Collaborative leadership in voluntary organisations

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Introduction and guidance

1 The course: an overview

This course, and another written by the same authors, *Developing leadership practice in voluntary organisations*, are designed to develop your understanding of leadership, and to help you develop your leadership practice in the voluntary sector context. Both are aimed at anyone working in or around voluntary organisations – whether as volunteers or employees, whether in a management position or not. *Developing leadership practice in voluntary organisations* offers a general introduction to leadership, and you are strongly recommended to undertake that course before embarking on this one: it provides background and terminology that serve as important foundations for this course.

The course takes a deeper look at leadership, focusing on its collaborative dimensions. Specifically, this course will address the following areas.

In Week 1, we will introduce our definition of collaborative leadership and discuss why the environment voluntary organisations work within is especially conducive to such ways of working.

In Week 2, you will learn in more depth about the interconnected subjects of identity and participative practice in leadership. You will learn what we mean by both terms and engage with some examples of how applying this twin focus might be useful.

Week 3 focuses on you as someone in leadership. You explore the identity of the practitioner and consider ways in which you can reflect in order to improve your capability as a collaborative leader.

Week 4 asks you to focus on exploring the unknown in collaborative leadership. You are introduced to some ways in which you can analyse and work with organisational language and the notion of stretch questions as a valuable way of exploring the unknown.

Week 5 focuses on constructive challenge in collaborative leadership, making the case for more robust ways in which we can push one another to more creative solutions.

Week 6 focuses on the particular challenges and characteristics of collaboration across organisational boundaries, and the implications for leadership. It explores the tensions which arise for leadership in inter-organisational contexts.

Week 7 explores an issue which underlies much of collaborative working, but which often remains hidden – power. You will explore the issues which arise when working in contexts of power asymmetry, and the potential for exerting influence in these contexts

Week 8 wraps up the course. It looks back on some of the main themes, with a focus on collaboration over the longer term.

The course is designed as a mix of reading, viewing and participation. You will be presented with some ideas but you will also be encouraged to interact with colleagues, friends, and fellow learners as much as you can. Talk with your colleagues or peers about what you are learning, take part in the online discussion forums. Consider the option of studying this course with a group of colleagues from your own or other organisations in a

learning club or informal group – either via occasional face to face meetings, or via social media. Contact the CVSL team at cvsl-oubs@open.ac.uk to find out more about facilitating a learning club.

2 Take control of your own development: join in with our development community

Throughout this eight-week course we will keep referring to 'development', rather than alternative terms such as 'teaching' or 'education'. You will spend some time learning about collaboration and collaborative leadership. However, the main focus of your work will be on developing yourself as a practitioner, as someone confident and capable of stepping into leadership work.

This does mean that you will need to take control of your own learning. You will be invited to reflect on collaborative leadership within your own working environment. More than this, you will be actively encouraged to try out certain ideas in your work context that will aid your development.

We have set up a discussion forum where you can discuss and debate the course content with your fellow learners and with us, your course authors. You will also see that you have a learning journal where you can record your own thoughts on your development in leadership. Key members of the OU's Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership will be able to see what you write and we may anonymise and draw on some of what you say for future research – we see this as a circular relationship where we develop one another's knowledge. The aim is to build a community of learning: we are all in this together.

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3 Your learning journal and discussion space

You will notice that throughout this course you will be pointed to an online space where you can reflect on your learning, engage with the activities set and talk with others pursuing the course. This space is comprised of two main areas.

The first is your learning journal. Only you and the course team (Owain and Carol) can see what you write here. The space is designed to enable you to reflect on your own development as you progress. Keeping a learning journal is good practice because it allows you to connect your learning to your work explicitly and also allows you to track progress over time.

The second area you will notice is an active discussion forum. This is a space where you can debate and discuss ideas generated in the course with others. It is not solely a space for text and you will be asked to post photographs in addition to writing. We encourage challenge and debate but please do maintain a civil tone and keep things focused on ideas rather than on personalities. The area will be facilitated and we do reserve the right to delete any contributions we think run counter to the spirit of generosity and robust challenge valued on the course.

Finally, we expect to be challenged ourselves, so if you find yourself taking issue with any aspect of the course or if there is something you think should be explored in more depth – please post something online or email us directly.

4 Who we are

Owain Smolović Jones is a senior lecturer in organisation studies at the Open University Business School's Department of Public Leadership and Social Enterprise. His main research focus is leadership and the political. Prior to working for the OU he worked in leadership development facilitation and research at the New Zealand Leadership Institute (NZLI), University of Auckland. He secured his PhD at Cranfield University, basing his thesis on public sector leadership development programmes. Prior to earning his PhD he worked in professional politics – but that seems like a long time ago …

Carol Jacklin-Jarvis is a lecturer in management at the Open University Business School's Department of Public Leadership and Social Enterprise. The focus of her research is collaboration between voluntary and public sectors and the practice of leadership in the collaboration context. Carol completed her PhD at The Open University after a career of over 25 years in voluntary and public sectors. At the weekend, she is often found volunteering in her local community, cooking and serving community breakfasts and dinners – and cleaning up afterwards!

Figure 1 Course leaders, Owain Smolović Jones and Carol Jacklin-Jarvis

Week 1: Thinking about collaborative leadership

Introduction

This week of learning introduces you to the concept of 'wicked problems' and how collaborative leadership can be used to help solve them. You will explore what collaborative leadership is, how your organisation can use it to approach 'wicked problems' and the challenges you may face in your sector. You will be asked to consider who your organisation collaborates with and the reasons behind collaboration. Towards the end of the week, you will update your learning journal and take part in a short quiz.

By the end of your studies this week, you will be able to:

*   describe some of the key characteristics of the voluntary sector that make collaborative leadership particularly appropriate
*   offer an account which draws out different kinds of collaboration, and some of the possibilities and challenges of collaborative working
*   relate that account to the current environment for voluntary organisations and to acting and leading within that context
*   offer a critique of the account of collaborative leadership introduced in this week's studies.

1 Why collaborate?

Meet Ellen. Ellen became the chief executive (CEO) of a local family support project, Family Time, four years ago. The purpose of Family Time is to provide support to the families of the local town in the form of advice and information, family activities and parenting classes.

Ellen's story is based on the experiences of a real leader in the voluntary sector and other people whose experiences we have come across during our research and practice. It is an amalgamated and somewhat fictionalised account that nonetheless gets to some of the big issues involved with collaborative leadership. You will return to Ellen's story on and off throughout the eight weeks of this course to focus your exploration of collaborative leadership. Hopefully, Ellen's story will in many ways be familiar to you, but will also raise questions, stimulate your thinking and encourage you to engage with the course content. To begin, please listen to the first part of Ellen's story.

> Audio content is not available in this format.

This section of Ellen's story brought out the fact that many of the people involved with the charity had somewhat different understandings of the problems they face. We would suggest that these differences in understanding often signal different understandings regarding the purpose of an organisation in the first place.

Very few of us can agree in advance what the problems facing organisations really are. Compare this with problems in a family – are family problems a series of individual and unique private problems, for which people just need some one-off support on some practical things, such as learning about baby and infant dietary requirements, speech development and so on? Or are problems with families much more systemic and rooted in far larger problems connected to the education system, criminal justice system, health, social care and the local economy?

If we favour the first, then solutions might be more apparent – we can search our expert knowledge base for good practice and solutions. But if the problem begins to seep into the latter (a complex, systemic problem), then we need to start thinking about all kinds of interventions and experiments. The catch with the latter is that we do not know in advance what some of the solutions – or even the problems – might be. So we need to work together with people in different professions and areas of the community to start not only solving problems, but also working out what some of the problems are in the first place.

