Building better collaboration

Improving collaborative behaviours in local government

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1. Summary

The District Councils' Network (DCN) is leading a programme on new ways of working, of which this paper is a part. The project seeks to identify excellent and innovative practice by districts that delivers better local services, savings and efficiencies; while supporting and growing their local communities. It encompasses collaboration by districts both across local government and with other public and voluntary sector organisations.

This paper sets out to highlight what makes collaboration at the district level work best – and to approach that task with honesty and integrity. It explores two key questions:

- *How are districts innovating to strengthen their role as local leaders and to deliver savings and better outcomes for the needs of their communities?*
- *What behaviours, systems and structures help make innovation by districts successful and sustainable?*

INLOGOV has both drawn on the most relevant academic research and sought to learn from practical collaborative projects that districts are leading or promoting. This paper contains lessons from leading practice on the ground in the context of the work of UK and international academics on collaboration. The core findings are that:

1. Districts are particularly well placed to instigate and lead collaborative projects, because they are close to the communities they serve by virtue of their size and the nature of their services. Best practice involves districts taking a role that we describe as "selfless" where they may put in more resource or effort than they might gain from a project, ensuring that their communities get the benefit.

2. Behaviour, culture and trust are far more important to success in collaboration than the structures through which people work. Recognising that this is more than just a cliché – and, acting on it – will lead to a stronger focus on boosting the skills of collaborators.

3. Collaboration is voluntary and thus particularly prone to procrastination; especially if projects meet complex challenges. Districts need a clear strategy to avoid a loss of momentum, especially during the start-up phases. This is a function of good leadership.

4. Collaboration doesn't happen by accident. Both practice on the ground and the academic work on collaboration underpin the view that it is driven by people with very particular skills. We describe these as "boundary spanners", "collaborative champions" and "collaborative entrepreneurs".

5. Districts need to seek out and develop these skills in their staff. As smaller and more focussed bodies, districts may be less likely to have such people than other service providers, so they need to be positively identified, recruited, supported and developed.

6. The national representative bodies for local government should encourage councils to collaborate by working more cooperatively together. DCN should address the criticisms of collaborative practice in districts set out by some contributors to this report.

7. The national bodies – and local government collectively – can do more to develop the collaborative skills of elected members (and not just of council leaders).

2. Introduction

It is notable that the institutional structure of local government outside the cities and metropolitan areas in England has been a relatively stable feature of our system of governance, for over a century. The two-tier functional split was largely put in place in 1894 and much of the two-tier structure has been with us since 1972, when the present arrangements were defined in law. Contrast this with the landscape in health administration, which seems to change with every incoming Secretary of State, or even the structures in Whitehall where departments change names and swap functions frequently and executive agencies come and go.

Of course, there has been reorganisation in the shire counties. Rounds of reorganisation and reordering happened in each of the three decades following the 1970s, but it is still the case that most of rural England is governed by two principal tiers of councils. Furthermore, the two thirds of England's land area where two tier local government remains in place has the more complex patterns of administration, for example larger counties with many districts and the two tier remnants of historical counties that ring some core cities.

Chasing the illusion of a perfect structure

The United Kingdom has some of the largest municipalities in Europe both in terms of population size and geography. Even so, the debate about the reordering of local government – mostly focussed on creating larger councils – shows little sign of abating. The public policy discourse around it seems preoccupied with the search for the "perfect scale" of municipality that can ensure both a reasonable level of local democracy and engagement at the same time as facilitating the economic and effective delivery of services.

No gathering of local government officers or members would therefore be complete without a discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of local government reorganisation. Wales and Scotland have already taken the unitary path (with yet more reordering to come in Wales) and for some, the complex English mosaic of cities, unitaries, counties, boroughs and districts is a challenge to rational workable local governance. For district councils, the debate can sometimes lead to defensive behaviours: however, the best English districts exhibit both a solid focus on core services as well as providing a local voice and local choice.

We suggest that the energy invested in debates about structure would be better applied to a focus on improving services and outcomes through collaborative behaviours. Indeed, perhaps the very longevity of the present municipal arrangements bears a certain amount of testimony to their relative success. While the arguments about confusion for citizens and inefficiency remain; a system that allocates local services and a local voice to districts and more strategic and cost-sensitive services to counties has stood the test of time.

Innovation in a two tier environment

It is important to keep the current system working in the best interests of citizens. The District Councils' Network, a sector interest group of the Local Government Association (LGA) has been exploring the ways that district councils are encouraging innovation and efficiency within the two tier system. DCN's "New Ways of Working"[1] workstream is therefore focussing on collaborative approaches to services and projects. As part of that

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[1] http://districtcouncils.info/knowledge-hub/new-ways-of-working/

workstream, DCN appointed The Institute of Local Government Studies (INLOGOV) at the University of Birmingham to a research brief to support and challenge DCN's work.

The brief in summary

The core of the brief that DCN issued to INLOGOV focussed on collaboration – that is, ways in which district councils cooperate and collaborate with each other; with other tiers of local government; and with other providers of public services. The brief set the project in the context of the almost unprecedented recent (and anticipated pressures on local government finance – coupled with a "moment of opportunity" around the debate on devolution following the national election of 2015. The core tasks in the brief were:

- To identify examples of districts working in successful collaboration with partners to strengthen leadership; deliver savings; and achieve better outcomes
- To explore the potential range of new governance and delivery models – and why they flourish or fail
- From that evidence – to identify and characterise the systems, structures and behaviours that help make innovation by districts councils successful

After some debate, the research was designed to address two key questions:

How are districts innovating to strengthen their role as local leaders and to deliver savings and better outcomes for the needs of their communities?
What behaviours, systems and structures help make innovation by districts successful and sustainable?

The project methodology

INLOGOV has undertaken a review of relevant academic and best practice literature on collaboration in local government (both for the UK and internationally). This was followed by a small number of qualitative interviews – 15 were specified in the proposal, although more than 25 were undertaken. At the same time, a survey of good practice and a "call for examples" of good and bad collaborative practice was put in place in cooperation with DCN.

The study output was planned to be a short report on findings – particularly focussed on the behavioural factors that influence good collaborative practice – accompanied by the production of blogs, articles, presentations and workshops. This document is that report; and it is published alongside a DCN companion document that picks up the key lessons of the research and proposes a way to further stimulate good collaborative practice across all district councils.

The relatively tight scope of the fieldwork and the small number of interviews gives this research a strong qualitative flavour. The interviewees were deliberately selected to have original and thought provoking contributions and the case studies were selected to give a range of illustrative examples of district collaboration rather than seeking artificial representation of all geographies or subjects. Given the relatively small numbers of interviews for the study, our interviewee list is not published here to maintain confidentiality, as opinions could too easily be attributed to individuals.

The interviews followed a broadly standard format, but again, they were designed to explore what might be interesting in the interviewee's experience of collaboration rather than to stick

to a rigid script. The clear focus of all discussions was on the experience of collaboration – whether vertical within a place or horizontal across a wider geography. We were seeking to draw out those factors that mark successful from less successful collaboration alongside a wider discussion of partnership and governance experience.

The interview stage was limited by both time and budget. Thus the interview results are impressionistic and are not designed in any way to be representative of all district council opinion – for example, across the different size and geography of local government. Alongside the DCN, we planned the interviews to ensure that some provocative and authentic voices would be heard – and not just from people known to be supporters of the current local governance arrangements.

Just over half of the interviews were with officers and elected members in the "district council family" with most of these being either with leaders or chief executives. Those outside the district council family were more diverse – including unitary and city chief executives and representatives of business and health.

Call for examples and case studies

A call for examples of good collaborative practice led to more than 30 submissions by districts (with multiple partners, thus covering many more than 30 districts). These are listed at Annex I. We chose ten of these for particular focus as case studies and highlights from these projects are set out at various points in the document:

- West Suffolk and partners
- Craven and partners
- South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse and partners
- Forest of Dean and partners
- South Norfolk District and partners

- South Norfolk and partners
- Cheltenham and partners
- Bassetlaw and partners
- Tendring and partners
- Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

What's in a name: collaboration, partnership or cooperation?

There is a key question about defining terms for the study. The brief from DCN had a specific focus on "collaboration". Usefully, in the event, the brief did not define that term as, in reality; we observed many forms of joint working by, with and through district councils. Too tight a definition could have been restrictive in our conversations given that our principal focus has been on behaviour in collaborative projects rather than legal structures or the obligations under which collaboration is practiced.

