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PEOPLE, TOOLS, AND PROCESSES THAT BUILD COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

November 2015

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INTRODUCTION

Collaboration allows partners to accomplish together that which cannot be achieved alone. As a strategy to solve shared problems or to meet common challenges, collaboration is an oft-celebrated tool across many sectors. The point of collaboration is not to join forces because it feels good or because it is easy; the point of collaboration is to join forces because the anticipated end result clearly relates to the shared purpose and goals of the participants.

Yet, effective and efficient collaborations can be excruciatingly difficult to develop, implement, and sustain. Work with multiple stakeholders requires that facilitators help to create clear expectations, to foster information sharing, to ensure follow through on problem-solving, and to track progress. Facilitating collaboration requires organizing all stakeholders around a common purpose that is congruent with desired outcomes and intersecting ambitions. This is hard, slow-moving, highly iterative work.

Most individuals who engage in collaborative work genuinely believe that work is valuable to their organizations. Yet, few are trained to engage in this work effectively. This white paper offers conceptual and practical tools to help collaborators and their collaborations succeed. Our goal is to provide practitioners, administrators, assessment professionals, and organizational partners with an integrated framework to help identify and align the people, tools, and processes necessary for collaborative efforts.



THE COLLABORATION CONTINUUM

In common practice the term “collaboration” serves as a handy label to mark and acknowledge working relationships between individuals, departments, or organizations. However, as research on organizational change has long recognized, collaboration as a working relationship actually lies on a *continuum* of inter-organizational models, each of which has specific, identifiable attributes.

Arthur Himmelman outlines the Collaboration Continuum in *Collaboration for a Change: Definitions, Decision-making Models, Roles, and Collaboration Process Guide*. The continuum Himmelman outlines includes *networking*, *coordinating*, *cooperating*, and *collaborating*. Each of these nodes on the collaboration continuum include specific--often measurable--attributes. Each step along the continuum, which is depicted visually in Figure 1, is characterized by a set of attributes that build on one another.

Networking, for example, involves exchanging information for mutual benefit. Such information exchange is easy to because it requires a low initial level of trust, limited availability of time, and no sharing of turf.

Coordinating likewise involves information exchange; in addition, participants in *Coordinating* groups alter individual activities to some degree for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose. This station on the continuum requires more organizational involvement than *Networking* with a slightly higher level of trust and some sharing of one’s turf.

Cooperating additionally involves information and resource sharing (e.g., human, financial, space, technology) for mutual benefit and to achieve a common purpose. More formal than *Coordinating*, *Cooperating* requires increased organizational commitment and alteration of individual activities (indeed, existing positions may need to be modified to provide time for participation). As a result, this station on the continuum may involve written agreements such as Memoranda of Understanding (a tool we discuss below). *Cooperating* also requires a substantial time commitment, a higher level of trust, and significant sharing of turf.

Collaborating involves substantial organizational commitment, a very high level of trust, and extensive sharing of turf. The qualitative difference between *Cooperating* and *Collaborating* is that collaborating partners demonstrate a public enthusiasm for--and commitment to the value of--learning from each other to become better at what they do collectively. Collaborators are clear that the importance of their partners’ success is as great as their own and that their own success depends on their partners’ success. Collaborating partners willingly share the risks, responsibilities, resources, and rewards of the work as Himmelman notes in [*Four Shared Rs of Collaboration*](#).

<FIGURE 1: The Collaboration Continuum>

Networking	Coordinating	Cooperating	Collaborating
Exchanging information for mutual benefit	Exchanging information for mutual benefit	Exchanging information for mutual benefit	Exchanging information for mutual benefit
Low or no level of trust required	Some altering of activities to achieve shared purpose	Increased altering of activities	Altering activities - may include modifying and/or adding positions
Limited time commitment	Slight increase in organizational involvement	Additional increase in organizational involvement	Substantial increase in organizational involvement
No sharing of turf	Some degree of trust required	Some sharing of resources (e.g., staff, finances)	Commitment to sharing resources (e.g., staff, finances)
		Increasingly formal organizational commitment	Formalized organizational commitment
		Substantial time commitment	Substantial time commitment
		High level of trust	Very high level of trust
		Significant sharing of turf	Extensive sharing of turf
		May involve written agreements	Written agreements
			Sharing of risks, responsibilities, resources, and rewards
			Equal commitment to partners' success
			Commitment to learning from each other

To this list of the original stations on the continuum we add *Immuring*, which is characterized by operating wholly independently from others. Himmelman also included *Integrating* on his list, which is characterized by fully integrating two or more organizations such that they become indistinguishable from one another. We see neither *Immuring* nor *Integrating* as forms of collaboration given both are ultimately versions of a solo operation (if two organizations

have become one organization, there are no longer two organizations across which work and relationships can unfold).

