

Journeys in Collaboration – Observations on leadership practice in collaborative multi agency projects

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Background

Collaboration has become the buzz word for public sector leaders. The idea that, by working in a collaborative way across organisations, the public sector can deliver outcomes more effectively and efficiently is now firmly embedded in leadership conversations. This trend is not unique to New Zealand's Better Public Sector¹ reforms. In Scotland, the Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services² carried the same messages about public sector organisations needing to collaborate across departments. As do the Civil Sector Reforms³ in England.

So how do leaders in public sector organisations make collaboration across agencies real? Is it just a matter of saying we will collaborate and getting on with the job or is there something else that leaders must do to make collaboration work? What does good collaboration look like? Can we in New Zealand learn from other's experience (including the private sector) or is our operating environment so different that we must forge our own path?

As part of a Leadership Development Centre fellowship in 2013 I sought to answer these questions. I did this by speaking to over a hundred first, second and third tier leaders mostly from across the transport and local government sectors in New Zealand, England and Scotland. The mix of interviewees included private sector leaders from a range of engineering consultancies and public transport operators. I also tested my thinking on a multi-national and multicultural range of leaders in two weeks of executive development programmes at Harvard Business School and Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Finally upon my return I tested my observations on a small number of iwi and local government practitioners working at the coalface of co-management to test whether our unique cultural heritage might require something different to enable effective collaboration.

The interviews identified a consistent list of key factors to successful collaboration. The list is presented below along with some choice quotes⁴ gathered along the way for readers to ponder as they develop their own collaborative experiences and leadership styles.

Speaking the same language

The concept of collaboration in an organisational sense is complex. It means different things to different organisations and different cultures. Expectations of partners can be fundamentally different, and much collaboration has struggled because the partners

¹ www.ssc.govt.nz/better-public-services

² Report on the Future Delivery of Public Services by the Commission chaired by Dr Cambell Christie (2011) available from www.scotland.gov.uk

³ www.civilservice.gov.uk

⁴ Please note that the quotes are generally not attributed as I did not seek the participants permission to be quoted.

understood the term to have a different meaning and therefore had different expectations.

For instance, the New Zealand Transport Agency's Effective Engagement Toolkit talks about the characteristics of collaborative relationships as being based on negotiated and agreed actions and shared decision making⁵.

Other definitions are more akin to the concept of partnerships as set out in the Agency's toolkit:

"A Commitment to sharing values, risks and rewards, resources, accountability and ideas and decision making and supporting arrangements with processes, systems, and mechanisms such as structures, contracts, Memoranda of Understanding, principles etc".

For instance, The Institute for Collaborative Working⁶ in the UK defines a collaborative working relationship as:

"....a relationship where there is a commitment between two or more parties in a collaborative relationship to create value by striving to achieve shared competitive goals and operational benefit through a spirit of mutual trust and openness."

The Institute champions the use of the systems and frameworks enshrined in the British Standard, "BS11000, Collaborative Business Relationships"⁷ as a means of supporting these collaborations.

Wikipedia talks of collaboration as being when:

".....two or more people or organisations work together to realise shared goals (this is more than the intersection of common goals seen in co-operative ventures but a deep, collective, determination to reach an identical objective.....by sharing knowledge, learning and building consensus."

Writing in the Harvard Business Review Blog Network in 2009 John Hagel III, John Seeley Brown and Lang Davison⁸ made the distinction between the following types of collaboration:

- Transactional vs Relational Collaboration – relational collaboration being where the partners seek to build trust and emotional capital during a long period of time rather than one off transactional collaboration that aims to deliver a single project or product.
- Loosely vs tightly coupled collaborations – the theory being that the less hardwiring in the collaboration the more likely you are able to scale it or transfer the approach to a new problem.
- Static vs Dynamic – a dynamic collaboration being where the partners are open to creating new knowledge and capabilities while the static collaboration implies merely sharing existing knowledge and capabilities.

In one of my group sessions a participant defined collaboration as:

⁵ "Effective Engagement Toolkit (20??) New Zealand Transport Agency

⁶ www.instituteforcollaborativeworking.com

⁷ www.bsigroup.com

⁸ C Hagel, D Seeley Brown and L Davison (May 2009) Defining Common Collaboration Tensions HBR Blog network, www.blogs.hbr.org/bigshift/2009/05/defining-common-collaboration.html

“Organisations working together have given up the need to control the outcome and are prepared to share both risks and benefits – they value the idea of being surprised when something new and unanticipated is created.”

