typically, there are differences in views about who the central members are and what their roles or membership status are with respect to the collaboration. In practice it can be difficult to be certain about what organization, collaboration or other constituency (if any) individuals represent. Simply identifying with whom to build trust therefore can be very difficult and time-consuming.

Working out with whom trust should be built is not the only challenge in getting started in the trust building loop. As we have already discussed above, practitioners continuously raise concerns over the establishment of joint aims. Seeking agreement on aims to effectively initiate the trust building loop can be problematic in practice.

b) managing risk

Gradually, as trust develops it becomes a means for dealing with risk. In situations where the small wins approach is not feasible however, the risk associated with the collaboration has to be managed as an integral part of trust building. Risk is usually associated with opportunistic behavior and vulnerability relating to apprehensions that partners will take advantage of collaborative efforts by for example claiming ownership of joint efforts. When the aim is to build trust however, risk management cannot be concerned with guarding against opportunistic behavior e.g. via sanctions set out in contractual agreements. Instead, risk

management must ensure that any future collaborative advantage can realistically be envisaged and is shared. This requires efforts associated with aims negotiation, structural ambiguity, clarification of expectations, willingness and ability to enact the agreed collaborative agenda in view of associated power and influence relationships and so on. These activities are extremely resource intensive and time consuming and their management requires a great deal of skill and sensitivity. Hence the effort is only recommended where trust cannot be built incrementally.

Sustaining the trust building loop

c) managing dynamics

Many collaborations are initiated so it must be presumed that expectations can be formed on the basis that either a minimal level of trust is present and / or there is a willingness to bear the associated risk. Sustaining the trust building loop then requires the participants to work together, gradually becoming more ambitious, over time, in their joint endeavors. Unfortunately, while all organizations are dynamic in nature, collaborations are particularly so because they are sensitive to transformation in each of the partner organizations and therefore may change very quickly. Effort put into building mutual understanding and developing trust can be shattered, for example, by a change in the structure of a key organization or the job change of a key individual. Sustaining the trust building loop therefore, requires continuous attention to trust relationships.

d) managing power imbalances

Even when careful and continuous attention is paid to trust building, the inherent fragility of the loop is evident. Alongside the issues relating to the dynamic nature of collaboration, power issues in particular seem to challenge efforts aimed at sustaining the loop. Imbalance in

power and the inevitably that some partners will be more central to the enactment of the collaborative agenda than are others tend to dictate behaviors that get in the way of trust building. An appreciation of the inevitability of power imbalances as well as the ability to interpret any actions that members take in response to them may help prevent loss of trust. Furthermore, an understanding of the way in which balances of power tend to change during the life of a collaboration and indeed whether and how power imbalances can and should be deliberately shifted seems essential in sustaining the trust gained.

e) nurturing the collaborative relationships

Issues pertaining to the identification of partners, complexity and multiplicity of aims, risk and vulnerability, complexity and dynamics of collaborative structures and power imbalances clearly all pose serious management challenges for building and sustaining trust. If not managed effectively, any one of these issues can prevent trust from developing or even cause loss of trust. Ideally therefore, all these issues need to be managed simultaneously and, due to the dynamic nature of collaboration, in a continuous manner. Failing to do so may cause the trust loop to fracture.

This framework has sought to illustrate in broad terms the contrast between two different approaches to the management of trust: small wins versus comprehensive management. Both approaches have their merits. The illustration of each intends to provide insight to inform the managerial judgment about the kind of trust building activities that are appropriate to collaborative situations (for a fuller account of this conceptual framework, see Vangen and Huxham 2003a).

