COLLABORATION MANAGEMENT: A DEVELOPING DOMAIN?

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ABSTRACT

In this paper we consider the various ways in which researchers have framed insights about the management of interorganizational collaboration. We seek to examine whether, collectively, these make a useful contribution to the practice of collaboration, or how they might do so. We identify, and describe research in, six categories of insight. The first three of these are framed as alternative conceptualizations of the nature of collaboration and the second three are framed as responses to the challenges of collaborative situations. We argue that while collectively they have the potential to form the basis of an impressive tool kit for informing practice, many would have weaknesses if applied prescriptively. We suggest that research in this area needs to pay attention to building more robust conceptualizations and, in parallel, to developing their use in a reflective practice mode.

Keywords: collaboration, practice, management

INTRODUCTION

Inter-organizational collaborations in their many forms – joint ventures, partnerships, strategic alliances, networks (Beamish and Berdrow, 2003; Osborne, Williamson and Beattie, 2002; Grant and Baden-Fuller, 2004; Sydow and Windeler, 2003) and so on – have been extensively researched from a wide range of disciplinary bases, including several, such as geography and politics, which do not relate directly to management or organization studies. Even within the realm of management and organization studies the subject is studied from a rich diversity of theoretical perspectives, including mid-range theorizing grounded in psychology (Gomes et al, 2005), sociology (Gustavs and Clegg, 2005; Larsson et al, 2003) or economics (Nguyen and Meyer, 2004), as well as theoretically promiscuous approaches such as institutional theory (Steensma et al, 2005; Teague, 2005). Despite the variety, a rather small proportion of this work is actually framed as though it were concerned with understanding how collaborations are, or should be managed.

Where academic researchers have turned their attention to practice, they have generally re-presented their work in practitioner-oriented journals (e.g. Hansen and Nohria, 2004; Isabella,2002) or in the form of books (e.g. Doz and Hamel, 1998; Spekman, Isabella, and MacAvoy, 2000). Consultants, however, have also had much to say about the management of collaboration (see, e.g., Ernst and
Bramford, 2005; Lank, 2006) and there have been many pieces of work authored by “practitioners” (Deering and Murphy, 2003; Logan and Stokes, 2004) or emanating from agencies that see collaboration as a core activity (e.g., Audit Commission, 1998). Bodies of relevant literature can be delineated by sector. One body focuses primarily on collaboration between firms, a second on governmental agencies and a third on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and not-for-profit organizations (NFPs). From each perspective, a sub-set of scholars look at cross-sector collaborations.

In this paper we draw together this literature in order to examine firstly, whether, collectively, it makes a useful contribution to the practice of collaboration and secondly, whether and how integration of the extant conceptualizations might be developed through future research that might further – and perhaps better – inform practice. In doing this, we are concerned with the actions of individuals: the range of notions of “manager” in the literature – who it is that might be informed by it – has a considerable sweep. It includes for example: a manager participating in a collaboration; a member nominated from within to lead or manage a partnership; an external professional appointed to manage a collaboration; an alliance manager attending to a portfolio of alliances on behalf of a single organization. We do also explore research concerned with building organizational capabilities as a product of, and an enactment through, managerial action.

**MANAGEMENT INSIGHTS TYPIFIED**

Authors organize their management insights in a plethora of different ways, each of which holds – occasionally explicit, but predominantly implicit – implications for potential modes of use in practice. The range is diverse and many contributions are idiosyncratic, so comparing and compiling is not a trivial task. Nevertheless, we have been able to group contributions, loosely, where they seem to have some similarity to each other. This has led us to identify six categories of contribution. We present these in two groups, the first focusing on those that start from a position of conceptualizing the nature of collaboration; the second with those that are aiming to provide managerial responses to collaborative situations. This is an imprecise grouping since most of the approaches can be viewed to some degree from both perspectives. It should not be seen to reflect a precise characterization of the
work of particular authors; many have multiple contributions which collectively span multiple categories. In the following sub-sections we aim to introduce the approaches in a value-neutral way, reserving evaluatory comment for the concluding section of this paper.

**Conceptualizing the Nature of Collaboration**

Many authors start from a position of conceptualizing the nature of collaboration itself, so that the tasks of managing can be related to aspects of this. We have identified three ways in which this happens.

