Collaborative Advantage or Collaborative Inertia?

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The theory of collaborative advantage (TCA)

- Practice oriented theory about governing, leading and managing inter-organizational collaborations (partnerships, alliances and networks)

- Focuses on situations where the intention is to achieve *collaborative advantage* – to achieve something that none of the partners could achieve on their own

Collaboration

- A "collaboration" refers to formalized joint working arrangements between organizations, that remain legally autonomous, while they engage in coordinated collective action to achieve those outcomes that none of the partner can achieve on their own

Practice oriented theory

- The TCA is derived from research involving practitioners whose roles have ranged from directing collaborations to representing specific stakeholder groups as members

- Researchers typically design interventions and act as 'consultants', 'facilitators', 'experts', 'sounding boards', run development workshops, awareness raising events etc.

Which practice contexts?

- typically concerned with social issues such as: economic development, poverty alleviation, children services, community care, health promotion, learning disability, education, unemployment, the environment, community planning

Major social complex wicked issues

# Why do we need a theory of collaborative advantage?

Understanding collaboration

Focus on issues recognised by those involved as causing anxiety and reward

Understanding collaboration

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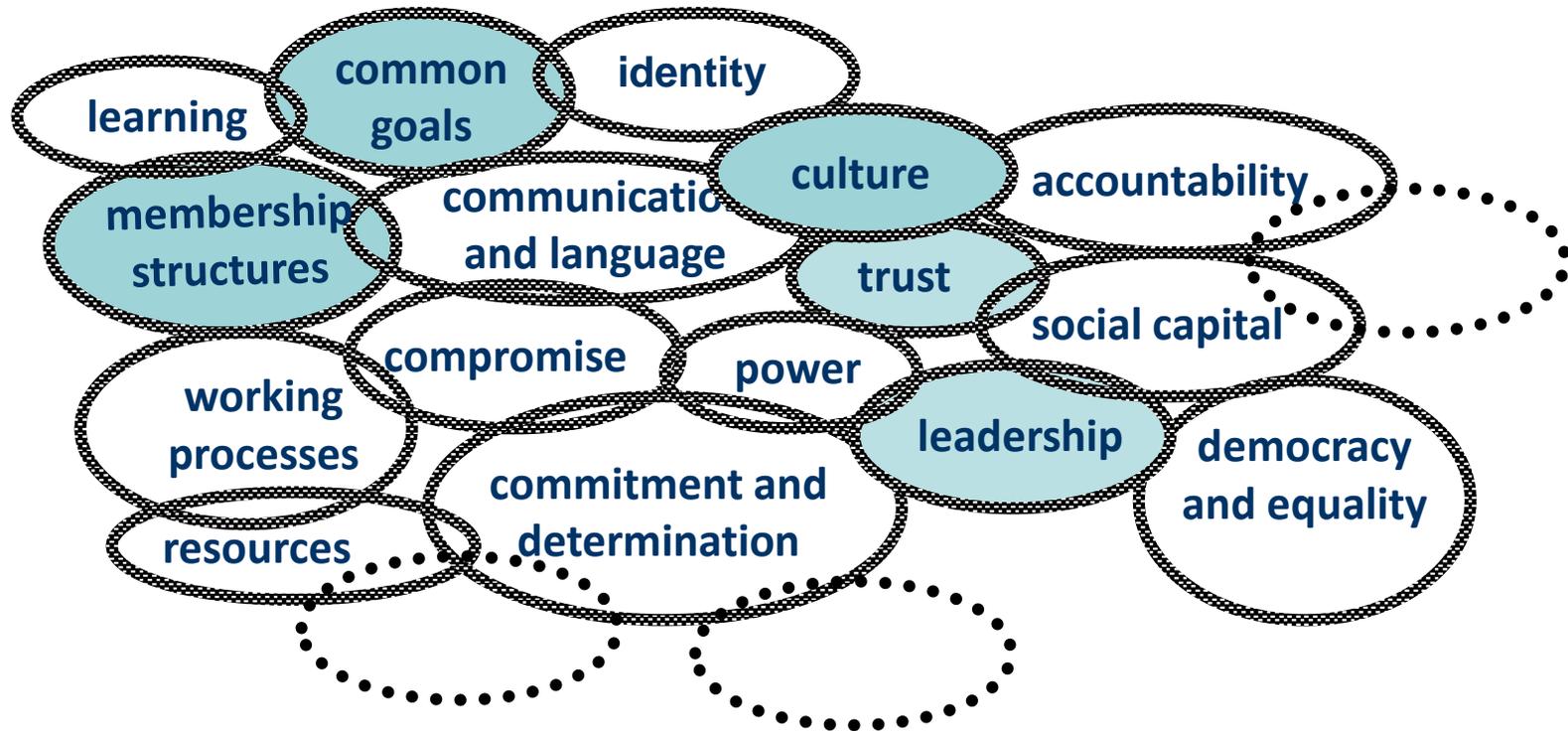
managing goals