In the New Zealand multi-cultural context a statutorily defined version of collaboration exists under the definition of co-management, which the Kingitanga Accord⁹ describes as including:

“..... a) the highest level of good faith engagement; and b) consensus decision making as a general rule;- while having regard to statutory frameworks and the mana whakahaere of Waikato Tainui and other Waikato River iwi.”

What is clear from this range of different definitions is that every individual and organisation has a different take on what collaboration looks and feels like based on their organisational history, culture and strategy.

The key thing to understand therefore is what collaboration means for you and your partners. Take time to understand why you are both wanting to collaborate and what the term means to each of you. Develop a common dictionary early to avoid uncertainty and later difficulties. Don't blindly assume that when your partner says they want to collaborate they are thinking of the same relationship that you are.

Plan before you Collaborate

All my interviews identified the importance of a planned, deliberate approach to setting up collaborations. Many saw this step as a critical success factor.

The interviewees identified some critical questions you must have answered as part of this planning;

- Who are your potential partners?
- What are their drivers?
- What will success look like?
- Where will the power lie in the relationship – will it be equal or is one of you wielding a controlling interest? How will this affect decision making processes?
- How will you share the risks and benefits?.....are you really ready for the level of sharing that collaboration implies?
- Have you got a shared language and business process to support the collaboration
- What is the lifecycle of your collaboration? How will you know if it is successful? How will you know that it is time to end the relationship and move on?

There are frameworks for collaboration that you can use to help with this process – one from the Institute for Collaborative Working is reproduced below. This framework has been adopted into BS11000, however proponents of models such as Alliance contracting or the NEC3¹⁰ contracting system follow a slightly different business model. What is important is that you adopt a framework and follow a systematic approach to the set up of these relationships and you do so with your partners so that the partnership starts off from a shared understanding and process.

⁹ Waikato Tainui Raupatu Claims (Waikato River) Settlement Act 2010, Schedule 1

¹⁰ www.neccontract.com

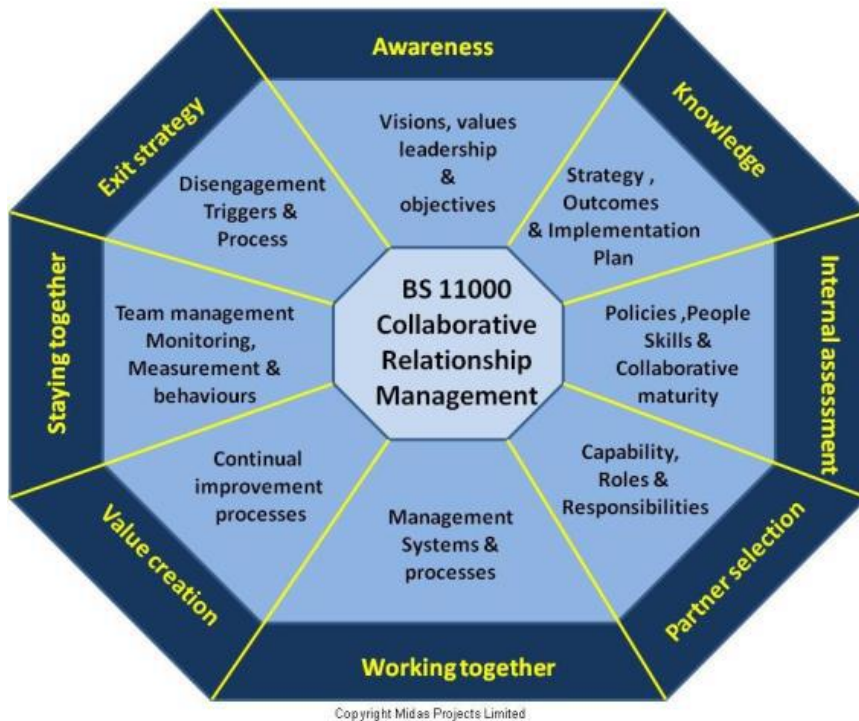


Figure 1 – BS11000 framework for Collaborative Relationship Management¹¹

The BS11000 model is attractive in the way it defines the phases of a collaboration (and which I paraphrase from the work of David Hawkins¹²;