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Managing cultural diversity

Cultural diversity in collaborations is also an issue that receives much attention from research and practice alike. Culture, in this context, is used broadly to refer to partners' 'habitual ways of being and acting' that stem from the distinct professional, organizational and national cultures to which they belong. Studies have shown that similar and compatible cultures yield greater connectivity and shared understanding between partners which render the act of collaborating less problematic (Beamish and Lupton 2009). In practice, however, collaborations may necessarily span organizational, professional and even national boundaries thus incorporating cultural diversity that may cause conflicts, misunderstandings and points of friction (Bird and Osland 2006; Shenkar et al, 2008). Indeed, research has tended to focus on addressing such friction rather than treating culture as one of the resources that may lead to synergistic gains. However, as with goals, is it possible to locate a 'culture paradox' which suggests that cultural diversity is both a source of stimulation, creativity and reward and a source of potential conflicts of values, behaviors, and beliefs. Cultural similarity and diversity is thus in tension.

One way of addressing the 'culture paradox', is to consider what specific management tensions need to be addressed if cultural diversity is to yield advantage rather than inertia. Our research points to three inter-related management tensions in this respect, each of which focuses on a particular interaction within collaboration. The first, termed 'accommodation', addresses the interaction between organizations in a collaboration. The second, 'agency', focuses on the individual actor and the quality of their orientation towards the collaboration and their host organization. The third, 'quantity', analyses the constitution of the collaboration in respect of the quantity and extent of cultural diversity within it. A brief summary of each tension is provided below.

Accommodation tension

In collaborations characterized by cultural diversity, flexibility at the organizational level is necessary to accommodate different operational procedures, different ways of being, interacting and working. Typically, partners have different structures and procedures (expressed through the organization but constituted additionally through professional practices or idiosyncrasies rooted in national cultures) that they deploy to meet their own goals. When such distinct resources can be deployed jointly, they can be used to pursue collaborative goals. This joint pursuit however, usually requires some flexibility as partners' resources are oriented towards internal purposes rather than the goals of the collaboration and so is not designed to accommodate partners. Paradoxically, this need for flexibility may compromise those structures and processes that enable them to deliver their core business which enables them to make a contribution to the goals of the collaboration in the first place.

We thus identify an accommodation tension defined in terms of the poles of *flexibility* and *rigidity*. Flexibility in structures and processes, working through - and sometimes in spite of - difference, is necessary to accommodate diverse cultures. Yet, a partner's established culture may be what enables it to make a contribution to the joint agenda in the first place; there is a need for a certain rigidity to preserve this resource.

Agency tension

Following on from the accommodation tensions above, in culturally diverse collaborations, organizational representatives typically have to respond to cultural frictions at the inter-personal level within structures that are ill fit for that purpose. Typically, cultural frictions arise because individuals come to the collaboration with different expectations of what can be achieved within an organizational or collaborative context, with different ways of

communicating and different etiquettes and norms. In order to anticipate or overcome these frictions, managers need to employ appropriately their understanding of partners' culture – i.e. their partners' culturally embedded perceptions, behavioral characteristics and professional expertise. However, managers express much frustration about not being in control of operational and strategic matters pertaining to the collaboration and the perception that they lack power, authority or discretion to respond appropriately.

While it is entirely reasonable that managers should be supported and empowered to act on behalf of their organizations for the purpose of the collaboration, any individual autonomy needs to be exercised without leaving the individuals vulnerable and organizations at risk. We can thus identify an agency tension defined by the poles of *autonomy* and *accountability* - which can play out in a number of ways. In terms of generating advantage through cultural diversity, managers undoubtedly need enough individual autonomy to act on behalf of their organizations even to the extent of deviating from established organizational procedures. Yet protecting the organizations' interest and their inherent contribution to the collaboration require individuals to maintain accountability toward their organization.

Quantity tension

When collaborations span sector and / or national boundaries, the context within which partners operate and the organizational cultures and professional practices enacted in them can be very diverse. In the midst of this complexity the quantity tension arises. It captures the sense in which increasing levels of complexity need to be embraced to secure advantage from cultural diversity. However such complexity requires an increasing level of control (and simplification) in order to militate against complexity induced inertia.