Many people we engaged with used the terms "partnership" "cooperation" and "collaboration" interchangeably and outside section four, this paper does likewise. The terms are actually defined in section five but our study team has been relaxed about interpreting day to day conversations about cooperation or partnerships as being equally valid for "collaboration" itself.

The term **vertical collaboration** is used to describe a district working with one or more partners to focus on a geographical or service issue. **Horizontal collaboration** is used to mean projects that work across a number of districts to cover a service or theme over a wider geographical area. These two terms are also defined more tightly in section five.
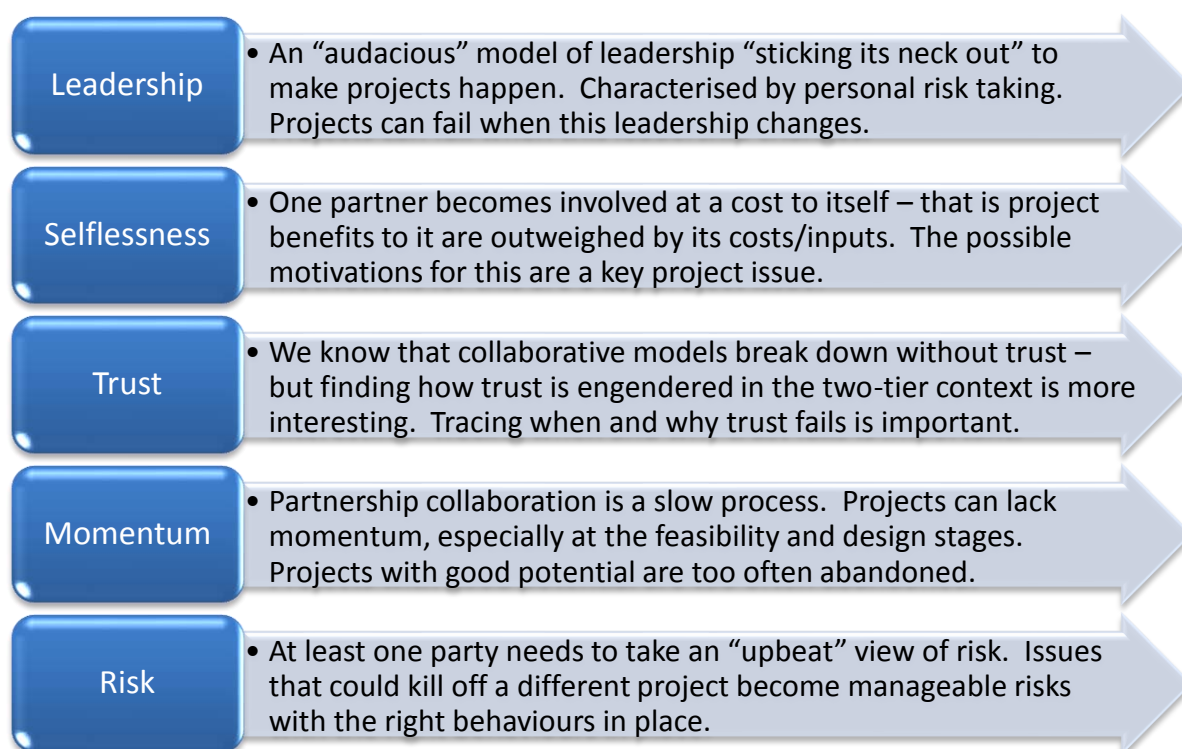
3. Making collaboration a success

This section highlights the practical experience of district councils – either through the interviews or the case studies – that have helped us to define what makes collaboration on the ground work. Our interest was not so much in the project architecture, or even core purpose. It was instead on the behavioural issues that impacted positively or negatively upon project outcomes. So the case studies leads were each asked to reflect upon the themes set out at figure two in the context of their project/collaborative programme.

The themes emerging from the interviews

Defining the behaviour traits and conditions that make collaboration succeed or fail is an inexact science. Our field work produced examples of the same behaviours producing apparently similar outcomes in different contexts, but divergent outcomes in some contexts. Thus it is clear that behaviour not the sole determinant of successful collaboration, but it is widely accepted to be a disproportionately important one. Thus the focus on behaviours as being of more importance to collaboration than structures and systems seems to be borne out by the interview stage of the project fieldwork as well as the literature review.

The exploration of the behavioural themes relied on both good "organisational self-awareness" and personal reflection by the participants, including by project leaders. From these, some common themes quickly emerged and formed the focus of the subsequent fieldwork. These are summarised in figure one and then explored in more detail.

Figure one: the themes influencing collaboration

Leadership	• An "audacious" model of leadership "sticking its neck out" to make projects happen. Characterised by personal risk taking. Projects can fail when this leadership changes.
Selflessness	• One partner becomes involved at a cost to itself – that is project benefits to it are outweighed by its costs/inputs. The possible motivations for this are a key project issue.
Trust	• We know that collaborative models break down without trust – but finding how trust is engendered in the two-tier context is more interesting. Tracing when and why trust fails is important.
Momentum	• Partnership collaboration is a slow process. Projects can lack momentum, especially at the feasibility and design stages. Projects with good potential are too often abandoned.
Risk	• At least one party needs to take an "upbeat" view of risk. Issues that could kill off a different project become manageable risks with the right behaviours in place.

Leadership
"You have to be happy with mess and complexity" Shared district chief executive

To suggest that collaborative partnerships need good leadership is hardly an insight. But what was interesting about the interviewees' focus on the topic was the extent to which

leadership in the initial exploration of collaboration seemed to be central to eventual success. And it was suggested time and again that the initial stage of "reaching out" to potential partners was characterised by a different model of leadership than that needed as partnerships mature.

"Talk horizontally – it's a way of working, not a project" *Melton BC community hub/ locality project*

We termed this "audacious" leadership – in the sense that captures:

- Risk taking
- Individuality – actions by one or two people only
- Capturing a moment in time
- Leading people where they wouldn't normally follow

Where collaborative ventures were initiated by district councils, the story we most often heard was of a very early overture by a chief executive then being taken up by a council leader. Thus in our fieldwork, it was the often either a council leader or chief executive who displayed audacious leadership.

> **Case study: West Suffolk and partners**
>
> The co-location and integration of services in West Suffolk
> - An ongoing and innovative programme to re-think and reorganise the public estate to provide the conditions to radically overhaul the delivery of public services.
> - Involves a number of public sector partners including: DWP, Police, CCG, and a town council.
> - The project maximises cost efficiencies and service integration and also releases sites for regeneration.

"Our chief executive effectively 'stuck her neck out' to champion the new model…what made this work was her personal belief in and commitment to the project"
DC-based early help project

The question of leadership profile as collaborative projects mature is addressed in some of the academic work set out in section four. Certainly, our most mature project said of audacious leadership:

"I recognise the model of charismatic/dynamic leadership from our early days. It can be a risk if it disappears. We're partly beyond that now as our model of working has embedded and developed" Thames Gateway Kent Partnership

> **Case study: Craven and partners**
>
> A partnership project to tackle long term socio-economic issues on a housing estate in North Yorkshire
> - Has a pooled budget to employ a project officer to deliver a concerted and focussed approach.
> - 17 partners are involved including health, police and charities.
> - Three main themes for the project: securing a community voice; working more effectively in partnership; and developing a funding strategy.

Selflessness
"We need to understand the uniqueness and narrative of districts to guarantee their future"
Shared district chief executive

Selflessness is an important concept for which we actually heard a variety of descriptions – selflessness was the word we initially coined for the observation. It captures a sense in which one partner in any collaboration was catalytic to the process overall and was especially driven to "making the running" in terms of outcomes for a place or a community. This is not quite the same as leading the project and not all collaborations are led by and/or initiated by a partner that displays selflessness. The essence of selflessness is that the selfless partner contributes to the partnership distinctly out of proportion to the benefits it is likely to receive from the projected outcomes. Most often in our examples, the selfless partner was a district council. While we recognise that our sample was to some extent self-selecting, it was striking how often this was the case.

An interviewee countered our coining of the word selfless by saying

"…this is actually selfish behaviour. It's about our core functions: it's what district councils are about" **Shared district chief executive**

"Selflessness" therefore springs from the role-appropriate local and place-shaping work of district councils. In two tier areas, it is most likely that districts will fulfil that role simply by being in being. Selflessness – in the sense of promoting outcomes for people and place is completely role-appropriate for districts. It is arguable that in place-centred collaborative projects, if districts are not displaying selfless behaviour, then they are not fulfilling the core role of a district council.