**Category I - life-cycles, phases and stages**

A common approach to discussing issues related to the management of collaboration, consistent with a process theory perspective (e.g. Van de Ven and Poole, 2005), is to consider collaborations as passing through a set of phases or stages, sometimes referred to as a lifecycle. This research may take the form of a theory driven model (e.g., Zajac and Olson, 1993), but more frequently emerges from single, or occasionally multiple, cases studies (e.g., Browning, Beyer, and Shelter, 1995). Generally, the particular stages are presented as generic, applying to all collaborations – or at least, to all collaborations of a similar type – and “narrating their life as a predictable, linear sequence of life-cycle stages” (de Rond and Bouchiki, 2004: 57). Some authors do, however, acknowledge that the boundaries between one stage and the next may not be as clear as the conceptualization itself suggests (e.g., Spekman et al, 1998).

Many of these “phases” models are concerned with the whole process of collaborating from start-up onwards. The stages included vary in number and detail. Kanter’s (1994) five-phase model is typical of many. She invokes the marriage metaphor and describes stages of “selection and courtship”, “getting engaged”, “setting up housekeeping”, “learning to collaborate”, and “changing within”. Some elaborate to a greater number of phases. Spekman et al (1998), for example, identify seven: anticipation, engagement, valuation, co-ordination, investment, stabilization, and decision. These models tend to follow the progress of a collaboration into functional operation and imply that this will be an indefinitely continuing state. Ring and Van de Ven (1994), however, do address termination
issues and Inkpen and Ross (2001) explicitly include a “dissolution” phase and argue strongly that collaborations should not be allowed to persist beyond their useful life. Some “phases” models concentrate on a particular part of the developmental cycle. The early periods of collaboration are often seen as particularly important; Gray’s (1985) classic model, involving the three sequential phases of problem setting, direction setting, and structuring is of this type.

Whatever their focus, processes that are relevant to the “phases” are typically elaborated in some detail. The intention is usually to provide some insight about issues that need management attention at that stage. These may be in the form of propositions or commentary about what needs to be done in order to increase the chances of (some aspect of) successful collaboration (e.g. Gray, 1989; Inkpen and Ross, 2001), guidelines evaluating key options (e.g. Das and Teng, 1997), or the roles that managers need to play (e.g. Spekman et al, 1998; Ring, Doz, and Olk, 2005) at that time. Sometime the “phases” themselves are intended to be prescriptive of how collaborations should be made to (i.e. managed to) unfold rather than merely descriptive of how they do unfold. For example, Inkpen and Ross’s dissolution phase appears clearly prescriptive, since they argue (descriptively) that many collaborations fail to dissolve themselves when they are no longer valuable.

An important exception to this general categorization of the literature is to be found in Doz, Olk, and Ring (2000). They looked at this literature with a view towards determining whether, or not, collaborations (in particular R&D consortia) actually evolved in any generalizable way. The results of their research suggest that there is variance in the ways that collaborations evolve. They identified nine variables from the literature describing phases or stages of evolution of collaborations and three distinct pathways of evolution which they labeled emergent, engineered and embedded. In each pathway the phasing was different and some of the phases that they included in their model were not present in all of them. The managerial implications of these differences have been discussed in some detail in Ring, Doz, and Olk (2005).
Category II - analytic conceptualizations – typologies, models and diagnostics

A diversity of other models and frameworks have been proposed with a view to providing a basis for managerial action. In the main, they focus on particular issues within the overall collaborative process. Typologies and categorizations abound, including some that relate variables to each other, spotlighting a variety of areas of collaborative management including networking activities and contextual variables (Harland, et al, 2004), the hierarchical level at which an organization participates in a collaboration (from corporate to individual), formality of involvement (from formal to informal), and time frame (long, medium, or short term) (Goerzen, 2005).

Typologies of forms of collaboration are also common; the notion here can be both to correlate collaborative purpose with the most appropriate type of collaborative form and to clarify the different management tasks or issues that each form implies. Most do this along a continuum from those that are seen as weak or unambitious relationships to those seen as the strongest or closest collaborations. Some – and this seems to be a predominant feature in typologies focused on commercial alliances – use terminology that partly captures the purpose and nature of the relationship: *viz*, for example, invasive, multi-function, multi-project, coopetition, networks (Anslinger and Jenk, 2004). Others focus on a generic hierarchy of relational constructs: *viz* networking, co-ordination, co-operation, collaboration (Himmelman, 1996). There is, unfortunately, no consensus in the literature about the nature of the items in these typologies nor about the labels used to describe them.