Grint (2005) refers to complex and contested problems as 'wicked problems': these are problems for which there is no prior agreement and no obvious solution based in current knowledge. These problems are 'wicked' because they are unwieldy: one important way of approaching these problems is to make the various dimensions of a problem visible and to work in unfamiliar ways with unfamiliar people, in other organisations and even sectors.

Working in this way also involves thinking about ourselves and our work differently. This will be explored next week, in what will be referred to as 'identity work', because it is the case that approaching work collaboratively involves a shift in thinking about how we see ourselves in leadership.

This kind of work is called collaborative leadership work and over the next eight weeks you will unpack and enrich your understanding of what such work entails.

Activity 1 Who can be involved in collaborative leadership work and why?
Allow about 20 minutes

Make a list of all the individuals, groups and organisations you think Ellen may need to collaborate with as she takes on her new job – and why. When you do so you may find it helpful to think about people and organisations who are interested in, and have the power to influence, Ellen's work. You can also think of people who are affected by her and her organisation's work. This may include people and groups who have the power to influence positively or negatively; people who may or may not currently be interested in Family Time.

Comment

Starting with the basics, Ellen will first need to think about her relationship with the existing people inside the organisation who she needs to establish trust and understanding with: the volunteers, staff and trustees. She will also need to think about her relationship with the chair. After establishing some of these basics, she can start to think more expansively. The local health services and local government would be a good place to start. Political buy-in can also be very important for collaborations – so,

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which local councillors and/or local MPs could be called upon to lend their support? She will also need to think about ways in which she can start to appeal to more people to volunteer and donate to Family Time.

Some of these people and groups will inevitably be more enthusiastic than others. Ellen therefore needs to think about where the greatest early promise lies and to go with that. She can start to focus her attention on people with the power to enable or block the growth of the organisation.

2 Collaborative leadership

In our other short course, *Developing leadership practice in voluntary organisations*, we introduced learners to the contested nature of the concept of leadership – the difficulty of reaching a definition which captures its elusive quality. We suggested that leadership is both slippery and significant, and offered our working definition:

> Leadership is a collaborative, political and democratic practice that provides direction, energy and critical engagement on issues that are made to matter.

The important thing to notice here is the clear tension between this idea of leadership offering direction but also the need to bring people with you in leadership practice. Practising collaborative leadership always involves engaging with the contradiction between the need to give people direction and the need for robust participation. We do not try to somehow solve this difficulty because it is precisely at the heart of this tension that much of the promise of collaborative leadership is to be found: a balance that is never solved but which acts as a continuous source of promise and challenge.

This eight-week course focuses in particular on the collaborative dimension of leadership – in short, how leadership brings together diverse groups of people within and across organisational and sector boundaries in order to achieve something that they cannot achieve alone. Here we offer our working definition of collaborative leadership:

> Collaborative leadership is a political and democratic practice that provides direction, energy and critical engagement on issues that are made to matter, *by bringing together diverse groups of people with the intent of achieving something they cannot achieve alone.*

If leadership is best understood as a practice (rather than as the characteristics of any individual), then so too is collaboration. To put this simply, collaboration only happens when people make it happen, even though we often refer to 'a collaboration' as if it had a life of its own. Collaborations are shaped by people, the relationships between them, the technologies they use and the processes in which they engage to reach agreements, develop shared purposes, frame problems and solutions and determine direction.

Collaborative leadership is enacted by individuals with management positions and without. Individuals are often required by their work responsibilities to provide direction and energy for groups of people for whom they have no hierarchical responsibility, nor do they have any tangible resources to incentivise these groups to engage with a particular task or concern.

You will notice that we want you to think of yourselves in relationship to leadership differently – to rethink and reflect upon your identity in relation to leadership. Identity shapes and influences how you think about and practice leadership. You will explore identity further next week.

Figure 1 Sharing the leadership burden

3 Sector challenges and the course's responses to them

To date much of the academic and policy writing about leadership in the sector has focused on individuals (Terry et al., 2019). We believe that leadership practice, and specifically collaborative leadership practice, is particularly important in the voluntary sector because of the sector's unique challenges. We draw on the following understanding of voluntary sector challenges for collaborative leadership:

Dependence, independence and interdependence

Voluntary organisations are frequently represented as dependent on public sector funding, and therefore as greatly impacted by a government's financial settlement. Actually, only a minority of voluntary organisations are directly funded by public agencies. However, at the broader level, the work of many voluntary organisations is closely linked to the policies and activities of public sector agencies. Retaining autonomy, whilst working interdependently, is therefore a key and ongoing issue for the sector.

Figure 2 A charity food kitchen

We will address the dependency, independence and interdependence of the sector by introducing you to a number of collaborative leadership practices. We will draw on some important ideas from informal democratic practice and participation. By democratic we do not mean every person having an equal say, and certainly not the act of voting. Rather, we mean practices that try to encourage as many diverse voices and perspectives as possible, and which involve thinking about how we talk with one another and challenge one another. Getting at what people hold to strongly is important because it can draw out hidden identifications and dimensions to problems that would otherwise go unnoticed. In other words, conflict can be constructive and productive.

Identity

The sector is increasingly concerned with its distinctiveness and independence (from the public sector and from private organisations). In this context, we understand identity as made up of an organisation's unique history, purpose and culture. It is impossible to say that the sector has one distinctive identity. Some organisations are very rooted in local communities, others see themselves as largely expert providers of services and still others view themselves as energetic national (and international) campaigners and advocates.

If you think about it, the identity of an organisation shapes the kind of activities it chooses to pursue (or not). Identity also shapes the sorts of people who are hired and volunteer for organisations. Does this mean that identity is set in stone, never to change? Of course not. Identity is up for grabs and can shift as the people within an organisation experiment with new ideas, via interesting leadership practice.

Value, values and power

Closely related to the issue of identity is the question of the sector's distinctive value (the difference that it makes in society), and of the values which underpin different voluntary organisations and their purposes. Our various collaborative partners will share different values. And some of these partners will necessarily enjoy more power and influence than others. It is our job in collaborative leadership not necessarily to equalise power relations (that is unrealistic) but perhaps to bring out the values of people whose voices can be muted in everyday public life. Equally, we need to think about constructive but also challenging ways of working through unequal power relations.

In her 2013 book, *Voluntary Sector in Transition: Hard Times or New Possibilities?*, Linda Milbourne wrote about the challenges facing the UK voluntary sector. It is not necessary to read this book in order to complete this course, but if you wish to continue with further reading beyond the contents of this course, Milbourne's book is worth exploring. To find out more about the contemporary voluntary sector in England and Wales, a good starting point is NCVO's annual almanac that collates key data and uncovers significant trends in the sector's development.

4 Reasons to collaborate

Watch the following video, an interview with Ian Revell, Chief Executive of the Milton Keynes Community Foundation, in which he sketches out some of the main features of collaborative working and ends by stating some clear benefits for collaborative working.

Video content is not available in this format.

Ian addressed something important for collaborative leadership practice in the video: namely, this shift to thinking of other people and organisations as partners rather than competitors. This is something that is easy to say but harder to do, as society is, in many ways, predicated upon the notion of competition being a good thing. And it is, but only in its proper place. Ian outlined how important it was when collaborating to let go to a certain extent and to give people the space to express themselves, which clearly also means that you will have less control of the final outcome of a collaboration. Ian points out the reason this is to be welcomed at the end of the clip: collaborative leadership endeavours enable you to tackle problems in imaginative, innovative and unexpected ways. Now it is your turn to consider some of the key challenges in collaborative working.