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Two common responses to handling complexity are suggested by our research. First, organizations seek to find partners with a similar culture or who are able and willing to compromise. This will yield connectivity and understanding between the partners and hence be easier to manage. Second, managers adopt practices which seek to control the impact that the activities of the collaboration have on their organizations' cultures. Typically they achieve such control by seeking to be the lead, thus effectively imposing their culture upon the collaboration, or by actively controlling the channels of communication between partners.

Notwithstanding the pragmatic need to control the complexity of collaborations, there is nevertheless a real opportunity cost associated with simplifying cultural diversity. Selecting partners that are culturally similar, insisting on being the lead partner or limiting the number of individuals involved will effectively limit the potential for stimulation, creativity and reward. Our data shows many examples of managers reflecting on the value of communication in 'avoiding thinking traditionally' and 'gaining a richness of discussion' thereby genuinely tapping into partners' expertise. Similarly, they reflected on how greater diversity between their own organization and their partners would lead to greater opportunities to diversify rather than simply expanding their core business.

The quantity tension is thus defined by the poles of *complexity* and *simplification*. The essence of the tension lies in dealing with the complexities stemming from the number and cultural diversity of the partners that are involved. Retaining control is a necessary element of steering the joint agenda forward, however embracing complexity is necessary if the collaboration is to generate advantage through cultural diversity.

The three inter-related management tensions identify seemingly opposing approaches to managing cultural diversity that may be used reflectively to support practice. They are intended to highlight areas of pertinent tradeoffs and compromises that should inform managerial judgment. As illustrated in figure x.3 below, the extremes on the left poles of the tensions treat cultural diversity as an inherent benefit to collaborative practice, in this mode managers embrace diversity through flexibility, autonomy and accepting complexity. By contrast the right poles of the tensions suggest that for cultural diversity to yield advantage, there needs to be substantial control. Here, the response is to simplify the extent and impact of diversity - organizations and individuals similarly show a bias outwith the collaboration in order to maintain their contributions. In practice, management interventions appropriate to moving the collaborative agenda forward will lie at some point between the two extremes. However, such intermediate positions do not 'solve' the tension; by contrast they operate *through* tension acknowledging the pull and validity of each side (for a fuller account of this conceptual framework, see Vangen and Winchester, 2012).
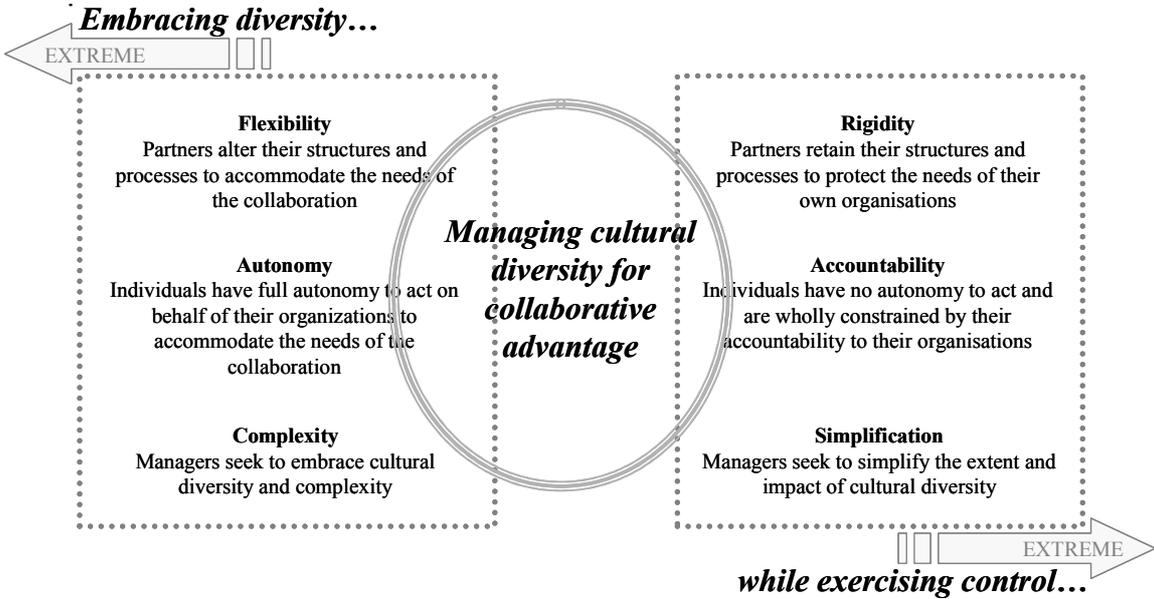

