



Collaboration Maturity





Collaboration is taken to imply a very positive form of working in association with others for some form of mutual benefit.

HUXAM, 1996: 1

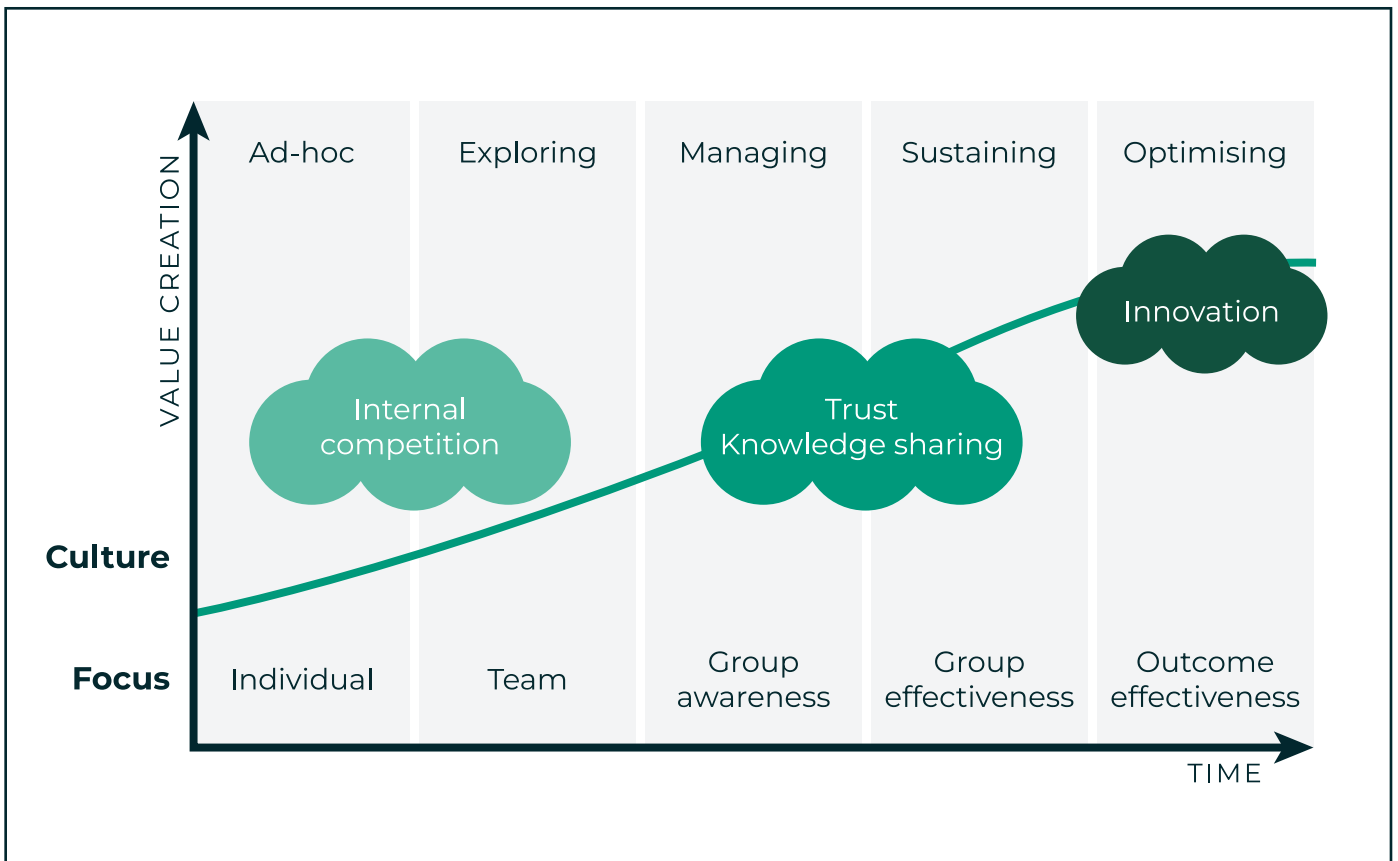
What's it all about?

Collaboration or joint working has been increasingly in the spotlight in all sectors. With the crises of recent years forcing a drive towards efficiency and performance improvement, collaboration is likely to come to the fore even more. Some public funders may even expect it of their clients. It is covered in this toolkit because:

- Inter-organisational working, partnerships, collaboration ... Call it what you will, it has already been happening for some time. It is not unusual in the creative and cultural sectors for artists to come together with venues, or music organisations to collaborate on festivals and so on
- Successful collaboration can bring real benefits. It extends resources, expertise and experience. It brings new perspectives to an opportunity or a challenge and can lead to real innovation. The whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts
- However, it can also be a challenging route to take. Issues of trust, power and control need to be carefully managed and can easily consume the project. To work effectively, members of the consortium have to give things up to gain the intended benefits – and that does not suit everyone. It can also be time consuming, slow moving and frustrating to manage

What's it for?