Trust
"The trust model at the district level is absolutely unique" **Shared district chief executive**

Trust is probably the most important result of good collaborative behaviours, including the right leadership.

> **Case study: South Oxfordshire, Vale of the White Horse and partners**
>
> Five non-coterminous districts jointly procuring corporate services and creating a single client side.
> - Aims to transform the way councils provide services, improving quality at the same time as reducing operating and contract management costs of outsourced services.
> - It is replicable for other districts by enabling them to attain buying power and service benefits that they may struggle to receive from large providers.
> - It has reduced costs of procurement and service delivery and increased resilience.

In the way in which the word is used in this project, "trust" is both a noun and a verb. Therefore trust isn't always of itself a behaviour: but collaborating partners can act to build or to destroy it. Trust is a necessary pre-condition to a successful collaboration and so behaviours that build trust are therefore prized in voluntary endeavours.

"the key trusting relationships in the partnership have been established by… who has really gone the extra mile in driving forward the vision…[and] been integral in supporting key partner agencies" **South Skipton project, Richmond BC**

It might be expected that trust would be most likely to break down in the power/size relationship between counties and districts – but on the basis of our very small sample, that did not seem to be so. Trust seemed to be hardest to build between local government and some health organisations and between councils and DWP: having said that, although such trusting relationships seemed hard to establish, once they were in place, significant benefits resulted.

"We just left a space for them to occupy trusting they'd come on board at some point"
Melton BC community hub/ locality project

Momentum

"…some projects just 'go'; and others seem to take forever" ***Cheltenham and partners***

Momentum – or speed of implementation is another key issue in collaborative projects. From our research, it seems to be one of the greatest potential weaknesses of district council partnerships; in that without strong leadership and a high level of trust, project momentum can be - and too often is – thrown off course. Time and again we heard people say that at specific points of the projects they felt they had no choice other than to slow down a project momentum in order to overcome a problem or objection. And that is without considering how many potentially interesting projects are abandoned altogether as momentum is lost because of relatively small problems.

"We constantly felt the danger of having to move at the speed of the slowest partner"
DC shared service collaboration

All of the projects we looked at could properly be described as voluntary – in the sense that partners came together without a statutory requirement to do so and all were free to leave at any point (subject to contractual obligations).

> ### Case study: Forest of Dean and partners
>
> A vision agreed across four district councils to retain their independence while working together and sharing resources to maximise mutual benefit:
>
> - The partners continue to allow local decisions to deliver unique outcomes and a tailored local service while creating, in effect, one workforce that renders the delivery of those outcomes more cost effective and resilient.
> - It received significant government funding (£2.3m) to aid implementation. A quick win has been identified as shared IT resources.
> - Aims to transfer of as much service delivery as possible into a new local authority owned company with its own terms and conditions of service thus tackling an increasingly unaffordable pension bill.
> - Has an extensive engagement plan but political support remains a challenge.

"This is a true partnership – there are no egos" ***Tendring and partners' family support***

It was therefore interesting to see how often a non-legislative external impetus had the effect of moving projects along. Many of the projects we reviewed had received financial support from the transformation challenge award (TCA) fund[2].

"We were stuck at that point…and along came TCA funding to unlock the project for us"
DC shared services collaboration

The effect of this seemed to galvanise projects at key moments – moving them along or bringing partners together for a common purpose. While it is possible to take a somewhat cynical view of this: as projects "chasing the money" but we began to see the external stimulus almost as a psychological means of moving partners along. It seems that relatively small sums of TCA funding were actually the positive mirror image of statutory compulsion.

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[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-awarded-to-improve-local-services-and-save-over-900-million

That is, the very existence of the funds from the TCA and the "rules" that surround it enabled project leaders to overcome hurdles and/or get compliance from their reluctant partners.

"…we moved pretty quickly once the money came on board to support the process of change" **Shared district chief executive**

This insight is worthy of further research in that it may not be the offer of large sums of money that, of itself, is the real stimulus to action: the money (and the "competition rules" that surround it) may be the catalysts that overcome blockages and spur action. In the absence of legislation to force action, small sums of external funding and all the bureaucracy and focus that comes with it, may be useful as a way to stimulate action.

Of course, as the commentary on collaboration in Greater Manchester in the next section makes clear, some projects can be more successful because they take their time – for example, to establish relationships and agree goals.

> **Case study: South Norfolk and partners**
>
> Joined up localised early help services:
> - Chosen as the first pathfinder for the new early help approach in Norfolk.
> - Identified a need for better intelligence and data sharing alongside frontline staff with more generic skills
> - The project has 'rebranded' early help so clients want the services instead seeing it as an imposition.
> - It works across access channels that make sense for the client and not just the services.
> - Core elements include: an early help collaboration hub; early help delivery hub; community engagement; and capacity and family connectors.

Attitudes to risk

"…everyone with their head on the block [for the project outcomes], *injects far more effort into managing the risks and preventing failure than is traditionally the case"* **South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse and partners**

Risks and their management are part of every project; and the projects we studied for this project had the usual paraphernalia of risk logs and mitigation strategies in place. But these mechanisms do not of themselves deal with risk (usually, far from it). Attitudes to the mitigation of project risk can be both conditioned by and even altered by the nature of the behaviour of project participants. It seems that people working in voluntary collaborations can choose whether to take risk averse or risk mitigating approaches to some tough issues – so given risks are not absolute from project to project but are subjective to project behaviours. A project with legislative underpinning can be open to interpretations of risk that are different to other types of project.

"While there has undoubtedly been an element of risk taking and putting some heads above the parapet, this has always been supported by a strong evidence base, good horizon scanning and regular checking of available literature to support a particular direction of travel" **Melton BC community hub/locality project**

There is, of course a risk that very successful projects can feel themselves become a risk to participants – particularly key people who are not involved in the collaborative venture.

"The more successful the project becomes, the greater the risk that partners start to feel threatened by collaborative power and decision making" **Case study participant**

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That risk can be managed by careful negotiation and moderating behaviour, but even then needs to be built on a trust-based risk mitigation model.

"We used to need 50 page business cases to approve a project extension. The level of trust we've built now means we can approve half a page of business case" **West Suffolk and partners**

4. Other insights from the fieldwork

Both the interview stage and the subsequent call for examples resulted in further interviews, telephone calls and submissions of varying lengths and levels of formality. From these, it has been possible to draw a number of insights that can better inform the debate about two-tier governance.

Within the 'district council family'

As might be expected, many participants were considered and realistic when reflecting on patterns of collaboration in two tier areas. They had a certain pride in their successes but were also realistic about the relatively small scale of many projects. They set out the difficulties they and others had had in bringing projects forward and especially in encouraging partners to join in. We heard examples of districts that were able to leave excess space in new buildings in the hope/expectation that desired – but reluctant – partners would eventual join.

We heard about classic "selfless behaviour" such as investments being made in advance of committed partner funds from other sources

"We have been very happy to make these compromises because of the wider community benefits. We do see ourselves as a community advocate – anchoring service provision in Bassetlaw" Bassetlaw and partners

> **Case study: Cheltenham and partners**
> Aims to reduce domestic abuse and sexual violence in a neighbourhood in Cheltenham
> - A local neighbourhood group identified domestic abuse as a priority following the death of a local woman from domestic abuse.
> - The team developed: support packages for victims and those at risk of abuse including young people; programmes to work with perpetrators; and awareness raising about reporting and referring.
> - Led by the local neighbourhood project, that was encouraged to take centre-stage and work with local residents to develop the concept of a zero-tolerance neighbourhood.

Some of the case study authorities were pragmatic – perhaps overly so – about measuring project investments against benefits. It is unfortunately the case that many public projects in the UK are very short term and often lack a focus on return on investment. Relatively few were able to respond with any detailed evidence about cost benefit where we sought some direct input on project costs and project benefits

The problems of keeping up the pace ("momentum") in voluntary partnerships, arose often in our conversations. It is clear that project speed – and the ability to overcome small obstacles – is the serious weakness in district collaborative partnerships.

Finally, a significant minority of the people we spoke to in the district council sector took an entirely different approach from the others. They were ambitious, self-critical and sector critical – particularly when asked whether the sector had "done enough" to stave off yet another round of debate about unitarisation in the life of the next government. For the most part, these voices were those of chief executives who considered that some local elected members need to have a greater sense of the urgency and/or were frustrated where short term perceived political expediency had trumped long term collaborative benefits.

