

FRAMEWORKS FOR APPROACHING **COLLABORATION** WITHIN THE HUMANITARIAN SECTOR

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Simple Models for Complex Collaboration

This paper is intended to make easier the proposition, design and implementation of multi-actor collaborations in support of humanitarian aid. It builds on a great deal of material that has been written on this subject, reviews of case studies, and one on one interviews. Collaboration is a subject of strategic interest and is frequently cited as one of the principle opportunities to advance the sector in a changing and challenging world. We believe this enthusiasm is well-founded.

Support for collaborative approaches has been building in the humanitarian sector over the past few decades. The Emergency Capacity Building project found that collaboration *“in many ways is greater than the sum of its agencies”* and that *“there is, indeed, strength in numbers”*¹, Janz et al in their reflections on collaboration in humanitarian action boldly proclaim that *“when collaboration and partnership thrive, humanitarian action and response everywhere benefits, as new learning accumulates, new tools are developed and mainstreamed, operations link more donors, governments and factions with their varied experiences and perspectives, accountability increases and better practices are disseminated, to more effectively meet human needs with dignity.”*²

Yet, there is a reason temper the optimism. In its 2009 report, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) together with the Humanitarian Futures project at Kings College London stated that *“Collaboration is an issue of central importance to international humanitarian action. Humanitarian agencies have, in principle, long recognised their interdependence as the volume of needs and multidimensional nature of most humanitarian crises normally surpass the capacities of any single organisation to respond effectively. While the importance of collaboration has been recognised, its definition has all too often been uncertain and its practice, more often than not, sub-optimal.”*³

We also see this **persistent gap between the promise of collaboration and the real-world ability to apply it in practice**. Like many other sophisticated concepts for transformational change (innovation, adaptive management, localisation), collaboration is a complex emerging field without easily accessible models to frame challenges or design solutions. While the promise of collaboration has resulted in lots of energised work, at some point this proliferation of analyses and case studies seems to contribute more to noise and confusion than practical application.

This paper’s goal is to provide a straight forward way of thinking about what collaboration is and what is necessary to make it successful. In short, we hope to **offer a simple way to think about a genuinely complex subject**. Our approach is propositional. We are not claiming to have defined the one truth about the nature of collaboration, but rather hope this framework will be practically useful to the leaders and practitioners who wish to apply collaboration to challenges in the difficult and continually changing humanitarian environment.

Organised for the 20th Century

If we go back to when much of the Humanitarian system was conceived, we find a period following World War II where organisational collaboration was distinctly out of fashion. Self-sufficiency and vertically integrated enterprises were the primary strategy for both public and private institutions. Mid-twentieth century businesses like Ford Motor Company could literally oversee the creation of a car from the mining of coal and iron ore to the delivery of a finished product in a show room. Similar concentrations of institutional prowess were built into the organisations serving people affected by crisis. Large international NGO’s arose alongside integrated United Nations agencies, providing globe spanning supply chains that could be deployed nearly anywhere in the world.

In the decades since the heyday of these large self-contained organisation, pioneers in commercial industry have made substantial changes to their operations and structure. A car in the showroom is now the result of the accumulated contributions from many dozens of companies. New business models like those used by Uber and Airbnb have emerged, drawing resources and effort from a continually shifting ecosystem of actors. Even

¹ ECB (2012): ‘What We Know About Collaboration: The ECB Country Consortium Experience’

² Janz, Soi & Russell (2009); ‘Collaboration & Partnership in Humanitarian Action’, Humanitarian Practice Network

³ ICVA & Humanitarian Futures (2009): ‘The Future of Humanitarian Collaboration: An ICVA Perspective’

stalwarts of 'top down control' approaches like national militaries have increasingly been configured as a set of dynamically interacting units.

While there are clearly unique challenges associated with Humanitarian action, there is little reason to believe that aid's mission is somehow uniquely dependent on mid-twentieth century organisational models. To the contrary, there are growing gaps between funding and needs, even as funding sits at near record levels, clear signs that the humanitarian effort is in need of new tools and concepts that could enable a step change in performance.

Commitments like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) and the Grand Bargain, have established the Sector's clear intent to go further and change the nature of humanitarian aid, increasing local participation, shifting to greater inclusion of non-traditional actors, and taking advantage of new technologies (such as cash programming). Meeting both expanding needs and the growing aspirations for a better form of aid demands fundamental shifts in approach.

Collaboration's Role in Transforming Aid

A number of management consulting buzz words have been leading this push for fundamental change. There has been investment in creative innovation capabilities fuelled in part by new technologies. While technology alone is clearly not the solution to big complex problems, there is the promise of potentially deep disruption with the upcoming suite of Fourth Industrial Revolution tools such as robotics, Internet Of Things (IOT), and Artificial Intelligence (AI)⁴.

The broader fabric of the sector's organisations can also be subject to reimagination. Internal business practices like Adaptive Management are also under review by initiatives like GLAM.⁵ However, if substantial change in capacity is the goal, it should be possible to consider how organisations themselves might organise themselves afresh in new collaborative ways.

The Partnerships Brokers Association, which works to support individuals who manage collaborative processes proclaim that 'multi-stakeholder collaboration is critical if we are to create a more inclusive and sustainable world'⁶. Imagine, instead of largely self-contained organisations, the actors within the humanitarian sector are seen as LEGO pieces that might be combined together in ways that are best designed to respond to different contexts and challenges.

If that were possible, different areas of specialisation could be mixed and matched, responding with a shifting combination of actors to meet shortfalls of capacity or deliver customised solutions. A more flexibly constructed sector would be well-positioned to trial new ideas in different forms and expand participation. The ICVA / Humanitarian Futures Paper on collaboration says this boundary breaking will be important in a world with expanding aid needs. It will be necessary to "work more with others outside the traditional 'humanitarian community' if we are to be able to meet these greater challenges".⁷

Why is Collaboration Stuck?

So why don't we leverage organisational collaboration more often? Tapping this promise is that collaboration has proven to be quite difficult to implement. In our experience, it is even difficult to have a clear shared discussion that cuts through the many different and conflicting dimensions of collaboration.

We propose that there are three reasons for this persistent barrier to using collaboration as a creative tool for shaping organisations. **The first challenge** is that the word 'collaboration' actually describes a number of very different strategies. While each of these strategies share some features that arise from being built from organisational 'LEGO' pieces, the strategies are actually quite different. Each uses its multiple actors in distinct ways to solve singular problems.

⁴ Schwab, K (2014); 'The Fourth Industrial Revolution', World Economic Forum

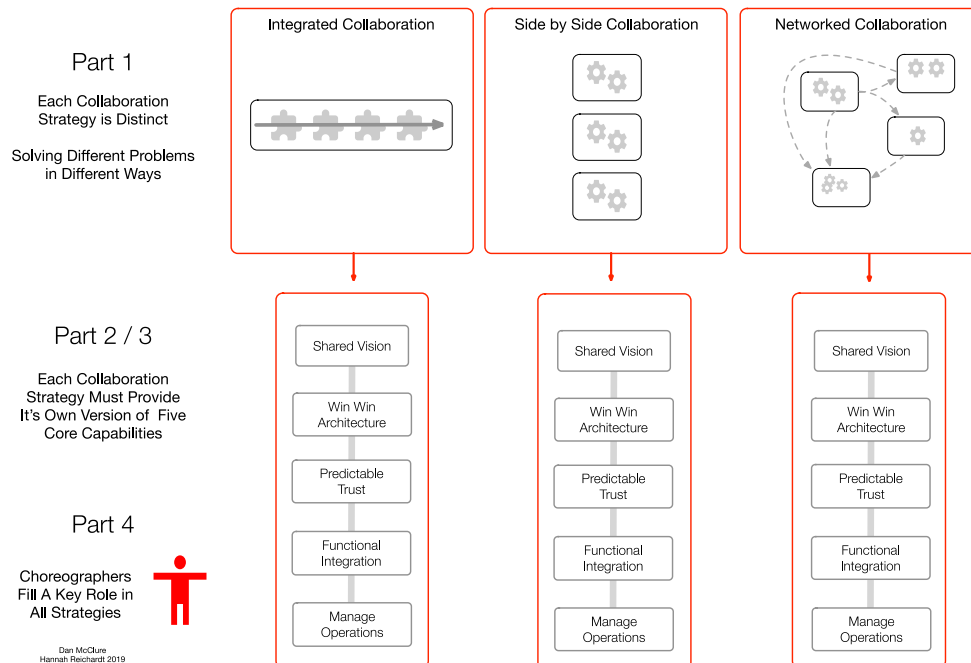
⁵ <https://www.odi.org/projects/2918-global-learning-adaptive-management-initiative-glam>

⁶ Partnership Brokers Association (2019): 'Multi-stakeholder collaboration is critical...'; Website.

⁷ ICVA & Humanitarian Futures (2009): 'The Future of Humanitarian Collaboration: An ICVA Perspective

As a result, proposing a single set of rules for delivering collaborations is an endeavour that is doomed at the outset. We need to recognise the unique nature of each strategy so that we can see the distinct groups of activities that each requires.

Framework for Exploring the Challenges of Multi-Actor Collaborations



The second challenge comes from the reality that creating a collaboration is a complicated task. A single collaboration must address many different issues to be successful. It is not simply a matter of aligning purpose, integrating activities, or establishing appropriate governance. It is all of these and more. Not only must these multiple challenges each be resolved, they must also be designed and implemented together creating a complete and consistent whole.

Finally, during our interviews, and supported by personal experience, we found **a third barrier** to the successful implementation of collaborations. Successful collaborations appear to need a secret sauce to thrive. A specialised role consistently appears at the centre of viable collaborations, a ‘choreographer’ who sees the collaboration holistically and works across the diverse actors. It is a role and a set of talents that is uncommon in most traditional business organisations, so filling this position presents a special challenge.

The remainder of the paper provide a simple framework for discussing each of these three concepts:

- **Distinct Strategies:** Three very different forms of collaboration are presented. This list includes the up and coming new networking strategy that feels very different from existing operational models.
- **Required Capabilities:** Five capabilities are proposed as the core components of any successful collaboration strategy. Different approaches for delivering these core capabilities are described in the context of each strategy.
- **Enabling Choreographers:** Finally, the need for a new enabling role that provides cross cutting “choreography” and support is provided.

The tone and focus will be aimed toward practitioners of collaboration building. The perspective is easily rooted in hands-on work within Save the Children UK, where collaborative initiatives such as ELRHA, the Start Network, and the Humanitarian Leadership Academy have been developed and grown. Save the Children UK has also directly participated in numerous sector efforts at collaboration building, such as the Collaborative Cash Delivery (CCD) initiative for cash programming and the Communicating with Disaster Affected People (CDAC) Network. Finally, the authors bring several decades of personal experience as the ‘choreographers’ of collaborations, a challenging role that has offered front line exposure to both the opportunities and stumbling points that occur during the creation of a collaboration.

Part 1 – Seeing Different Strategies

What is Collaboration?

Let's begin by defining the slippery word, Collaboration. In their paper proposing a comprehensive theoretical framework of collaboration, Gray and Wood state that "...a collaborative alliance can be described as an interorganisational effort to address problems too complex and too protracted to be resolved by a unilateral organisational action."⁸

This open view creates a broad field of play. **Collaboration is a way of integrating the work of distinct organisations.** While they share goals, the actors retain their independence, potentially entering into a variety of other collaborations as well as continuing to pursue their own primary organisational interests.

