Leading collaboratively

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Why is inter-organisational collaboration so often an experience of intense frustration and limited progress?

What kind of leadership practices can help us make progress and achieve collaborative advantage – something we couldn't have achieved on our own?

The Vision

'Collaborative initiatives work when all of the tasks of leadership are consciously and effectively performed… They envision new directions, define problems, and develop solutions because participants trust each other and have skills to work together. They achieve results because members are inspired to overcome obstacles by their collective commitment. When collaborative initiatives are well executed, they achieve extraordinary results of unexpected dimension.'

Chrislip and Larson (1994) *Collaborative Leadership* p.108

The problem

- Slow rate of progress

- Resource expenditure

- Power asymmetry

- Conflicting aims

- Competing interests

- Lack of trust

- History

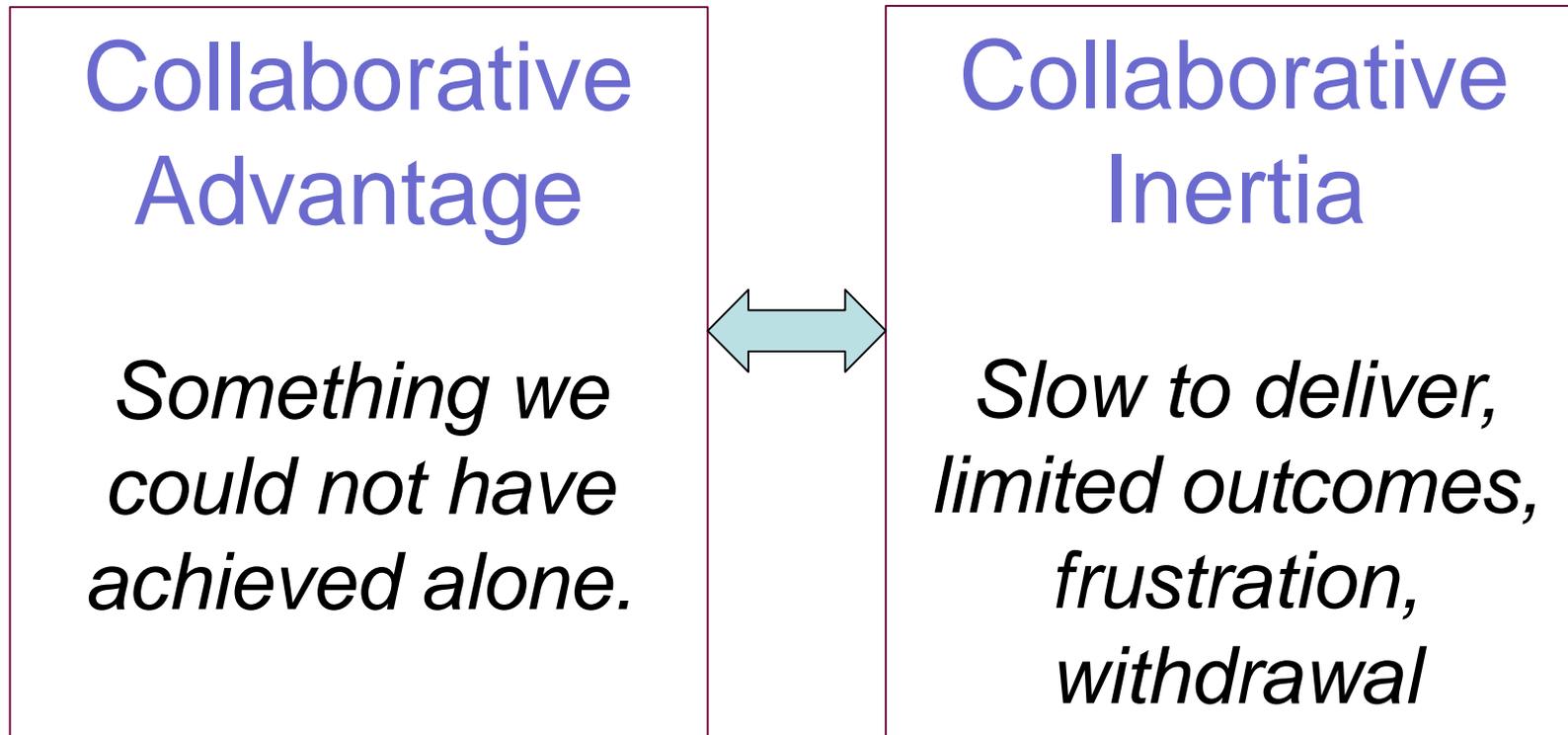*Don't do it unless you have to….*(Huxham and Vangen 2005)

The imperative

- The resource imperative
- The need imperative
- The ethical imperative

So how do we adopt a more reflective approach to collaborative leadership practice?

The Paradox of Collaboration

Differences are essential to achieving synergy, but differences pull partners apart.

Collaborative Advantage	Collaborative Inertia
Something we could not have achieved alone.	*Slow to deliver, limited outcomes, frustration, withdrawal*

(Huxham and Vangen 2005 *Managing to collaborate*)

Collaborative Leadership

- Tensions and dilemmas
  - Aims – shared/organisational
  - Integration / Independence
- Compromise and Good enough
- Starting small, building trust
- Collaborative thuggery vs the spirit of collaboration
  (Vangen and Huxham 2003)
  - A place for manipulation and politicking
- Collaborative disruption (Jacklin-Jarvis 2014)
  - Challenge – questions and complaints
  - 'Voice' and campaigning

Differences are key

Dilemmas:

1. How do we express our differences safely and collaboratively?
2. What risks are we prepared to take – for ourselves, our organisations, the collaboration?
3. When must we speak out, and when will we be silent?
4. What can be said backstage, and what needs to be pushed onto the frontstage of collaborative practice?
5. How do we continue to express distinctiveness and independence whilst also committing to service integration?

Metaphors of collaboration

- Communication
  - Interpretation
  - Collaborative conversations
- Gardening
  - Nurturing as pruning and tending
  - Preparation / Growing from seed
- Performance
  - Back stage and front stage
  - Choreography
  - Disclosure and dissimulation

Note one insight from the gardening metaphor and one insight from the performance metaphor.

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Leadership panel / Collaborative leadership research programme: contact c.e.j.jarvis@open.ac.uk

References

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Jacklin-Jarvis, C. (2015) 'Collaborating across sector boundaries: a story of tensions and dilemmas', *Voluntary Sector Review,* 6(3): 285-302.

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Also recommended:

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