Each of the stations on the Collaboration Continuum can be appropriate for particular circumstances. There are situations where it may be sufficient to network by, for example, providing correct and updated information on programs and services. In other circumstances, organizations and teams may need to develop more complex relationships to meet objectives and needs more effectively. Importantly, the stations of the continuum build on each other. Coordinating cannot exist in the absence of networking; cooperating can't exist without coordinating; and collaborating doesn't exist without cooperating.

Thus, the first step to formalize a collaborative relationship is to identify where your project lies on the collaboration continuum. A series of questions can help make this determination:

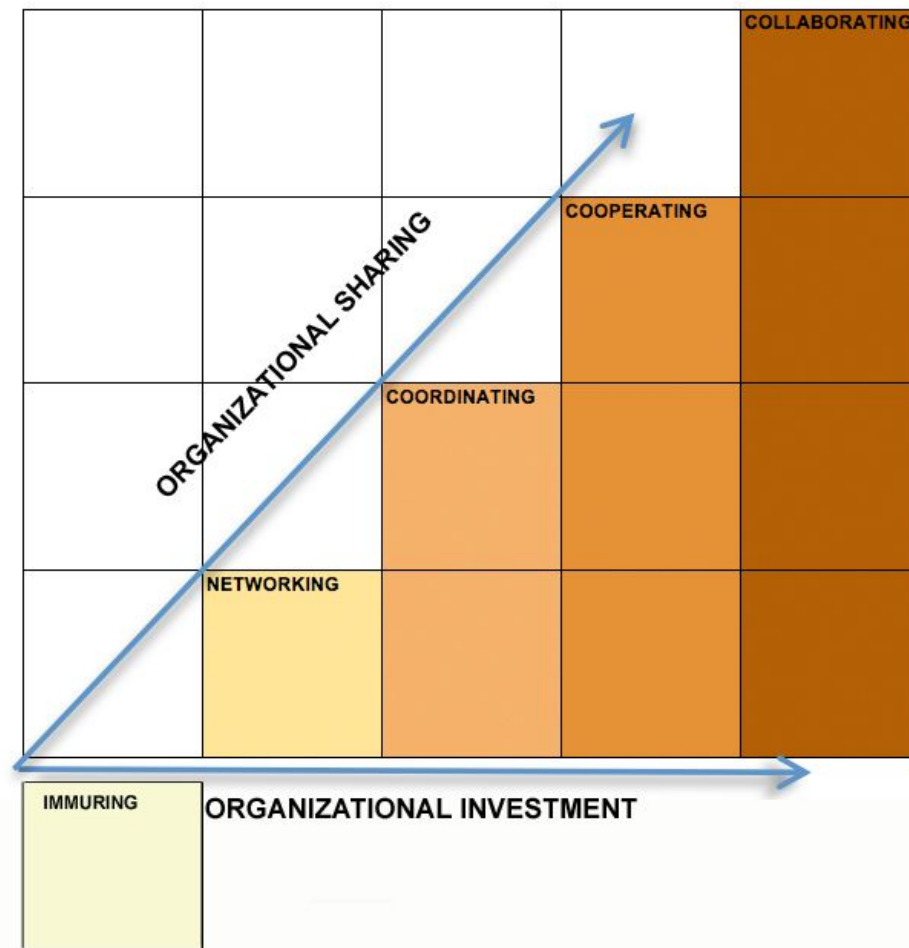
- Have partners identified and clearly stated their shared purpose?
- Do participants actively exchange information across institutional boundaries for mutual benefit in pursuit of that purpose?
- Do participants alter activities to achieve their shared purpose?
- Do participants demonstrate the trust to share resources (e.g., staff, finances, infrastructure) across institutional boundaries?
- Do participants demonstrate they value learning from each other to enhance the other's capacity?
- Do participants demonstrate they value sharing the risks as well as the rewards of collaborating?
- Do participants demonstrate they are committed to enhancing each other's capacity for mutual benefit and a common purpose?

As illustrated in Figure 2, increasingly affirmative answers to these questions helps to inform where on the continuum a particular project lies. Similarly, organizational investment increases as projects traverse the continuum from left to right. It is useful to identify where your project lies on the collaboration continuum in order to identify and target the necessary organizational resources that map to the station your project inhabits - especially if you aim to advance along the continuum. By contrasting where you are and what resources you have with where you're going and what resources you will need, you will be well-positioned to advocate for needed resources. The decision tree available [here](#) can help partners determine their position on the continuum.