Yet, this interorganisational effort is more than a simple mutual business transaction. The organisations participating in the collaboration share a view and intent for the effort. Thomson et al state, "Collaboration is a process in which autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships"⁹. While some collaborations may only exist for a short period of need, they must still invest in a foundation for performing complex tasks together.

UN OCHA described their New Way of Work in similar terms, highlighting the presence of multiple actors, shared outcomes and substantive engagement. "The New Way of Working can be described, in short, as working over multiple years, based on the comparative advantage of a diverse range of actors, including those outside the UN system, towards collective outcomes."¹⁰

It is important to see the collaboration as more than an operational convenience, for example a simple pooling of resources. There needs to be a worthy purpose for such a demanding shared effort. Marian Casey-Maslen from the CDAC Network makes this point when asking "what other benefits are there from a collaboration except from getting the money? If it doesn't go beyond that then you haven't gotten to the deeper purpose."

One final distinction should be made. Collaboration is often used as a verb, a cooperative act performed between two individuals or organisations, much like the activities of negotiation or communication. The previous views of Collaboration as an organisational form are much bigger than this. While effectively performing 'collaborative' activities like negotiation and communication is quite valuable in many situations, this paper focuses on the more complex challenge of creating and operating multi-actor organisations.

Untangling the messiness of Collaboration building begins by defining distinct strategies that fit within these broad definitions. It is important that to tie this work in something concrete and observable in the real world, so we'll start by anchoring each strategy in a particular type of problem that needs to be solved.

Problem A – Performing a Big Complicated Processes

Imagine there is a large complicated process that demands diverse skills and substantial capacity to perform. Each of the tasks are difficult and require organisations that have both the investments and practice needed to do them well. Finally, imagine that it is important to do this complicated difficult work well, consistently delivering a high level of quality overall.

This is the kind of problem that exists in manufacturing or aid delivery supply chains, and it presents a fairly demanding set of specifications. Not only are there many parts, each of the parts must be performed according to tight specifications in tight coordination with others.

⁸ Gray, B & Wood, D.J. (1991); Collaborative Alliances: Moving From Practice to Theory; Journal of Applied Behavioural Science, Vol. 27, No.1, March 1991, p3-22

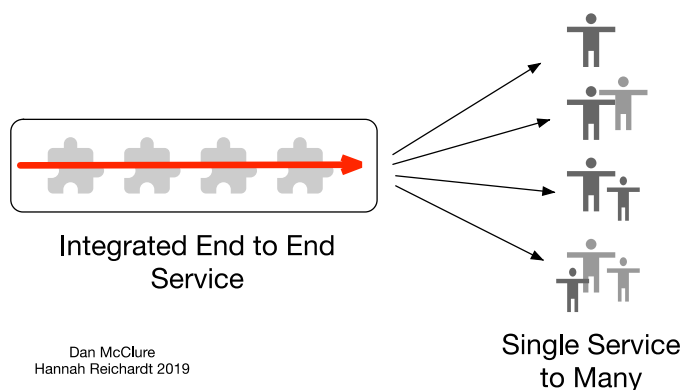
⁹ Thomson, A. M., Perry, J., Miller, T. (2008); 'Linking Collaboration Processes and Outcomes – foundations for advancing empirical theory', in 'Big Ideas for Collaborative Public Management', Blomgren Bingham, L. & O'Leary, R. (eds).

¹⁰ OCHA (2017): 'New Way of Working'; <https://www.unocha.org/story/new-way-working>

The large NGOs and aid agencies that dominate the humanitarian sector are generally vertically integrated enterprises that are able to execute complex aid delivery missions from beginning to end. However, shifts in the humanitarian mission have begun to challenge the vertically integrated organisation strategy, to a more collaborative form of the model. New forms of aid, such as cash programming, require constructing complicated new supply chains. This creates a need for new actors to enter the middle of the supply chain, for instance a financial service provider or mobile network provider in a cash aid programme. Mastercard may have had little to offer an NGO that was moving food into a crisis, but they can contribute a great deal to a supply chain that is intent on moving cash.

There may be opportunities to gain improvements in performance by integrating new actors into the chain. For example, Atlas Logistique provides locally sourced last mile delivery services as part of a long-integrated supply chain¹¹. This is intended to diversify the supply chain, taking advantage of in country resources and increasing local engagement. As the number of Humanitarian to Humanitarian (H2H) services grow, it is likely that existing single organisation supply chains will be unbundled to include more providers. Moves to engage more with state governments and their services are another source of pressure for diversifying supply chains and making them more collaborative.

Problem A - How do you provide a complicated multi-part service to many people



If we look for historical precedents, a similar unbundling of supply chains occurred during the late 20th century for international automotive companies. Today, one supplier could plug into one part of the process for all the major car brands, with product, process and information flows are tightly integrated among the companies contributing to a car. However, this is not a permanent commitment, as the supply chain can be reconfigured to obtain advantages in cost, quality or innovation.

Solution A - Integrated Collaborations

In this problem space, the goal will be to produce consistent high-quality results even when operating to deliver high volumes of products or services – in the humanitarian aid sector, that is the challenge of scale with quality. What does a collaboration capable of delivering solutions for big complicated challenges look like?

The nature of the problem dictates that the collaboration would need to have:

- A clear understanding of complicated work, with each actor aware of what needs to be done and why
- Expert practitioners with established assets, processes and teams
- Business operations that have been optimised to deliver consistent results and where each actor is able to scale their contribution
- Seamless reliable communication between actors in the process
- Very little improvisation / Consistent stable approach

This sound very much like a traditional vertically integrated business enterprise. However, in our case instead of all the actors being coordinated from within a single enterprise, the roles and activities are spread out among multiple organisations.

The metaphors applied to this model are often based on machines. Actors are parts that can be individually engineered and fit together like gears in a clock. It is a deliberately designed system, where someone is likely to be in a strong leadership role directing a mission that remains relatively stable over time.

¹¹ Atlas Logistique (2019): <https://reliefweb.int/organisation/atlas-logistique>

The combined mastery of complicated jobs comes with trade-offs. Connections between the organisations will need to be detailed, formal and robust, so they will often take a long time to negotiate and setup. Once put in place, the overall collaboration will tend to be inflexible when confronted by changing needs.

Key Features of Solution A – INTEGRATED COLLABORATIONS

- Top-down direction and control
- Well defined multi-step processes (complicated but stable)
- Tightly integrated work flows linking multiple actors

Strengths	Challenges
High performance on complicated tasks	Slow to setup
Clearly defined roles and authority	Dependent on boss that’s far from the field
Consistent and repeatable operation	Difficult to customise to context

Problem B - Need for Adaptive Capacity in Context

Now imagine a different kind of problem. In this demanding new context, we find ourselves with many independent actors who are performing a job in broadly similar ways. There is a core level of consistency in quality and approach, but also an opportunity to tailor their work to varied local challenges. This is not uncommon in many rapid onset response contexts where a large number of implementing agencies are present.

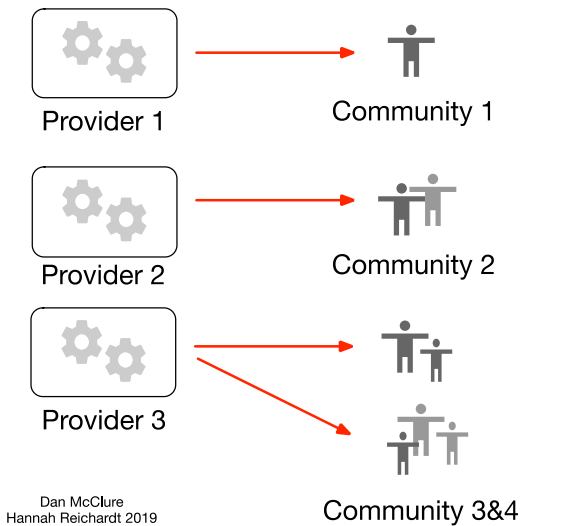
In this environment are some real advantages to having multiple organisations providing consistent quality services side by side. For one, it provides a flexible model for scaling a response in one location while also being able to distribute capacity across multiple challenges if necessary. For example, multiple NGOs can be deployed in a major crisis, collaborating to divide up the responsibilities by geography or some other factor. Ideally, each actor will provide similar levels of high-quality service, so that the quality of support a person receives is not dependent on their luck in selection of aid providers.

Perfect uniformity is not the goal, however. When distinct organisations are working side by side, there is an opportunity to tailor each approach to unique context or client needs. While there may be a desire to have consistent services overall, there may be real advantages to customisation in the details.

This is what many consulting companies do when providing tailored business management services. The organisation has many established tools and practices that are shared amongst consulting teams, but the individual consultants are expected to tailor their application to the needs of each individual client.

This problem space asks us to walk a thin line between control and independence. On one hand we want consistency in quality and overall approach, while on the other, we want to take advantage of the independence of each actor to tailor and fine tune their services to nuances in the context.

Problem B - How do you enable flexible yet consistent service across service providers



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Once operations begin there is one other challenge. Each actor must avoid overlap, gaps, and conflicts when working side by side with others.

Solution B – Side by Side Collaboration

The Side by Side problem space lacks the same demand for clear and rigid structure that is present in an Integrated Collaboration. The goal here is consistency and shared competence, not necessarily perfect operational integration. Individual actors could be largely independent of each other during day to day operations, while still delivering consistent services, common practices and shared standards in their work.

ALNAP's research into national humanitarian networks notes that “a striking number of the networks and collaborations research... are concerned with efforts to coordinate the activities of humanitarian agencies and other actors”¹².

These standards and common practices can be designed by bringing the future collaborators together in advance of the deployment. Working collectively, they develop cross-cutting tools, standards, and resources that can be applied across multiple organisations. In the Humanitarian Sector, this approach is reflected in the Cluster Approach upon which the humanitarian coordination system is based, where specific sector domains like Shelter or Health have central convening groups that help identify best practices and coordinate responses across multiple actors using tools such as the 4W tool (capturing who, what, where, when).

Ideally, the individual actors are still empowered to adjust their response to the local context, so there is not a rigid top down requirement for compliance with specific tasks. This model is also seen in some business environments. For example, large consulting and product development firms often have relatively autonomous teams that share cross-cutting expertise but pursue individual projects with relative autonomy.

Two forms of control are present here. One is provided by consistency in cross-cutting practices, standards and tools that are put in place before the collaboration begins work. The second is an opportunity to measure various actor's performance during operations. This is light weight oversight, tracking high level outcomes and indicators of performance rather than enforcing detailed compliance with process or tasks.