Embracing diversity…

EXTREME

Flexibility
Partners alter their structures and processes to accommodate the needs of the collaboration

Autonomy
Individuals have full autonomy to act on behalf of their organizations to accommodate the needs of the collaboration

Complexity
Managers seek to embrace cultural diversity and complexity

Managing cultural diversity for collaborative advantage

Rigidity
Partners retain their structures and processes to protect the needs of their own organisations

Accountability
Individuals have no autonomy to act and are wholly constrained by their accountability to their organisations

Simplification
Managers seek to simplify the extent and impact of cultural diversity

EXTREME

while exercising control…

Figure x.3: Managing cultural diversity towards collaborative advantage

Leadership

Given the challenges inherent in collaborative contexts characterized by incongruent goals, lack of trust, cultural diversity, paradoxes and tensions, concern for leadership is clearly important. A key question, in this respect, is what kind of leadership can most appropriately support the practice of collaboration? We will argue for an approach that departs from classical theories on leadership.

A presumption in much of the literature on leadership in organizations is that leadership is concerned with a *formal leader* who either influences or transforms members of a group or organization – *the followers* – by attaining alignment and commitment toward the achievement of some specified goals. Since hierarchical relationships generally do not feature in inter-organizational settings, leadership that is centered on the formal senior business or public figures that are the subject of much leadership literature is likely to be found inadequate in collaborative context. Also, in collaborative contexts enacting leadership can mean influencing whole organizations rather than just individuals. Given the inherent complexity and challenge and in particular the difficulty in specifying collaborative goals, it is far from straightforward to translate mainstream theories of leadership into the collaborative contexts.

However, some contributions to the theory on leadership are potentially relevant. Given the lack of traditional hierarchy in collaborative settings it seems appropriate to focus on informal or emergent leaders (Kent and Moss 1994), decentering of leadership (Martin 1992) and distributed and shared leadership (Crosby and Bryson 2005). Researchers on leadership in

collaboration have tended to emphasize relational leadership and processes for inspiring, nurturing, supporting and communicating (Agranoff and McGuire 2001; Crosby and Bryson 2005). All of these views do not necessarily presume a leader – follower relationship and the focus tend to be on facilitating, empowering and enabling rather than directing towards specified goals.

Our own approach incorporates these nurturing aspects of leadership and focuses on the mechanisms that *lead* collaborative activity and outcomes in one direction rather than another. Leadership is thus concerned with mechanisms for *making things happen* (note how this definition is much broader as it is no longer concerned with leadership being delivered by individuals only). Clearly this definition of leadership can include both visionary and more mechanistic aspects and therefore does not recognize as relevant the classic distinction between leaders and managers (Bryman, 1996). We argue instead that in collaborations, *structures* and communication *processes* are *leadership media* that are as instrumental in leading to specific outcomes as is the behavior of the *participants* associated with it. This theoretical framework considers the three leadership media - structures, processes and participants – and argues that all three are important to an overall understanding of leadership in collaborative situations. Leadership as it is *enacted by individuals* is considered within the *context* of the leadership influences of structures and processes. Below, we briefly describe the kinds of activities that occupy those who seek to enact leadership in practice.