In this framework it is easy to see how the need for organizational investment must increase to ensure that real collaboration can hope to succeed. It is also clear how easy (and how frustrating) it is to begin a "collaboration" with enthusiasm only to watch it struggle - even wither - in the absence of organizational collaborative capacity. To truly collaborate, your organization must demonstrate the capacity to share resources, turf, and leadership; alter activities - even modify job descriptions if necessary; and, most importantly, work to help "the other" to be better at what they do and, in the process, improve on what you do. The matrix

[here](#) helps visualize the relationship between capacities needed at station on the continuum and the inter-institutional resources needed to support those capacities.

<FIGURE 2: Answers to these Questions Help Determine Placement on the Continuum>



Perhaps the most critical element of successful collaboration is a clear understanding of the shared (or intersecting) goals that justify inter-organizational collaboration.

BUILDING CAPACITY

A collaboration with the necessary organizational capital to endure is established and sustained with the help of facilitators and partners with a deep understanding of and appreciation for the relationships between *people*, *tools*, and *processes*. All are interrelated, mutually limiting, *and* mutually amplifying. Cultivating and developing these elements is a persistently iterative process. It is not linear and there is no simple solution. As a result, it is important to develop a toolkit of practical approaches that are transparent, easily articulated, accessible to users, and result in concrete outcomes. Personality-driven project management and evangelism (whether delivered through charm or cajoling), only goes so far.

PEOPLE

Collaboration involves new processes and the aggregation of skills in new configurations. These processes and skills will adhere productively to the extent that the shared purpose and intersecting ambitions of the people who comprise the partner organizations are aligned. As such, it is critical that you develop a cadre of talent that will ensure appropriate alignment. Some of the characteristics of that cadre are listed below:

Sponsors. Sustained collaborations have the benefit of senior sponsorship to help articulate the vision, to appoint the champions, and to telegraph that vision to current and potential partners. Sponsors sanction change. The defined opportunity or problem to solve must be clear so that senior leadership and other sponsors can easily get behind it in a productive and persistent manner. While not a guarantee, sponsorship will be helpful in weathering organizational and funding storms down the road.

Champions. Successful collaborations also have one or more public champions who are willing, able, and eager to go to bat for you and your collaboration. Champions need not be a part of the collaboration proper. Champions can be found at all levels of the organization including executives, senior administration, technology partners, and even corporate and industry leaders. Champions galvanize the change. The extent to which these champions can easily re-state the vision as outlined in a clear statement of purpose (a tool we discuss below), the easier it will be for them to remain enthusiastic champions.

Sponsors and champions help articulate, refine, and buttress a shared vision. Without a straightforward vision it's difficult to put together an effective plan enabling you to assemble necessary resources and skills, and to generate incentives for your stakeholders.

Project director. Any successful (and survivable) project management process has somebody functioning as a *steward* of the effort with their finger solidly on the pulse of the project at all times. Individuals in this role don't have the luxury of relegating project issues and opportunities to a back burner. They are visibly accountable for the success or failure of the effort. Poorly directed projects have the tendency to fragment or worse, self-destruct. Without appropriate "care and feeding" there is a tendency for partners to revert back to an independent view (and practice) of success. Effective project directors create structures that constantly underscore the vision, the availability of skills and resources, the coherence of the plan, and the sponsorship of incentives, to contribute to persistent buy-in and ownership of the collaboration at all levels. Project stewards organize the change to help ensure these structures are in place and active.

Skilled partners. Successful collaborations are populated with partners who have the skills to get the work done. You will need to identify the skills necessary for your collaboration, inventory available skillsets, and assemble a cadre of participants that demonstrates they have the proficiencies necessary to successfully perform the tasks required by your project. As Tim Knoster observes in "A framework for thinking about systems change," in *Restructuring for Caring and Effective Education* (see Resources section below), the absence of the necessary skills will result in anxiety for everyone with responsibility for the project. Without the skills the "collaboration" remains an unfulfilled idea.

External evaluator. In an extended, sustained collaboration it may make sense to retain an external individual or agency to document progress. Having the benefit of an unbiased eye to review your program plan, objectives, and scheduled outcomes can provide utility during and after the program. When the program is externally funded (i.e., with grants or other financial tools), scheduled reports from an external evaluator can inform the reporting process. Developing a library of documentation that includes scheduled evaluations can be helpful in subsequent project planning, future fundraising, and efforts to legitimize the work.