Activity 2 Key challenges in collaborations
Allow about 45 minutes

Now it is your turn to think about collaboration in your work place.

First, think about and note as many different examples of collaboration as you can in your own working week, or more broadly within your organisation. For each example, note whether this is an example of *intra*-organisational (internal to your own organisation), *inter*-organisational (across organisational boundaries), or cross-sector collaboration (with organisations and individuals from public or private sectors). Remember, you can rewatch Ian's video for some inspiration to help you get started. Spend 20 minutes on this part of the task.

Think about why these collaborations exist in the first place. Do people share a common reason for being involved or are people's interests more varied than that? If you are struggling to think of inter-organisational examples, start small. Any working relationship is basically a collaboration between two or more people. We anticipate that this part of the task will take you around 10 minutes.

Now bring your thinking to a close by summarising in your learning journal, up to five key challenges of collaborating with others. Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 1 Activity 2. Spend around 15 minutes on this part of the task.

Comment

Despite the challenges that you may have thought of in the last part of the activity, here are eight reasons that we think the need for collaborative leadership in and across voluntary organisations is so pressing and worth persevering with:

1. The world is becoming more interconnected than ever before. Many of the problems that communities, families and individuals face are now fuelled by cross-national, let alone cross-community, forces. Globalised trade and the overturning of how our economy is structured has led to more opportunities for many, but also left many people behind. Such issues defy previous ways of working that focused on national and regional working. Likewise, the degradation of the global environment by definition cannot be addressed by isolated organisations or governments.

2. Money is tight. The effects of the global recession have not yet dissipated. Budget constraints mean that people need to work together in more creative ways.

3. The small size of most voluntary organisations, especially in comparison to local authorities, can be posited as a good reason for collaboration, enabling greater reach and impact. The fragmentation of welfare service systems also suggests that organisations should collaborate more in order to achieve change.

4. Change happens quickly. Globalisation and new technologies have transformed the way we live and work. Leadership has to keep pace and often this requires more creative and collaborative responses.

5. Old identities seem outdated. People in our societies seem less willing to simply be a certain thing at work or in their extra-curricular lives. The idea that we should only be managers, volunteers or trustees seems outdated. While people's responsibilities are of course important, it is also important to reflect on what is lost when we simply stick to our pre-defined identities.

6. Old practices seem outdated. People are less accustomed to authoritarian relationships and by and large want to be more involved in the organisations and issues that matter to them. Collaborative leadership is one important way in which we can draw on more ideas and better practices.

7. Collaborating more in leadership is socially and politically vital. While the political and economic forces facing our communities seem larger, a counter-tendency exists to withdraw simply to the private realm, to check out of the issues facing our society and the leadership of these issues. This is an unhealthy state of affairs and voluntary organisations play a crucial role between government and citizens in pulling people in, engaging them and, ultimately, transforming what we think of as important and possible.

8. Academic knowledge and sector practices have moved on. New ideas related to leadership spring up all the time now and are more accessible thanks to the

internet. We are able to share ideas related to what works and does not much more than in the past.

Practice of the week: interrogating problems

Wicked problems seem counter-intuitive in a world in which we are conditioned to think about problems as discrete and manageable. More specifically, much of our organisational training involves trying to reduce problems to such an extent that they can be managed or solved by experts. Grint (2005) refers to such work as taming work: like a new pet, the goal of taming work is to train the animal so that it can integrate into family life.

Working with wicked problems involves taking the opposite approach. It means asking yourself and others what you might be missing. It involves questioning the context of the problem at hand and seeking out ways of thinking about the broader complexity within which the problem is situated. This work can mean pushing yourself to think differently; it can mean pushing others to think differently; it also means asking ourselves different questions – questions that open up thinking and possibility, rather than shutting them down. All of the practices you encounter in this course will be focused on unfolding this approach.

5 Week 1 quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 1 quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

6 Summary of Week 1

This week you were introduced to the ethos of the course, one of active participation and developing a community of learning. A definition of leadership was further developed, to focus more on the collaborative dimensions of such work. You reflected on some of the issues that mean that collaborating more in leadership work seems vital within the context of voluntary organisations. In particular, you were introduced to the idea of the 'wicked problem', this idea of problems that defy simple explanations and ask for more diverse input from a range of people and groups. Finally, you were asked to reflect more on some of the possibilities and challenges you see around you for collaborative leadership work.

Thursday 12 March 2020

Week 2: Identity and participative practice in collaborative leadership

Introduction

This week's learning is based on the two key dimensions of leadership that inform the course as a whole – identity and participative practice. Identity is a blend of how we think of ourselves and how others think of us – and identity shapes how we approach collaborative leadership. We need to start thinking of ourselves and our work differently, if we are going to be effective in collaborative leadership practice.

This week also introduces the idea of participative practice, rooted in ideas from informal democratic practice. By democratic we do not mean that members of staff vote on issues as they come along for organisations, although such models do exist and can be interesting. Rather, we adopt democracy as an ethos, a way of thinking and practicing that is relational and places a priority on critical reflection, respectful but also conflictual debate. We have to *think* and *act* in certain ways in order to be able to practice good collaborative leadership: and it is collaborative leadership that seems particularly suited to tackling wicked problems.

By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- define identity as far as it relates to collaborative leadership
- describe identity as enacted through the language and practices used
- identify the various sources of your identity – as a professional, a civic activist, a family member and organisational partner
- define participative practice and its significance for leadership work in the voluntary sector
- describe some of the main aspects of your own identity and practices you value
- reflect on the kinds of practices that seem to define the organisations you work on behalf of.

1 Identity and participation

You were introduced to Ellen, the CEO of a local family support project, Family Time, in Week 1. Listen to the following extract from Ellen's story:

Audio content is not available in this format.

Listening to this extract, you should develop a good sense of the following, crucial dimensions of the leadership fabric that acts as context to the challenges facing Ellen:

- how Family Time is seen as an organisation;
- how Ellen is seen as a leader;
- how Family Time's staff view their work and themselves in that work;
- how local government workers view their work and themselves in that work;
- the webs of practices employed by Family Time in its everyday work.

We summarise and capture these dynamics as related to two substantive dimensions of leadership: identity and participation. It is these dimensions that shape how we approach this course. This week will be dedicated to providing you with a primer on both.

2 Leadership and identity

It is often difficult to change how we view leadership in practice because of what we refer to as *identity*. Over the years we have been informally trained to think of leadership as residing in single leaders, rather than as a practice built between people in collaborative ways.

In this section, we will provide our definition of identity, before moving on to discuss how identity informs all kinds of leadership work within voluntary organisations.

In this course you will see identity as something that can be created yourself but also as something that is imposed upon you by social and political norms. Identity is how you think of yourself and how others think of you. Identities can act as a kind of lens that enables certain types of leadership thinking and practice while restricting others. Identity is therefore very important for leadership practice, as it acts as a filter for the kinds of work we regard as legitimate leadership practice.

More than many other sectors, voluntary organisations draw on a number of different identities. Most voluntary organisations are an eclectic mix of volunteers, paid staff, professional experts and supportive partners. Each decision and practice embarked upon by these people further builds the identity of the organisation.

The following activity serves to draw out what we mean by identity.

Activity 1 Ellen's story reconsidered
Allow about 25 minutes

Re-listen to this week's extract from Ellen's story. Remember that identity is comprised of how people think of themselves, of what they think makes them what they are – at work, at home, in relation to their communities, their beliefs and so on.