Enacting leadership

Much of what is done by those who try to make things happen is undertaken in *the spirit of collaboration*. Activities tend to be highly facilitative and concerned with *embracing, empowering, involving and mobilizing* partners. Finding the 'right' partners may for example

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emphasize the inclusion of those with a stake in the collaborative issue. While such

embracing of partners is an obvious initial task, it is also a continuous activity in practice. Due

to the highly dynamic nature of collaborations, it typically entails continually looking out for

alternative partners that are needed whilst at the same time supporting those who want to be

partners. Embracing members does not in itself empower them to have a voice in the

collaboration or to contribute to the shaping of its agenda. Creating an infrastructure in which

individuals and organizations can participate is an essential aspect. It may entail, for example,

the design of a structure that will allow 'the community' to act as a member alongside public

organizations and to be empowered to play an active role. Yet, creating structures and

support for involvement does not ensure the *involvement* of partners so leadership includes

activities specifically aimed at overcoming hindrances to this. Problems arise because of the

inevitability that some partners are more central than others, so managing the inequality

between principal and subsidiary members frequently becomes an issue. Embracing,

empowering and involving members are essential leadership activities yet to *make things*

happen and to influence individuals and whole organizations in support of the collaboration is

seriously challenging. The issue of *mobilization* is closely linked to goals and aspirations and

the recognition that partners need to get something in return for their efforts. Looking for

'levers for the activities that are shared' to get partners to pay due attention to joint projects is

one aspect of this role.

Leadership in collaboration thus implies much facilitative activity suggesting the need for

relational skills such as patience, empathy, honesty and deference. However, carrying through

such an approach is far from straightforward and if collaborative inertia is to be avoided, more

decisive tactics may be required.

To overcome the inevitability of working with individuals who are located in different organization, perhaps even in different countries across different time zones, have different needs, values, perceptions and varying levels of commitment, find communication difficult and so on, those enacting leadership may engage in activities that, on the face of it, are much less collaborative. This may involve taking an active lead rather than facilitating agreement and joint implementation of the collaborative agenda. It may even involve *manipulating agendas* and *politicking*. The need to alter joint agendas can arise in many different ways though typically it may be to avoid stagnation and collaborative inertia. Imposing an understanding of collaborative issues on others and influencing the agenda via stealthy behavior may be necessary tactics. Though collaboration is intended to be a sympathetic way of working, political maneuvering is often strongly evident. Those involved in collaborative activities frequently talk about probing the political undercurrents between and around individuals and finding ways of excluding those who are not "worth the bother".

These kinds of activities may be characterized as being *towards collaborative thuggery,* so called after the member of a city alliance who said that a collaboration he was involved with had been successful "… because the convener is a thug … if people are not pulling their weight he pushes them out." He was arguing that, thoughtfully adopted, this was a positive and effective mode of leadership.

Is this a case of high principles giving way to the pragmatism needed to get things done? We prefer to see it as another aspect of nurturing. In gardening, if you want to nurture an overgrown garden back to health, pulling up weeds and cutting back overgrown plants is all part of "tough love". So it is in collaborations. Those who lead more successfully seem to

operate from both perspectives – in the spirit of collaboration with a healthy portion of collaborative thuggery – and to switch between them, often carrying out both types of leadership in the same act.

The purpose of this framework is to highlight and legitimize the simultaneous enactment of both a facilitative and a directive leadership role. Both roles appear essential in making progress and should not be seen as alternative ways of leading but rather as alternative aspects of a leadership portfolio. Successful leadership seems to imply the ability to operate from both perspectives and to continually switch between them, often carrying out both types of leadership in the same act. As illustrated in Figure x.4 below, the essence of the enactment of leadership for collaborative advantage would appear to involve the ability to lead in the "spirit of collaboration" whilst simultaneously drawing on "collaborative thuggery".