External facilitator. Project implementations often benefit from the involvement of an external facilitator--someone who is not central to your process. In project planning and implementation many individuals come together to create something new. Even in the best circumstances there is some period of time - short or long - in which the project's vision, structure, focus, and intent reflects preconceived interpretations (or ambitions) of the players. It is inchoate. Consciously or

not there will be lobbying for position and process. It can be extremely helpful to have an external ear to turn to in order to talk through the issues and opportunities that will arise. Whether labeled consultant, coach, mentor, or counselor, having that unbiased interpretation can help sort through tangled influences and help smooth the path forward. This role may be external to the collaboration but need not be external to the parent organization. It just needs to be someone not directly invested in the project. However, that individual must have sound soft skills and experience in managing projects, people, and processes.

TOOLS

Implementing collaboration is an iterative, non-linear process. There is no unified field theory of change management, no checklist to work through that will ensure successful enduring collaboration. As in matrix management, there are multiple processes in simultaneous development that require alignment (sometimes re-alignment) and persistent review. It is by no means easy, but there are tools that can help. That said, it takes a good deal of time to become skilled with these tools; sponsorship and mentorship can provide needed time and apprenticeship, respectively. To help ensure success in your efforts to marshal these resources, develop a toolkit of practical approaches that are transparent, easily articulated, and result in concrete outcomes.

As with any toolkit, your collection of collaboration tools must include a variety of approaches that are at your disposal for use at appropriate times. You will need to make decisions about which tool to use when. Below are a few to get you started; the more you work with collaboration, the more tools you will add to your kit. Importantly, many of the tools below are actually *touchstone documents*, meaning they offer a place to return to help everyone stay on track. Sometimes these documents will be brief and informal. In other circumstances the documents may be quite lengthy and very formal. The nature of the collaboration will determine what the scope of these tools need to be.

Statement of shared purpose. Perhaps the most critical element of successful collaboration is a clear understanding of the shared (or intersecting) goals that justify inter-organizational collaboration. A well thought out statement of shared purpose (or problem statement) is your most useful tool to help define the program vision. The program vision provides a vivid image of the desired future that will result from the adoption and implementation of the project. It succinctly answers the question, “Why should we do this?” Echoing Knoster, knowing the answer to the question “Why?” combats confusion by offering a clear destination. In addition to combating confusion, the statement of purpose has practical uses. It:

1. Clarifies the current situation by specifically identifying the issue or opportunity at hand;
2. Clarifies the urgency, timesensitivity, and/or financial impact associated with the issue or opportunity;
3. Provides a vehicle to ensure that all stakeholders agree on the opportunity on the table;

4. Serves as a useful communication tool that will help secure buy in and support from others and develop sponsorship and champions.

Successful collaborations avoid the trap of leaping to solutions before adequately identifying the shared problem or purpose. Time is taken to clearly identify and define the common problem to solve. The success or failure of collaboration often depends on the strength of this element more than anything else. If the rationale is strong enough and the vision clear to all potential stakeholders, money, staff time, and other required resources will be found. If the goals are not intrinsic (e.g., if the collaboration is motivated by externalities that may vanish at any time), the collaboration will be jeopardized. Getting to that clarity may take work but it is worth the effort. In sustained collaborations everyone around the table – all of the roles represented – clearly see the value in pursuing the opportunity at hand. It is clearly articulated and easily communicated to others, whether they are potential supporters like foundations or future partners or participants.

Project charter. At a minimum, you should draft a document that outlines in general terms the program you are undertaking. Often overlooked, a project charter is a *brief* statement describing the purpose, scope, objectives, participants, their roles and responsibilities, and primary stakeholders. A significant purpose of the charter is to describe and publish the authority of the designated project director. Common elements of a charter include:

1. Project Description
2. Project Participants / Team Members
3. Scope of Organizational Change Represented in the Project
4. Deliverables
5. Stakeholders
6. Guiding Principles
7. Project Timeline
8. Resources (both available and needed)

Project plan. Sustained programmatic change requires a concrete *plan* that outlines the steps that must be taken for development and implementation to succeed. The plan must be clear, demonstrate the support of sponsors, and be easily articulated by program champions. It must be available to all participants. Failure to provide a transparent, well-structured plan will leave individuals feeling as if they are tied to a never ending treadmill of effort. While project plan language will vary, typical elements will include at a minimum:

1. Scope (Project Objectives and Deliverables, Assumptions and Constraints)
2. Roles and Responsibilities
3. Resources (Human, Funding, Infrastructure)
4. Schedule/Timeline
5. Communication Plan
6. Budget

Along with a statement of shared purpose your project plan is one of the most useful tools in your kit. It will help you remain focused and on task, develop assessment criteria, measure success, and provide for ongoing development.