> Audio content is not available in this format.

Spend 10 minutes making notes of the various ways in which you could describe Ellen's identity.

Now spend 15 minutes thinking about what kind of things these various identities enable and what they restrict: how does Ellen's identity shape her particular view of what needs to be done at Family Time?

> *Provide your answer...*

Comment

Here are the different identities we drew from the extract of Ellen's story.

Ellen is portrayed as a children's services professional. The way she thinks and sees the world is strongly informed by the body of legislation, regulation, evidence and practices amassed in the world of social work. These are manifested in processes to be followed in relation to families with problems and in the expectations she has of those who work for her.

Ellen is someone who is a committed member of a local community. Her civic identity is apparent in the fact that she appreciated the informal ties and some of the strengths

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of the informal ways in which Family Time works. It is often difficult to draw on such informal and intangible ties from the more constrained identity of a children's services professional.

Ellen is someone who is a family member. She takes her role as a parent seriously. Ellen cannot help but see the world through this lens – her emotional awareness and sensitivity towards suffering makes sure of that.

Ellen is political. By political we mean that she recognises the importance of organising and progressing coalitions of support among diverse groups of people. She has developed this pragmatic identity through her years of trying to enact change in a democratically mandated organisation (local government).

Ellen is also a woman. Now, this does not mean that she is not masculine (rather than male) in her approach to leadership: bossy, very rational, very assertive, and so on. But from what we can see of her narrative, Ellen is more open and inquisitive than merely being a masculine stereotype – she hopes to learn a lot from her current staff, rather than assuming that one leadership practice from her local authority will transfer straight across to her new context.

3 Defining identity

None of these identities presented in Activity 1 in the previous section can be regarded as Ellen's complete identity. Her identity is a combination of all of them and no doubt more. Identity was defined earlier as something that is built for you. Some people may choose to view Ellen very clearly as a rigid local government manager, for example. But identity is also something you can influence and shape as you go along – you can defy the way others position you through your practice.

How you position yourself in identity terms is a gateway to how you think of and practice leadership: it shapes you and your practice.

This is not to say that Ellen's discretion to establish her own identity is removed in advance. To suggest this would be the equivalent of saying that she is a prisoner of the different forces and people around her. Yet not to acknowledge the huge amount of social and political pressure that exists in shaping you as a person is also naïve.

People are heavily influenced by the norms of those who bring them up – parents, siblings, close friends and those who educate. As you get older, you develop your own tastes, passions and interests. Not many of us invent these options but instead draw on a range of choices that pre-exist: you choose to identify as committed to a certain political or religious identity; you learn to name certain sexual feelings you have one thing or another; you seek out people with similar leisure interests as your own.

Likewise, you are taught to relate to certain ways of thinking about leadership in relation to your identity. Either thinking of yourself as a natural born leader, as a good, obedient follower or as something much more collaborative. How you think of leadership is closely tied to how you position yourself and how others position you.

Yet you can also break these restrictions and challenge the norms given to you by others. People challenge and influence their religious affiliations, for example: to change their perspectives on LGBT+ issues. People challenge their traditional gender roles: for example, women winning the right to vote, and now demanding equal treatment at work and in society.

Figure 1 Defining identity

4 Identity work

We adopt the title 'identity work' to convey the notion that identity is active, that it moves with the practices and language we adopt: such as collaborative leadership. Smolović Jones et al. (2016) argue that the very identity of group leadership and that of the leader is open and fluid according to the debates and collective learning of groups and that such processes are even more expansive and open to possibility within a cross-organisational context, which necessarily draws on a broader range of perspectives. Another example will help you understand this point:

> Ellen's son, Harry, is 16 years old. He is very attached to his smartphone and does not like to be without it. He uses his smartphone to stay in touch with all of his school friends and the friendships he has developed in his karate club. Via his phone, he learns about the clothing styles worn by people interested in the same kind of music as him. Harry is also a socially and politically aware teenager. He uses Twitter to stay in touch with what people are saying about politics. A group of his friends also happen to be volunteers with Family Time. They organise fundraising sessions and volunteer to spend time with younger people, playing sports and encouraging them to learn musical instruments. They organise and communicate via WhatsApp, an app that enables rapid communication within groups. Their activities can be quite spontaneous, as well as carefully planned. Ellen often does not understand the language Harry and his friends use, although she sometimes wishes he would improve his punctuation and grammar in his online life!

Harry, like many people, young and old, develops his identity through practices we would have thought impossible a relatively short time ago. People's phones and tablets are a part of them, almost like an extra limb. They develop as people as a result of a huge range of influences and communications.

Figure 2 On the phone

Who you are informs what you do, and vice versa. Harry is no different to a retired woman (let's call her Mair) whose identity is influenced by her friends, her experiences of volunteering in her local charity shop and the opinions she receives from her daily newspaper. In both cases you can talk about the practices and technologies that shape their identities. Of course, you can re-interpret who you are as people and organisations through the language and practices you adopt. Mair could change her newspaper, could learn how to navigate a smartphone or could start dressing like a teenager.

In more meta terms, you can look at the bigger strategic decisions of organisations as generating an identity. Many larger voluntary organisations have embarked upon ambitious partnerships with large corporate businesses: the argument in favour being that such partnerships achieve tangible benefits, with the criticism being that they can erode the radical edge of an organisation. Other voluntary organisations have become providers of services for government: again, the benefit of such an arrangement is argued to be the tangible improvement of people's lives, with the criticism that a relationship of dependency upon government is created. Other organisations have chosen a more 'independent' path but risk being something of a voice in the wilderness when it comes to influencing society. Each of these strategic positions creates an identity for the

organisation and the people within them: corporate partner, critical friend, service provider, agitator, critical voice and so on.

Identity is not static but is continuously being created by small and big acts, through the language you use and the personas you adopt. Identity is an active process: it is better thought of as identity *work*.

5 Voluntary sector identities

In this section, you will explore identities that are sometimes attributed to voluntary organisations and their leaders, before exploring the significance of identity for collaborative leadership in more depth.

Figure 3 Voluntary sector identity

A well-read guide to the law for voluntary organisations is Hayes and Reason's *Voluntary but not Amateur* (2009). This title captures (and challenges) one identity that is sometimes attributed to voluntary organisations and their leaders – a group of well-meaning amateurs. In recent years, there has been an effort to convey the professional nature of the sector and its leaders, with an emphasis of the effectiveness and efficiency of the sector. However, there may be times when individuals and organisations in the voluntary sector want to distinguish themselves from the groups more commonly referred to as 'professionals', or from some of the connotations of a 'professional' identity.

> The term 'voluntary' conjures up visions of well-meaning amateurs attempting to do good in a very British, slightly dysfunctional way. However, those working for charities know the reality of the sector is far from this, with some charities delivering services to those most in need far more effectively and efficiently than government bodies and other self-proclaimed professional organisations.
>
> (Cooper, 2013)

A second identity that recurs in narratives of the voluntary sector is that of the lone rescuing hero – consider the founding figures of nineteenth-century charities. Some long-standing charities are still named after these figures – for example, Barnardo's, Spurgeon's and Fegan's.

Consider this headline from the Guardian's reporting of the refugee crisis – 'The idealists of Lesbos: volunteers at the heart of the refugee crisis', accompanied by a picture of volunteers apparently rescuing a child from the sea (*Guardian*, 15 April 2016). Or this line from later in the same report: 'At no other time in modern history have NGOs or individuals stepped in to make up for the limited resources of a near bankrupt country that has struggled to cope with the influx.' While it is good to acknowledge the commitments and achievements of individuals, and clearly makes for good publicity, many in the sector will be uncomfortable with identifying themselves primarily with the lone rescuing hero identity.