"This isn't really sharing – hardly anything is shared underneath yet" **Shared district chief executive**

Other local government perspectives

We engaged with a small number of chief executives and representatives from national bodies outside the district council sector – both in an attempt to gain some sense of an "outside-in" perspective on collaboration in two-tier local government and also to get their insight on where they saw the debate on local government restructuring going next.

These individuals did not speak with one voice, but most saw their future priorities as lying outside a narrow debate on local government structure. All were very focussed on relationships with health, both providers and commissioners. For example, pre-election commitments to better health and social care integration by the major political parties were seen as a much more important likely determinant of the future structure of local government than any consideration of county-district relationships. If the responsibility for social care provision was to move towards health as some national commentators predict, then that would "drive a coach and horses" through the major focus of counties for the future.

"In providing a more solid base for funding social care, we could inadvertently put at risk the core cost base of two-tier local government" **CCG lead**

Case study: South Norfolk District and partners
Greater Norwich Growth Board established to deliver homes and employment in the area: - Agreement that a coordinated approach to development was required, ensuring the resources were pooled into those strategically important infrastructure developments, something which one district could not do alone.   - The Board provides strategic direction and coordination of both the city deal and wider growth programme   - Three sub-groups focus on infrastructure delivery; enterprise and innovation; and employment and skills.   - Collaboration with districts for many years has fostered strong relationships and cooperation to enable strategically important development to happen without too much controversy.

The flip side of this was said to be that if social care (especially adult social care) responsibilities remain as now, but predicted spending cuts continue for upper tier local authorities, then district councils would find their county partners ever harder to engage with as their non-statutory functions gradually fall away and almost all their resource is concentrated on core statutory services.

Outside the district council family, there is a sense that districts are sometimes "hard to engage with". This is a common view amongst counties – especially as some of the large counties have so many districts within them – but we also heard this message outside the two tier structure. There was, perhaps, a sense that on occasion, wider local government is missing a coherent voice from districts – or that if such a voice exists, it is not always delivering a coherent message. This is an important issue for districts individually and collectively (for example, through DCN and the other national local government bodies) to address.

Input from health

We engaged with a couple of perspectives in health (a clinical commissioning perspective and a voice from a national health think tank) but some common themes emerged.

Our interviewees underlined that relationships are central to making collaboration work – but that the current structure of health and wellbeing boards had a tendency to hamper, rather than to aid, relationship building. There was a concern about how the boards are operating on the ground.

"they behave like a council committee and not like a set of relationships" **Health think tank**

Both saw it as inevitable that shared forums in the future would eventually lead on to a much greater degree of joint commissioning than now. This was seen as being an especially complex issue in two tier areas such that meaningful engagement with districts on health and care was hard to achieve when most districts are excluded from health and wellbeing discussions. This is especially so in the larger counties where the inclusion of districts is difficult because of numbers, if nothing else.

There was, nonetheless, a feeling that district councils have a vital role to play in articulating the local voice. In fact, a CCG made this point even while acknowledging that a local district political party group was implacably opposed to a hospital downgrading that the CCG was progressing.

> **Case study: Thames Gateway Kent Partnership**
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> Thames Gateway Kent Partnership
> - A longstanding public-private partnership to help deliver economic growth across north Kent. Board includes members of the business community as well as the leaders of the councils involved.
> - Attracts inward investment, promotes and enable collaboration between private and public sectors.
> - Works with partners in London and South Essex to ensure views from North Kent are represented.

"If prevention is what we need, further integration is inevitable [with social care]; *just as inevitable is our work with districts on their local place-based role"* **CCG Lead**

There was a common feeling that some sort of local government reorganisation was probably inevitable – largely because resource restrictions will demand it in the future. This underscores an implicit, but largely untested, recognition that local government restructuring will save money.

The business voice

Perhaps the least comforting input we had from the perspective of two tier local government was from business. Our input was from two local enterprise partnership (LEPs) members – one a LEP leader nationally and the other a former LEP chair. One of these individuals was also a small business entrepreneur.

Our interviewees did not share one view of local government – but both started from a viewpoint that dealing with local government in a two tier context was unnecessarily complicated and required too many "side deals" to satisfy particular localities. One of our interviewees also considered that economic growth was being actively limited by the planning system and "bitty rules and regulations". Both were therefore clear that there is great scope to improve the understanding of business within local government.

Business can, of course, find the complexity of two tier service provision difficult to unpick, but the core concern expressed here could probably be summed up as "district parochialism". This is a sense that district councils – especially district elected members – can sometimes fail to see a bigger picture within a larger geography. Implicitly, current collaborative efforts by districts were seen to have been insufficiently strong – perhaps insufficiently "selfless" – to overcome the view that local government as a whole needs to be recast to produce a system that will be fit for purpose for the future.

To some extent, our business voices were identifying the way in which a local focus can militate against strategic collaboration for the benefit of more than one district area. If the very point of district councils is to fight for their communities and localities, it is not surprising that this can be interpreted as parochial by those not subject to a democratic mandate. Evens so, districts should, perhaps, reflect that being merely champions of the local can have negative consequences, both on their abilities to achieve better outcomes for their residents and on the way they are perceived by the non-governmental partners who may be crucial for their success.

The development of combined authorities

With the election in 2015 of a Conservative government strongly in favour of devolution in England through combined authorities, local government is fast making progress in putting together real or prototype organisations. We spoke to representatives of both the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) and of an emerging two-tier combined authority on if and how informal collaboration plays a part in the establishment of combined authorities.

GMCA is seen as being in the vanguard of partnership working and it was considered important to set out the lessons from this significant experiment in local authorities working alongside each other.

A central lesson of GMCA is the length of time that the local authorities have been working with each other. They first came together on the dissolution of the former Greater Manchester Metropolitan County Council in 1986 to discharge the combined functions left by the County's demise – including the fire service and pensions. The arrangements soon grew into further cooperation, largely revolving around economic issues. And it is instructive that notwithstanding the recent announcement of the devolution of health commissioning to the GMCA, its prior focus was solely on growing and sustaining the regional economy.

"We have a remorseless focus on the economy" **a GM council chief executive**

> **Case study: Tendring and partners**
>
> A large and active family solutions project based in Essex:
>
> - The project offers up to 12 months' intensive work with families experiencing a range of complex issues and facing multiple disadvantages.
> - It has identified sustainable family outcomes and savings for a number of key service providers.
> - It brings together statutory and non-statutory partners to deliver the required action to address a family's needs.

There is relatively little in the way of shared or pooled service within the GMCA yet. Each of its constituent councils remains in place as an independent body and even the GMCA bureaucracy is based on the same small secretariat that previously ran the informal collaboration. Formal power in GMCA is shared sensitively and carefully. In terms of the

formal constitution, Manchester City Council cannot dominate affairs: for example, the leader of Manchester cannot chair the GMCA, but is allocated one of three vice chair roles. The other two vice chairs are presently allocated to minority party leads, even though the area is overwhelmingly Labour-controlled.

"Decision making is almost painfully inclusive with rounds of formal and informal consultation that are meticulously planned" **a GM council chief executive**

The leadership of the GMCA is soon to be handed to an interim – and then an elected – metro mayor. It will be interesting to see if the present delicate and careful model of leadership can survive that change. GMCA also faces new challenges as it continues to push the boundaries of collaboration: greater sharing of posts and services is bound to be on its future agenda.

Some similar lessons come out of the prototype two-tier combined authority. Although not yet a formal combined authority, it is based on long existing partnerships. There is a sense that previous collaborative ventures in that locality had suffered from districts feeling "done to" rather than included as equals. So this combined authority is being orchestrated by a district chief executive and the desired outcomes are being sensitively pursued so as not to repeat past mistakes: this is "inclusion" not "enforcement" of district collaboration.

"The first months were tricky with some disputes about combined authority powers and competence, but we're beyond these now. The turning point was to focus on defining our ambition so we could get over 'the governance stuff' " **a district chief executive**

Council leaders are also collaborating well, with relationships developing across both political affiliations and tiers of councils. This is translating into a granular focus on skills and economic growth – in an exact parallel of the Manchester arrangements.