Memoranda of Understanding. Before we discuss Memoranda of Understanding (MOU), a cautionary note is warranted regarding written agreements. Entering into written agreements too soon - before trust is established between partner organizations - can undermine the relationship. You will need to evaluate the timing of suggesting and implementing such agreements.)

MOUs describe a mutually beneficial framework of expectations and obligations that both entities can work within to achieve shared goals. They can be a useful tool for management and coordination of services developed and delivered by a number of providers whether departmental or organizational. Implementation and oversight of such services could be a nightmare for managers unless specific elements, including workflow, infrastructure, and support are clearly described in advance of operation. The MOU serves as a vehicle for establishing the requirements of the agreement. In this respect it can be used to:

1. Delineate responsibilities and work flow;
2. Specify the services and/or resources to be provided to faculty, students, and staff by partner campuses;
3. Specify shared objectives;
4. Facilitate communication by defining a process for regular meetings;
5. Ensure that all participants share the same interpretation of the program by spelling out details of the relationship;
6. Cut through red tape by defining new or altered procedures;
7. Eliminate, or at least minimize, friction over turf issues by specifying responsibilities.

MOUs are less formal than contracts and typically include fewer details and complexities, but they are more formal than handshake agreements. In general, MOUs are not legally binding documents, nor do they involve the exchange of money. In developing an MOU you should identify the key people to work with in developing the MOU and work to keep goals and objectives broad (this is not a project management plan). Set realistic expectations based on interviews with key people and be specific about the functions of the participants. Be sure to set review dates but avoid making the MOU more complicated than necessary (it's not a contract). Define the terms, units of service, and service definitions. Clearly specify procedures and timeline for amending the MOU. Once you have made the decision to develop an MOU the following elements should be considered for inclusion:

1. Description of each partner organization;
2. Brief statement of the purpose of the MOU;
3. Clear description of the roles and responsibilities of each organization;
4. Identification of the staff responsible for completing the specific responsibilities;
5. Description of how collaboration benefits the project;

6. Description of the resources each partner will contribute to the project. This can be a time commitment, in-kind contributions, or grant funds (e.g., office space, staff, training, etc.);
7. Duration of the MOU and review dates;
8. Signatures: All participants must sign the MOU. Signatories must be officially authorized to sign on behalf of their organization and include title and agency name.

As noted above, MOU can be a very useful tool to keep you and your partners on track. It is a touchstone document to refer to when, as sometimes happens, your project seems to be falling victim to the fragmenting effects of project creep or unintentional shifts in progress as a result of changes in staff, leadership, or funding. Change happens and tools like this can be very helpful in realigning you and your partners when it does.

Structured evaluation/Assessment tools. Collaborators need to know whether their joint efforts are truly serving the mutual needs and interests of the partners; we thus need to assess our efforts. As noted above, in an extended collaboration it makes sense to retain an individual or agency external to your immediate working group to evaluate progress. Having the benefit of that unbiased eye to review your program objectives and scheduled outcomes will provide utility during and after the program. The individual or agency you retain may bring their own evaluation tools, or you may provide them for the evaluator to make use of. Below are some tools used to to evaluate sustainability, collaborative capacity, readiness for change management, and progress.

All of the tools shared below can be used in a variety of settings and formats. Each consists of a series of statements that the user responds to in order to rate program success across a range of specific factors. The user rates each statement as it relates to their project by checking the number that best reflects the accuracy of the statement, with 1 indicating a response of "to little or no extent" and 5 indicating a response of "to a great extent." In all cases, the statements in the tools are easily transferred to an online survey environment to both automate data collection and to provide anonymity if desired. Print copies can be used in interviews, small-group workshops, or focus groups to solicit feedback and generate dialogue.

Program Sustainability. Washington University developed the [Program Sustainability Assessment Tool](#) and makes it available for wide use. The Washington University tool is a 40 item self-assessment that staff and stakeholders can take to evaluate the sustainability capacity of a program. Although originally developed for use by public health programs, it is useful across domains. The issues regarding collaboration cut across all disciplines, professions, and industries. The Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike License applied to the WU tool permits you to modify the original to suit your environment. We have adapted the original to an abbreviated version (eight items) which can be found [online](#). You may find this version to be more nimble than the original.

Collaboration Continuum. We find it useful to revisit regularly the collaboration continuum, as the ideas contained therein give way to accessible and face valid strategies for diagnosing the well-being, needs, and changes over time of collaborative projects. We have

derived nine metrics from Himmelman's Collaboration Continuum to gauge organizational capacity to collaborate. A sample version in PDF format is available for [download](#). Feel free to and modify to suit your needs.