common wisdom

the success of collaborations depends on the extent to which partners' goals are congruent, shared and agreed

organizational and individual agendas frequently make it difficult to agree goals

common practice

managing goals

Dimensions	Types
Level	the collaboration, the organizations, the individuals
Origin	members, external stakeholders
Authenticity	genuine, pseudo
Relevance	collaboration dependent, collaboration independent
Content	collaborative process, substantive purpose
Overtness	explicit, unstated, hidden

A tangled web of goals

Genuine, congruent goals for a collaboration exist if at all in an entanglement of other goals that are both real and imagined.

Goal diversity is far more prevalent than goal congruence.

A dilemma in terms of strategies for identifying common objectives and agreeing on goals…

One the one hand

e.g. Goal diversity can yield expanded and unwieldy agendas, confusion, misunderstandings or just apathy.

One the other hand

e.g. Too much scrutiny can reveal irreconcilable differences.

managing goals

common wisdom

the success of collaborations depends on the extent to which partners' goals are congruent, shared and agreed

I wanted a clear vision, a set of aims and a clear set of outcomes. And without that I wasn't prepared to play ball
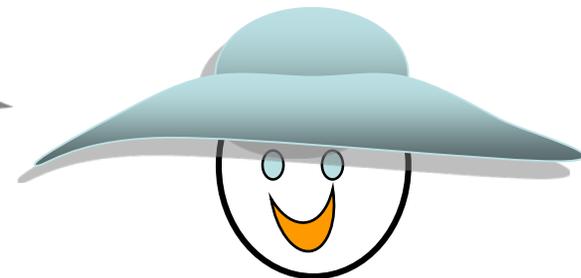
Director of Environmental Services

collaborative advantage

... the bringing together of different resources and expertise provide the basis for getting advantage from collaborating

... joint actions must satisfy many different agendas
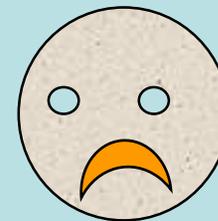
collaborative inertia

the practical conclusion ….

sometimes it's best to get started on some action without fully agreeing on goals

we have to write a statement of aims to justify our existence … my job is to find a way of writing it so that none of the parties involved can disagree
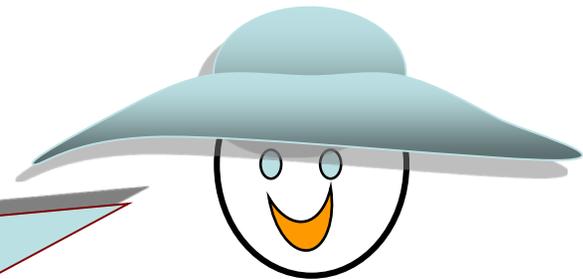
manager, area regeneration partnership

managing culture

common wisdom

If you are going to work collaboratively with another organization there must be shared values and culture

Partners will bring to the collaboration different ways of being, interacting and working

common practice

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managing culture

The organisation has a difficult culture and they're very politically motivated, they get messages from on high that send them all into a bit of a spin
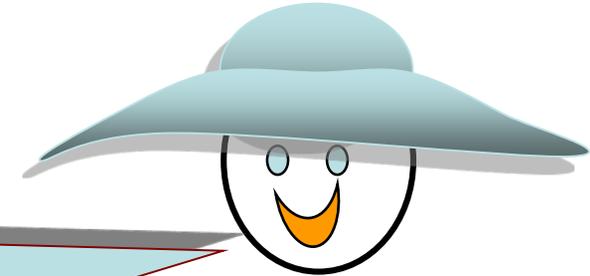
Partnership Manager
Public - Private
Partnership