At face value, there are few common lessons between legally-constituted combined authorities and the sorts of voluntary cooperation covered by this report. But the focus on the behaviours, skills and relationships of the human participants and on a strong core/common purpose is still at the heart of making progress. Collaboration through the formal structure of combined authorities is clearly central to progress on devolution in England and so getting the human behaviours right within such a formal structure will be the real hallmark of success – or determinant of failure, where the behaviours are wrong.

Does the public notice all this effort?

"Success would be if the public doesn't notice" **Forest of Dean and partners shared service project**

Interest in local government is a minority sport. An appreciation of how the system actually works is a benefit shared by fewer still. And for the most part, the best of local government will make it easy for the public to continue with that benign indifference. Why worry about "who does what" if services are provided so effectively and seamlessly such that it isn't important to answer that question in the first place?

In many conversations around the case studies, we asked about local awareness of collaborative initiatives. Not surprisingly, projects that were about shared services generally elicited little or no voter interest. Perhaps more surprisingly, even projects based on vertical

or horizontal sharing of management capacity (chief executives and senior management) excited little local comment. Neighbourhood awareness and appreciation of local vertical projects (i.e. those based on neighbourhoods and/or a stratum of the population) were said to be greater than those relating to back-office or shared management arrangements.

Perhaps of more concern for districts is what appears to be a distinct lack of appetite amongst the public for services that are different in one locality compared with another, even when those differences are clearly sanctioned by local members. When asked about nine key council services, members of the public said that only refuse collection and recycling were appropriate areas for local control and differentiated services[3] and that by only a very small majority. Some key district services such as planning and housing were seen by the majority as better provided everywhere to a consistent national specification.

On the basis of this evidence, where collaboration is "bending" service outcomes with any degree of radicalism so that services in one area would be different to the area next door, councils would be well advised to carry out detailed public consultation in advance to address any "postcode lottery" concerns.

How important are organisational structures?

The case study projects were at different points on a line of continuum between informal networks and strong combinations of bodies where the combined organisation had a legal identity of its own. Angst about governance arrangements has been more often expressed in our conversations than any issue about the organisational structure of the collaboration. Specifically, no-one raised the issue of the legal form of a collaboration - from informal partnerships to Community Interest Company – as a factor determining success or failure.

"We had endless debates about governance, but organisational form didn't really raise its head" **case study participant**

> **Case study: Bassetlaw and partners**
>
> Has built public services hubs in principal town halls to address the migration of services away from the district:
>
> - It aims to: improve customer experience; achieve efficiency savings; enhance the coordination of service delivery; improve the sharing of intelligence; and build the resilience of frontline services.
> - Supported by satellite community bases – digital processes initially for BDC's most popular transactions.
> - Has faced a challenge to work within different organisational cultures and officers with different levels of delegated powers.

We found no national or international study that demonstrates that organisational models can overcome poor behaviour in partnerships and cooperative arrangements. Equally, there is qualitative evidence that good behaviours can still make a poor organisational model work effectively. While, in terms of evidence, this study cannot draw conclusions on organisational form, it is perhaps significant that our case study interviewees were simply silent on the issue of organisational form – and we would maintain that this is a strong message in its own right.

We have developed a six level model that describes and characterises almost all the collaborative models we observed in the fieldwork. It is partly based on the academic commentary in the next section of the paper. Importantly, the model is descriptive one: it is not trying to suggest that one form of collaboration is better than another or that either end of

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[3] YouGov 2012 "Future of England" survey

the line of continuum represent "good and bad" models of organisation. The model is illustrated at figure two overleaf.

Figure two: a descriptive model of the range of collaboration arrangements

Networking	Cooperation	Coordination	Coalition	Collaboration	Combination
Informal agreements to share information and certain resources	Limited agreement to share resources	Letter of agreement formally defines the commitment and relationships	Formal written agreements to pool resources and define commitment and relationships	Formal agreements to devolve some degree of autonomy	Merge organisations into single unit
Aims to support each other's activities	Aims to accomplish individual goals	Aligns activities and shares resources	Shared goals which require long-term commitment and stable relationships	Larger proportion of resources are pooled	Common commissioning intention – shared outcomes
Organisations maintain their own autonomy	Ad hoc activities to address specific common issues	Aims to accomplish specific tasks	Some common governance	Long-term and formal relationships	Governance independent of hosts
Loose and informal relationships	Informal relationships – no structures	Usually short- term relationships	Structure governed by outcomes	Gear up to form a separate entity to carry out common tasks	Legal identity – long term intention

5. Review of the academic literature on collaboration

This section draws on the work of Pobsook Chamchong, a doctoral researcher at INLOGOV. Its purpose is to provide a brief overview of the academic literature on collaboration that is specifically relevant to the fieldwork for this study: thus this is not a comprehensive review of studies of collaboration. The bibliography is at Annex II.

Collaborative working between organisations has been an important strategy for managing public programmes across the globe (not just in the West) since the late twentieth century. Therefore, there is a significant body of literature on the subject of collaborative activity that has set out a number of theoretical approaches that attempt to explain this phenomenon (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002). The issues are explored here under the following questions:

- What do we mean by collaboration?
- What are the drivers to collaborate?
- What models of collaboration exist in local government?
- What factors influence collaborative performance?
- Are there any drawbacks to collaboration?

What do we mean by collaboration?
The definition of collaboration is "elusive, inconsistent, and theoretical" (Gajda, 2004) and studies have suggested that there is a conceptual confusion in the meaning of the term. "Collaboration is known by many names" (Gajda, 2004) such as partnership, collaboration, co-operation, networking, co-ordination, alliance, joint working, coalition and joint venture (Mandell and Steelman, 2003; Gajda, 2004; Williams and Sullivan, 2007; Huxham, 1996).

According to Alter and Hage (1993) and Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) collaboration occurs both in vertical and horizontal forms of interagency relationships. In vertical collaboration, cooperation occurs through levels of government and in horizontal, across similar layers of government. Collaboration can be formal or informal: collaborative management sometimes takes place in a formal partnership or by means of formal contractual obligations (Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Schneider *et al*, 2003). In other cases, occasional and informal cooperation occurs when organisations freely agree to work across organisational and sectoral boundaries to cope with a common problem or to achieve a shared interest (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002; McGuire 2006).

What are the drivers to collaborate?
Williams and Sullivan (2007) suggest that the motivation to collaborate stems from.

- **Individual factors** where public managers use forms of partnership working in service planning and delivery because they have a personal belief that working with partners by integrating individual demands is the best way to achieve a positive outcome.

- **Organisational factors** where agencies realise that exchanging and sharing scarce resources is an efficient way to accomplish common tasks or to tackle common issues, resulting in better use of scarce resources and the promotion of learning and innovation.

- **External factors** such as government policy, which in most of the Western world in the last quarter century or more has strongly favoured and rewarded collaborative arrangements irrespective of whether constituent organisations actually want to collaborate.

They also say that the need for collaboration stems from key challenges to the public policy system including

"…the proliferation of wicked issues, fragmentation of public services, limited financial resources, decentralisation and devolution, a move towards governance models, and a globalisation of policy issues"
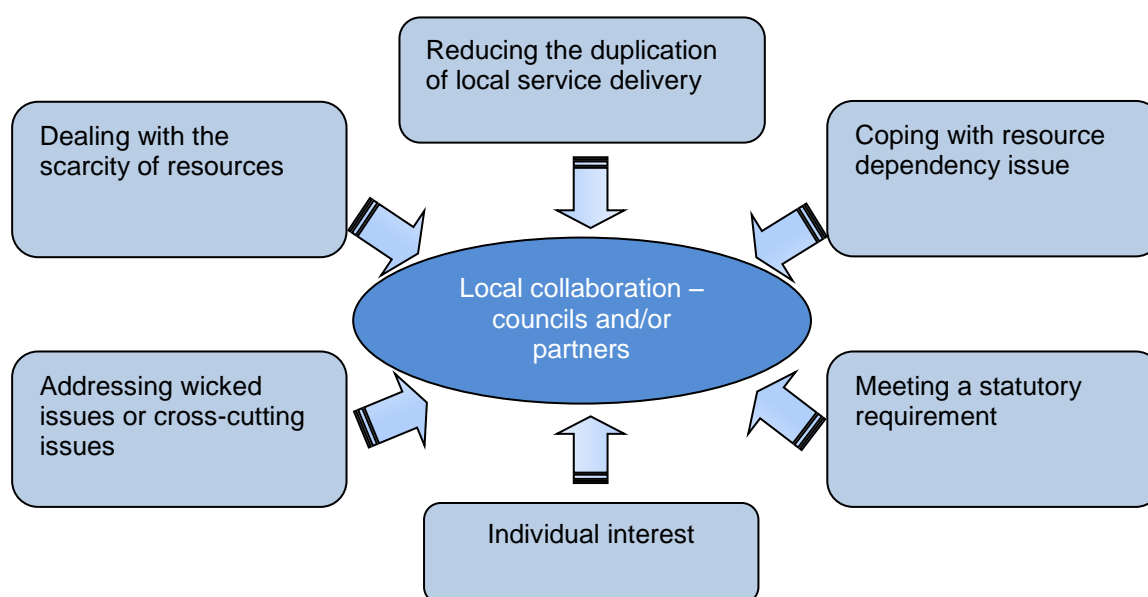
A study on partnership working in Wales (Bristow 2003) identified the drivers for collaborative working as:

- **Increasing efficiency** where agencies come together to improve the efficiency and quality of public services by sharing resources and ideas. Since different organisations have distinct competencies, when these are shared among partners, all agencies achieve a better outcome.