Some researchers provide explicit frameworks to dictate the circumstances when it is appropriate to adopt a more or less collaborative stance, usually focusing on a specific aspect of circumstance such as the division of surplus value (Cox et al, 2003) or the degree of risk or trust (Ring and Van de Ven, 1992) between partners. Frameworks of this latter sort may be thought of as diagnostics. A manager might use them to establish what position her collaboration is in – or would like to be in – and to aid in selection of an appropriate course of action. Diagnostic models have been developed to focus on many aspects of collaboration, including ensuring corrective change (Ernst and Bamford, 2005),
management levers to overcome barriers to collaboration (Hansen and Nohria, 2004) and which sub-
projects should be carried out by a single partner (Gerwin, 2004).

**Category III - success and failure factors**

Our final type of descriptive conceptualization is perhaps the most common of all. It focuses on the
identification of inherent generic factors that affect the success of collaboration. Factors promoting
success are often explicitly conceptualized as “success factors” although other terms such as
“conditions” and “criteria” for success are sometimes used. Factors promoting failure tend to be
wrapped up in terms such as “challenges”, “obstacles” or even “minefields” (Buchel, 2003). Both are
sometimes expressed as hypotheses or propositions in which an independent variable is related to
performance. They are sometimes presented as quite detailed theoretical frameworks (e.g. Hudson et
al, 1999).

This way of conceiving of collaborations is very close to being directly prescriptive. The factors tend
to be a mix of uncontrollable environmental attributes that need to be accounted for in the
management of collaboration and controllable attributes of the collaboration itself, that are the essence
of what needs to be managed. The approach generally appears to carry the implicit presumption that
knowing the factors can lead to better management practice (Bijlsma Frankema, 2004).

The investigation of success and failure factors focuses at two rather different levels. One approach is
to identify a single or small number of variables that are thought to contribute to collaboration
performance and examine it or them in detail. Taken together, factors treated in this way form a rather
disparate collection, including, for example, power issues (Mayo and Taylor, 2001; Medcoff, 2001),
risk management (Ring and Van de Ven, 1992), issue framing (Dewulf, Craps, and Dercon, 2004),
influence (Samuel, 2005), and the dilemmas between maintaining control and committing to
collaboration (van Marrewijk, 2004) and between competition and collaboration (Zeng and Chen, 2003).
Some, such as national culture (e.g. Buckley, Glaister, and Husan, 2002, Lane and Beamish, 1990), trust (e.g. Bachman, 2001, Child, 2001), and partner selection and management (e.g. Buchel, 2003, Fitzpatrick and Dihullo, 2005, Shenkar and Yan, 2002), have received much attention from
many researchers while others are more idiosyncratic.

A second approach concentrates on establishing the broad range of factors that contribute to collaborative performance. A surprisingly small amount of attention has been paid to understanding the collectivity of contributors to poor performance and with the occasional exception (e.g. an Accenture survey reported in Anslinger and Jenk (2004)), they tend to be context specific. For example: Qiu (2005) identifies recruitment and training, dismissal (problems with hiring the right staff), energy supply (problems with electricity and gas supplies), and development agendas (problems with partners’ conflicting objectives) as key to joint ventures in China’s interior; and Sink (1996) focuses on problems associated with involvement of public officials, incrementalism, the shift to empowerment, individual representatives, and diverse sectors, in the context of community-based collaboration. In all cases some of the factors may be applicable in the generic collaboration context while others are very specific to the local circumstances.

By contrast, much attention has been paid to deriving lists of success factors and there is much complementarity between them. The lists contain anything from three to twenty items and some factors occur repeatedly across authors. For example, Mattessich, Murray Close, and Monsey’s (2001) review of 40 articles concerned with social collaborations highlights the importance of trust as being identified in almost 70% of these. Trust also appears regularly in literature based on commercial collaborations. Other highly cited factors identified in Mattessich et al’s review are: history of collaboration or co-operation in the community; mutual respect, understanding and trust; appropriate cross section of members; members see collaboration in their self-interest; multiple layers of participation; development of clear roles and policy guidelines; open and frequent communication; shared vision; sufficient funds, staff, materials and time; skilled leadership.