Awareness – A clear understanding of how collaboration fits into your organisations vision, objectives and values

Knowledge – Organisational strategy and plans for how you will collaborate and manage risks

Internal Assessment – A deep understanding of your organisations strength and weaknesses

Partner Selection – Understand the type of partner you are after and how you will select them

Working Together – The process of creating joint governance, establishing shared and individual objectives, describing behaviours required to support the collaboration and incorporating those into contracting arrangements

Value Creation – Maintaining the relationship, driving innovation to bring new value

Staying Together – Ongoing nurturing of the collaboration, dispute resolution, managing transitions etc

Exit Strategy – Managing the end of the process to keep partners focussed and create future opportunities

¹¹ From Institute for Collaborative Working website (20 September 2013)
www.instituteforcollaborativeworking.com

¹² David Hawkins (May 2013) “Collaboration: the new business discipline”
www.instituteforcollaborativeworking.com

The following quotes from my interviewees support the importance of having a planned approach to your collaborations:

Be clear on the vision/long term goal behind the adoption of a collaboration strategy.

Organisations who collaborate must do succession planning - provide for a constant renewal of people – Collaborations fail where this is not done and/or the wrong people are inserted into the project without adequate backgrounding.

Collaboration can be the wrong approach for some tasks – you need to deliberately choose to take a collaborative approach and then take time to let it grow.

Collaboration can mean different things to different parties – you need to be clear how your partner interprets the term before you commit.

Partners will go off the boil during a collaboration process as their context changes. You need to have a plan for what to do when this happens, not just let things trundle along as if nothing has happened.

You need to understand your strategy for exiting the collaboration when the time comes – at the very least you need to think how will you reintegrate staff when they return from a collaboration as their view of the world is likely to be fundamentally different from what it was when they left your organisation to join the collaboration.

Be careful to understand why you are collaborating – for instance, alliance models are one path to collaboration but not the only one.....

It takes time to melt the organisational permafrost – You can never accept at first instance the "Its the suppliers/partners systems that are at fault not ours" defence mechanisms.

The biggest barriers to collaboration are the hidden, vested interests and drivers of different organisations CEOs and leaders. Some collaborations have struggled due to conflicting performance measures and the importance given in home organisations to achieving individual targets at all costs (including causing losses to partners).

Its important to understand how collaborativeness will be assessed in a competitive tender process – the best approach we have seen is where the tender documents asked for examples where partners have created shared value from collaboration as a measure of the contractors effectiveness working in these environments

Leadership must be authentic and committed to the collaboration

Every interviewee emphasised the critical roles of governance and leadership in creating an environment where collaboration is supported as a valid working approach.

They saw the role of both organisational governance and leaders as enablers and “modellers” of the behaviours required to make collaboration work. Of particular importance was the emphasis placed on the role of governance;

“Governors need to do governance - keep out of the detail, trust the managers to make decisions. If the governors intervene and make technical decisions in a non collaborative way they undermine the culture that is being built within the team.”

“If collaboration exists at the governance level for multi agency projects there is no censoring of messages. Senior executives in both organisations get the same story at the same time - this forces staff to resolve issues early rather than playing games (although note that if project staff have agreed matters collaboratively and then executive governance unpicks those solutions this can create problems in the culture)”

“The organisational accountability model needs to support collaboration – this means the organisation has to change the view it takes of accountability and measure and reward realisation of benefits received by partners as well benefits received by the organisation.”

For public sector organisations the importance of governance behaviours raises some challenges – particularly where ministerial or mayoral accountabilities and political decision making can run contra to collaborative intent. This risk is especially acute when collaborations are with the private sector, iwi or non government organisations who operate in a different cultural and accountability context. Collaborations need to be up front about these differences in context, acknowledge them and work out how the partners will maintain the collaborative intent when the inevitable contextual challenges arise.

The response of the Scottish government to this challenge is worth reflecting on. In 2011 report of the Christie Commission into delivery of public services resulted in a commitment from the Scottish government to achieve:

- Simpler structures which support the achievement of the Scottish Government’s national strategic objectives and local government’s delivery of better outcomes for local communities.
- Transparent and clear public service decision making, with streamlined scrutiny and control regimes, which facilitate Scotland’s capacity to mobilise capital and grow our economy.
- Fewer, better structured arms length bodies at a national level which receive clear, strategic direction from government while at the same time given room to deliver.
- Collaboration and joint working between public services, which is essential for delivering better services, facilitated through less heavy formal structures and fewer organisational boundaries cutting across decision making¹³.