- **Improving inclusiveness** where collaboration can help to develop more participatory and inclusive forms of governance by engaging other agencies and sectors in delivering public services.

- **Integration.** Collaborative working eliminates the overlapping activities between agencies that arise from the decentralisation and fragmentation of public agencies in public services delivery. Moreover, working together allows agencies to address cross-cutting issues.

The Audit Commission (1998) argues that there are five main drivers for collaboration in local government. First, agencies work together **to deliver co-ordinated services** because multiple organisations have responsibilities towards clients in a particular public service. Secondly, agencies need **to tackle a proliferation of 'wicked issues"**: the complex problems that cross organisational boundaries such as environmental well-being or community safety. Thirdly, interagency working developed to reduce the impact of **the fragmentation and overlapping jurisdictional responsibilities** of agencies providing local services. Fourthly, partnership working enables agencies to **bid for new or increased resources**. Lastly, collaboration is driven by the need **to meet a statutory requirement**.

These studies highlight up to six key drivers for collaboration that are synthesised and illustrated in figure three overleaf.

Figure three: a summary of the drivers for collaboration

Some of these drivers are expanded upon further below.

Coping with resource-dependency. Another important potential motivation for collaboration is resource dependency. Sullivan and Skelcher point out that in a situation of resource scarcity where some organisations control essential resources more than others, collaboration occurs in order that the individual organisations may maintain or enhance their power by attempting to influence or control the activities of others. While it may not be a pure driver of collaboration, resource-dependency theory may explain some of the power relationships and behaviours that we see in some partnerships.

Addressing wicked issues or cross-cutting issues: Sullivan and Skelcher seek to explain how collaborative working can help to address cross-cutting issues:

"Issues such as environmental sustainability, fear of crime and social exclusion require concerted action by numerous actors from across the public, private, voluntary and community sectors. They cannot be tackled successfully by a single agency, nor will disjointed action have any real effect. Collaboration therefore had become the accepted mechanism for implementing public policy on cross-cutting issues".

Reducing the duplication of local service delivery. Sometimes collaboration is stimulated by the need to decrease the duplication of local service delivery resulting from the fragmentation of public bodies (the Audit Commission 1998; Pollitt 2003). Williams and Sullivan (2007) say:

"In the UK, the need for co-ordination in government stems in part from the fragmentation of public services and the creation of multiple agencies with unclear and differing forms of accountability; … as a result of decentralisation and devolution which make problems of co-ordination and policy coherence between different tiers of governance highly problematic."

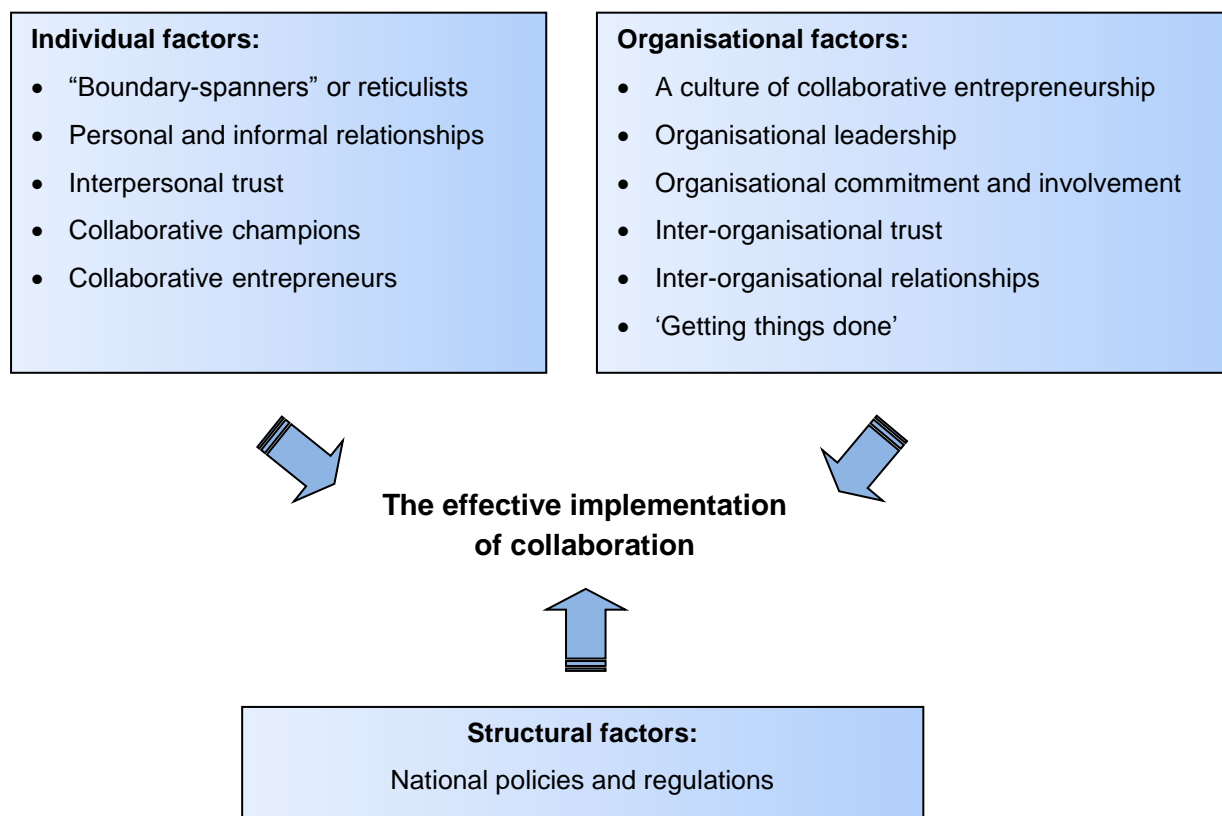# What models of collaboration exist in local government?

There is no single theory that explains how collaboration works on the ground, although there are similarities in the academic approaches to describing the continuum of options for inter-organisational collaboration (Williams and Sullivan 2007; Sullivan and Skelcher 2002; Mandell and Steelman 2003). Annex three illustrates how four different studies have characterised the models.

For the purposes of this study, we developed a six level model that synthesises Bailey and Koney's structural focus with Mandell and Steelman's focus on function. The model is illustrated earlier at figure two.

What factors influence collaborative performance?

There is considerable academic work on collaborative performance. We have synthesised this at figure four and expand on the main themes in the remainder of this section.

Figure four: synthesis of the factors influencing collaborative performance

Individual factors:

- "Boundary-spanners" or reticulists
- Personal and informal relationships
- Interpersonal trust
- Collaborative champions
- Collaborative entrepreneurs

Organisational factors:

- A culture of collaborative entrepreneurship
- Organisational leadership
- Organisational commitment and involvement
- Inter-organisational trust
- Inter-organisational relationships
- 'Getting things done'

The effective implementation of collaboration

Structural factors:

National policies and regulations

Individual factors

For the purposes of this study, the **individual factors** are perhaps the most interesting as they map more directly to behavioural issues. The studies identify three key personal attributes and/or behaviours that influence how well collaboration works: reticulist capacity, trust, and leadership.

- First, effective collaboration requires people identified as **'reticulists'[4]**, or **'boundary spanners'** who have specific skills and abilities to bring people together and help partners to determine and identify their roles, linkages, and their contributions to partnership working.

- Another important element of successful collaboration is **trust** which is essential both to build the sense of common goal in the beginning stages of collaboration and to maintain the quality of interagency working over period.