This tool provides a mechanism for reviewing any inter-organisational working that you may be involved with. It looks at how collaborations develop over time. Research in this area shows that inter-organisational collectives go through a number of phases: some are able to reach what might be regarded as full collaboration while others remain at a more ad hoc level (Figure 1). Being able to spot where your collaboration is positioned may help you take action to improve its effectiveness and achieve your goals.



Using the tool

Consider the following statements with regard to your inter-organisational project. Circle the ones that you think are most appropriate for the way your inter-organisational project currently operates.

1. Project organisation

- a. Our group is informal and takes each meeting as it comes
- b. Our group feels like it is still getting to grips with the issues and working through how we will operate together
- c. We have some clear guidelines for how we will work together and everyone is signed up to them
- d. We are really building on our work together and can see a long-term future to our relationships
- e. We are operating as one and understand what each of our members brings to the project. We make good use of our collective expertise and experience

2. Group behaviours

- a. The members of the group are primarily concerned with representing their organisation and gaining an advantage
- b. Some of the members work more closely together but still compete to gain benefits from the project
- c. Knowledge is carefully managed and shared between group members
- d. Knowledge is widely exchanged. Our partners talk openly and are fully aligned
- e. Everyone is committed to the group and our joint expertise and experience is allowing us to develop new approaches and solutions

3. Characteristics

- a. Our group would really be classified as a collection of individuals
- b. Members have come together to form more of a sense of being a team
- c. All the partners are aware of the nature of the group and how they contribute
- d. Everyone is working to ensure the group is as effective as possible
- e. Everyone is focused on achieving the joint outcomes we set for the project

4. Trust

- a. Everyone tries to suspend judgement of each other but there is still a degree of competition between members
- b. Trust is building as we work more closely together
- c. Trust has become well established and is expected as standard practice
- d. Trust is constantly reinforced and renewed as we work openly and honestly together
- e. Trust is fully established and allows for conflicts as well as consensus

5. Creating value

- a. Our inter-organisational project is relatively new and none of us are clear about what we are likely to gain yet
- b. We are more actively exploring the benefits of working together and have a sense of possible outcomes
- c. We have identified potential outcomes and have a plan for how they will be achieved
- d. The group is working very effectively and everyone understands the benefits of working collectively
- e. We are achieving our outcomes and optimising the contribution of all partners. We are preparing the ground for future alliances

If you answered:

Mainly A: The project is likely to be in its early stages and the partners are still getting to know each other. Ensure that you include activities which allow the group to form effectively and that you don't just focus on the project tasks. If you have been working together for some time and are still at this point, you may want to explore the group's commitment to the project. You might also consider whether the right people are involved from the partner organisations to ensure you have the capability and capacity to move ahead.

Mainly B: The group is likely to feel like a team with a common purpose. There may still be internal competition for resources, attention or getting ideas implemented. The partners are checking out each other's boundaries and exploring potential. Again, if you feel as though you have been at this stage for some time, there may be a reason why trust is not being built between the partners.

This may be to do with sensitivities between the respective organisations rather than the individuals involved; work with the group to explore this further. It may be worth considering an external facilitator at this point to help move the group on.

Mainly C: The group has probably been working together for a while now and has moved out of competition into managing its collective activity. This is a positive step and should be acknowledged. There may be a tendency to become overly task focused and concerned with managing the group.

Try and keep people focused on outcomes. If you have been here for a while, you might want to introduce some new members or use some creative problem solving to renew the energy and commitment to innovation.

Mainly D: The group is working well together and is starting to see the benefits of the collaborative approach. The members have been prepared to give things up for the benefit of the group and have a sense of achieving what they set out to do. Try and keep the process fresh and energising.

Mainly E: The project is achieving its outcomes and the members are really optimising the benefits of working collectively. You are now in the innovation stage and everyone is fully committed to the project.

At this stage of the project, the end may well be in sight so you need to be mindful of partners starting to 'check out' or get complacent about what has been achieved. Ensure everyone stays focused on the outcomes and use the opportunity to explore possible future alliances. Use this time to evaluate what has been achieved and any lessons learnt.

What's Next?