More broadly, there is a continuing debate in the voluntary sector literature about whether there is something that is recognisable as a 'voluntary sector identity' (Milbourne, 2013) that captures the distinctive characteristics and attributes of the sector as a whole, and in turn informs the actions of individuals within the sector.

Activity 2: Leadership and identities

Allow about 50 minutes

Reflecting on how you see the identity of the voluntary sector will inevitably shape how you view leadership, so in this activity you will reflect in more depth on the identity of the sector. We created the word cloud below from words we found used to describe the distinctive identity of the voluntary sector in the academic and practitioner literature. Spend 20 minutes reflecting on which of these words (if any) you identify with. Are there any words you would add?

Figure 4 Identifying with voluntary sector identity

Share these words with a colleague in the voluntary sector and ask them which of these they identify with – or not. How does their response differ from yours? In your learning journal,, reflect on what your response to these words might suggest about how you see the sector's identity, and your own identity within it. How might these constructions of identity impact on the ways in which you collaborate with others in and beyond the sector? Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 2 Activity 2. Spend 30 minutes doing this.

Comment

How easy did you find it to begin to identify a voluntary sector identity through this activity?

Milbourne (2013) is one of a group of researchers who argue that a distinctive voluntary sector identity has been eroded by the policy and political context since the 1990s – the move from public sector grants to competitive commissioning and the increased role of voluntary organisations in the provision of public services. Voluntary and public sectors have historically each impacted on the development of the other, but Milbourne argues that the sector needs to recover a distinctive identity. This sense of distinctiveness (or otherwise) informs the actions of individuals within the sector, and the ways in which it is perceived by those outside the sector, and therefore impacts on collaboration across sector boundaries. Could part of the distinctiveness of voluntary sector identity be that people within the sector are great collaborators?

You conclude this week's learning by reflecting on how the notion of participative leadership practice can contribute to the development of an identity for voluntary organisations that is open but also meaningful.

6 Participative leadership practice and identity

Participative leadership practice is strongly informed by informal democratic practice. When people mention democracy, what usually springs to mind are things like television and parliamentary debates between politicians, the act of voting in elections and the rituals that accompany the tallying and reporting of results. Yet democratic practice can also be conceptualised as something with a much broader significance, as something that can permeate how you engage with your work and society.

If you boil down democracy to its core meaning you are left with something that seeks to convey a sense of relationality between people, a sense that people work out what is in the best interests of a community: how people can participate and have a say, in other words. This is underlined in a voluntary sector context by Smolović Jones et al. (2016) in relation to the voluntary sector, where they theorise a democratic form of leadership from the basis of a cross-organisational initiative between voluntary sector groups as offering a platform for a range of previously marginalised voices and presences to participate. Democracy also conveys the sense that the meaning attributed to various things (policy, practice, identity) is contested and up for grabs. For example, what does it mean for a voluntary sector organisation to enjoy independence? Independence is an important word for voluntary organisations that is sure to excite and provoke. Yet how easy is it in an interconnected world to be ever truly independent? The meaning of independence will inevitably vary depending upon who you speak to in the sector.

Figure 5 Participation through vote-taking

Engaging in participative *leadership* practice means that democracy is purposeful: not *only* sitting around in rooms talking. It is shaped in a way that acknowledges that organisations have to move forward, have real work to do and decisions to make. Participative leadership practice is a state of mind as well as a state of practice: it seeks to mainstream active and rich, conflictual (when necessary) practice into the everyday working of organisations.

Participative leadership practice is a way of drawing people into decisions but also into the everyday work of organisations. We outline a participative leadership practice as working along two main dimensions – identity is crucial to both.

6.1 Democratic practice as work on the self

The first dimension of participative leadership practice is work on the self, work you engage in, with yourself as the primary focus. This is primarily reflective work, where you critically engage with your own commitments, knowledge and beliefs (Connolly, 2004 and 2005). This is about opening yourself up to the potential for collaborative leadership.

What is democratic about this process is that you reflect deeply on who you are being in certain situations (in meetings, in your conversations and relationships with trustees, partners and volunteers) and ask what it is they might need from you, rather than what you would prefer to offer them. Critically reflecting on your own work in leadership means that you start to see yourself as dependent on those around you – you start to see yourself relationally, as deeply entwined in the lives and fates of others. You ask yourself what kind

of identity would your group value from you, or, what kind of identity does your group need of you now? These are two different propositions, of course − what a group wants is not always what it needs. As Vangen and Huxham (2003) state, sometimes adopting a leadership identity involves a degree of steel and pragmatism: this is only problematic if it becomes the default position.

Activity 3 Your close working relationships
Allow about 25 minutes

Spend 10 minutes thinking carefully about the one person you work most closely with. What is it you think that person values most from you? Is this the same thing that you think you offer that person? If you are uncertain, why not have an informal discussion with that person about what they value and need from you in terms of your work and leadership? Spend about 15 minutes and make notes of your thoughts in your learning journal,. Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 2 Activity 3.

Comment

Asking what others need of you is a different way of thinking about leadership. You can already now sense the influence of democratic thinking into leadership practice – opening up what you do and even your identity to the influence of others.

6.2 Participative and relational practice

We have already stated that identity is shaped by and through practice. Identity is not static but something that moves and changes with practice. For example, every time you write something about your organisation or yourself on a website or social media forum, you influence the way in which you are seen, and perhaps also the way you see yourself.

Participative leadership practice throws into play your own and your organisation's identity. It does so because practice is *relational*. Practice does not happen in isolation but exists in the spaces between people (Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011). Leadership is something that is generated between people and their bodies, as they learn to respond to one another in sensual ways (Carroll and Smolović Jones, 2018). A simple illustration of the point is that it is impossible to think of leading without the presence of following – not everyone can lead all of the time and, likewise, not everyone can follow all of the time (Ford and Harding, 2015).

Focusing on leadership as a practice inevitably means you think about the kinds of practices you create together, rather than looking inwards at the kinds of people you think you are (Raelin, 2011). It is a subtle but important shift in thinking: leadership is less about you as an individual and more about the practices your relational work generates. If you think of leadership as a practice, then you should also think about how you can nurture and develop the most helpful parts of your practice and challenge those aspects of your practice that are less helpful.

Practices are informed by your identity, but your identity is also shaped by your practices. The two are locked together to such an extent that the lines between the two blur significantly. Participative leadership practice recognises the fact that you are mutually dependent on one another and tries to draw out and learn from your experiences of practice.

Activity 4 Your organisational identity

Allow about 55 minutes

Spend 15 minutes thinking about the kind of person you tend to be in your organisation, rather than at home, socially or in the community. Make some notes along the way. Are you a commander? A facilitator? A provocateur? A mentor? Or someone else?

Spend another 10 minutes thinking about where these identities come from – from your workplace or somewhere else?

Now visit the discussion forum. Make sure you post your comments within the correct thread for this activity. Summarise and describe your thoughts. Ask a question of at least two other learners – these questions should help your fellow learners open up their thinking. Examples might include:

- Have you always been like this or are your habits things you have developed at work?

- Can you think of any examples to illustrate your point?

- Are there things related to your values that could explain such behaviours?

- Where do you think your values come from?

You should spend around 30 minutes on this part of the activity.