As previously indicated, factors identified in this sort of research are sometimes environmental. For example, Mattessich et al indicate that a “favourable political and social climate” is cited as essential by several. These may be directly relevant for policy makers, but are outside of the control of those
involved in the collaboration. For the latter, the most obvious management implication is presumably that collaboration should not be initiated in situations where the factor is not present. Another way of viewing environmental factors is as features to be managed around. For example, a “history of collaboration or co-operation in the community” is obviously not changeable, but it may be possible to take managerial action to compensate. Other success factors are directly within the managerial sphere and are thus, at least to some extent, controllable. By the very nature of collaboration, however, many of these are relational attributes – for example, commitment, trust, communication quality, (Mohr and Spekman, 1994) - and thus can only be partially managed by any single party.

An important aspect of the success factors literature is the research basis from which a set of factors is derived. Not infrequently, these are based on questionnaire or interview responses concerning participants’ reflections on their experience in one or more collaborations and are not examined for their actual effect on performance in those situations. In these cases the factors must be viewed as representative of perceptions of those involved about what has made a positive difference. This does not diminish their significance – perceptions are important and will affect the way participants try to manage their involvement – but perceptions are not the same as actual determinants of performance. When performance is explicitly addressed – for example, as in some hypothesis testing research – a variety of different surrogate performance measures are used. This means, firstly, that every piece of research has to be examined carefully before it can be related to practice; and, secondly, that it cannot be taken for granted that different contributions are comparable.

A very different slant on success and failure is provided by the “themes” approach encapsulated in Huxham and Vangen’s (2005) “theory of collaborative advantage”. The theory is concerned with conceptualizing aspects of practice that are inclined to lead towards “collaborative inertia” – a tendency for slow or negligible progress, pain or hard grind. It aims to provide rich conceptualizations of each of these aspects and, in contrast to much of the literature previously described in this section, explicitly focuses on identifying areas where there may be tensions between alternative possibilities for useful modes of action (Huxham and Beech, 2003). As a whole, the theory is structured in
overlapping “themes”. Each theme relates to an aspect of collaboration practice such as managing aims, power, trust, identity, collaborative structures and so on. The themes do not identify success or failure factors, but instead focus on areas that have to be managed if failure is to be averted. Dividing the world into themes allows the complexity of the whole to be considered in manageable chunks.

**Establishing Responses**

As we have indicated already, conceptualizations of the nature of collaboration can be a precursor to devising responsive management behaviours and tasks. We have also indicated that many of these conceptualizations either implicitly suggest actions or behaviours or explicitly spell out the actions and behaviours that follow from the description. We now turn our attention to those prescriptive aspects that are directly related to the management task. For some authors, this is the central focus of the work and mapping the nature of collaboration is not a part of the logic of their approach. We include here insights from both those who do and those do not start from the “nature of collaboration” position.

**Category IV - competencies, behaviours and tasks**

Many prescriptions for successful collaboration are couched in terms of competencies, skills, capabilities or attributes. Closely related to these are those couched in terms of collaborative behaviours and the roles that are needed within a specific collaboration. Also related are those that focus on activities, tasks, strategies and techniques. While all of these labels suggest a focus on individual managerial action, some of the approaches are actually framed at the organizational level. For example, organizations may be exhorted to gain partnering competencies or to use partnering techniques. As suggested in the introduction, however, we view these as “managerial” because implied individual competencies or actions are needed to enact the proffered organizational level response.

A significant body of literature that is framed at the organizational level is concerned with “alliance capability” (e.g. deMan, 2005) or “portfolio management” (Wagner and Boutellier, 2002). The focus here is on an individual organization’s ability to manage multiple (often many hundreds of) collaborations. Some of the literature develops categories of collaborative relationships – which may vary along dimensions such as intensity, closeness or power asymmetries – and differentiated portfolio
management strategies for those alliances that are more or less important to a central organization (Dyer, Cho and Chu, 1998; Bensaou, 1999). A recurring theme in this area relates to the importance, role and structure of an “alliance function” within an organization: that is, a part of the organization that is dedicated to ensuring smooth management of its key alliances (Hoffman, 2005; de Man, 2005). It is generally concluded that such a function makes a significant difference to achieving good performance in the individual alliances. Kale, Dyer, and Singh (2001), however, present a “4-C” framework (capture, codify, communicate and create, coach) for ensuring that the collaborative know-how is retained and built upon. A key focus of research in this area is on specifying the tasks (Hoffman, 2005), techniques (de Man, 2005), or guiding principles (Wagner and Boutellier, 2002) that alliance management demands. In some cases, this is done to a considerable degree of expansion (e.g. Child and Faulkner, 1998).