Key Features of Solution B – SIDE BY SIDE COLLABORATIONS

- Multiple independent actors operating alongside others with similar capabilities
- Shared standards and practices across organisations
- Loosely coordinated activities

Strengths	Challenges
Scalable capacity	Many organisations to engage
Shared “best” practices	Difficulty defining and agreeing on standards
Avoids overlap and gaps in services	Limited direct control over actors
Ability to customise services to context	Deviations as small / Bigger change is slow

¹² Scriven, K. (2013): “A Networked Response? Exploring national humanitarian networks in Asia; ALNAP, 2013

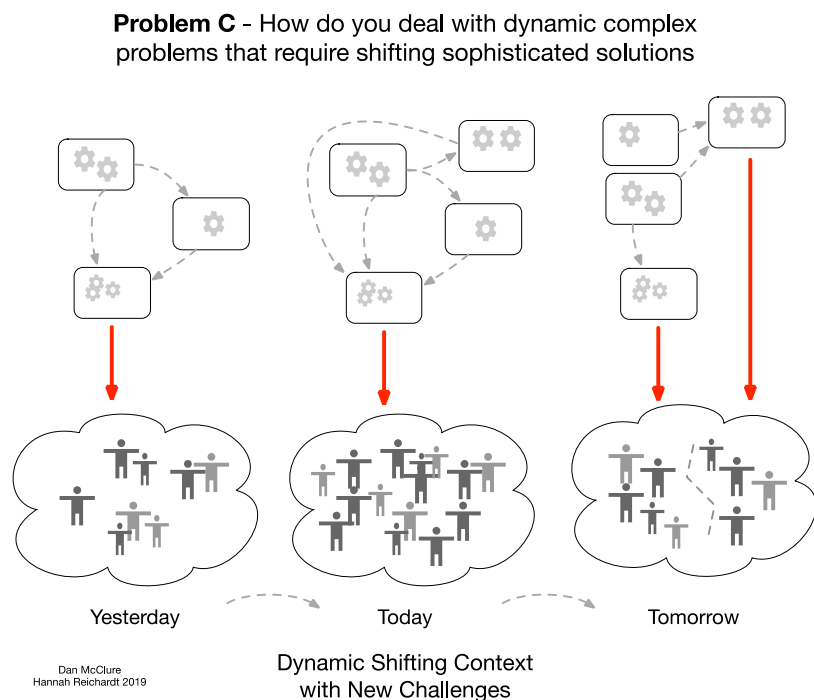
Problem C - Need for Flexible Originality

Both of the prior problems, engineering complicated responses, and the parallel scaling of capacity, are common well understood challenges in aid. While the forms of the collaboration strategies used to respond to each of these challenges are quite different, both require a lot of upfront planning and design to put in place.

What about messy complex problems that are not so well understood or stable? If the nature of the problem we're trying to solve is big and complex, but is also poorly understood and still evolving, we are likely to need a different form of collaboration.

There is a growing realisation that doubling down on existing approaches to aid is not sufficient to address foundational issues and produce the required step change in capabilities. This was the conclusion of the Overseas Development Institute 'Time to Let Go' report in 2016 that, "despite a decade of system-wide reforms, the humanitarian sector is still falling short in the world's most enduring crises."¹³

Randolph Kent of Humanitarian Futures at Kings College London sees an "emerging gap of need [that] will not be bridged by philanthropy and multinational NGOs, the gap in capacity and capital is too large - bridging to this future will require us to both transform and re-imagine the sector systematically from funding to intervention."¹⁴ Problems such as providing aid in conflict areas, delivering urban context aid, and addressing complex social issues such as gender-based violence push the bounds of conventional practice and structure within the sector. These messy challenges sit alongside difficult strategic priorities like genuinely engaging on the localisation agenda and disruptive threats and opportunities that are arising from external factors such as Fourth Industrial Revolution technologies.



All of these problems share key features of Wicked Problems. Wicked Problems are challenges where diverse actors engage with each other based on their own motivations and incentives, in a system that generates benefits and harms with no one truly in charge. Many of the key elements are hidden and the way the system works is constantly in flux.

These complex problems are particularly difficult to solve for organisations working within their existing silos of practice. A single organisation, even one performing at the top of its game, will find that these challenges daunting for multiple reasons.

1. **Break with Status Quo:** Applying run of the mill 'best practices' has already proved to be inadequate to the task. Original new ideas are needed. These new strategies can disrupt existing practices and operating models.
2. **Problems are Big:** These problems have risen to prominence because they are having a broad impact on the aid sector's mission and the prospect for success in the future. Individual organisations and agencies will often lack the capacity to address problems of this size and complexity.

¹³ ODI (2016): 'Time To Let Go'; Humanitarian Practice Group; 2016

¹⁴ ICVA & Humanitarian Futures (2009): 'The Future of Humanitarian Collaboration: An ICVA Perspective

3. **Require Diverse Skills:** Both the problems and their likely solutions cross-multiple disciplines. It is unlikely that any single individual, team, or even organisation will have all the skills, tools and experience needed to address each of the domains. Diversity of talent and resources is critical when addressing wicked problems.
4. **Unpredictable and Changing:** These problems are not stable challenges. Systems and environmental advocate Donella Meadows makes the point that *“Self-organising, nonlinear, feedback systems are inherently unpredictable. They are not controllable. They are understandable only in the most general way. The goal of foreseeing the future exactly and preparing for it perfectly is unrealisable. The idea of making a complex system do just what you want it to do can be achieved only temporarily, at best.”*¹⁵
5. **Excellence is Necessary:** Incredibly hard, unsolved problems require actors who can deliver a high degree of mastery in varied fields. Transformations demand innovation from those already at the top of their game.

Solution C – Network Collaboration

How can we modify our collaboration strategy to respond to these big shifting problems? The Humanitarian Policy Group report and specifically the work by Paul Currión on reimagining a new humanitarian sector, Constructive Deconstruction proposed that a networked solution which is *“more modular, more specialised and more nimble in approach to problem solving, and more distributed and horizontal in its communication and interaction”*¹⁶ could be applied to solve a number of critical challenges.

To be successful, we need a complete and sustainable operation that solves a difficult problem in an original way. Barbara Gray promotes collaborative models as way of imagining with more creativity by stating that collaboration is critical for bringing together different *“parties who see different aspects of a problem (and) can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible”*¹⁷. In a Networked Collaboration, established organisations with proven skills come together to integrate their talent in a dynamic interwoven solution.

In an interview with ACAPS Lars Peter Nissen¹⁸, he emphasized the need to shift away from simple coordination of activities (e.g. Side by Side Collaboration) to a more sophisticated networked collaboration. He described coordination is simply slicing the pie, while network collaboration makes the pie bigger with strategic partnerships that generate synergies.

In a Networked Collaboration, actors pass activities back and forth, much like a football team might kick a ball from player to player. Flexibility is a valuable feature emerging from such an interwoven configuration. The Start Network started life as the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies in 2010 and since has evolved in ways that might not have been foreseen, that have drawn on the tenacity and imagination of its membership. In a review of case studies exploring the Start Network’s history, Marieke de Wal highlighted the ‘paradox of collaboration’ by stating that *“on the one hand focusing on results requires clear and upfront structuring, planning and coordination of the process; on the other hand collaboration needs room and flexibility to do justice and evolve from what arises.”*¹⁹

Key Features of Solution C – NETWORKED COLLABORATIONS

- Multiple independent actors with different capabilities
- Flexible network of connections between actors
- Dynamic signaling and response to produce ‘system’ behaviour

¹⁵ Meadows, D. (2019), ‘Dancing with systems’; <http://donellameadows.org/archives/dancing-with-systems/>

¹⁶ Bennett, C, Currión, P., DuBois, M., Zaman, T. (2018): ‘Constructive Deconstruction’, Humanitarian Practice Group, Overseas Development Institute

¹⁷ Gray, B. (1989): ‘Collaborating: finding common ground for multiparty problems’, Jossey-Bass.

¹⁸ Lars Peter Nissen, July 11, 2018 Interview

¹⁹ De Wal, M. (2016): ‘A review of the Start Network case studies By Marieke de Wal , Topic: [Action Enquiry](#) , 17 Jun 2016, ‘Betwixt & Between’ Journal of Partnership Brokering, Issue #6

Engages wide range of proven capabilities
 Can be architected to meet unique needs
 Self-sustaining incentives for participation
 Resilient and flexible configuration

Few pre-established links and standards
 No one organisation is naturally in charge
 Everyone needs an incentive
 Can easily slip off in a new direction

According to Paul Skinner in his book on Collaborative Advantage “*the better you can become at harnessing and working with that external resource to achieve goals that you can share with others, the more success you are likely to achieve.*”²⁰ Network Collaborations provide a framework for using these diverse talents and external resources to organise big creative responses to hard problems. The unique combination of scale, excellence, and flexibility enables a scaled response to a complex problem that requires diverse expertise, and then shifts approaches again as the challenge evolves.

There are several reasons these loosely connected groups of independent organisations working together for a shared goal are potentially so special.

1. **Broad Diverse Talent Pool** – Collaborative organisations engage multiple organisations or other actors that normally operate impudently of each other. Each actor has the potential to act independently on its own behalf outside of the collaboration. The actors don’t all have to be the same, in fact the potential to draw on diverse skills and resources is one of the principle benefits of forming a collaboration. The actors don’t have to share the same motivations or respond to the same incentives, so very different types of participants can be engaged without fighting over the same slices of the rewards pie. Paul Skinner suggests that a “*collaborative advantage can often best be unlocked by partnerships among strange bedfellows, where competitive considerations do not arise, and where a shared agenda can be fully embraced as a reciprocal benefit.*”
2. **Fast Scaling with Excellence** – The organisations that participate in collaboration are typically already established and effectively delivering their craft. Instead of trying to add a new function to an existing organisation or starting up a new organisation from scratch, a collaboration can select the best performer from a field and draw on a working mastery of difficult challenges. The participants have in effect already invested in creating component skills that are complete and sustainable, building out the potentially complex systems inside and outside their organisations that are necessary to operate at a top level.
3. **Originality and Flexible Assembly** – The collaboration can be customised to fit the challenge. A large complex problem can be addressed with a unique configuration of capabilities that might not exist anywhere. With a Collaborative Organisation, parts of the collaboration can be removed or repurposed, while new pieces are added. It’s as if the actors are LEGO bricks that can be reconfigured in response to new threats and opportunities.
4. **Non-traditional Power and Broken Barriers** – It is possible for a networked model to build connections and processes that deviate from traditional conventions and power structures. Since no one party exerts top down control on the network and there is no presumption of lock step consistency, participants can architect new approaches. This is particularly valuable in the Humanitarian Sector because of challenges like those cited in the Overseas Development Institute’s (ODI) ‘Time To Let Go’ report, “*The humanitarian sector is stubbornly resistant to change. Asymmetrical power dynamics and perverse incentives exclude organisations beyond its traditional horizons.*”²¹

²⁰ Skinner, P. (2018): ‘Collaborative Advantage: How collaboration beats competition as a strategy for success’; Robinson

²¹ ODI; HPG: Time To Let Go, 2016

Part 2 – What Success Looks Like

We propose three distinct strategies, each designed to solve a particular type of real-world challenge using multiple collaborating organisations. One uses tightly integrated connections. Another seeks to achieve consistent side by side performance. The last is a dynamic adjustable network responding to shifting needs.

Of course, these may not be the only types of problems that need attention and there may well be additional collaboration strategies that can be added to our initial list of problem/strategy pairs. Still, this clarifying of the differences between each of these strategies is big step forward, since it provides a starting point for potential collaboration leaders to identify their challenge and then select a suitable collaborative approach.

Now the collaboration initiator faces the challenge of putting their chosen strategy into practice. Since these approaches are so different from each other, it seems unlikely that there is a set of universal guidelines for collaboration design. To the contrary, it may be necessary to treat each of strategy as a unique field of study, creating customised tactics for implementing each one.

All that variety will be difficult to master. But the good news is that the strategies share much in common. While each strategy takes a very different approach to its mission, they must all do the vital work of creating a functioning organisation where people can set goals, assign responsibilities, and do work. These essential organisational challenges exist whenever people desire to work together toward a shared outcome. While it may be the case that each strategy will deliver each these specific capabilities in different ways, the same underlying challenge must be met.