Encountering otherness

Cultural awareness is necessary to understand the issues affecting a collaboration

managing culture

For a year I sat on the SIP [partnership] board as a nodding Dove… I hadn't a Scooby what they were talking about…
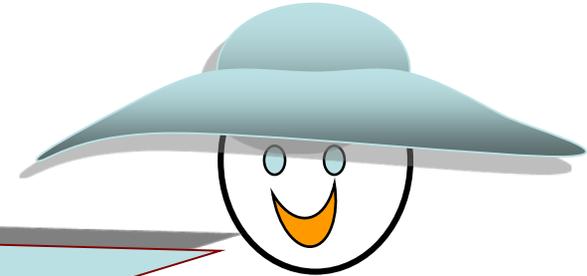
Community representative

Incompatible professional cultures

Terminology may not readily translate across organisational and cultural boundaries

managing culture

Work in spite of our systems, even with the best partnership we've got, we're struggling and clunky
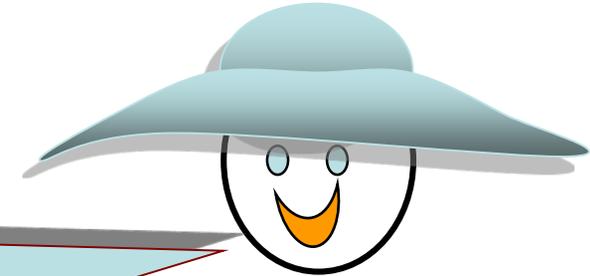
Head of Business Development

Incompatible organisational cultures

Things that are easy to do in your organisation may not be straight forward to do in another

managing culture
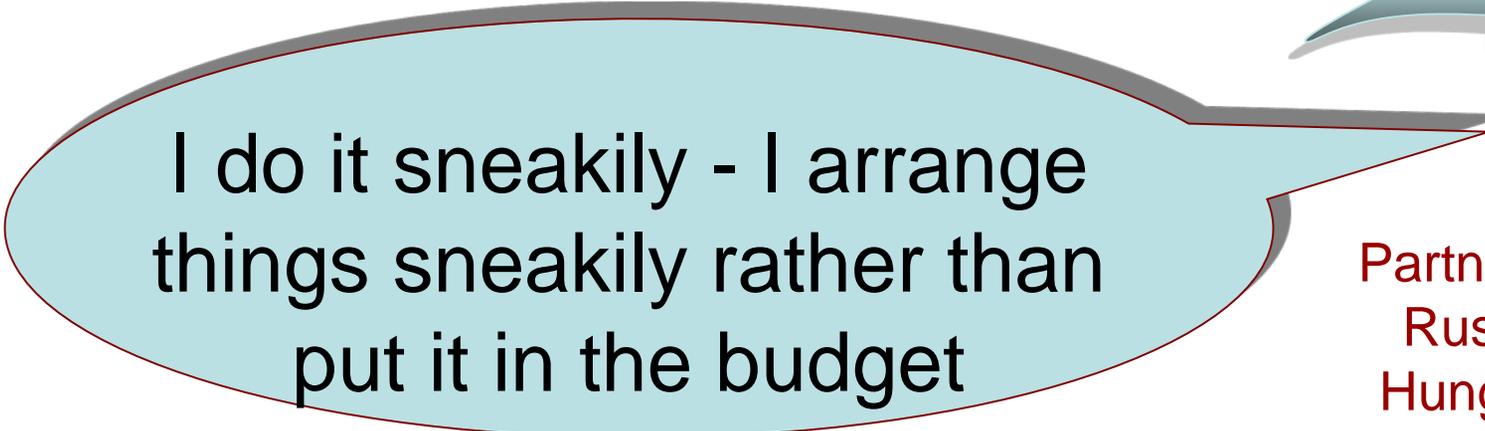
I do it sneakily - I arrange things sneakily rather than put it in the budget
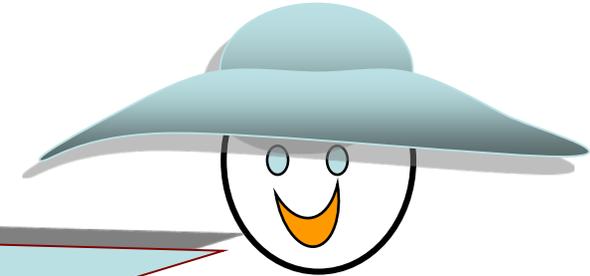
Partnership Manager, Russia, Rumania, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria

Incompatible national cultures

Things that are expected in one culture may not be acceptable in another

collaborative advantage

... the bringing together of *difference* (resources and expertise) provide the basis for getting advantage from collaborating

... joint actions requires a resolution of the points at which different *cultures* intersect

collaborative inertia

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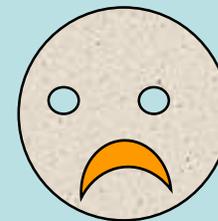
Business School

Harnessing cultural diversity

Embracing diversity…

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

Bespoke learning
Culture is seen as socially constructed

Partner specific communication
Diverse communication in use

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

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

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

Generic Learning
Culture is seen as something that can be learned without context

Collaboration specific communication
Generic communication is used

while exercising control…

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Business School

managing trust

common wisdom

trust is a precondition for successful collaboration

common practice

suspicion is often the starting point - partners are needed where trust is weak

research says

reinforce trusting attitudes

gain underpinnings for more ambitious collaboration

aim for realistic (initially modest) but successful outcomes

form expectations about the future of the collaboration based on reputation or past behaviour or contracts and agreements

have enough trust and take a risk to initiate the collaboration

the trust building loop

complexity

Community Group

Voluntary Organisations

Housing Agency

Health Board

Chamber of Commerce

Training & Enterprise Agency

Regeneration Partnership

Umbrella Group

Community Organisations

Charity

Community Group

Community Group

Local Employer

Community Collaboration

Community Partnership

Bank

Housing

Social Work

Local Authority

Planning

Education

Regeneration Partnership

managing complexity

complexity

Regeneration Partnership

Housing Agency · Health Board · Umbrella Group · Community Group · Voluntary Organisation · Community Organisations · Charity · Chamber of Commerce · Regeneration Partnership · Community Group · Community Group · Community Collaboration · Community Partnership · Local Employer · Bank · Training & Enterprise Agency · Housing · Social Work · Local Authority · Education · Local Employer · Planning

MY REGION

MY ORGANIZATION — key units in my organization — design businesses · manufacturing businesses

KEY PARTNER ORGANIZATION — key units in partner organization — businesses · SMEs

KEY PARTNER ORGANIZATION — key units in partner organization — SMEs

complexity

Board members from 12 of the organisations direct the partnership at policy level

The director, who is a staff member is a member of the board

10 Alliance staff manage the partnership.

Staff look after the communication link in between the board of directors, the staff team and the working groups

...and work on projects in the community - often with community collaborations

Alliance members - 100 organisations in the Region and a few individuals pay a membership fee

Charity · Community Group · Local Authority · Local Community Org. · Govt Agency

Working Groups of alliance staff and individuals from member organisations work in specific areas such as youth employment

Poverty Alleviation Alliance

complexity

partnershipitis pluralism

5 individuals members and 5 individuals from other member organisations or partnerships

4 individuals from other member organisations

A · B · C · D · E · F · G · H · I

Membership of Partnerships in Bristol
From Sweeting, Stewart and Hambleton's 1999 study

complexity

EAST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL · WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL · NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL · SOUTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL · EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

NORTH GLASGOW UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS NHS TRUST · HEALTHY CITIES · GLASGOW ALLIANCE · SIPS · GLASGOW CITY COUNCIL

SOUTH GLASGOW UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS NHS TRUST · LHCCs/GPs · UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

PRIMARY CARE NHS TRUST · GREATER GLASGOW HEALTH BOARD · HEALTH COUNCIL/PUBLIC · GLASGOW CALEDONIAN UNIVERSITY

YORKHILL NHS TRUST · MEDIA · HEBS · DAT · MEMBERS OF THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT

NHSiS MANAGEMENT EXECUTIVE · GGHB EMPLOYEES · PROFESSIONAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES · GREATER GLASGOW PARTNERSHIP FORUM · HEALTH AND COMMUNITY CARE SELECT COMMITTEE

MY ORGANIZATION · supplier · customer · customers' suppliers · customers' customers · supplier and suppliers · suppliers' customers

dynamics

**collaborations tend to be *dynamic*, "movable feasts"**

- oranisational restructuring and mergers

- new strategies

- new government policies and incentives

will change the structure and purpose of existing joint initiatives

and individuals *will* make career moves

**it's hard to
agree goals, accommodate cultural diversity,
communicate and build mutual understanding, manage power relationships, build trust
and
maintain continuity**