To deliver these goals the Scottish government (with direct ministerial and state sector CEO leadership through leaders such as John Swinney, Cabinet Secretary for Finance), Employment and Sustainable Growth have set out implement their vision through a range of collaborative initiatives including:

- The Scottish Leadership Forum (a group of public sector chief executives) making workforce engagement and development a core priority, establishing initiatives such as the “Collaborating for Outcomes” programme (an intensive cross public sector leadership development initiative for emerging leaders).
- Enhancing the work of the government and third sector collaborations such as the Joint Improvement Team in the health sector (www.jitscotland.org.uk) – a joint initiative partnership between the Scottish government, local government, the housing sector and non government organisations focussing on delivery of health sector outcomes.
- Working with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities to develop Community Planning Partnerships which develop Single Outcome Agreements as a condition for investment. These agreements confirm a commitment from organisations to work together, not apart, in providing public services

This direct, supportive and strong support at all levels of the public sector sets a strong leadership platform for the development of a collaborative culture that should be able to survive the challenges presented by politics.

An internet search for speeches from the likes of Minister Swinney in Scotland or Bob Kerslake (Head of the Home Civil Service in England) will find a number of examples where these leaders provide clear, top down messages that attempt to empower creativity and encourage a culture of cross agency working. Their aim is to make their expectations become the norm.

One of my interviewees summed up their view of the role of leaders in collaborative organisations as follows:

“In collaborative organisations the messages from public sector leaders are translated into internal communications so that staff have ‘line of sight’ from their day to day work to the expectations from public sector leadership that we will work collaboratively. This broader context is important to help overcome organisational inertia.”

So What Does a Collaborative Leader Look Like?

I asked this question in every interview. There was a remarkable degree of commonality in the responses I received. All interviewees agreed that leadership in organisations requires a different set of skills from leadership in collaborations.

They emphasised interpersonal skills, a sense of vision and an inclusiveness in style that seeks to create value and acknowledge and value the unique contributions that all the partners bring to the table. They also emphasised the need for a certain degree of strength, an ability to draw the line when the interests of partners were not being met and have the hard conversations, but have those conversations in a way that maintains ongoing relationships. Collaboration, and collaborative leadership, was not seen as a “love-in” where conflict never happens – collaborative leaders need to be comfortable with conflict and able to use it constructively to find innovative solutions. Some of the best quotes are re-produced below:

“Leadership in organisations requires very different skills from leadership in collaboration space. Collaborative leaders have to;

- *share power and rely more on influencing skills/building trust and relationships.*
- *establish credibility as a partner.*
- *recognise that the people you have to work with all bring something of value to the table.*
- *form a good understanding of the strengths that lie in the group and make sure those strengths are utilised positively to support collaboration.*
- *create a sense of safety and vulnerability based trust*
- *take the group beyond individual self interests to collective interests where the group shares goals, holds each other accountable etc.”*

“A natural collaborator can rise above issues, not get caught in to today’s dramas and have the ability to pause, think and revisit positions. They are able to quickly move beyond the technical analysis and facts to the people and political issues.”

“Interpersonal skills and social skills - You can teach technical skills but it is a lot harder to teach people EQ and interpersonal savvy required of collaboration projects.”

“Good leaders of collaborations accept that they don’t have all the answers and know not too close conversations down too soon. They are prepared to take their hands off the project and let others take lead/accountability along they way – in other words, they can accept that other peoples ways of working or quality standards might be different but know that, for the good of the project that is ok if we are still getting to the right outcome.”

“A natural collaborator is prepared to change perspective and share risks.”

“A good collaborator has a broader perspective - they think about relationships, how people work “

“They listen, are inquisitive and open to new ideas, they find it easy to get up on the balcony and see the big picture. They are a connector who can see benefits for others and are happy to help them achieve those benefits even if they do not further their own organisations interests for the good of the relationship or the broader outcomes.”

“They have an ability to see themselves in action and adjust their styles/roles to suit the situation.”

“They have patience and perseverance – and are prepared to take time to understand other people’s fears, concerns, desires (they take the time to walk in other peoples shoes.)”

“Someone who knows why they are collaborating, what the new value you are trying to create looks like.”