Many researchers have explored what it takes to make a successful organisation. Thompson et al proposed that there are five key capabilities which must be provided²². These include an ability to support governance and decision making, the ability to provide mutual rewards, the presence of norms for establishing trust, and a combination of administration and organisational alignment that fosters shared action. Vangen and Huxham offer a similar list, identifying the need to manage a range of activities including shared aims, trust, culture, and knowledge transfer.²³

Five Core Capabilities of Any Successful Collaboration

Merging the input from researchers and our hands-on experience, we propose that it is possible to look at any collaborative strategy through the lens of five interlocking organisational capabilities. Each collaboration, regardless of its strategic form, must find a way to deliver these capabilities in order to thrive.

1. **Align Goals:** Define what the collaboration will do. Establish the purpose of the work and identify which opportunities are worthy of being pursued. Provide a unifying narrative for the collaboration's work.
2. **Architect Responsibility and Reward:** Architect a structure of actors and roles that will sustainably create value. Allocate work and reward amongst various actors, so that all participants are incentivised to fulfill their responsibilities.
3. **Establish Trust:** Establish a foundation of confidence that others will act as promised. Develop ways for different actors to trust in the predictability of other's work. Provide a mechanism for resolving disputes.
4. **Integrate Work:** Provide efficient ways to hand-off work between actors. Develop common forms of content and establish shared processes. Provide ways to translate differences in approach when necessary.
5. **Manage and Respond:** Take all the prior capabilities and use them to operate. Provide a way to reflect upon and measure performance and respond appropriately to shortfalls and opportunities.

²² Thomson, A. M., Perry, J., Miller, T. (2008): 'Linking Collaboration Processes and Outcomes – foundations for advancing empirical theory'; from 'Big Ideas for Collaborative Public Management', Blomgren Bingham, L. & O'Leary, R. (eds).

²³ Vangen, S. & Huxham, C. (2010): 'Introducing the theory of collaborative advantage'; from 'The New Public Governance? Emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance'; Osborne, S (ed).



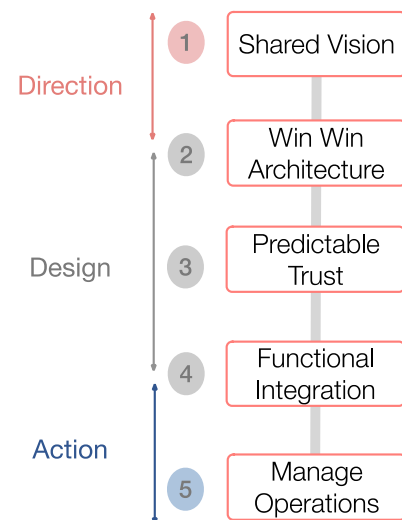
Our premise is that these five core capabilities are, at least at a high level, both necessary and sufficient for any organisational form to create value. If an organisation, regardless of its type, can deliver on this list of capabilities it should be well positioned to establish a mission and create value through the ongoing effort of its participants.

Together, these form a MECE model, which means that the elements are mutually exclusive (ME), in that they can't overlap with one another, as well as comprehensively exhaustive (CE), in that they must fully cover the possibilities of the subject area. It's like a tile floor for a problem, each of the parts addresses a different unique issue and there are no gaps in coverage. Our interviews with actual leaders of collaborations made it clear that they had to perform across this entire spectrum of core capabilities.

While much of the research into organisational design focuses on one or another of these functions, Gray and Wood suggested that the theories available for understanding collaboration encompass a number of different approaches but together do not produce a comprehensive theoretical foundation²⁴. This helps explain why building an effective collaboration is so difficult. The leaders of a proposed collaboration must dance to many different tunes. Failure to realise any one of the core capabilities has the potential to undermine the entire initiative's success.

Let's look more closely at these five core functions.

Core Capabilities for a Successful Collaboration



Core Function #1: Align on Shared Goals and Guardrails

Organisations need to decide what they are going to do, and just as importantly, what they will not do. In its learnings on collaboration at national and international levels, the Emergency Capacity Building (ECB) project, a collaborative project to improve humanitarian response effectiveness between 2005 and 2013, promoted the importance of 'ensuring alignment'²⁵. The report on collaboration learnings highlighted both the need to ensure internal alignment within a collaborating entity due to risks presented by staff turnover and waning interest ("you need to ensure that all levels of the organisation are clearly and consistently behind the effort") and between the collaborating entities ("there must be agreement as to why the process of consortium-building is needed, what shared problems you are trying to solve and where the relationship is going").

Defining common objectives and assuring alignment among the various members of the collaboration were key elements of successful country-level collaborations as defined by the ECB. Its report on collaboration was clear in stating that "having clear aims and objectives is a must for a country collaboration, as is the demonstrated ability to deliver results". The report also captured learning that demonstrated the importance of ensuring alignment, within agencies (relating to the purpose of the collaboration) and between collaborators. The report stated "if you want to build a consortium then you need to ensure that all levels of the organisation are clearly and consistently behind the effort.... Alignment is also needed among the agencies taking part... There must be agreement about why the process of consortium-building is needed, what shared problems you are trying to solve, and where the relationship is going."

There are two aspects of this direction setting. The first is a 'goal', which tells participants in an organisation where they are going. It is a definition of what success looks like. There is also a need to define what the organisation will not do and what constrains its actions while pursuing the goal. We will call these limits to behaviour 'guardrails', since they limit how and where the organisation can be directed. In many cases, these guardrails will be framed as principles that ground an organisation's work irrespective of context.

In an article reflecting on case studies undertaken on the Start Network over a number of years, Marieke de Wal reflects upon the balancing of expectations around goal in stating that "it is likely that those involved will want more

²⁴ Gray, B & Wood, D.J. (1991); Collaborative Alliances: Moving From Practice to Theory; Journal of Applied Behavioural Science, Vol. 27, No.1, March 1991, p3-22

²⁵ ECB (2012): 'What We Know About Collaboration: The ECB Country Consortium Experience'

from a collaborative mechanism than they expect from a more conventional (single agency) mechanism – otherwise why go through the struggles or the transaction costs involved in making a collaboration work?"²⁶

Core Function #2: Define Architecture - Structure and Rewards

Once a goal has been set for an organisation, the collaboration founders need to determine how the organisation will be configured to deliver a solution to their chosen problem. Responsibilities and relationships need to be assigned to each participant and appropriate incentives need to be provided for each actor.

Ultimately this is like architecting a machine where all the parts needed to perform are present. There must be a complete and consistent construction of roles where each actor is qualified and motivated to take on their responsibilities. This extends out beyond the direct participants to include additional stakeholders such as the investors who will want to see their investments well spent and key participants in the community.

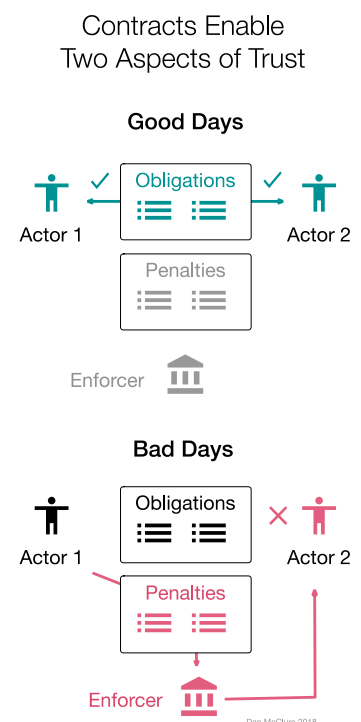
Allocations of power and responsibility can often end up as points of contention. In their article sharing learning on collaboration in humanitarian action, Janz et al state the importance of documenting agreements clarifying organisations' participation to assist in the establishment of a collaborative entity and to resolve any disagreements that may arise.²⁷ Thomson et al state that "organisations enter collaborative agreements to achieve their own goals, negotiating among competing interests and brokering coalitions among competing value systems, expectations, and self-interested motivation"²⁸ and so it is in accepting and acknowledging this that each party has its own agenda and reward needs that appropriate architecture can be designed.

As with any issues that involve power there can be concerns about fairness and balance. Janz et al recommend explicitly confronting these issues, clarifying roles through decision-making agreements, in order to demonstrate equity in shared leadership and ensure decision-making is not determined by actor size.

Core Function #3: Trust and Compliance

Trust was identified as another critical component of successful collaborations by the Emergency Capacity Building project. In the prior function, collaboration builders established mutually acceptable roles and responsibilities for each actor. In this challenge, there is now a need to build confidence that each actor will perform their assigned duties.

This may seem like a soft informal feature of a collaboration, yet it repeatedly seen as crucial to success. In research carried out by McKinsey and Company on behalf of the ECB Project, trust is identified as a vital ingredient for effective emergency-response teams, and that creating a 'culture of trust' amongst staff



²⁶ De Wal, M. (2016): 'A review of the Start Network case studies By Marieke de Wal , Topic: [Action Enquiry](#) , 17 Jun 2016, 'Betwixt & Between' Journal of Partnership Brokering, Issue #6

²⁷ Janz, Soi & Russell (2009); 'Collaboration & Partnership in Humanitarian Action', Humanitarian Practice Network

²⁸ Thomson, Perry & Miller (2008): 'Linking Collaboration Processes and Outcomes - Foundations for Advancing Empirical Theory; from 'Big Ideas for Collaborative Public Management', Blomgren Bingham, L. & O'Leary, R. (eds).

was the second most important factor in creating effective emergency-response teams.²⁹

Two strategies can be applied to deal with the challenge of trust. The first, presumes good days between the parties, validating a belief that each party is competent and capable of performing the work and that they are unlikely to take advantage of dishonest opportunities. If we say that we trust someone to pick up something valuable for us, we are saying in effect that we believe that they are both able to perform the task and that they will do as they promise.

In the aforementioned HPN article, Janz et al reflected that although building trust was not typically a recognised goal in collaborations, once trust between agencies was established it became the most significant factor in timely and effective collaborative humanitarian responses. Specifically, with established trust it becomes easier to agree on joint actions, processes, resource investment and tools. The authors also pressed that “*building partnerships takes time. Results require commitment, patience and persistence.*” Vangen and Huxham propose that trust can be built incrementally and that it can be helpful to imagine a trust loop whereby modest successes built gradually (small-wins approach), reinforce trusting attitudes and providing a basis for more ambitious collaboration.³⁰

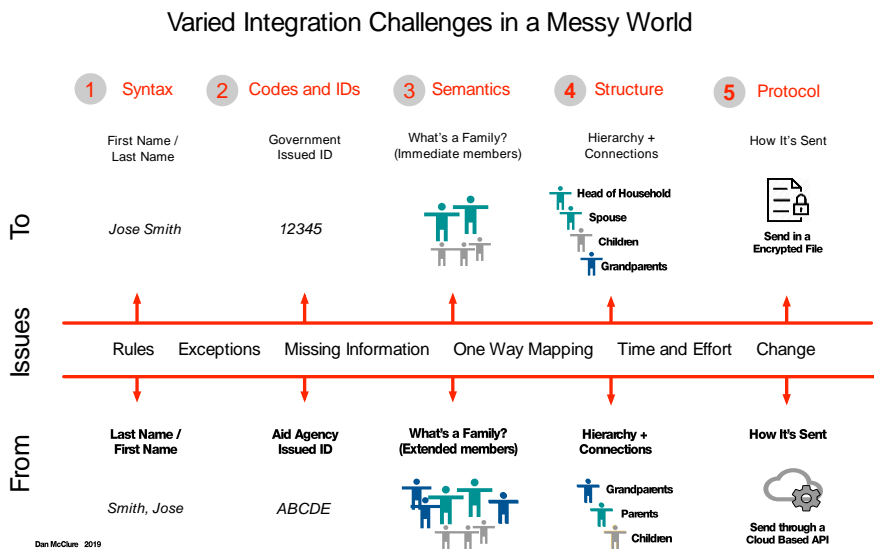
A second strategy is needed for less happy days. Here, detailed specifications of responsibilities are augmented the first with penalties and compensation for any failure to perform as promised. This is the purpose of contracts. A contract does not actually assure that a party will absolutely deliver on a particular promise, but instead, the contract specifies what happens if there is a failure to perform. It’s a stick, often enforced by an authority figure, that punishes failures and makes the rest of the parties whole. Formal contracts aren’t the only option for providing discipline to trust relationships. Other sticks, such as the loss of reputation, may be used to deal with violations of trust in other circumstances.