**in
complex, dynamic structures**

reinforce trusting attitudes

gain underpinnings for more ambitious collaboration

aim for realistic (initially modest) but successful outcomes
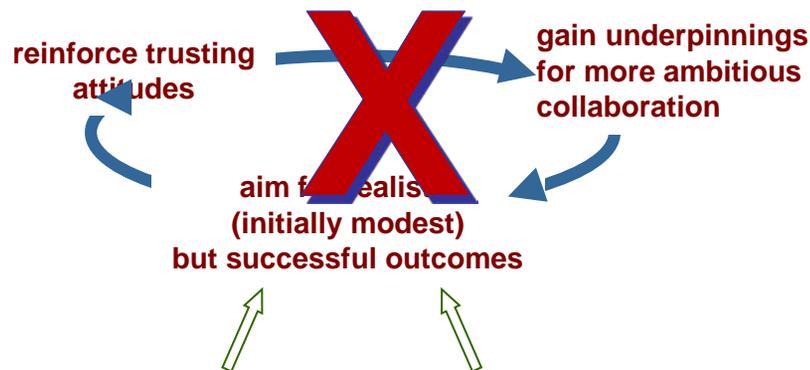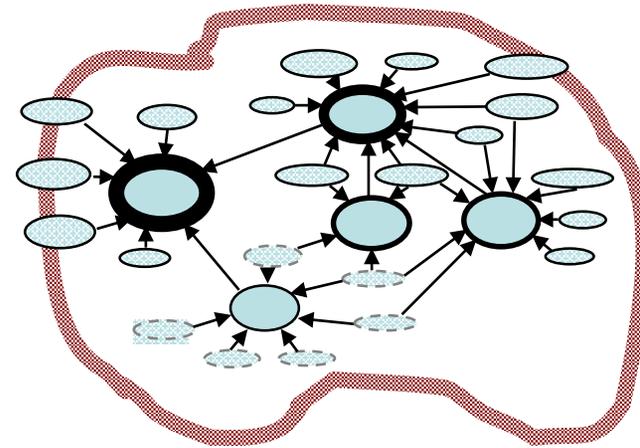
**dynamics make
the trust building
loop fragile**

How do you 'make things happen' in complex dynamic inter-organisational structures?

- Complex social issues beyond the reach of any organisation to address effectively on its own

- Leadership situated in the context of interacting organisational hierarchies

- Individual leaders will not usually hold positional authority

- Leadership enacted by many individuals who bring diverse resources, experiences, and professional expertise

In the spirit of collaboration…
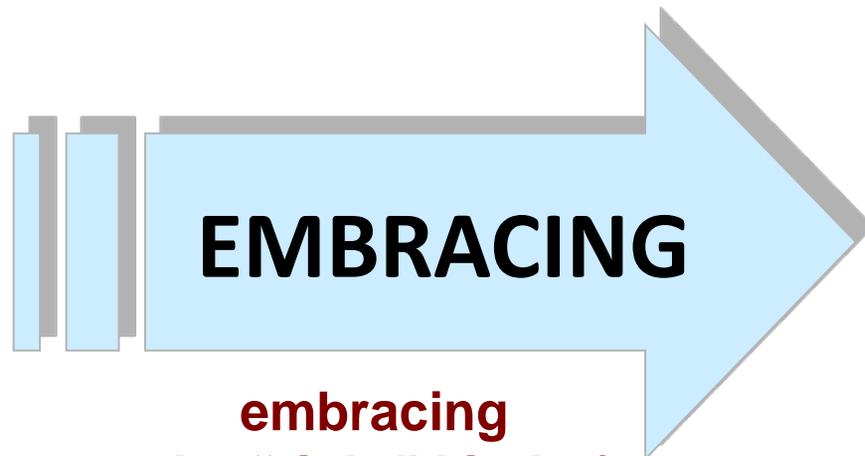
EMBRACING