“They are good networkers. As leaders, they have a track record that commands respect. They can easily establish a good rapport with decision makers whatever their background. They have good judgement particularly with respect to people. They are confident, with great listening skills, an ability to stand back, see the big picture and make difficult decisions combined with a focus on actually delivering outcomes at the end of the project.”

“Collaboration is not a single skill set able to be defined in a competency list - it is an ability to learn and value what is present in a room or group and understand how you impact on those other people - it is about self knowledge. Leaders of collaborations need to understand the skills in the group and know how to use them to bring the right skills forward at the right time - they need the ability to choose power differently, to share benefits and risks, to sit on the balcony.”

“Leaders of collaboration are storytellers, able to tell an engaging story to a wide network of colleagues about why they should work collaboratively. They have an ability to tell stories in a way that helps others to see how collaboration is relevant to the work they do.”

“When in the public sector do the CEO leaders of collaborative projects informally get together with the whole team for social interaction? In an alliance we do so at least once a month - our project leaders must be equally confident with the CEO as with the digger driver..... “

“Culture eats strategy for breakfast”¹⁴

Simply articulating a vision of a collaborative culture and planning a strategy of collaboration is not enough to guarantee success. The culture of each partner organisation carries a degree of inertia that leaders must act deliberately to change if collaborations are to be effective in the long run.

Most leaders will be able to reflect on their careers and identify moments in time when they have had to bring teams together, often from different organisations, to deliver an outcome. The interviewees consistently identified the role of culture in both successful and unsuccessful collaborations.

It is not sufficient to put in place the systems and policies to support collaboration. If you don’t get the people and culture right the collaboration is doomed to failure. As a minimum the interviewees suggested that it is critical that leaders in collaborations:

¹⁴ Quote attributed variously to Mark Fields (CEO, Ford Motor Company) in 2006 or to social ecologist Peter Drucker (1909 – 2005)

- Understand the cultures of the different organisations involved in the collaboration. What are the aspects of those cultures that will support or hinder collaboration? How can you demonstrate respect for those cultural norms whilst building a new culture in the collaboration?
- Treat collaboration as an organisational change and renewal exercise. A leader following accepted best practice wouldn't seek to change an organisation without considering how the culture and behaviours of the people in the organisation need to change to support the new strategy. The same applies to building a collaboration
- Set up is everything – the interviewees stressed the importance of deliberately setting expectations of a collaborative culture from the outset and constantly reinforcing those expectations at every opportunity
- Choose your teams carefully. Some people are not natural collaborators, they are not comfortable working in ambiguous contexts, they find it hard to share power and information. Don't just randomly select the stars of your organisation and assume that they will be effective in a collaboration – particularly if the culture of your partner organisations does not gel with their own working styles and behaviours.

Some excellent examples of how to build collaborative culture and recognise the change process that is required come from the private sector. For instance, in construction alliance models for delivery of infrastructure, specific positions called "Alliance Coaches" are used to help form and maintain collaborative teams. Leaders of alliances that I spoke to suggested that they allow for an up front investment of 3-4 days for training to support formation of a collaborative team culture. Their coaches then return to the team regularly to take a health check and help address any behaviour or cultural issues that arise. The work of the alliance coach "goes really deep into interpersonal areas". Between 5-10% of professional services costs in an alliance is spent on developing the team, alliance coaching etc. Most of these costs occur up front before the Alliance is agreed and contracts signed.

The transport operators in England that I spoke to (Network Rail, FirstGroup Plc) told me that they have adopted a strategy of collaboration for parts of their business and use BS11000 to structure their collaborations. Network Rail in particular placed a significant emphasis on culture change as they were seen by many of their potential partners as a non-collaborative organisation. They are not changing their entire business culture overnight but are instead rolling collaboration out in a targeted way, identifying specific procurement opportunities, selecting staff who are comfortable working in collaborative environments and putting them on collaboration projects. When the collaborations finish, they then bring them back into the organisation to transfer their knowledge and help change the internal culture.

In our New Zealand context of cross cultural collaboration and co-management the need to be sensitive to your prospective partners cultural context is particularly relevant. For instance, one Maori interviewee noted an example where standard facilitation approaches that did not pay attention to cultural differences in communication styles set back the evolution of a collaboration. In that instance at the initial meeting the facilitator insisted on starting proceedings by inviting participants to put all their thoughts on post it notes and then work together to group the notes under common issues. The interviewee noted the cultural importance of oral communication in his cultural context particularly at

the start of a process and suggested that denying this opportunity frustrated the chance for the collaboration to grow.