Attributes of Collaboration. Similarly, we have used the same format to develop the [Attributes of Collaboration Tool](#) which will help you gather feedback on the extent to which you have successfully developed a statement of purpose/problem statement, identified sponsors and champions, and cultivated trust and vulnerability among your partners.

Equation for Change. Another tool that adapts the work of Tim Knoster, mentioned above, helps you evaluate your capacity to effect change. The [Equation for Change Tool](#), based on Knoster's work, ranks your success in developing project vision, skills, incentives, resources, and plans. Administering this as a survey or workshop tool to your colleagues and partners will provide feedback on the extent to which you have communicated your vision.

Developing a Collaboration. This [Required Components Tool](#) will be useful to rate your success in articulating a clear, shared purpose, galvanizing financial commitment and oversight, defining roles and responsibilities, and implementing effective governance and decision-making models.

Incentive. Incentive is an often-overlooked collaborative tool. Everyone needs something specific that encourages and motivates participation and action. Because those specifics will vary from role to role, avoid cookie-cutter "incentives." Instead, take time to understand what makes sense to your colleagues in their roles. Some may be motivated by recognition, others by the promise of simpler way of doing business, others by having an authentic sense of ownership of the process, and yet others by stipends. The important point here is that project leaders should avoid assuming they know precisely what incentives make sense for their colleagues at a given point in time.

If key players are not provided incentives that help them see the value in enthusiastic participation, but are instead corralled into "getting on board," resistance is likely. Invest your time to develop a deeper understanding of who your skilled participants are, what their roles are in the organization, and how their roles intersect with the collaboration. Taking the time to learn about your colleagues and what makes them "tick" will help you create real incentives that make sense to them. Don't leap to "incentives" that are transitory. Consciously developing incentives in a transparent manner will help build trust as it demonstrates your commitment to your people and their needs. It provides a lifeline that helps connect partners in meaningful ways. It can be a powerful tool ensuring that participants are actively engaged--even invested--and not just fulfilling an assignment.

One should not merely look to the designated leader for guidance, but rather that one should let logic dictate to whom one should look for guidance on the basis of individuals' knowledge of the situation at hand.

~ Mary Parker Follett (1924)

Professional development. Individuals entering into a collaborative relationship may need to take on new roles or responsibilities as they innovate to create stronger, more effective organizations. Although many people welcome new professional opportunities, it is also the case that few of us are likely to already have within ourselves every single piece of knowledge, specific skill, or useful ability to maximize our potential impact within a new organizational role. Layer onto this the fact that many sectors--higher education, included--are populated by professionals who have "grown up" in contexts that promote and celebrate individual accomplishment. Not surprisingly, these individuals can find the collaborative landscape especially foreign. Even for those individuals who are well-practiced at collaborative work or who have an internal impulse toward creating mutually empowering relationships, opportunities to hone or refresh skills or to continue one's development can be critical to a project's success. Professional development is thus an important tool in the collaborator's toolkit.

While we can't predict with perfect certainty the areas in which any one collaborator might benefit from professional development, we can predict that every collaborator could benefit from professional development. The needs vary as a function of the collaborators' backgrounds, the goals of the project, the stage the project is in, and the context in which that project is unfolding. Sample areas for professional development include understanding the needs and concerns of the institutional executives, assessing program effectiveness, project management, hiring and coordinating staff, budgetary approval processes, managing budgets, running effective meetings, and having difficult conversations.

Multiple modalities exist for obtaining needed professional development. Sometimes a simple chat with a trusted colleague is sufficient. Other times it can be useful to work with a professional coach, read a book or blog, or watch a lecture on youtube. And, organizations such as the Association for Collaborative Leadership (national-acl.org) offer intensive professional development institutes and annual conferences to hone and share collaboration tools.

Shared leadership. For most of us - steeped as we are in hierarchical, centralized management models - shared leadership may be one of the more challenging tools to master, yet it is critical

to collaboration in which risk, responsibilities, resources, and rewards are shared. A comprehensive review of shared leadership is beyond the scope of this white paper - volumes have been written on the topic - but it is important to raise the issues here. Please review the recommended readings on the topic in the **RESOURCES** section below. At a minimum we hope to introduce some of the basic attributes of shared leadership and we encourage you to explore the use of this tool in greater detail.