Comment

Throughout this course you will learn, we hope, as much from one another's practices and thoughts as from what is written in the formal part of the course. How can you recognise your own deeply held passions for leadership but also be responsive and open to the thoughts of others?

Practice for the week: doing identity work

Identity *work* conveys the active nature of approaching identity as something that is both done to you and something that you craft with others. You are usually very task focused when going about our practice at work, and rightly so. However, it is also worth thinking actively about how the work you are doing also shapes your identity, and vice versa. Holding a collaborative identity means that you need to think of your work as closely related to your own identity – as open, participative practitioners.

7 Week 2 quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 2 quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

8 Summary of Week 2

You started this week by looking at the idea that identity acts as a filter for the kind of leadership we practice. Identity is something that is given by organisations and other people and groups, but is also something that you can shape and influence. You considered that identity is dynamic, that it moves as you practice, through identity work. Having spent time on identity in general, you then considered identity in relation to voluntary organisations and reflected on the distinctiveness (or not) of the voluntary sector.

You were then introduced to the idea of participative practice as practice that is democratic and relational. Leadership in this context was described as offering collective direction to practice. Participative practice was described as making sense of the self and in terms of practice between people.

http://www.open.edu/openlearn/languages/chinese/beginners-chinese/content-section-0?utm_source=openlearnutm_campaign=olutm_medium=ebook

Week 3: Working with identity, reflection and difference

Introduction

Last week, you were introduced to the idea of identity as important for learning about and practising collaborative leadership in order to tackle wicked problems. This week's focus is on yourself as someone deeply involved in leadership work. Guiding your exploration this week will be this simple question: what kind of work can you do on yourself in order to become more engaged and critical participants in collaborative leadership?

Figure 1 Identity

In order to address this question you will cover two areas. The first is how you might become more responsive and appreciative of your own identity and those that are different to yours: opening yourself up to collaborative leadership possibilities. The second is a reflection on some important identities that seem to predominate in the voluntary sector and the potential of these identities to form the basis for collaborative work. Ellen, the CEO of family support project Family Time, discusses these two areas in the next section.

By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- reflect on the sources of your own professional identity
- reflect on how your professional identity has adapted over time
- reflect on the difference at the heart of your identity and how these differences might signal the possibility for developing new conversations and working relationships
- describe and discuss the range of identities associated with the voluntary sector and how these may, or may not, be useful for a practice of collaborative leadership.

1 Ellen reflects on difference

Listen to another extract from Ellen's story.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Ellen is getting to grips with the difference she sees around her – in her organisation, within other organisations and in the communities in which Family Time works.

Rather than assuming that others are simply wrong or wrong-headed, she is trying to open herself up to the possibility that her own identity prevents her from seeing the full range of possibilities open to her and her organisation. We will later call the mindset in which Ellen is working a 'bicameral orientation'.

That sounds technical but it is really just an orientation to everyday thinking where we are both passionately committed to our own identities but also maintain an openness to their limitations – and therefore to the legitimate positions of others. Key to thinking in this way, we will argue, is to develop the habit of critical reflection upon one's own identity and positioning in the world.

2 Reflecting on difference

Crucial for any form of collaborative leadership is the basic idea that it involves working closely with other people. There are two other things to bear in mind regarding collaborative leadership. First, it usually involves working with new people or groups – people you do not necessarily think of as regular, day-to-day collaborators: this is because wicked problems seem to need the input of a wide variety of perspectives. Leadership, as outlined in Week 1, involves stretching the boundaries of organisational and social problems. If problems are not to be regarded as more complex and unwieldy, then it stands to reason that they will require a broader range of people to put their minds and talents to work at these problems.

Second, and most crucially for this week, collaborative leadership means relating to other people – and yourself – differently. Let's take this one step at a time. In terms of yourself, you become accustomed to thinking of yourself in certain ways, professionally and otherwise and last week we referred to this as identity. Identity is simply a word that describes how you think of yourself and how others think of you.

When you think about and relate to other people, you inevitably filter your impressions through the prism of your own identity. It is sometimes hard to appreciate that others will see the world very differently to you. Everyone is exposed to various experiences, relationships and pressures that contribute to how you think of yourself and how you are thought of. You cannot really know what it is like to occupy the identity of another, but you can remain open to exploring what it might be like.

Figure 2 Your shoes or mine?

Bear in mind here that organisations, professions and even sectors have identities, as well as people. They develop collective – if also contested – ways of thinking about and seeing the world.

Let's provide you with an example of how identity can shape our work: I (Owain) cannot, professionally, remove my knowledge of political discourse and language: I tend to see patterns that can be enlightening but also sometimes dispiriting. I was brought up to think of myself in the world communally, of my responsibility to others and find it hard to think of only myself and my own interests in politics. Materially, I cannot escape the fact that I, at present, live a fairly comfortable life, in a pleasant middle class neighbourhood, employed in a fulfilling job in a stable and respected organisation. My parents did not have this privilege, of course, but it is impossible for me to understand what life would have been like for my father growing up in a working class community in west Wales. I do not know what it is like to live in social housing, getting by on insecure employment, people who have felt the brunt of globalisation and tough economic times.

But does this mean that my identity is always sealed off to difference, to being able to reach out and stretch my thinking? No, of course not.

In the next section you will think about a couple of ways in which you can reflect on your own identity as a means of opening your own identity to difference.

3 Identity and difference

When you think of identity, minds usually turn to what you *are* and what you identify with (be it profession, beliefs, values and so on). But let's turn this normal way of thinking on its head for a while and consider the case that identities are as much defined by *what they are not* as by what they are (Connolly, 2002).

Let's unpack this statement with an example. Owain recently conducted some in-depth research with elected politicians and council officers in a large English local authority. The purpose of the research was to explore the journey that leadership goes through as it is put into practice in a workplace. What was interesting about this research was the different ways in which people identified with the concept of leadership. For some, leadership was very much collaborative, about bringing people together in novel ways to tackle complex problems. But for others, leadership was defined as the acts of strong individuals – leadership was just a name for the collection of things a leader does (we will call this view leaderism).

What was interesting about this case is that both sets of people defined their view of leadership against a caricature of the other side. For the collaborators, people who invested in a leader-centric view were too stuck in the past and traditional. For those who believed in strong leaders over leadership, the collaborators were too interested in talk and process over action. Neither side could know its own identity outside of how it knew the identity of those people it opposed. Had both sets of people reflected on how their own identities were shaped by difference, they might have been able to open themselves up to some interesting and exciting collaborative leadership possibilities.

This example also brings to the fore the fact that identities are as much held by groups and organisations as by individuals – you can develop collective sense of identity as well as a collective orientation to difference.

The examples drawn upon are of course extreme cases but such examples do make a point. The key point is that all identities are built as much by what they are not – by difference – as they are by any positive content. The identities of all always contain this element of the 'foreign' that helps define them (Honig, 2003). Identity is difference. Because identities are so dependent on difference, this demonstrates that identities are necessarily limited and always will be. They will never provide all the answers you need. You will now consider how to work with this insight in practice.

Figure 3 Who am I?

4 Identity in reflection: Developing a bicameral orientation

You will now reflect on how you can use this idea of identity being built upon difference, developing yourself so that you can be more effective collaborators. In a nutshell, what you are aiming for is a parallel process of reflection where you come to recognise better:

a. the identity that you passionately hold dear
b. that which is different to your identity
c. what might enable your own identity to adapt and grow as a result of noticing its partiality and dependence on others' (equally partial) identities.

This process of reflection and recognition is what Connolly (2005) referred to as a bicameral orientation.