The role of an “alliance manager” (Draulans, de Man, and Volberda, 2003; Spekman et al, 1998) within an organization’s alliance function is a different role from that of a partnership manager appointed by the collaboration to manage its activities (Vangen and Huxham, 2003). Consideration of the latter shifts the focus of attention to the management of the collaboration itself. Researchers who focus at this level often conceptualize their recommendations in terms of strategies or tasks that will “foster collaboration” (Gray-Gricar, 1981: 403). Gray’s own early work, for example, identifies strategies of advocacy, diagnosis, networks, search conferences, and referent structures. These are tasks that are to be undertaken by the collaboration; we may presume that this means by those individuals who enact the collaboration on behalf of their organizations. A related body of literature concerned with network management. focuses on the skills needed when a “looser set of relationships” is envisaged (Kickert and Koppenjan, 1997) and the task is to promote the mutual adjustment to each other of actors within a framework of inter-organizational relationships. As with alliance management, there are many examples where collaboration and network management has been expansively elaborated (e.g. Gray, 1989; Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004).
An alternative approach takes the principal focus as not so much on the tasks themselves as on the competencies and behaviours required to carry them out. Williams (2002), for example, focusing particularly on individual “boundary spanners”, defines competencies as the combination of particular skills, abilities, experience, and personal characteristics. He argues that effective boundary spanners demonstrate competencies for building sustainable relationships, managing through influence and negotiation, managing complexity and interdependencies and managing roles, accountabilities, and motivation. Expressed at this level, the competencies approach still focuses principally on tasks that have to be carried out. It is only when the tasks are examined at a more detailed level, that individual capabilities that contribute to the enactment of these become evident. In a longitudinal study of people whom participants identified as effective collaborative leaders, Feyerherm (1994) arrives more directly at behaviours. Her list of 14 items includes, for example, reasoning, bridging, using humour, and providing examples and analogies.

The themes approach, discussed earlier, sees competencies in a different light (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). It argues that competence in managing collaboration is connected to the ability to understand the challenges inherent in collaborative situations and, in the light of that understanding, to formulate managerial action in the light of the particular circumstance and individual abilities. The themes-based theoretical frameworks are seen as a way of conveying the challenges; the manager is encouraged to concentrate at any one time on a particular theme of current concern – let us say, dealing with difficulties in the agreement of collaborative purpose – while maintaining an awareness that dilemmas and difficulties highlighted by the other themes – say, lack of mutual trust and power imbalances - will affect the fruitfulness of any line of action that they choose to take.

**Category V - guidelines and process steps**

Some approaches are expressed in what appear to be more directly prescriptive terms. Many authors produce guidelines for managing (nearly) any collaboration, or some aspect of it. Guidelines are generally expressed in lists of “soundbites” of best practice, always leading with a clear imperative. Thus Das and Teng’s (1999) guidelines for risk management in collaboration include instructions such
as “ensure increased productivity by emphasizing superior alliance performance” (60). Their guidelines for the broader task of sustaining strategic alliances are slightly more elaborate, including for example, contingencies, but are equally firm in their advice (Das and Teng, 1997). Spekman, Isabella, and MacAvoy’s (2000) guidelines for a “no-blame review” of a collaboration’s performance – which is just one aspect of their overall guidance - are also framed as instructions, although their content is more process oriented than Das and Teng’s and includes a long list of “things to think about” before the meeting, a set of ground rules to be followed during the meeting, and a list of possible outcomes - including both validating the collaboration’s strategy and terminating the collaboration – presented almost as a list of options from which participants might choose.

Guidelines of this sort are often suggestive of sequentiality or sometimes explicitly framed sequentially as a set of process steps (e.g. Crosby and Bryson, 2005a; Ring, Olk, and Doz, 2005). Some – particularly those set out in books (e.g. Doz and Hamel, 1998; Bergquist, Betwee, and Meuel, 1995; Mankin and Cohen, 2004; Lank, 2006) – are presented with rich discussion aimed at fleshing out the explanation for the sound bite guideline. At the other extreme are those that are presented with no elaboration or explanation of the guideline as though the reader is expected to trust the author.