In Himmelman's model, collaboration is a working relationship in which you and your organization actively strive to help your partner organization become increasingly proficient at *their* stated objectives while simultaneously honoring and achieving your own. As a result, collaboration necessarily involves a very high level of trust and extensive sharing of turf.

Authentically sharing risk, responsibilities, resources, and rewards requires an alternative to traditional hierarchical command and control decision-making and leadership. Leadership must be shared. But learning to shift leadership as the situation necessitates requires practice. Ann Hill Duin of the University of Minnesota provides a useful overview and specific workshop techniques of shared leadership in [Fostering a Collaborative Culture: Smart Change and Shared Leadership](#). Some of the attributes of shared leadership as noted by Duin encourage practitioners to:

- Look beyond the designated leader;
- Shift the role of leader as needed;
- See leadership as relational and emerging over time;
- Lead together to achieve goals;
- Foster simultaneous, mutual influence.

In the table below we share some approaches to leadership adapted from the work of Duin. Learning to recognize attributes of hierarchical v. shared leadership in your organization is an effective place to start:

HIERARCHICAL	SHARED
Identified by position in a hierarchy	Identified by quality of interactions
Evaluated by whether the leader solves problems	Evaluated by how well people work together to solve problems
Leaders provide solutions and answers	Leaders provide multiple means to enhance problem solving process
Distinct boundaries between leaders and followers	Members are inter-dependent
Communication is formal	Communication is critical
	Publicly demonstrates commitment to authenticity and a common good

PROCESSES

In addition to identifying and recruiting people and assembling a toolkit, take the time to develop and implement processes that consciously connect people and tools in sensible and productive ways. Well-conceived processes applied programmatically help people administer program tools coherently over time.

It is useful to recognize and catalog those elements of program development and management that are typical across programs. Develop processes that take similarities and redundancies into account, revise to accommodate them, and thus minimize “re-inventing the wheel” for subsequent project opportunities and assignments. Developing such processes helps to create a programmatic culture that will minimize redundancy and customized or personality-driven approaches to problem solving. At a minimum, consider developing processes that foster *Communication*, *Project management*, and *Accountability* and consciously link people, talent, and tools with an eye to ensuring the tools are well understood and used purposefully.

Communication. Successful collaborations demonstrate attention to effective information exchange. To reliably and efficiently exchange information across organizational boundaries, collaborative groups require the basic capacity of clear communication channels. Sponsors and champions can bolster the cultivation of clear channels by ensuring inter-organizational administrative support for tasks that support the collaboration and do not interfere with pre-existing needs of each individual organization.

As you develop a communication process, take the time to understand the culture of your partner organizations. Identify common practices with an eye to cultivating the implementation (if not already present) of collaborative communication platforms that are many-to-many in nature rather than hierarchical, one-to-many models. This is not to say that you should not use the latter at all but rather, develop an approach that will allow collaborators to use open, transparent communication services when appropriate.

Determine to what extent current communication processes are programmatic and inclusive in nature, ad hoc and episodic, or overly formal, hierarchical, and exclusive. Develop communication processes that connect your partners with the objectives of the collaboration and communication tools at their disposal in a coherent and programmatic manner. Encourage the use of the tools of collaborative communication early. Identify potential professional development opportunities as new communication tools are put in place. Ensure that there is a meaningful relationship between people and tools – that they know how to use them and use them well.

Project Management. There are countless volumes written about project management, conferences and workshops dedicated to the topic, and plenty of experienced consultants available to assist with developing and implementing project plans. Perhaps the very volume of resources available for implementing and improving project management is a testament to the

inherent challenges of leading and executing complex projects with multiple stakeholders. When such projects are *inter-organizational* those challenges are significantly amplified. You will need a project management process that suits both (or all) organizations involved in the collaboration. That process must help you to define, plan, manage, evaluate, and complete the collaboration within that inter-organizational matrix.

In developing your process you will need to survey, identify, and acknowledge current project management culture and protocols across the partner organizations. It has been said (variously) that culture eats strategy for lunch (or breakfast). This observation unfortunately can set organizational culture up as something to be overcome, rather than a resource to be cultivated. The reality is that organizational culture is not going to go away. With respect to project management, find a way to work within it rather than to fight – or fix – it. Identify how your stakeholders invest in and administer project management now and establish processes to secure their confidence in you and your effort. If you think there is room for improvement in the existing organizational culture, lead by example rather than exhortation.

The process you develop should enable you to identify and implement standard elements of project management that resonate with all partners without unnecessarily interfering with their current organizational initiatives and priorities. As with communication, ensure that the project management processes you put in place connect your partners with the appropriate tools, that they know how to use them, and their utility and usage is transparent.