All of the interviewees emphasised the critical importance of deliberately managing organisational culture throughout the life cycle of a collaborative process. The comments below reflect thoughts from participants on the role of an organisation's culture in collaboration;

"Collaboration goes to the heart of an organisation's culture and its people."

"The adoption of a collaboration strategy into a traditional engineering style organisation needs to be seen as a phased process."

"Some people are natural collaborators, others are great joined up thinkers but there are always loners who hurt collaboration. You can teach technical skills but it is much harder to learn collaboration."

"It is not about what's written in an MOU or a Charter - successful collaboration comes from the culture of an organisation."

"Culture eats strategy for breakfast" - Never underestimate the power of cultural inertia.

"Poor behaviours by leaders in particular can undermine collaborative culture more effectively than any other challenge - a single thoughtless act or poor choice of language by a leader can undermine years of work developing a collaboration"

Create heroes - the importance of myths and legends in changing the story and helping achieve clarity.

"In a private sector alliance we set aside 1/2 a day a month for 'social/team activities' - investing in our people means taking time getting to know each other, developing together, checking in constantly on how we are doing as a team not only in terms of delivery"

"In the private sector, we put our collaborators into long term projects, one of my staff has only been back in the firm for a few months over ten years. In government your "bright young things" move around mid project or have very short tenures - how do you maintain the long term relationships necessary to deliver big collaborative goals in those circumstance?"

The type of people we put into collaborative projects was seen as important by all interviewees. Some, following the BS11000 model, like First Group (A public transport operator) had incorporated specific collaboration competencies into their role descriptions and performance plans a part of their Collaborative Skills Plan prepared through their process of gaining BS11000 certification.

What does an effective collaboration look and feel like?

To get a better sense of how culture, process, policy and people come together to make an effective collaboration I asked my interviewees what made their collaborations successful. Some of their comments were:

"a catalyst for change (e.g. London Olympics)"

"governance and senior leadership to be aligned and setting the right tone - top level commitment is essential."

"a consistent attitude to collaboration right through an organisation (a matter of culture)."

"clear rewards or incentives for people who are collaborative and deliver."

“needs to be actively and deliberately fostered - may need governance and project leadership to have as individual whose formal role is to feed collaboration (e.g. the Alliance Coaches used in NZ construction alliances)”

“leaders to select their teams deliberately - “best for project” does not necessarily mean star performer in a technical or delivery sense. The softer interpersonal skills are critical.”

“partners to deliberately talk about who to put onto joint teams and whether they can work effectively together.”

“teams to see what is in it for them - what the value of collaboration is at an individual level.”

“adequate resourcing to do the job – and this mean more communication, governance and team development resources are expended than in a standard internal project – it also may mean that you need to accept delivery timeframes may be a bit longer as well as it takes time to build and maintain a collaborative culture.”

“people to leave their egos and organisational “sacred cows” at the door – they are in the room for a reason and that is not to defend the status quo.”

“partners take accountability for achieving not only their shared objectives but the individual objectives of the other partners”

“people who are prepared to share both good and bad experiences - an environment where people are prepared to “bare all”.”

Collaboration does not equal process efficiency - leaders must reconcile the differences

Mutual or shared benefit has to be present.

In an effective collaboration the power dynamics have changed – the organisations that have traditionally held the greatest power and influence have given that away in order to focus instead on the interests of all participants.

Collaboration is about the way people think and treat people - a good collaborator is someone who constantly engages with partners in a two way process - giving and receiving information, seeing the bigger picture and how it affects partners¹⁵

One aspect of successful collaborations that was consistently identified was the importance of measuring success and celebrating milestones. Of being clear up front how success will be measured and ensuring you celebrate successes frequently to reinforce the benefits of working collaboratively. In this regard the insights of the leaders I interviewed who had worked in both sectors are thought provoking. The questions they asked but left unanswered were:

- *Why do private sector CEOs seem to see the benefits of collaboration quicker than public sector ones? Is it because commercial benefits are so easy to measure and the immediate rewards more tangible?*
- *How can you celebrate success in the public sector? - In a commercial collaboration the measures are clear and simple and the culture enables success to be celebrated, often we identify how success will be celebrated explicitly from the outset (eg via bonuses) - How does the public service do this when your goals are often qualitative and shift in response to external drivers and some standard methods of celebration and reward are not available to you?*