There are two key points to be made. First, you need to recognise that all identities are highly dependent on others for their everyday functioning: we are connected to others, whether we like it or not. This recognition should spark the realisation that your identity in isolation is incapable of fully understanding the world and its problems. Second, because your identity is so relational and partial, you should try to maintain an openness and generosity to the identities of others: to really understand how they see the world and their beliefs, which are as dearly held – and as partial – as your own.

Developing a bicameral reflective approach enables you to know your own identity more rigorously. It also helps you cultivate a generosity that opens up possibilities for new conversations with colleagues. You become genuinely inquisitive of their perspectives, seeking out differences as they offer interesting and valuable possibilities for future collaboration.

Through developing an appreciation of the difference identities are rooted within, you might also begin to develop what Connolly (2005) refers to as 'critical responsiveness'. By this he means an appreciation and awareness of alternative views of the world and a sensitivity to other, emerging identities and perspectives.

Being attuned to difference means that you can be more open to noticing certain movements and causes outside your regular view of the world. Being critically responsive means being open to the emerging concerns of your community. It also means developing an understanding of the work of others and how such work may find common cause with your organisation.

Now it is time for you to test this thinking in relation to yourself and your organisation.

Activity 1 Your values and the voluntary sector
Allow about 50 minutes

Spend 10 minutes thinking carefully about why you decided to work in the voluntary sector. Do you still feel passionately about these identifications and values? How does this identification translate into the way you see and approach your work? Spend a further 20 minutes making a note of your answers in your learning journal,. Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 3 Activity 1.

Now spend 20 minutes thinking about the differences your professional, organisational and/or sector identities are rooted in: what are your identities defined *against*? Make a note of these in your learning journal,. Does thinking about this difference offer you any clues to the kinds of groups or people you might seek out in order to better understand certain problems or issues facing your organisation or community?

Comment

You will build on this activity later this week. Thinking of your identity as rooted in difference helps to open it up to growth and should enable you to see some interesting possibilities for collaborative leadership, or at least to indicate some specific people or groups you might seek out for further conversations. Returning to the local government example provided earlier in Ellen's story, what might have happened had our two groups with opposing views of leadership reflected more deeply on how and why they thought of leadership in certain ways? It might have opened the way for a constructive set of discussions about where each was coming from – what people valued and the kind of problems they saw leadership as tackling.

5 Identity, difference and the voluntary sector

The voluntary sector attracts such a diverse range of people – from the professionals from other areas giving their time for free, to enthusiastic and idealistic volunteers, people with deep sector expertise and to those simply volunteering to enjoy themselves and learn. These are all people who need to come together to engage in collaborative leadership. Here are some of the work identities we think are important to the sector:

- The volunteer: many volunteers have professional lives away from the organisation for whom they volunteer, others volunteer in the hope of building valuable skills for the future. Volunteers get involved for a variety of reasons. Some for deeply personal reasons – volunteering at a hospice, for example, because of the care given to a loved one in the past. Some people simply enjoy the social side of volunteering. Others hold certain ideological, spiritual or moral commitments that drive them to get involved. The implication is that volunteers also contribute a range of quite different things, according to their preferences and skills. Some people may also contribute professional services for free.

- The subject expert and professional: subject experts usually undergo years of training in their areas of expertise (finance, law, human resources, and so on). They usually identify with at least two different spheres, the organisation in which they work and their broader profession outside the organisation.

- The manager: managers may start as subject experts and learn management along the way. Management comes with its own language, its own techniques and practices. Managers are generalists by definition. Few people choose in advance that they want to become managers – rather it is something that they grow into as they advance their careers.

- The trustee: trustees can be appointed because of their professional knowledge, experience of overseeing other organisations or because of their passion for a cause. The trustee is an interesting identity because it sits somewhere between volunteer, subject expert and manager.

Figure 4 Success in the voluntary sector requires diverse identities from those working in it

There are two key points to be made in relation to these identities. The first is that each is assembled over the years due to training and experience. The second is that no one fits neatly into any of these boxes. We break the confines of our own identities – within our

own heads and externally, in our interactions with others in collaborative leadership. It has already been noted that people become volunteers for a number of different reasons and pursue volunteering in a number of different ways. As you reflect on the difference that helps to build your identity, you appreciate even more how much your identity can be opened up, even as you remain committed to your own beliefs and values. Working and talking with others in collaborative leadership can also help you see possibilities for stretching and growing your own identity.

Even if you see your work identity in certain, quite narrow ways, others do not construct your identity in this way. They see you predominantly via the filter of their own identifications. For example, Harrison et al. (2012) note that the role of the charity board chair, despite the statutory obligations of such a post, are perceived in ways that exceed these boundaries. The authors note that chairs are looked upon by members of staff and volunteers for leadership, despite leadership not being in the job description. Chairs are also expected to demonstrate a range of 'softer' behaviours (emotional intelligence, affinity for teamwork) not normally associated with this role.

In other words, identities, even professional ones, are capable of growth, and it is worth you reflecting on whether you are able to make the most of the diverse identities housed within your organisation - and beyond in your collaborative leadership work.

Now watch the following video, an interview with Alison Miller, Chief Executive, and John Wallace, Chair, of St Francis' Children's Society. In the video Alison and John reflect on how they work within their identities as chief executive and chair.

Video content is not available in this format.

John and Alison talk explicitly about their shared leadership, but as you know, these things are simpler in principle than practice. Voluntary organisations are a mix of very diverse people and identities. John refers to himself as a 'critical friend', which is a powerful way of saying that good chairs will feel able to offer constructive critique (you will learn more about this in Week 5). Offering critique from a position of difference is an important part of collaborative leadership. Most importantly, Alison and John talk about building and nurturing personal relationships of trust. Putting the work in at this level

enables them to tackle difficult problems when they arise and make the most of their diverse identities in practice. With that in mind, you will now move on to think about ways in which voluntary organisations can draw on the strengths of diverse identities.

6 Making the most of diverse identities

We can now propose some ways in which voluntary organisations can make the most of the diverse identities housed within them and beyond them.

- Allowing time and space for people to express themselves. This sounds somewhat obvious, but it is easy to get caught up in the busy environment of everyday organisational life. If people aren't given opportunities to express themselves, then often their valuable perspectives and life experiences may not even become known about in the first place. Of course, tasks in organisations need to be completed, but allowing time and space for informal conversation is important too, whether at a regular communal tea or a more structured idea sharing session.

- Introducing some collective decision-making. Some organisational managers will say that they consult staff or stress the importance of communicating decisions to staff and volunteers. These are all minimalist approaches, with a strong hierarchy still directing decisions: the agenda, and often the substantive decision, is already framed in advance. You cannot really refer to this way of working as particularly democratic, as almost all of the power still resides with top management.

- Introducing a more participative approach to discussion and decisions. Such approaches are often referred to as deliberative practices. They allow people the opportunity to come together to shape how an issue is perceived and how it should be tackled. Deliberative democrats emphasise the need for rational debate based on strong, balanced evidence. Important in this approach is a measure of good faith: that a process is being used genuinely in order to gain the best possible decision, rather than being used to further someone's existing opinion or interests. This is a hard request to make of people and whether or not genuine good faith is ever truly achieved is questionable. Perhaps the challenge is to become better at identifying examples of good and bad faith in practice.

- Paying attention to silence: some people are less comfortable than others at speaking up in public forums, which is perfectly natural. Yet it should be a matter of concern when some people are routinely silent. Not everyone is comfortable speaking in meetings and these people need to be approached for their views in less formal contexts. Likewise, some organisational functions are valued more than others within organisations. Meetings can be dominated by a particular function at the expense of others, so it is worth thinking about whether all aspects of an organisation are being offered the time and space they need for expression.