- The final factor is **leadership** by people trusted by partners to resolve conflicts which may happen along the process (Benson 1975; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002). Studies refer to the necessary leadership characteristics as **collaborative champions** and **collaborative entrepreneurs**.

Who makes a good boundary spanner?

Trevillion (1992) says that the success of inter-agency working depends on individuals who work across agencies. Individuals who have the right competencies, skills and attributes, and play important roles within interagency working are **boundary-spanners** or reticulists (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002; Williams and Sullivan 2007). In the UK, Williams suggests that there are four key competencies of boundary-spanners:

- Building sustainable relationships
- Managing through influencing and negotiation
- Managing complexity and interdependencies
- Managing roles, accountabilities and motivations

There are particular skills and attributes that make up these competencies. In terms of specific skills, boundary-spanners have excellent *communication*, *networking*, *negotiating*, *empathising*, and *conflict-resolving* skills that enable them to persuade people from different organisations who face common issues or have shared concerns or objectives come together to work, and to create a shared understanding and sense of common goals between partners (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002; Williams 2002).

Boundary spanners will be able to think in "holistic-pictures" and can understand the different background of partners and the nature of common problems that partners encounter (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002; Williams, 2002).

Boundary spanners are vital ingredients of successful partnership working since they play key roles throughout all the stages of collaboration.

Who makes a good collaborative champion?

Being a **collaborative champion** differs from traditional models of leadership which can focus on the formal role of a leader commanding and influencing others to follow (Williams and Sullivan 2007; Sullivan and Skelcher 2002). Chrislip and Larson (1994) talk about 'collaborative leadership' through collaborative champions who can:

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[4] A "reticulist" is someone skilled in creating, servicing and manipulating networks, and is astute at identifying where in an organisation decisions are made.

- Inspire commitment and action
- Lead as a peer problem solver
- Build board-based involvement
- Sustain hope and participation

Similarly, Sullivan and Skelcher (2002) have emphasised that effective collaboration needs a leader who is trusted by all the partners and who has sufficient personal competencies to persuade and bring potential individuals and agencies together to remedy common and complex issues. Collaborative champions must facilitate coordination among partners; resolve conflict that may happen along way; and motivate and maintain the action and involvement of partners (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002; Benson 1975).

Who makes a good collaborative entrepreneur?

The role of a **collaborative entrepreneur** reflects the view that current public policy problems are not readily amenable to traditional approaches, instead, they demand the application of new ideas, creativity, lateral thinking, and a rejection of conventional practices. Degeling (1995) considers that people employed to undertake this role need to be "committed to finding new ways forward on specific concerns"; Challis *et al* (1988) use the term "risk takers"; and Hornby (1993) focuses on the importance of flexibility and a "readiness to explore new ideas and methods of practice".

A collaborative entrepreneur will promote good informal and personal relationships. A study on urban regeneration partnerships in the UK (Lowndes and Skelcher 1998) shows that this role is one of the most important factors in effective collaboration, especially in the early stages of pre-partnership collaboration where building trust and a sense of common goals among partners is critical.

Organisational factors

Building a cross organisational collaborative culture

Although the contributions of individuals to collaboration are invaluable, they are insufficient to sustain effective interagency working. A collaborative culture needs to emerge that values shared understanding, identifies common goals, and nurtures new ways of managing and working for joint action (Sullivan and Skelcher 2002), (Himmelman 1996).

Newman (1996) suggests that there are two key organisational cultures which will support collaboration namely 'adaptive' and 'responsive' (Newman, 1996). Organisations with theses cultures tend to have strong strategic partnerships; effective mechanisms for linking with various agencies; and staff at all levels who can work well across boundaries.

Cropper (1996) suggests that creating 'principled conduct' based on the agreement of agencies may help to build trust since the beliefs and values of various agencies can be shared in this process. This leads to a better shared understanding between agencies as well as the promotion of a sense of belonging on collaborative programmes.

Inter-organisational relationships in local government

A research study on consolidation in local government (Aulich *et al* 2011) demonstrates that the frictions among different tiers of local government as well as staff resistance are the most significant "organisational factor" (see figure four) barriers to effective performance. In a

study on shared services in local government, Deloitte, (2010) indicate a number of obstacles to the effective operation of collaboration:

"…there are also behavioural and political obstacles, linked to individuals' careers or the risks of reducing headcount that have also delayed progress. The urge to protect local authority autonomy is understandably strong. This can manifest itself in a desire by elected members to maintain self-determination over frontline services (outputs) and back office support (input). For some, the concept of sharing infrastructure or management functions with another local authority is an anathema. Furthermore, the idea of relocating staff outside a political boundary is difficult to agree, as is sharing control of support services or buying them from a neighbouring authority; even at a lower cost".

Structural factors
Working within regulatory constraints
Collaboration based around public service providers will always happen in the context of national policy and legal regulation. Sometimes these can conflict with the collaborative outcomes – or at least, can be a barrier to progress.

In the UK, the Audit Commission (1998) reviewed previous studies on collaboration and pointed out that **national policies and regulations** can become an obstacle that local government faces in partnership working. This is because these obstacles can

- "impose conflicting high-level objectives;
- restrict agencies' ability to pool resources and information;
- impose performance monitoring regimes that discourage collaboration;
- limit the powers available to agencies to address problems; and
- distort locally identified needs and priorities".

Are there any drawbacks to collaboration?
Of course, collaboration may not be a "public good" all of itself. In their review of previous studies of the outcomes of partnerships and collaborative ventures, Gazley and Brudney (2007) pointed to the possibility of:

"*mission drift, loss of institutional autonomy or public accountability, co-option of actors, greater financial instability, greater difficulty in evaluating results, and the expenditure of considerable institutional time and resources in supporting collaborative activities".*

Similarly, an empirical study on partnership working in mental health services (Glasby and Lester 2004) demonstrates that a decrease in job morale and satisfaction of staff was clear evidence of negative outcomes to a collaborative arrangement. This negative effect occurred because staff were confused about organisational identity and concerned about changes in their professional roles.

6. Bringing together the strands

Collaboration: at the core of the role for districts

More than any other tier of English local government, districts are local-place-centric and so in two tier local government, bear a much greater responsibility for local place-shaping. The review of local government by Sir Michael Lyons[5] brought that term into common use. He defined place-shaping thus:

"…the creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its citizens… local government should… pursue the well-being of a place and the people who live there by whatever means are necessary and available… wider local outcomes will be improved by a broader view of the locality's interests now and in the future"

On the basis of our fieldwork, district councils have much to be proud of and much to take heart from. In the best examples, they are showing preeminent collaborative leadership skills. Our fieldwork captures high level detail from more than 30 projects where, perhaps up to 100 districts are taking a central role in place shaping and in promoting better services for citizens. But districts always have more to do and the laggards now need to catch up.

Figure five captures the "essence" of collaboration as demonstrated by our fieldwork and it highlights the future challenge for district councils in a networked and collaborative world. The key questions seem to be whether districts can do more to nurture individual talent and to develop their organisational culture to fulfil their "selfless" role while at the same time, demonstrating more "audacious leadership" to maintain project momentum.

Figure five: the core issues that dictate the success of collaborative work

Collaboration – networking – promoting partnerships – resource multiplying – are all tools to promote place shaping and the ability to promote good partnerships and to practice excellent collaboration should be foundations skills in modern local government.

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[5] Lyons Inquiry into Local Government – Final Report March 2007

Figure six gives a sense of the range of collaborative choices open to local authorities working in partnership with each other. Based on some prior work by DCN, it illustrates the choices to be made at the organisational level to nurture better collaboration and gives some sense of the trajectory of fruitful collaboration at the organisational level. Thus strong relationships with partners in a context where financial pressures are significant point to equally strong collaboration and/or integration.

Figure six: a framework for collaborative organisation

Districts must better nurture individual collaborative talent

"The people dimension is ignored too often. We need different skills for partnership working in modern local government" **Shared district chief executive**

Both in the fieldwork and in the review of academic writing on collaboration, we have shown that collaboration doesn't happen by accident. It happens because individuals with the right skills are in the right place at the right time. And yet, despite many similar studies saying that modern "soft" skills such as networking, listening and moderating are central to partnership working, not all councils are acting to identify people with those innate competencies and helping them to grow and develop their skills. In particular, districts need to identify and to value "boundary spanners", "collaborative champions" and "collaborative entrepreneurs" when some have suggested to us that these skills are less likely to emerge easily in districts compared to other tiers of local government.