Leadership Development

Many of the Agencies I spoke to have developed programmes to develop the capability of their leaders with an emphasis on their capability in collaborative working

¹⁵ UK Highways Agency (www.highways.govt.uk, accessed May 2013) Developing Catalysts for Change – Changing the way the road sector thinks, behaves and performs

arrangements. Some of the programmes such as those offered by the UK Highways Agency's "Roads Academy" or Solace Enterprises the commercial arm of The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives in the UK are highly structured and targeted programmes offering university qualifications. Other firms such as many NZ engineering consultancies have structured leadership development programmes - customised to their companies but generally focussing on self awareness and life skills.

The UK Highways Agency also works in with professional organisations such as the Institute for Engineers to offer "Master classes" and Network Rail in the UK has three targeted development programmes for collaborators and partnership programmes with technical colleges for admin and technical staff.

SOLACE Enterprises who do leadership development work for local government Chief Executives in the UK outlined their comprehensive leadership programme (see <http://www.solaceenterprises.com/>). This programme has a strong emphasis on adaptive leadership with some interesting inclusions related to the dialogue around place shaping and the role of community.

In Scotland, the leadership development team of the Scottish Government also has a focus on adaptive leadership programmes and working around place shaping and the role of the community. In Scotland one initiative was to use the process of negotiating service level agreements in communities as an experiential training component, relying on the high level of interdepartmental staff exchange to move leaders through collaborative processes in that sector and then take those experiences to their new agencies.

Collaboration is a change process

Because each collaboration is different, due to the dynamics of the different organisations, people and cultures involved, it is important that we treat collaborations as an organisational change and renewal project. This means the disciplines of leading change are an important factor that we must build into our thinking. As part of the fellowship, I spent two weeks at Harvard Business School and Harvard Kennedy School of Government. Through the courses I was left with a number of insights or challenges relevant to the challenge we face in moving the public sector a more outcomes focussed, collaborative sector. Of particular relevance are these reflections from myself and other participants in those courses;

- *To lead change we need to understand how the external world is impacting on our both our people at an individual level and our organisations as a whole and actively shape our responses to respond to those drivers*
- *Play your change process forward - what will failure look like?*
- *Explore opportunities now rather than simply exploiting your current business model and waiting for the world to change around you.*
- *Clearly understand your organisation's current state, transition state and future state*
- *Seek innovation outside your boundaries - look outside your sector for new ideas*
- *Think about how messages get around and stories evolve in your organisation, viral connections within an organisation can be good and bad for change processes*

- *You have to operate at multiple levels in an organisation to land change*
- *Managers look after hardware, leaders look after both hardware and software*
- *Have you thought about 360 reviews for all participants - built into the process to create an open conversation about how well are we collaborating*
- *How far do you go in deliberately recruiting for collaboration? Is it more important that the answer is technically perfect for your business or that the answer was satisfactory but relationships were built and value that did not previously exist has been created.*
- *Do you have to be equals? How do you collaborate where you don't have equal power? Where do power inequalities lie in your collaboration? Don't accidentally feed them by letting one organisation lead all the sexy work*
- *Ask yourself, what is our legacy? What do we give to our staff and our organisations as benefits from being in this collaboration?*
- *What's in it for me if I work in this collaborative way? Why should I give up control?*
- *Collaboration takes time to deliver outcomes of quality but they can be more enduring outcomes (time and effort vs speed and delivery) - how long are you prepared to stick with it to get those outcomes?*
- *Would you be happy having your collaboration partners sitting in the room with you when you write your budgets and develop your priorities? If not, how good is your collaboration really?*

Summary

At the core of all the interviews and study of collaborations are common themes. The critical elements of effective collaboration identified consistently by all interviewees can be distilled down to a few key elements;

- A common language and a shared goal
- Thorough planning and clear processes and systems to support the collaboration
- A collaborative culture and the right people
- Engaged and supportive governance that is prepared to share risks and benefits
- Resilient, creative, adaptive leaders and team members

All of these factors have at people factors at their core.....bringing a modern organisational lens to the whakatauki:

He aha te mea nui o te ao
He tangata! He tangata! He tangata

What is the most important thing in the world?
It is people! It is people! It is people!