**embracing
the "right" kind of
members**

Example Challenge

Embracing those who would
like to be involved when
representation of
stakeholders is problematic
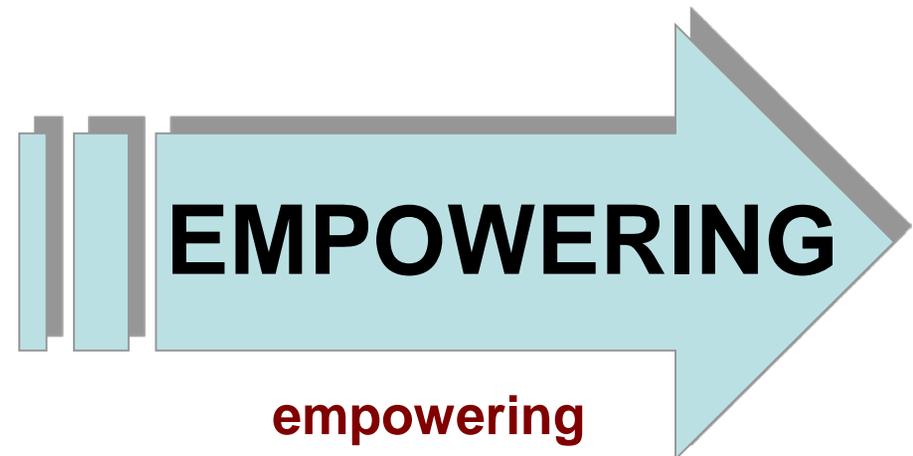
EMPOWERING

**empowering
members to enable
participation**

Example Challenge

Creating infrastructure through
which all members can be
enabled to participate in spite
of inevitable differences in skill
levels

In the spirit of collaboration…

INVOLVING

Involving and supporting all members

Example Challenge

Involving all members although they have unequal role and power positions in the collaboration

MOBILISING

Mobilising members to make things happen

Example Challenge

Encouraging members to work on behalf of the collaboration while recognising that they need something in return

...towards directive leadership

MANIPULATING THE COLLABORATIVE AGENDA

Example challenges: making things happen through …

imposing an
understanding of
substantive issues
on members

influencing the
agenda via
stealthy
behaviour

PLAYING THE POLITICS

Example challenges: making things happen through …

probing the
political
undercurrents
between and
around members

networking to
find out who
is "worth the
bother"

Leadership is about making things happen…

in the spirit of collaboration …

EMBRACING → EMPOWERING → INVOLVING → MOBILISING → Achieving Collaborative Advantage

MANIPULATING THE AGENDA

PLAYING THE POLITICS
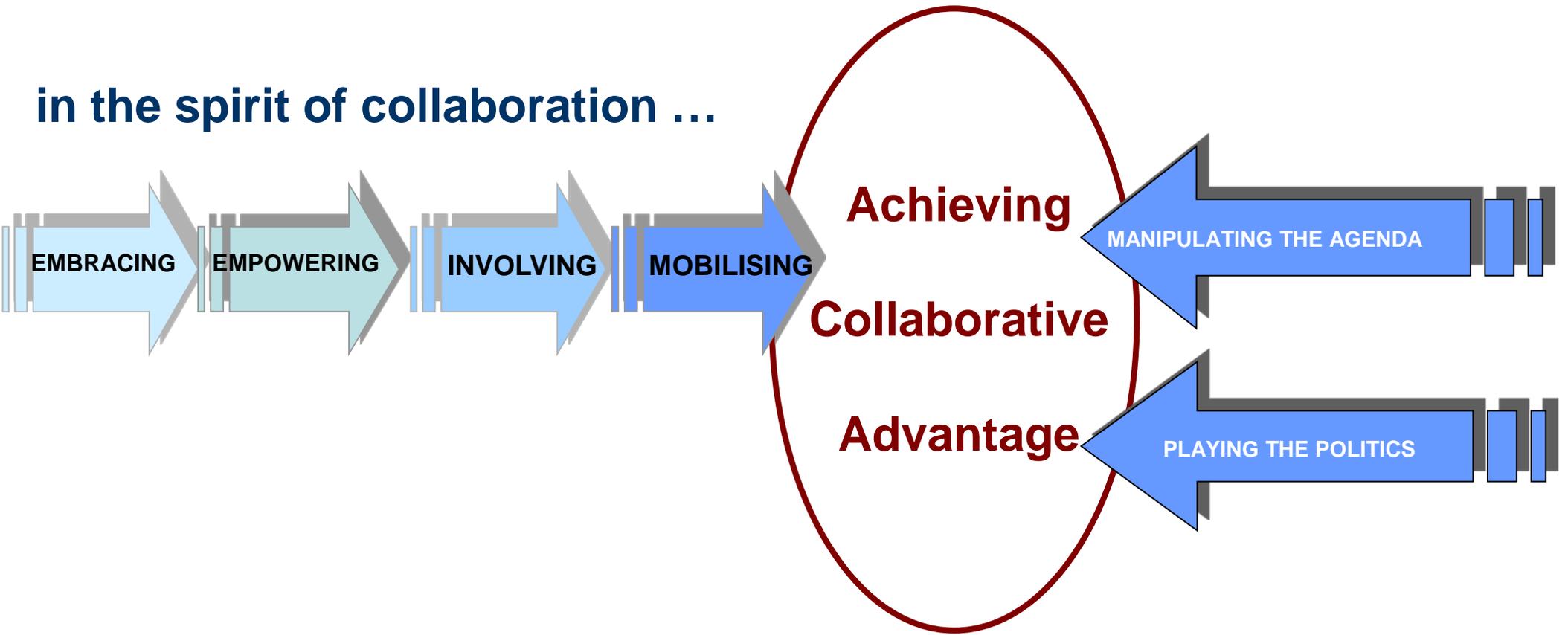
… with a bit of directive leadership