Core Function #4: Integration of Activities

Creating roles and responsibilities supported by trusted terms for action within lays the groundwork for different members to work together. This must then be operationalised by interconnecting the individuals and systems within the various collaborating organisations. The collaboration must build shared processes and the necessary plumbing to allow distinct organisations to pass resources, actions, and information back and forth.

Enabling efficient and consistent interoperability is a complicated activity. Details matter and small differences can undermine the organisation’s ability to perform effectively. When diverse actors assemble to perform an activity together, they typically arrive with different approaches to shared tasks and different ways of viewing similar types of information. For instance, an organisation with its roots in the United States might express its standards for volumetric measures in Imperial (or ‘English’) Units while organisations working elsewhere might naturally use Metric Units.

This simple translation of standards is only one of many different challenges when data and processes are integrated. For example, it is even harder to catch errors when the meaning of terms are interpreted in different ways. For example, one organisation may define ‘family’ broadly to include anyone living in a shared home, while others may find that for their purpose ‘family’ is limited to immediate relatives. The diagram highlights the wide range of



²⁹ ECB (2007): Building Trust in Diverse Teams: The toolkit for emergency response'; Oxfam GB
³⁰ Vangen, S. & Huxham, C. (2010): 'Introducing the theory of collaborative advantage'; from 'The New Public Governance? Emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance'; Osborne, S (ed).

consistency challenges that integration efforts face.

In the humanitarian sector, efforts to deliver cash in collaborative structures such as the Lebanon Cash Consortium have highlighted the numbers of different aspects of inter-operability that may need to be considered (including programming standards, monitoring activities, staff competencies, data management), and also the challenges of some aspects that require alignment on a granular level, in particular around data management. A lessons learnt report on the Lebanon Cash Consortium highlighted the challenges of creating a web-based shared inter-operable information management system amongst the members that created a smooth flow of data regarding cash transfer payments and beneficiary data, meeting donor requirements and workable across 30 different involved agencies.³¹ In doing so, the system was solving a critical integration challenge but it required consensus and investment to implement.

The ECB lessons on collaboration emphasise a patient approach to operational integration, finding that alignment requires dialogue and consensus-building stating that *“each participating organisation will need to consider alignment – and on occasion re-alignment – of their relevant standard operating procedures and strategies”*³²

This is not a small ask. The ‘right’ way to integrate systems or unify processes is often far from clear. Each organisation will have its own reason and need for certain approaches in its own business operation. Seeking to merge these with others forces hard negotiations around common approaches. Even if consensus can be achieved, any process and system that is modified to engage with the collaboration will potentially conflict with legacy operations that remain within each individual organisations.

Core Function #5: Operational Management

Finally, there comes a time for action. The many diverse actors within a collaboration must work together to perform activities that deliver on the collaboration’s goals. This requires a unified operating capacity across organisations that in most situations are autonomous, making their own choices in response to information in the world around them.

This real-time operational management comes in multiple forms. Routine operations require ongoing monitoring to keep functions on track, while deviations from expected conditions require reasoned adjustments. Operational management will from time to time need to provide:

- **Consistent Operation:** Manage the ongoing performance of the organisations’ activities, keeping them in line with the original design
- **Operational Adjustment:** Respond to shifts in need. For example, align resources with needs when spikes or slumps in activity occur.
- **Exception Management / Pivots:** Respond to changes in circumstances or collaborations capabilities. When something goes wrong, determines a solution and assures that it is implemented.
- **Collaborator Commitment:** Assess the ongoing commitment and satisfaction of organisations to continue working as part of the collaboration. Reflect upon collaborator openness in order to strengthen trust and optimise the endeavour.

Effective decision-making requires a range of supporting capabilities across the collaboration. There must be an ability to ‘listen’ to operational conditions, channel that insight through a decision-making process, and then take appropriate action, so that how the cycle of listen, decide and act is implemented across the collaboration can vary substantially depending on the strategy. Crespín and Moser observe that simple data reporting is not enough to implement this capability: *“Partnerships that adopt an agile approach improve their probability of success ... but too often, partnerships gather data with no clear sense of how the partners should interpret it in useful ways that drive learning and action.”*³³

³¹ CaLP (2018): ‘The State of the World’s Cash’; Lebanon – Designing & Implementing Operational Models for Cash at Scale

³² ECB (2012): ‘What We Know About Collaboration: The ECB Country Consortium Experience’

³³ Crespín, R. & Moser, H. (2018): Six proven strategies for a backbone organisation, Stanford Social Innovation Review

Part 3 – Implementing the Strategies

To actually implement a collaboration, we now have to select an overall strategy that matches the type of problem we face (Integrated, Side by Side, Networked). Then it will be necessary to implement the five capabilities (Goal Setting, Organisational Architecture, Trust, Integration, and Operational Management) to provide end to end support for the selected strategy.

There are three criteria that should guide this work.

- **Strategic Alignment:** The strategy and problem need to be aligned with each other. For example, a collaboration providing complicated services through an Integrated strategy will want to emphasise tightly integrated processes and stable goals. In contrast, the Network Collaborator who is working in a dynamic environment with shifting needs and opportunities will want to be more resilient in their approach, building flexibility into their Architecture, Trust, Integration, and Operations.
- **Functional Completeness:** All five of the core functions are necessary for a successful collaboration. The five functions represent a set of end-to-end capabilities needed to create a viable collaboration, so getting just a few of the parts right won't be enough. For example, a well architected collaboration won't work if it lacks integration between the parts, nor will operational management be possible if there is no foundation of trust.
- **Functional Consistency:** Finally, each of the pieces must fit consistently with the others. They not only need to serve the same strategic goal, they must do so in a way that the details each function build and connect with the on the other elements of the collaboration.

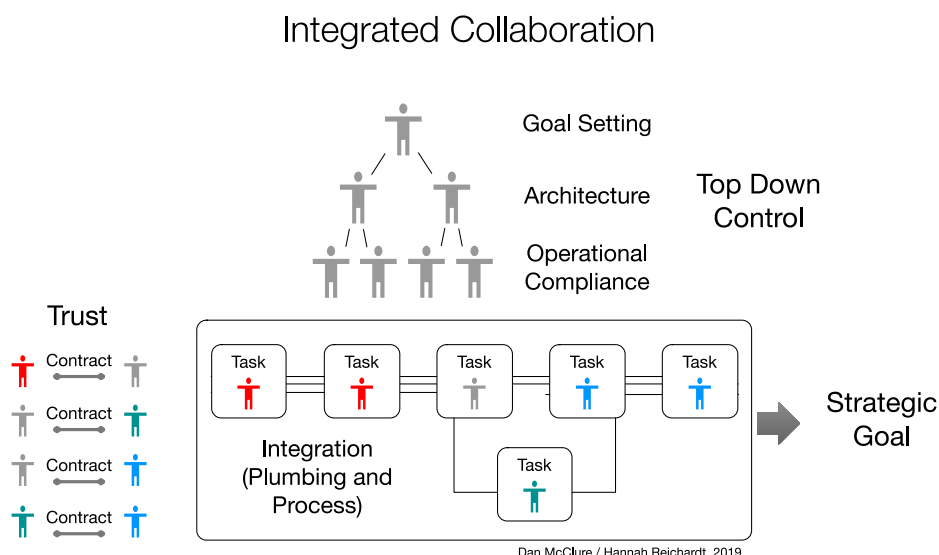
With these three requirements in mind we have a foundation for shaping different forms of collaboration that meet specific real-world needs. Let's look at examples of how aligned, complete, consistent designs might be developed for the previously described Integrated, Side by Side, and Networked collaboration strategies.

Implementing an Integrated Collaboration

Strategy Summary: This collaboration seeks to solve the problem of delivering complicated services at scale, while assuring a high degree of consistency and quality. Think of tightly integrated supply chain with multiple actors. The tasks being performed may be complicated, but the environment is generally stable, which allows processes and activities to be engineered in detail and optimised over time.

Key Skill: Process Engineering

Design Insight: This form of collaboration can take advantage of a stable challenge, rigorously planning and executing complicated functions, even if they involve multiple organisations. A clearly defined executive team can be placed in charge of direction and operations, since every organisation is contributing to a single integrated process. This allows roles and responsibilities to be clearly defined in contracts, as well as enabling formal system integration and well-defined operational processes.



1 – Executive-Led Goals and Guardrails

For Integrated Collaborations, multiple actors make distinct contributions to a well understood, but complicated operation. It is possible to centralise command and control, setting organisation-wide goals and guardrails as an executive function with strong powers. The organisation's Mission, Vision, and Code of Conduct often emerge from executive level debate, with little or no attempt to debate or update them with bottom up feedback.

Of course, this doesn't preclude collaboration leaders from obtaining input from every actor or others lower in the hierarchy of participating organisations. As long as there is consensus on the goals to be achieved, broadly engaging rest of the collaboration may be seen as an optional courtesy, which may not required by the nature of the problem being solved.

There may also need to be debate regarding guardrails (what the collaboration will not do). In some cases established practices will often have already established those limits. However, if participants from outside the domain are involved, or if the subject is still being explored by within the humanitarian sector, it may still be necessary to explicitly shape and state these restrictions. For example, humanitarian sector actors often feel a strong need to make those outside the sector aware of the impact of guiding humanitarian principles.

2 – Engineered Architecture and Defined Rewards

Integrated collaborations can borrow the structure of traditional business organisations that implement large integrated operations. With a clearly defined goal and process in hand, decision-making and reporting can typically flows along formal channels, which are codified through organisational models and formal business processes.

Integrated collaborations can rely on detailed specifications and formal structure to define organisational functions. The collaboration can be engineered to perform the task at hand, with the architecture made visible to all the parties. This makes it possible to establish well-defined roles that are visible across the collaboration. Since, each party explicitly knows their responsibility, rewards can be assigned to each participant based on their commitments.

3 - Trust Via Formal Contracts

With clear well-defined obligations, contracts can be developed as needed between any participants. This well-defined commitment comes with a cost. Negotiating a detailed contract that covers the wide variety of circumstances and expected responses can be demanding and time consuming. For example, donor consulting contracts in the humanitarian sector can exceed 80 pages.

Still such formal agreements minimise the need for pre-existing long-term relationships or the need to build a personal bond of trust. With some due diligence into questions of past behaviour and competence, the contract takes care of how the collaboration will deal with any shortfall in performance.