Think about another group project you have been part of. Where would you place that on the value creation scale? Did it achieve its desired outcomes? Why do you think that was the case? What might have been done differently to have made it even more successful?

Quick tips

- Remember that joint working is valuable but it is challenging
- When joining such a project, be clear about what you are prepared to give up as well as what you might gain
- Ensure that the project has realistic expectations from the outset. Not all groups make it to the full-blown collaboration and innovation

- Ensure from the outset that the partners involved have the capability and capacity to deliver the project outcomes
- Check regularly

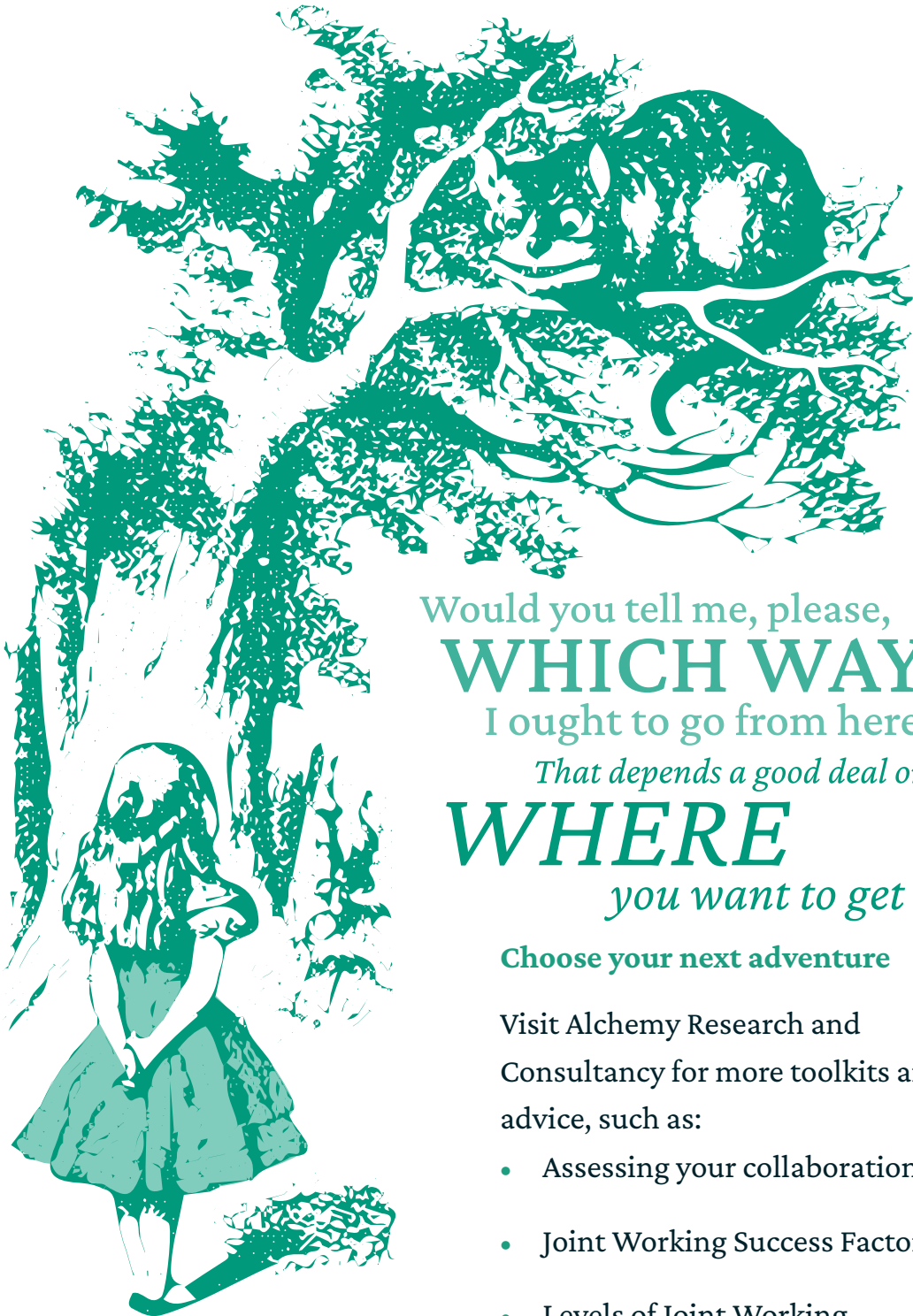
References

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Huxham, C. (Ed.). (1996). Creating Collaborative Advantage. London: Sage Publications Ltd.



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I ought to go from here?

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