Districts need to identify their best leadership talent – and especially their collaborative champions – Those "audacious leaders" who can lay out the groundwork for collaboration. Collaborative champions are not necessarily "completer/finishers" but they are the leaders who can take risks, make initial contacts and establish good lines of communication with

similar leaders in other organisations. In hierarchies, such leaders can seem maverick – but in partnership working, they are mainstream.

By their very nature, boundary spanners will not always be classic bureaucrats (using that word descriptively and not pejoratively). They may not fit easily into a vertical pecking order through command and control. Their initial skills are more likely to be innate – but they can be spotted and developed. Boundary spanners can follow up the work of collaborative champions to embed partnerships and to "get the show on the road".

Collaborative entrepreneurs then run the collaborative show. They help to make change stick and to deliver real project benefits. They are the individuals that can harvest the right project outcomes to improve services and neighbourhoods.

Districts can do more to foster a collaborative culture

"We really do need to change the culture before we change the IT" Shared *district chief executive*

Place-shaping districts are already encouraging "collaborative entrepreneurship" based on firm evidence that it works. But the underlying culture change is difficult and complicated. Indeed, some might argue that, in and of itself, it is not possible to change culture: leaders and managers can set the tone that allows a collaborative culture to emerge – and then to flourish. Arguably, this is a particular challenge for political leaders. Our business voices made a charge of "district parochialism" (our words) against some districts and in the worst cases, this may be why partnership and collaboration is not happening – or only happening skin-deep. Without the right collaborative culture, services to citizens are likely to suffer.

This isn't just about the culture of political leadership, of course, but to the extent that it is, it is particularly hard to challenge and change in a democracy. Some responsibility for it lies with political parties nationally, some with political groups locally. And it lies at the heart of some of the complexities of the leader-chief executive relationship.

Shared leadership can certainly make a difference here and through this project we've seen good examples of culture change that has followed both vertical (county and district shared) and horizontal (multiple district shared) chief executives and executive management teams. We've also heard of examples where that initial step has not led to culture change and the resulting collaboration has only been superficial.

DCN (and the other local government membership bodies) can play a significant role here by highlighting and celebrating good examples while being realistic about the bad examples. But the primary role must be for each district council: organisational self-knowledge from real reflection among staff and elected members is a good skill to practice, both in preparation for partnership working and as projects unfold.

National bodies can play a higher profile role to make this happen

The principal membership organisations for local government: the LGA, the County Councils' Network (CCN) and DCN should set the tone by demonstrating much better collaboration nationally. This would set the scene for good local projects by encouraging mirroring behaviours. Figure seven gives an idea of the fields where that cooperation would be useful.

While some might point to SOLACE[6] to make this happen, or indeed, one of the academic institutions such as INLOGOV, none of these forums has a "perfect legitimacy" in this sphere. So we suggest that the most effective way forward is for the LGA, CCN and DCN to model collaborative behaviours by working with other key actors to pursue an agenda that:

- Further develops and promotes the "selfless" role of districts as local place champions. Wide acceptance of this role (especially in Whitehall) is bound to head off some of the incessant clamour for institutional reorganisation.

- Develops some tools and techniques to help districts to test their organisational culture – particularly in encouraging collaborative entrepreneurship.

- Develops national training programmes and tools to support boundary spanners, collaborative champions and collaborative entrepreneurs across local government and in partner organisations. These roles need to be legitimised and this would be a good route achieve this.

- Makes it acceptable to articulate well founded criticisms of poor collaborative practice, thus stimulating unresponsive or uncooperative districts to accept the need for change.

We know that the latter is potentially the most complex role for local government's representative bodies. But the principle of peer-led support among councils must also mean that the national membership organisations can challenge poor behaviour and identify poor practice in their membership.

They can and, we would argue, must do this at the same time as celebrating the significant body of excellent collaborative practice already going on in district councils.

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[6] SOLACE is the representative body for chief executives and senior managers working in the public sector - http://www.solace.org.uk

Annex I. Projects submitted as part of the "call for evidence"

	District council	Project title
1	Rugby with partners	Home Improvement Agencies project
2	West Suffolk and partners	Co-location and integration of services in West Suffolk
3	Craven and partners	A partnership project to tackle long term socio-economic issues on a housing estate in North Yorkshire
4	Forest of Dean and Wye Valley	A partnership project to reduce the tourism sector's dependence on public sector delivery and funds
5	South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse and partners	Five non-coterminous districts jointly procuring corporate services and creating a single client function
6	Malvern Hills and Wychavon	Appointment of a joint head of paid services
7	Lichfield and partners	Provision of statutory building control services across three council areas
8	Hinckley and Bosworth and partners	A multi-agency project aimed at resolving anti-social behaviour, environment, safety, vulnerability of individual or communities
9	Hinckley and Bosworth and partners	Leicestershire shared IT service – a partnership with a private provider and four district councils
10	Harrogate Borough Council and partners	Harrogate District Public Service and Leadership Board has replaced the LSP to develop new ways of working to help all public sector partners deliver more for less
11	Forest of Dean and partners	Agreed vision across four district councils to retain independence whilst working together and sharing resources to maximise mutual benefit
12	South Norfolk District and partners	Greater Norwich Growth Board established to deliver much needed homes and jobs in the area
13	South Norfolk and partners	Two pronged approach to meeting the challenges facing local authority building control services
14	South Norfolk and partners	Joined up localised early help services
15	Mendip and partners	Shape Mendip a strategic vision and change ethos driving public service and value across Mendip
16	Rother and partners	Joint waste contract involving four councils
17	Cheltenham and partners	Reduce domestic abuse and sexual violence in an area in Cheltenham
18	Bassetlaw and partners	Create public services hubs in principal town halls to

	District council	Project title
		address the migration of services away from the district
19	Aylesbury Vale	New business model approach to redesign services and recreate and initiate new sources of revenue
20	Cambridgeshire City, South Cambridge and partners	Closer integrated working on a number of new initiatives
21	Melton and partners	Multiagency building to facilitate the transformation of public services
22	Melton and partners	Holistic and coordinated support to enable individuals to become digitally, financially and socially independent
23	Tendring and partners	Essex family solutions project
24	Lincoln and partners	Universal credit local support services framework
25	Mid Kent Improvement Partnership	Mid Kent Improvement Partnership – partnership across three councils
26	Thames Gateway Kent Partnership	The North Kent partnership supporting the Thames Gateway programme
27	South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership	South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership
28	Norfolk Waste Partnership	A Waste Partnership consisting of seven local councils
29	Scarborough and Ryedale	The White Rose Home Improvement Agency
30	Christchurch and East Dorset	Christchurch and East Dorset Partnership
31	Colchester and partners	Building an integrated customer journey with community hubs and spokes

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Annex III. A comparison of conceptual models of collaboration

Author	Model	Continuum of interagency relationships					
		Low — Formal relationships and Integration — High					
		• Informal agreement to share information and resource to support each other's activities • Organisations maintain their own autonomy • Loose and informal relationships	• Limited agreement to share resources • Ad hoc activities to address specific common issues • Semi-formal relationships • Maintain separate identities	• Align activities and share resources to accomplish compatible goals • A letter of agreement to formally define the commitment and relationships	• Formal agreement to pool resources to accomplish common specific goals • Extensive and long-term commitment on relationships and resource sharing with formal written agreements	• Formal agreements to devolve some degree of autonomy to achieve common goals • Larger proportion of resources from members • Long-term and formal relationships • Separate entity to carry out common tasks	• Merger of organisations into single unit
Sullivan and Skelcher (2002)	Forms of collaboration and rules of governance	1. Network	2. Partnership	2. Partnership	3. Federation	3. Federation	4. Integration
Bailey and Koney (2000)	Strategic alliance processes and models	1. Cooperation	1. Cooperation	2. Coordination	2. Coordination / 3. Collaboration	3. Collaboration	4. Coadunation
Hogue (1993)	Community linkages-choice and decisions	1. Networking	2. Cooperation or Alliance	3. Coordination or Partnership	4. Coalition / 5. Collaboration	5. Collaboration	
Mandell and Steelman (2003)	Inter-organisational innovations	1. Intermittent coordination	1. Intermittent coordination / 2. Temporary task force	2. Temporary task force / 3. Permanent and/or regular coordination	3. Permanent and/or regular coordination	4. A coalition / 5. A network structure	

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