Finding the appropriate party to hold these contracts can be an issue too. This may require careful consideration of the legal governance issues associated with setting up contracts and other formal relationships.

4 – Integration with Formal Standards and Connections

Because Integrated Collaborations emerge in stable environments where organisational activities have to be consistently repeated over and over while keeping costs low, it is possible to invest in high performance integration. The challenge is to wire the actions of organisational participants together as effectively as possible, so that their diverse operations are seamless.

Integrated Collaborations leverage their stable environment and detailed process knowledge to consistently execute complicated. This connection might be captured in software systems or through well-defined business process such reflected in ISO 9000 documentation.

Detailed system and process integration is expensive to implement. As a result, it is best done once and modified infrequently. This encourages the creation of standards. If a similar activity is going to be performed by several

different participants, then there are advantages to settling on a single standard which would allow the interface to be constructed and deployed the same way for each connection.

5 – Managing Tightly and Responding Slowly

Consistency and repeatability are the underlying foundation of success for an Integrated Collaboration. The entire model is based on the belief that a certain set of activities can be mastered and then replicated to efficiently produce consistent results. As a result, the default operational target is strict performance of established processes and results. This supports compliance-based monitoring which views variation from target performance as a failure. The inflexible application of Logical Frameworks ('Log Frames') in the Humanitarian sector are an example of this kind of target-based measurement of success. Breaking what already works is a real danger, so for the manager of an Integrated Collaboration change is best made in small incremental steps after careful analysis and testing.

While it's easy to paint these managers as risk-adverse Luddites, this antipathy to change is a realistic response to an organisational mission rooted in consistently delivering low cost, high-quality results. Cautious measured change, not speed, is the priority.

In this world, even well-intentioned change agents can be dangerous rock throwers. In this environment, there are several strategies for managing change. In one model, the executive team act as the source of changes in direction based on periodic planning sessions. They provide course corrections which are then dutifully incorporated within the detailed planning of individual projects and operations. Since these course corrections often occur only annually, it is clearly a slow way to steer the ship.

A second model is to allow controlled change that originates from non-top down channels. This was the insight that W. H. Demming made with his factory optimisation strategies. Pioneered by Toyota as Total Quality Management (TQM) and eventually adopted throughout the manufacturing industry, this model of change leverages suggestions for change from throughout the organisation. Detailed operating metrics are leveraged to compare the impact on performance before and after the change. Ultimately, sanctioned reviewers and specialists analyse the impact, evaluate the business cases and account for dependencies on existing systems.

Summary – Exceptional but Rigid Performance

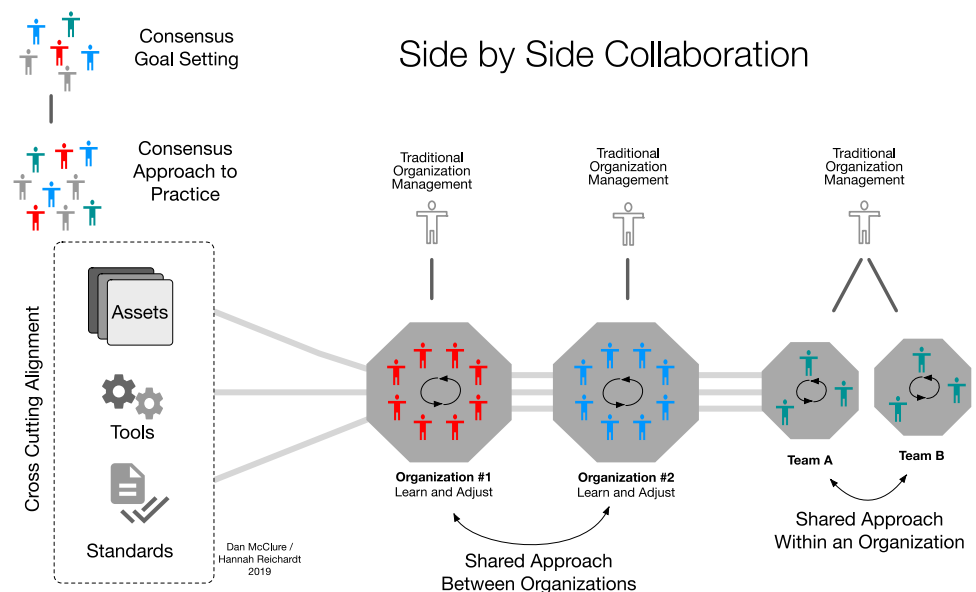
These are robust high-performance collaborations that do what they do well. When faced with the need to provide radically different services or when confronted with disruptive competitors, a tightly Integrated Collaboration will have a difficulty mustering the will and capacity to abandon their core strength in status quo operations. It's common to see these organisations doubling down on existing strategies, trying to become even more of what they were before, even as their products and services become increasingly irrelevant to the rest of the world.

Implementing a Side by Side Collaboration

Strategy Summary: This collaboration seeks to deliver a consistent approach to a challenging activity when multiple actors are working side by side. Good examples are the humanitarian sector's Cluster Approach or a Management Consulting company. Each organisation or team may operate with relative autonomy, but there are shared standards and processes designed to consistently deliver best practices.

Key Skill: Consensus-Building

Design Insight: This form of collaboration engages multiple organisations within a loose collaboration. The goal is not necessarily tight operational integration, but a shared general approach. While the collaboration may adopt standardised tools and some operational coordination across the actors, each team/organisation may modify and tailor their work to their specific context.



1 – Consensus Based Goals and Guardrails

When compared to the Integrated Collaboration, this is far messier form of shared action. Instead of a concisely specified goal that every actor must work to support, the collection of organisations in the collaboration may each have somewhat different perspectives of priorities and needs. In this environment, there is less of a natural justification for the top-down control of an executive. Instead, the primary actors within a Side by Side Collaboration are likely to see themselves as equals, expecting to have each of their unique perspectives heard and respected.

This creates a need to negotiate the goals and purposes of the collaboration. In a theme that will be repeated through all five core capabilities, there will be a need to manage trade-offs between participants that have legitimately different perspectives and needs. Creating a sense of participation and ownership at this early stage will be important since there will be many demands for difficult detailed discussion of complex, potentially divisive issues ahead.

The Joint Standards Initiative is an example of this. Discussions amongst actors in the humanitarian sector over a number of years led to a general acknowledgement that there were too many unaligned standards for effectiveness and accountability being used and that consolidating these could strengthen their uptake and impact. In 2013, the collaborative Joint Standards Initiative was founded by HAP, Sphere and People In Aid to address this, which ultimately led to creation of the Core Humanitarian Standard in 2014. The goal of creating a coherent standard had to be held front of centre throughout this consultative and collaborative process, which involved more than 60 different organisations.

2 - Architecture for Acceptable Standardisation

Side by Side collaborators can feel as if they are serving two bosses. Most organisations will have their own leadership, processes, and standards. These will have been developed to serve their primary organisational missions. At the same time, the Side by Side Collaboration will provide a set of cross cutting practices, tools, and guidelines that reflects the shared beliefs of the group.

Unlike regulations, which are legally imposed by outside governmental bodies, standards and tools created by a collaboration will often be subject to debate within member organisations. Ideally, each organisation will still be

able to bring its own unique perspective and capabilities to the challenge area. If the goal was simply to create organisations that clone each other's behaviour, then there would be little reason for having multiple organisations at all. The virtue of having diverse organisations dealing with a single challenge is that they can each apply common guidance in their own way, ideally learning and fine tuning their application of the shared tools.

This leaves the leaders of a Side by Side Collaboration to perform a tricky balancing act. They must build credibility and legitimacy for the collaboration, without becoming so dictatorial that the rich diversity of the participating organisations is lost. Crespín and Moser see this tension as both a challenge and a potential benefit. *“Partnerships can be especially tricky because they ask us to create and maintain dual loyalties, staying loyal to our home organisation and having additional loyalty to the multi-stakeholder collaboration (MSC). Not only is this complicated; it almost inevitably leads to conflict when the needs of the home organisation come up against the needs of the MSC. Great MSCs harness this energy, growing from it rather than being weakened by it.”*³⁴

3 – Trust for Shared Practice

Side by Side Collaborations have to establish at least two levels of trust. There must be trust among those who are working together to establish a shared view of the challenge and the best response. Personalities and culture can play a big part in this, with very different people and perspectives having to come together around complex and challenging problems. This level of trust can be built by effective engagement among the participants in the room and their later skilled advocacy within their individual organisations.

This is far from easy work but establishing a mutual creative trust to build shared standards and tools is just the beginning. Adopting and applying complex cross-cutting approaches to key business operations requires a higher level of trust and verification. The Collaboration must determine what level of authority it will have to mandate and measure adoption. Trusting a collaborative group to develop suggested standards is far different from organisations and their teams granting a level of sovereignty to collaborative group over their adoption and performance. If this level of trust is to exist, there will need to be broad organisational buy-in along with legitimate and transparent validation of actual practice across the collaboration members.

4 – Shared (But Flexible) Integration

It's obvious that the inflexible integration strategies that hard wire a particular approach, the kind of high-efficiency connections favoured by Integrated Collaborations, are likely to be a barrier to delivering customised value. The good news is that tight integration is not the goal of most Side by Side Collaborations. Instead, they seek to provide broadly consistent high-quality results across many organisations.

The individual organisations that make up a Side by Side collaboration have a collection of shared goals, processes, and tools, but still need to tailor their efforts to the unique needs and challenges of different clients and contexts. While they are not re-inventing every aspect of their service or product, they must provide tailored solutions that are well aligned with a particular need and context.

One way to implement this seemingly conflicted strategy is to provide high level guidance that can be implemented by each organisation according to their specific needs and perspective. There are several challenges with this approach. With only general instruction to direct them, the resulting implementations may or may not interoperate with each other. Perhaps an even greater danger is that subtle differences in approach may be hidden in what otherwise looks like similar compatible implementations.

Defining the right level of detail needed for implementation is difficult. As we've seen, broad guidelines may not provide sufficient guidance to align practice. On the other hand, extensively detailed lists of criteria may place such a long list of conflicting demands that practical application is impossible. Key gaps may exist in either case. There will be a strong incentive among the members of the collaboration to avoid dealing with some of the most contentious issues, so that the very point that requires a well negotiated answer, is needed is the one where collaborators fail to achieve consensus.

³⁴ Crespín, R. & Moser, H. (2018): Six proven strategies for a backbone organisation, Stanford Social Innovation Review

Leaders of a Side by Side Collaboration respond to these challenges with a variety of resources:

- **Frameworks** – providing a way of viewing the problem space
- **Standards** – mutually agreed upon choices for key elements of the solution
- **Best Practice Models** – samples of good practice that guide implementation
- **Tools** – ready to use resources (may be built into other custom tools)
- **Measures** – approaches for measuring both compliance and quality

5 – Managing Consistency and Quality

In Side by Side Collaborations, there may be an opportunity to coordinate the efforts of organisations that offer similar capabilities. For example, when already-established and newly-arriving aid agencies are responding to a crisis, it is possible to coordinate specific sectors and geographical areas of the response through the Side by Side Collaboration of the cluster approach utilised by the humanitarian coordination system. This is made possible because the different actors are still working from a shared perspective of the challenges involved and the types of capabilities needed to perform the work.