Collaborations are inherently paradoxical in nature and characterised by…

contradictions, tensions and dilemmas

complexity

multiple views

dynamics

frustration of intention

achieving collaborative advantage requires compromise, energy, commitment and care

nurture, nurture, nurture

Recognizing success …

Substantive outcomes
- Varied, relative and not same for all partners

Process of collaboration
- building social capital

Emergent milestones
- not planned but emergent semi-serendipitous

serendipity and success …

"the right people from different organisations came together at the right time"

"we also tried and abandoned many other collaborative initiatives; this is the one that worked"
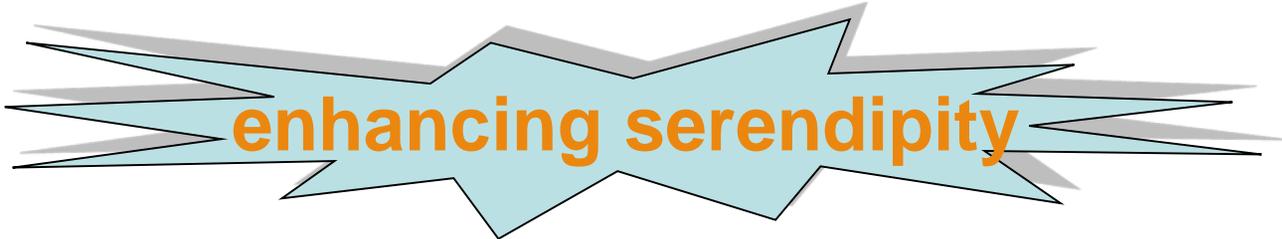
enhancing serendipity

Making it happen involves...

understanding the complexity

...everything I thought I knew about how to achieve change doesn't feel god enough

accepting the pain

...it's the hardest part of the job

allocating enough time

Sometimes you have to meander a little bit in order to get on the right road

knowing *what* to nurture

I am beginning to understand what is going on

Knowing *what* to nurture…
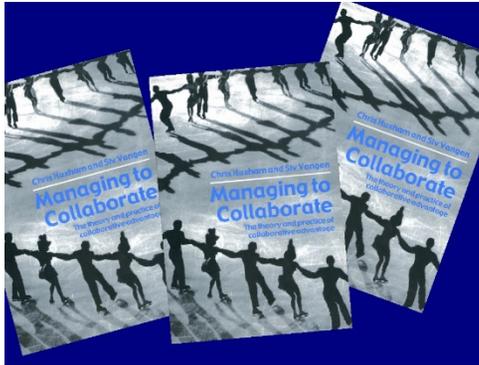
Managing to Collaborate: the theory and practice of collaborative advantage
Chris Huxham and Siv Vangen 2005, Routledge

Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership

http://www.open.ac.uk/business-school-research/centre-voluntary-sector-leadership/people

Free access to written material

Research gate https://open.academia.edu/SivVangen

Academia.edu https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Siv_Vangen

E-mail siv.vangen@open.ac.uk

managing goals

Goals paradox: goal congruence and goal diversity influence success in collaborations

Congruence

+ Partners and collaboration goals aligned

-Competitive conflicts of interest (reluctance to share information)

Congruence and

diversity in tension

Diversity

+ Synergy from diversity of resources

- Incompatibility conflicts of interest (seeking different outcomes)