Accountability. At the outset, think about accountability. Consider how you will measure success - of the collaboration, yourself, the processes you put in place, and the tools you use. Review the Collaboration Continuum and the [capacities mapped to the four stations](#). Identify where you are on that continuum and where you are aiming for. Establish a transparent and inclusive process to document the organizational capacity and adaptability of you and your partners with respect to the characteristics of the stations of the Continuum.

You will need a process to inventory and evaluate the availability and quality of existing organizational capacities per the Continuum. Inventory your talent to ensure that the proficiencies necessary to successfully perform tasks required by the project are in place or being developed. Identify what's missing. Develop a process that will alert you to the absence or inadequacy of specific capacities needed for the project. If the capacities that are essential to the group's work are missing or lacking, those capacities need to be cultivated.

In collaborations - in which partners share risks, responsibilities, resources, and rewards - the work must become more than a project temporarily layered over pre-existing responsibilities of individuals or departments. It must become programmatic and the partner organizations must be adaptable – they must be able to organize to meet the new responsibilities of the collaboration and support the work of skilled staff, even if it means altering workflow and modifying positions. Create a process to determine the extent to which the organizations can actually demonstrate that level of adaptability. Review the statement of purpose; the program scope; and the project plan to identify required skills and whether or not positions and/or workflow must be altered to achieve objectives. The process you develop must allow for a

respectful review of staff assignments and responsibilities and include a means to recommend reallocation and reorganization as appropriate (and reasonable).

The processes developed to ensure accountability must include a reporting mechanism to alert leadership, sponsors, staff, and champions to progress, successes - and challenges. Develop a transparent and inclusive process in which you connect the evaluation tools you use to project reporting schedules and venues. Connect accountability and reporting to your communication and project management processes. Do not simply administer tools such as the Program Sustainability tool or the Collaboration Continuum tool and shelve the results. Incorporate their administration into a review and accountability process that will help all participants understand and appreciate the successes and challenges of the project.

In all cases, consciously connect accountability processes with the evaluation tools you elect to make use of. Ensure that partners and skilled staff are familiar with these tools, why they are useful, and know how to use them.

CONCLUSION

The clean boxes of the Collaboration Continuum and the straightforward list of needed people, tools, and processes belie the first foundational truth of working together: collaboration is hard, messy, and highly iterative work. Although some might crave an “A to Z” procedural checklist that, if followed, would yield a glorious collaboration, such a procedural pattern would fail to account for all the nuances, all the unanticipated twists and turns, and all the personalities that emerge during collaborative work. Instead, we argue the Collaboration Continuum offers a rough road map that becomes navigable through the strategic use of appropriate tools.

The second foundational truth of collaborative work is that collaborations are ultimately built on trust. It can feel professionally and emotionally risky to be vulnerable enough to work together in a public manner, to show our work before it is “finished,” and to allow others to work collaboratively on it, or even see it, before it is “polished” to our satisfaction. It can be hard to let down our guard, to believe others hold our needs and interests in mind, to release control, to invite others to re-work our contributions, and to insert their work in its place. These capacities--this openness--are not typically taught to students or socialized in our professions; asymmetries in organizational cultures and operations can be obstacles in this effort. Yet, these capacities are essential to robust collaboration. Developing the trust that gives way to these capacities takes time, and it takes relationships.

RESOURCES

COLLABORATION

A framework for thinking about systems change. Tim Knoster. In R. Villa and J. Thousands (Eds.) *Restructuring for caring and effective education*

Arthur T. Himmelman, *Collaboration for a Change: Definitions, Decision-making Models, Roles, and Collaboration Process Guide*. January 2002, Himmelman Consulting, Minneapolis, MN.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Knoster, T., Villa, R., and Thousand, J. (2000). A framework for thinking about systems change. In R. Villa and J. Thousands (Eds.) *Restructuring for caring and effective education: Piecing the puzzle together* (2nd edition). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

SHARED LEADERSHIP

Pearce, Hoch, Jeppesen, and Wegge observe in *New Forms of Management: Shared and Distributed Leadership in Organizations*

Weibler, J. & Sigrid Rohn-Endres, S. (2010). Learning conversation and shared network leadership: Development, Gestalt, and consequences. *Journal of Personnel Psychology*, 9(4): 181-194.

Ann Hill Duin, University of Minnesota, "[Fostering a Collaborative Culture: Smart Change and Shared Leadership](http://www.slideshare.net/nitle/fostering-a-collaborative-culture-071613)."
(<http://www.slideshare.net/nitle/fostering-a-collaborative-culture-071613>)