This coordination is most easily performed when there is a clear framework that can be used to allocate activities, such as geographic area. Softer boundaries, such as service to particular groups of individuals, can become more difficult to negotiate and apply. Many guides for collaboration strongly advocate communication across members and its clear in these situations why frequent and open connections would be important.

Lessons from a large-scale cash aid programming consortium in Lebanon for Syrian refugees, the Lebanon Cash Consortium (LCC) highlighted the trade-off between shared operational governance and flexibility in the face of changing needs. According to the impact assessment, “*for the most part, this (governance) system and segregation of duties (amongst member NGOs) worked well. However, a review highlighted the importance of adequate planning and investment at the outset to ensure such structures, systems and standard operating procedures are in place before operations begin... whilst the management structure supported inclusive and consultative processes between members, it was not conducive to rapid decision-making on critical strategic issues*”³⁵.

There is also a need to look across the participants of the collaboration and ask how well the collaboration is doing at encouraging consistency and quality of performance. Using integrated data gathering and reporting can provide valuable feedback both to organisations working within the collaboration as well as the sponsors of the work.

Feedback and measurement models, particularly when there are varying forms of implementation on the ground, are difficult to develop and use. There will be a tendency to push reporting up to larger aggregate activities, since the details may be different from organisation to organisation. However, aggregated reporting, is no guarantee of accuracy since there may be other variations in approach, definition, and timing that distort the results.

Summary – Tension Between Shared and Independent Approach

A Side by Side Collaboration is a loosely-formed collection of actors who are simultaneously pulled in two different directions. They seek to build quality and consistency in complicated domains of practice, while at the same time empowering each organisation to take advantage of its unique capabilities and perspective. This push pull between consistency and flexibility shows up in every aspect of the collaboration, goals, architecture, trust, integration, and operation.

Unlike the rigorously defined Integrated Collaboration, there is no one best answer for the design and operation of a Side by Side Collaboration. They represent a continuously difficult form of shared action that must be continually nurtured and supported as it walks the line between shared approach and independent operation.

³⁵ CaLP (2018): The State of the World's Cash Report: Cash Transfer Programming in Humanitarian Aid; February 2018

Implementing a Networked Collaboration

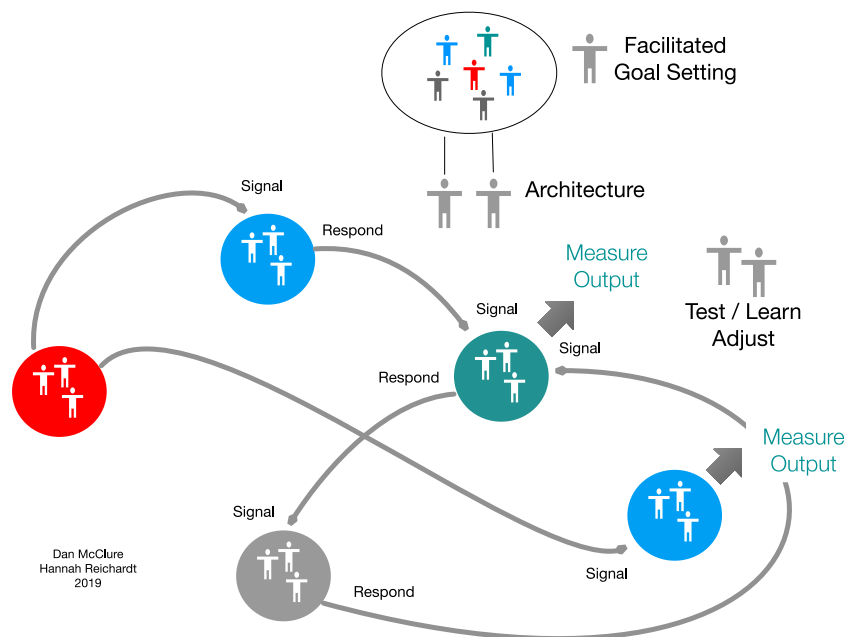
Strategy Summary: This loosely structured collaboration provides sophisticated new functions that are still evolving in response to shifting challenges. While expert capabilities are needed at scale, there is little time to build out extensive formal integrations or negotiate broadly shared practices. Think of an experienced football team moving the ball down the field. Actors continually respond to events, challenges, and opportunities with new forms of cooperation.

Key Skill: Systems Architecture

Design Insight: The fact that problems are not well understood and still lack standard practices creates an opportunity to leverage different contributors in a loose network.

Connections are lightweight and flexible, as is the roster of actors. The network may be dynamically redesigned by its participants without formal top-down control or consensus across the whole range of participants.

Network Collaboration



1 – Story Based Goals and Guardrails

Goals must serve a particularly challenging set of needs in a Networked Collaboration. They must simultaneously provide a shared vision among the participants in the collaboration as a way to align their independent efforts and drive shared action. Yet, this must be done with leeway for adjustment and pivots as the circumstances surrounding the collaboration shift and evolve. This will tend to push collaboration leaders into acts of storytelling rather than detailed specifications.

Clody Wright from ACAPS points out the importance to providing collaborators with a reason to collaborate. This could include a strong compelling story of the problem's nature, why it matters, and how it might be solved through joint action. This shared story is more than just a broad mission statement, since it must serve as a compelling actionable tool, guiding an ongoing stream of choices across multiple actors in a changing world.

Developing a shared understanding of an emerging complex challenge is difficult under the best of circumstances but is made worse by limited shared context and perspective among the shifting collaboration membership. Clody Wright shared that *“language can be huge barrier to collaboration. People don't realise that we're talking about the same thing but with different terms”*.

Unlike other more static forms of collaboration, this goal setting will not be a one-time activity, done at the beginning of the collaboration and then stuck up on the wall. There will be a need to continually refresh and retell the story.

2 – Architect Networked Roles and Responsibility

A Networked Collaboration can be a built to purpose web of interconnections. An imaginative architect of this type of collaboration can tailor the levels of authority and how roles and responsibilities are allocated across of a networked of relationships.

This effort benefits from strong leadership. Provan and Kenis (2008) call out the incorrect common assumption that with collaborative networks, governance (with the implication of hierarchy and control) is inappropriate. They state that for “*goal-directed organisational networks with a distinct identity, some form of governance is necessary to ensure participants engage in collective and mutually supportive action, that conflict is addressed, and that network resources are acquired and utilised efficiently and effectively.*”³⁶

Provan and Kenis describe three models of collaboration governance. These include (a) a single organisation member that takes a leadership role (well suited to Integrated Collaborations), (b) a shared governance structure (well suited to Side by Side Collaboration), and (c) an ‘networked administrative’ entity acting as an independent collaboration leader.

This last option is particularly appropriate for Networked Collaborations. While there may not be a clear organisation that is in charge, that doesn’t eliminate the need for active building of connections and negotiation of roles backed by a strong consistent vision. Members may come and go and the purpose may shift in response to new opportunities. Having a dedicated leader and team who are immersed in these challenges provides a much-needed combination of sustained focus and broad perspective. A designated organisation can also help provide a formal landing place for funding, legal standing to engage productively in the world, and a host of supporting services ranging from legal services to accounting systems.

How are roles and responsibilities architected within a network? Participants are expected to each bring unique skills to the collaboration, as if each organisation was a LEGO brick that could be assembled with other brick in different ways. This diversity of capabilities and business models is a powerful advantage when working to solve complex problems, since it provides a diverse toolkit of skills and resources to those shaping the network.

It also increases the chance that each individual actor may have a different incentive for participating in the joint action, even as they contribute to a common overall mission. It’s a useful rule to assume that no one works for free. Even in volunteer initiatives, there is some form of personal or social reward. Sustainable organisations of any type find a way for everyone who is contributing value to receive a reward in a form that matters to them.

A big picture vision of where skills and rewards must be leveraged to guide the search for potential participants. This system-building role places particularly demands on the role of the Choreographer described in Part 4. Choreographers can act as creative leads, architecting a complex set of relationships and roles and drawing out motivations, skills and relationships that can be knit the various actors together into a functioning system.

This architectural job is not necessarily a top-down role with executive authority. The choreographer (or other leader) who knits together the network may have relatively little direct power within the network they assemble. While they develop substantial influence through their ability to shape the organisational architecture, this won’t make them ‘the boss’. They must have the ability to influence and negotiate rather than simply dictate terms as an autocratic manager.

3 – Trust – Simple or Pre-existing

A Networked Collaboration must find a way to deal with the Trust challenge that offers nimble responses in the face of a changing opportunities and needs.

One way to do this is to minimise the level of trust required. This could be done by limiting the range of functions to a familiar and well-defined menu of actions. This is what a typical restaurant does with its customers. While the ingredients in the kitchen could conceivably be used to make any number of different dishes, the actual dishes that the cook will prepare are limited to those on the menu. Beyond a certain number of well-recognised features, how well the patty is cooked and what toppings are applied, there is little need to negotiate the specification of a hamburger.

A second option is to create clusters of actors that have strong trust bonds already in place from prior experience with each other. In the book *Messy*, Tim Harford sites a study of particularly effective computer game making collaborations by De Vaan, Stark, and Vedres³⁷. They found that “*outstanding games were forged by a network of*

³⁶ Provan, K.G. & Kenis, P. (2008): Modes of Network Governance: Structure, Management and Effectiveness; Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory; Vol. 18, no. 2.

³⁷ Harford, T. (2016): *Messy: The Power of Disorder to Transform Our Lives*; Abacus.

teams... groups of people who had worked together many times before and so had trust and commitment.” This doesn’t imply that these collaborations were the same time after time. Harford goes on to point out that “the networks were also diverse, in the sense that each of these teams was different from the others, having worked on very different projects in the past.”

Even in the best of circumstances, lessons from large collaborations such as the ECB project highlight the reality that crises within the collaboration itself are to be expected and responding to them swiftly and appropriately is critical. This places a significant burden on the Choreographer and other leaders of the collaboration to actively work through these challenges even as the network is operating. Returning to Provan and Kenis (2008) *“It is the role of network facilitator to maintain trust and to build trust among participants who might not normally work together.”*³⁸ Lawyers can’t be trusted to keep all the trains on their tracks, particularly as the tracks are actively being moved about.

4 – Plug and Play Integration

Both Integrated and Side by Side Collaborations are well positioned to make long-term integration investments in the technology, processes, and training needed to repeatedly perform a specified function and deliver a consistent result. They have long timelines and can take advantage of a stable problem definition.

In contrast, the Networked Collaboration will have much more operational fluidity. The value of standardised integration is trumped by the need for organisations to contribute uniquely valuable services. The members may move in and out and even the purpose of the collaboration may be revised in a shifting world. In this dynamic environment, building connections will be difficult since both the functionality and the actors involved may change, creating an ongoing need to modify the ‘plumbing’ between organisations and teams.

Ironically, one of the common initial knee jerk reactions to this shift, is to double down on standard making to provide order to the growing chaos. Yet, forced standardisation is unlikely to work. Fortunately, strategies to enable this kind of swappable plug and play interconnection have been pioneered in the technology space.

Strategies such as Software as a Service (SAAS) or modular system development involve the creation of LEGO brick like functions which are connected by Application Program Interfaces (APIs). Functions are packaged up so that they can be accessed by a wide variety of customised tools and resources. As in the restaurant example cited earlier, each function has a limited menu of services and options that can be used tailor the service to specific needs. This loosely coupled form of integration can be extended to business organisations with modularised products or processes.