**Category VI - tools and facilitation**

Our final category of responses aims to provide direct assistance with the enactment of the previous two. It is concerned with the development of tools and techniques that can be used to support the collaborative process. These include conceptualizations which have both practice and process related aspects, and examples vary radically: Shaugnessy’s (1994) techniques for collaborative project management include quantitative analyses of risk, while Winer and Ray’s (1994) collaboration handbook includes questions to think about, group activities, and so on. There is an increasing number of these tools and they focus on a wide variety of different aspects of collaborating. In a recent review, for example, Gray (2007) identifies tools associated with eight roles played by those who intervene with the intention of making collaborations work: visioning, convening, process design, reflective intervening, problem structuring, conflict handling, brokering and institutional entrepreneurship.
Although these tools can be used by participants themselves, there is often a presumption that they will be used by a facilitator (e.g. Ackermann et al, 2005; Friend and Hickling, 2005).

At a higher level, the notion of Transorganizational Development (TD) can also be regarded as being in this category. Conceptually, TD was introduced by Cummings (1984) as the inter-organizational embodiment of Organizational Development (OD). It is concerned with large system change. Many methods have been devised for promoting such change; Boje and Rosile (2003), for example cite 16 on their TD “gameboard”. They range from the theoretical (e.g. critical theory sociology of OD) to practical events (e.g. search conferences).

**EVALUATION – THE DEVELOPING DOMAIN**

In introducing the six incarnations of management insight under the “nature of” and “responses” headings, we stressed the impreciseness of the categorization. Nevertheless, we believe it is – if not taken over-literally – helpful in providing a sense of the array of contributions to the field.

The six categories – and the variants within them – each have merits and it might be argued that collectively they could form the basis of a very impressive toolkit. However, putting them to use singly, let alone collectively, is not always straightforward. In some cases this is because their form of presentation hides their context-specificity. For example, taken together, the lifecycle approach literature suggests there is variance in the ways that collaborations evolve (Doz, Olk, and Ring, 2000) and in practice it may be more helpful to understand the specific stages that an actual collaboration is passing through than to try to force-fit it to generically specified ones. Typologies are problematic to the extent that the literature does not coalesce towards any agreed version. Even when the same terminology is used, the definitions are often different. The basic success and failure factors approach is good at suggesting where pain or reward can be experienced in collaboration but rarely correlates perceptions with outcomes – and assumes that factors can be consistently determined to assist or detract from positive outcomes. As a rule, little guidance is given on how to turn the factors into
successful managerial action and many of the factors may pull in either direction or be often unattainable in practice. Similarly, specified tasks and guidelines are generally quite explicit about what is to be done but rarely address the practicality of doing it. Tools and techniques can be a help with this, provided that they have a sound empirical and theoretical basis, but this is not always spelled out.

One way in which the domain might progress therefore is through research that pays attention to context and variance, examines the link between practice insights and performance, focuses on the micro detail of the practical enactment of the insights and is clear about their theoretical basis. Over time, it should be possible to produce an increasingly useable set of insights. However, many authors have argued that collaboration is too complex and idiosyncratic for precise prescriptive remedies (e.g. Crosby and Bryson, 2005b; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Imperial, 2005). This view suggests that however carefully researched and framed the insights are, they are unlikely to address fully the needs of any particular practice circumstance. Therefore, a parallel progression for the domain might be a focus on development of the use of the insights as “handles for reflective practice” rather than as precise prescriptive remedies (Huxham and Beech, 2003; Cunliffe, 2004). This implies providing the user with research-justified areas to direct their thinking, while expecting them to use their own expertise and judgment to determine a course of action. Operating within this mode, each insight is seen as a stimulus for constructive thought in the practice situation and as such is likely – and necessarily – to be challenged and reconstructed in that context. Many of the tools of category VI are already framed in this way (e.g. Friend and Hickling, 2005; Huxham and Vangen, 2005, Winer and Ray, 1994) but in other cases, reframing of the insights could facilitate their use in this manner. For example, guidelines and success factors could be reframed in less assertive language and offered as key issues that often need to be managed.

A further important area for the development of the domain relates to the categories themselves. We are conscious that typifying the field in this way belies its variety and that many who believe they have something to offer would not happily include their work in any of the categories (indeed we did not
find a comfortable fit for our own work in them). More than this, it seems likely that others would slice and describe the domain in entirely different language. We do believe, however, that attempting to pull the various contributions together in ways that allow comparison, conjoining and debate is important. Therefore it is to be hoped that a variety of alternative conceptualizations of the domain will, over time, appear.

However these alternative conceptualizations are developed, an important consideration for research into the management of collaboration is that they grasp and develop both of the dimensions of the problem that we have highlighted here. The requirements on the one hand for robust conceptualizations of the phenomenon of collaboration and on the other hand for the ability to support reflective management practice within these complex and challenging environments, seem to us to be inseparable.
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