(For a fuller account of this conceptual framework, see Vangen and Huxham, 2003b).
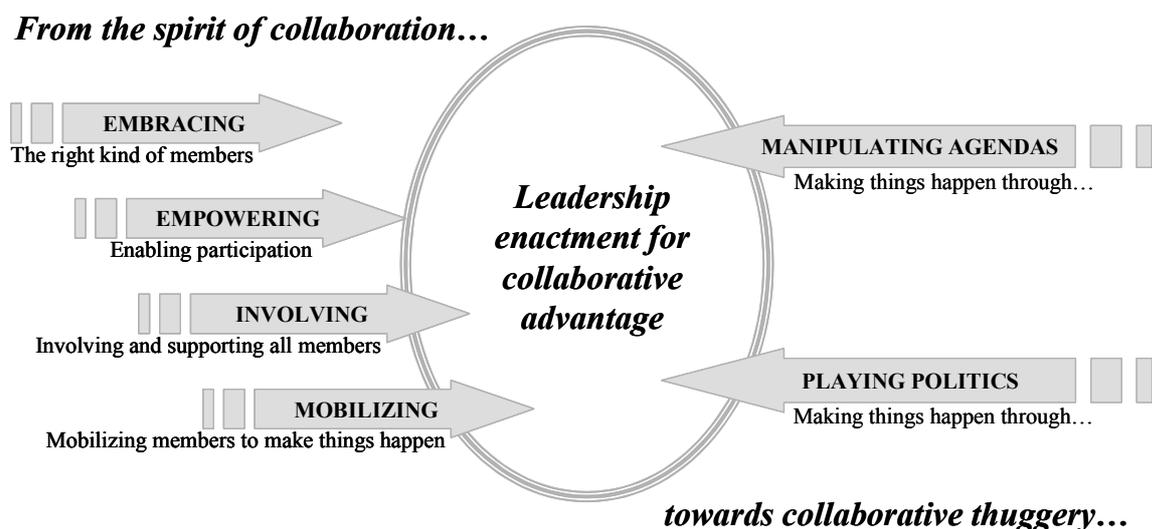
From the spirit of collaboration…

EMBRACING
The right kind of members

EMPOWERING
Enabling participation

INVOLVING
Involving and supporting all members

MOBILIZING
Mobilizing members to make things happen

Leadership enactment for collaborative advantage

MANIPULATING AGENDAS
Making things happen through…

PLAYING POLITICS
Making things happen through…

towards collaborative thuggery…

Figure x.4: The enactment of leadership

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this chapter we have introduced the Theory of Collaborative Advantage through providing overviews of a selection of conceptualizations and frameworks pertaining to the management of goals, trust, culture and leadership. These themes each present a part of the overall picture and, as we have alluded to, they interact with each theme affecting others. The theory of collaborative advantage is structured around many more of these themes but it is beyond the scope of this chapter to describe them all here. However, in terms of power for example, a key concern is that power sharing is important yet there are often both real and perceived power imbalances between partners that tend to have a negative impact on behaviors. Membership structures are frequently ambiguous, complex and dynamic which render issues do to with agreement on goals, building trust, managing power relationships and cultural diversity infinitely hard. Success is not necessarily predictable and when it is achieve, is often not as anticipated. Knowing how to recognize key perspectives of success is nevertheless essential to facilitating the development of collaboration in practice.

Taking all of these themes together, it is clear that without careful intervention and management, collaborations are more likely to reach *collaborative inertia* than *collaborative advantage*. It is not surprising therefore that many fail. Nevertheless, there are many reports of success albeit that less may have been achieved than had been hoped for, some participants may be less pleased than others, the pace may have been slower than expected yet the final outcome is perceived as better than would have been the case without the collaboration. Achieving such collaborative advantage requires careful reflection around the types of issues raised in this chapter and then careful attention to managing them.

The theory conveys that managing collaborations is a highly complex endeavor. It prescribes the kinds of issues that need attention. It does not however, tell the user which of the themes to focus on, when to do so and how to use the information captured in them to guide them in their management actions. Knowing how to use the theory is in itself a matter for managerial judgment. Themes such as goals, trust, culture and leadership provide sensible starting points to aid understanding about the management of collaboration in practice. The various conceptualizations and frameworks can then be used effectively to as handles to support reflective practice.

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