Another strategy growing in popularity is the development of ‘platforms’. These are software or business systems that offer access to a standard set of services through relatively stable connections. Multiple organisations may plug into the platform to integrate their operations, without having to build large numbers of one to one integrations.

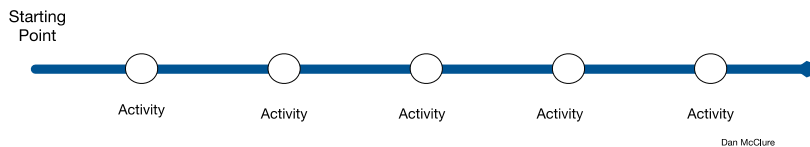
³⁸ Provan, K.G. & Kenis, P. (2008): Modes of Network Governance: Structure, Management and Effectiveness; Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory; Vol. 18, no. 2.

5 – Evolutionary Operations

There are a great many number of unknowns, uncertainties and sources of change in a Networked Collaboration. The nature of the challenge is likely to be only partially understood. The performance of a custom created network of actors is also going to be uncertain until it is tried out in practice.

As a result, an organisation with multiple actors, interwoven connections, and varied forms of reward must iteratively evolve, discovering the right approach and architecture in a step by step process. In his book on collaborative advantage, Paul Skinner points out that “*Ideal finished solutions rarely exist in business. Creating*

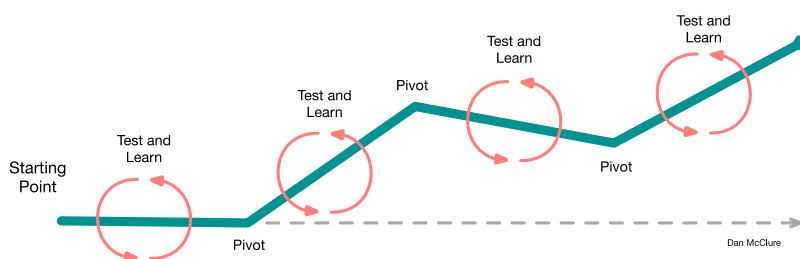
Pre-Planned Path for Change



collaborative advantage requires ongoing creativity, effort and the development of collaborative capabilities.”³⁹

Provan and Kenis (2008) agree with this, stating “*Effective network management needs to recognise and respond to internal and external network demands.*” Yet this flexibility in the midst of a changing world is not automatic as “*Evolution is not a natural process that occurs as contingency factors change - it requires a specific choice by participants and managers.*”⁴⁰

Evolving Journey of Change



through a series of steps that discover the true nature of the complex problem being solved and the ultimate best form of the collaboration. The ability to redirect the approach to a complex problem is among the most valuable capabilities associated with a dynamic Networked Collaboration.

This can be done by assembling the component LEGO brick parts of the collaboration in new ways, taking advantage of new elements and re-architecting the elements that already exist. It may also be possible to build in resilience by creating multiple options for the network in advance.

Summary – Creating Flexible Originality

Networked Collaborations are perhaps the most ambitious form of shared effort. They are best suited for complex multi-dimensional problems that shift over time. In theory they allow new capabilities to plug in a dynamic network of actors, augmenting capabilities and creating previously unavailable options and synergies.

This is hard work, but there is reason for cautious optimism. A virtual version of a LEGO based world is being implemented by software engineers, with examples of success (big SAAS or ‘software as a service’ platforms in the Cloud) and many instances of difficult practical challenges when trying to architect genuinely flexible capabilities on the fly.

Turning to the humanitarian sector, and the many other organisations that surround it, into LEGO bricks will also be far from easy. ICVA observes that “*in the future, the impetus for effective collaboration may be so great that humanitarian organisations will need to structure themselves differently.*”⁴¹ The Networked Collaboration will create an opportunity for innovation in status quo organisations, but this won’t simply be a case of revamping the workings of existing sector players. The Networked Collaboration model also opens the door to new participants and modes of action.

³⁹ Skinner, P. (2018): ‘Collaborative Advantage: How collaboration beats competition as a strategy for success’; Robinson

⁴⁰ Provan, K.G. & Kenis, P. (2008): Modes of Network Governance: Structure, Management and Effectiveness; Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory; Vol. 18, no. 2.

⁴¹ ICVA & Humanitarian Futures (2009): ‘The Future of Humanitarian Collaboration: An ICVA Perspective

Part 4 – Choreographers

The prior section emphasised differences between the implementations of three collaboration strategies. It's important to recognise these differences, since building the wrong type of functionality for a particular collaborative strategy can doom it to failure.

Yet, when looking at practical case studies of different collaborations, including collaborations that leveraged different strategies, there was at least one common theme emerged. Successful collaborations were repeatedly associated with a strong cross cutting leader who worked as an ambassador across the many stakeholders in the collaboration. ACAPS' Lars Peter Nissen⁴² called out the need for “Knitters”, individuals with a unique capacity and mindset, to form connections, curate collaborations.

The Choreographer

Formal business practices tend to overlook the crucial contribution of specific soft skills. There is often an assumption that hard work and sticking to the script of tasks and responsibilities will enable the step-wise construction of any type of business operation. Yet, during our interviews with heads of collaborative organisations it became clear that this kind of key individual leadership was a critical component of success.

In ALNAP's study of humanitarian coordination collaborations in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and The Philippines, Kim Scriven found that ‘Network’ functions were essential for success⁴³:

- **Community building:** Creating and sustaining relationships of trust
- **Convening:** Bringing together and building social capital among diverse groups of actors
- **Knowledge management:** Administering the exchange of knowledge and relevant information, ensuring coordination and shared learning
- **Amplification & advocacy:** Extending the reach and influence of individual members, and engaging with others outside the network to bring about change
- **Resource mobilisation:** Accessing and channel resources (both financial and technical), to increase the capacity and effectiveness of members
- **Implementation:** Conducting operations, coordinating the delivery of relief services, and directly implementing humanitarian programmes or projects

Collaborations, even loosely held networks or side by side consortiums, appear to need someone to ‘own the overall system’. Someone must work across the siloes that normally define business operations, reaching out to diverse groups in different organisations. These ‘choreographers’ frequently take personal responsibility for building coherent broad-based perspectives of the entire effort.

Crespin and Moser observe that “Most multi-stakeholder collaborations (MSCs) excel at vision and fail in execution. They suffer when the original altruistic vision meets the hard reality of the daily grind. A gap opens between collective strategy formulation and collective strategy execution ... Many MSCs expend great effort to identify and ground the partners in a common purpose when they first launch. Over time, the overarching vision and purpose of a collaboration can and will change. MSCs need someone to maintain a constant drumbeat, ensuring that all partners maintain a clear and consistent connection to the overarching purpose of the partnership.”⁴⁴

While a crowd of individuals acting on their specific concerns can help develop pieces of a collaboration, this broad perspective and action is not easily provided by members of a committee or representatives from multiple organisations. In our interviews it was often clear that this function was performed by a uniquely skilled and passionate individual. These ‘choreographers’ worked laterally across the members on diverse issues as they arose.

⁴² Lars Peter Nissen, July 11, 2018 Interview

⁴³ Scriven, K. (2013): “A Networked Response? Exploring national humanitarian networks in Asia; ALNAP, 2013

⁴⁴ Crespin, R. & Moser, H. (2018): Six proven strategies for a backbone organisation, Stanford Social Innovation Review

The ‘choreographer’ role uses their cross-cutting position and big picture insights, to shape solutions that creatively weave together different skills and resources. They are door openers to ideas that can help bring new candidates into the collaboration or when problems and difficulties threaten to break the collaboration apart, retell the story in a way that brings renewed commitment and patience.

A choreographer will routinely shift between challenges, addressing issues that involve both technical and interpersonal challenges. In a single day, a choreographer may work to:

- Amplify the value proposition for doubting stakeholders
- Remove barriers to progress
- Architect win-win relationships
- Establish trust and alignment
- Solve unexpected operational problems

It does not have to be an autocratic role, with power to dictate actions and responsibilities. The ability to formally command or control may be very limited. More frequently, success turns on the ability of an adroit visionary, architect and problem solver, to influence and persuade.

Supporting a Choreographer

There are often challenges associated with filling this key position and then empowering them to perform a Choreographer’s duties. In traditional business organisations with strong process and control structures this kind of free-floating big picture organisational weaver is so rare that it lacks a name.

Interestingly, the arts have many such roles with film directors, musical conductors, and dance choreographers all being asked to use insight and influence to shape collective action around a shared creative goal. For purposes of this paper, we have used the title ‘choreographer’ to refer to this cross-cutting collaboration architect.

This strong dependence on key creative roles and individuals can make traditional institutions uncomfortable. In fact, reviewers of collaboration have raised similar concerns. The ICVA / Humanitarian Futures Paper worried that “the ‘culture of collaboration’ seems to be too dependent on personalities, instead of being institutionally driven.”⁴⁵

While sympathising with the concern that key factors of success can’t be institutionalised, we don’t believe this limitation should keep organisations from pursuing and supporting highly skilled choreographers for their collaborations. Organisational leaders looking to develop a collaboration should expect to fill and support this role in ways that differ from their conventional management functions.

- **Flexibility and Big Picture Skills** – Don’t assume that someone who has been successful in traditional Top-Down Control organisation roles or as an expert in the field will be able to remake themselves into this role. Look for individuals with a history of big picture thinking, who pioneer efforts that break through boundaries and conventions.
- **Passion and Persistence** – Choreographers are largely self-motivated and must work through extensive opposition. Seek out those who have passion for the mission and the challenges they will face. In contrast, don’t worry too much about specific subject-domain knowledge. An effective choreographer will quickly learn domain knowledge. Marian Casey-Maslen from the CDAC Network shared in a collaborative organisation “there needs to be a personality to inject enthusiasm into (it).” The choreographer must champion the goal and whip up belief in the ability to get there.
- **Provide Freedom and Support** – Choreographers need freedom to act (and will quickly abandon efforts where their work is constrained and unappreciated). Provide broad levels of freedom to work across organisations and levels of leadership while at the same time providing support when necessary to enable the choreographer to keep moving forward.

Ultimately filling this role well, may be one of the most significant drivers of success for a new or growing collaboration.

⁴⁵ ICVA & Humanitarian Futures (2009): ‘The Future of Humanitarian Collaboration: An ICVA Perspective

Conclusion

The ICVA / Humanitarian Futures Paper captures the urgency of this work. Although many factors “*constrain effective collaboration, the exponential changes in the dynamics, dimensions, and types of future disaster threats will make collaboration vital not only for the survival of hundreds of millions of affected people, but also for those organisations that seek to protect and assist them. Collaborative failures of the past can no longer be afforded.*”

Our goal with this paper has been to provide a straightforward practical path for approaching the building of collaborations. It is not intended to be a comprehensive instructional manual, but rather a robust basic model for thinking about collaborations that is useful to the collaboration builder.

This has produced a few key activities, with each activity having a great deal to unpack at more detailed levels. The structure of a collaborative journey should include:

1. **Intentionally Address a Type of Problem:** Define the type of problem you’re trying to address with the collaboration. Understand its key features.
2. **Select a Collaboration Strategy:** Determine what form of collaboration is best suited to the problem.
3. **Design and Implement End-to-End Functionality:** Design and implement all five core functional capabilities (Goal Setting, Architecture, Trust, Integration, Operational Management).
4. **Provide Choreography:** Enable the entire process with a Choreographer.