- Avoiding being dominated by functional thinking: the functions of organisations are usually expert-led, but just because one person has spent years doing a certain type of work, does not mean others in the organisation might not have some valuable perspectives to share. In fact, very often hearing from someone outside a particular function can inject an important fresh perspective.

The key point with all of these approaches is that they can help you see beyond the boundaries of the identities you establish for yourself and your organisation: their aim is to put together a range of perspectives in order to generate something new.

 Thursday 12 March 2020

Activity 2 Seeking out difference

Allow about 40 minutes

Building on your insights in this week's learning journal, spend 15 minutes thinking about someone either in your organisation, your community or another organisation that you think offers a very different perspective on an issue you think your organisation could help to address. Ask that person for their view, emphasising that they can help stretch your thinking and enrich your perspective as a practitioner. Spend a further 20 minutes writing about your experience in the discussion forum. Then spend 5 minutes commenting on the posts of two other learners.

Comment

Engaging with people at the level of identity necessarily means that you are exploring issues and ideas in ways that exceed the everyday activity and detail of an organisation. You come together with an ethos of openness and generosity. You should also share a critical commitment to probe the limits of one another's identities. Exploring the world in this way provides the foundations for a successful collaborative leadership endeavour, one that engages with important values and issues, rather than something far more instrumental.

Developing a bicameral orientation to identity is an important reflective practice. It means maintaining a strong commitment to your own identity but also recognising that identity is rooted in difference and so is also only a partial account of the world. Being bicameral therefore means that you stay open to the possibilities and learning of others: you operate at a level of generosity towards others and their identities. It means seeking out opportunities to learn from others – people from other faiths, other ideologies, other professions, other organisations. Engaging with someone at the level of identity means that you begin to explore issues and problems at a deep and sophisticated level; you begin to appreciate new possibilities, while also developing a deeper appreciation and understanding of your own commitments.

7 Week 3 quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 3 quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

8 Summary of Week 3

This week, you covered the importance to leadership practice of reflecting on your identity and those of others. You were asked to think carefully (and critically) about your own identities and your reasons for doing what you do within the voluntary sector. Such identifications help to guide us, providing an ethical anchor for leadership work. Nevertheless, it was noted that all identities are ultimately rooted in difference, that it is impossible to know of your identity outside of what it is defined against. Such an insight underlines the fact that no identity is fully capable of capturing the full richness of human experience. Although a challenging idea, this is also encouraging when planning collaborative leadership work, as it seems as if you are already reliant on others.

You have already noted that relying on others and bringing others together is important in tackling wicked problems. Bearing this in mind, in this week you also thought about the range of identities often associated with the voluntary sector, and hopefully recognised that while important, these categories also conceal a range of subtlety and degrees of variation. The intimate connection between identity and difference, and the fundamentally relational character of all identity, identifies potential for collaborative leadership work. It is by maintaining a commitment to our yown values, but also to learning from the identities of others, that interesting and fresh collaborative opportunities might emerge.

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Week 4: Collaborative leadership and exploring the unknown

Introduction

Welcome to Week 4 of this course on collaborative leadership for voluntary organisations. This week takes a step into the unknown. We, the course authors, are going to talk to you about what we don't know. As most of us don't know what we don't know (living in blissful ignorance), you could be forgiven for thinking that this will be a very short week of learning.

Of course, that is not the case. It is perhaps natural that you spend most of your time at work focusing on the things that you do know. Knowing is more comfortable and can be enjoyable because everyone likes to feel that they have mastered something, whether it's budget spreadsheets or writing a really snazzy policy document. In many ways, building slowly upon knowledge defines managerial and professional life.

Many of you will also operate under the assumption that you know what you don't know. For example, you might know that you could be better at communicating with volunteers via social media. You know that there are a range of options out there to solve this; so it is merely a matter of finding the time and learning a set of skills you know are available.

Operating in the unknown is a bit different to this: it means seeing the limits of your own identity, your own ways of making sense of the world and following what makes you feel awkward and uncomfortable. In the next section, you'll hear how Ellen from Family Time has tried to cope with this uneasiness.

Exploring the unknown is an important democratic practice and leadership practice. In the case of democratic ways of working, it is important because it can help you see beyond the limits shaped by your dominant identifications. In the case of leadership, leading yourself and others to the unknown is one valuable way of exploring new and innovative possibilities for the future: it is a good way of keeping your organisation a fresh and exciting place to work.

This week you will be taken through two ways in which you can help each other explore the unknown. These ways are:

- the craft of noticing and building upon the gaps and fractures within your language
- the practice of asking stretch questions.

By the end of this week you will be able to:

- discuss with colleagues the potential for creating more forums for free expression of views
- analyse the language used by colleagues (and by you) at work with a view to exploring unknown possibilities
- practise asking stretch questions at work.

Figure 1 Exploring the unknown

1 Ellen reflects on the unknown

Listen to the latest instalment of Ellen's story.

Audio content is not available in this format.

As you have just heard, Ellen is rightly proud of the work her organisation has managed to accomplish in the few years she has been in charge. The organisation has professionalised and the staff are now masters at gaining funding. Yet she still feels uneasy. You can hear that in the pauses and re-directions in her speech. Our view is that such uneasiness is actually healthy, something to confront and build upon rather than to wash away. You will now move on to think about how you can work with language to explore the unknown in leadership practice.

2 Language, identity and exploring the unknown

You are going to spend some time here considering the language used in leadership practice. The language you use also shapes how you experience the world. For example, organisations can become fixated with instrumental language – we do *x* in order to achieve *y*. Instrumental language can replace alternatives, such as the language of ethics, of intellectual stimulation or political language. After a while, organisations settle into a pattern of speaking that shapes the way they think and see the world.

There is always something lacking in the language and knowledge available to us, however. Language always fails to capture all of our ambitions for leadership: we often chastise ourselves in this regard. You wish we had produced a more perfect policy report or been more eloquent at a meeting. Yet the fact that you can find it hard to find the right words, the fact that you stumble mid-sentence can be a sign that you are exploring something important – that you are entering the unknown.

We advocate a practice of noticing and working with the cracks and flaws in language as important in signalling when we are starting to explore the unknown. We can help each other in collaborative leadership by encouraging each other to explore further these issues that we find hard to communicate satisfactorily.

A practical example will serve to illustrate the point. Think about the last time you felt something strongly but lacked the words to express yourself satisfactorily (as Ellen found in the audio you heard earlier). Or the last time you spoke with someone about something that mattered to them and their talk was filled with pauses, repetition, uncertainty, contradiction. These moments are a sure sign that you are onto something important.

The reason you find it hard to express is precisely because your identity and system of thought are being stretched.

This is a provocative proposition as most people are taught and trained to pursue only eloquence and coherence. You seek to only speak out loud when your thoughts are fully formed or to only share polished, final drafts of papers. Yet could it be that you close off all kinds of opportunities for growth by working in this way?
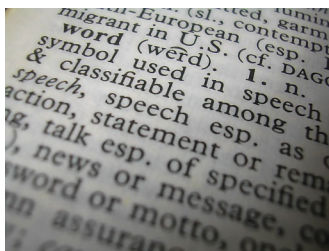

Figure 2 Language

2.1 Grappling with the unknown through language

You are now invited to participate in some practical work with language. The purpose is to explore how a speaker grapples with the unknown – to help you see possibilities in your own leadership work for exploring the unknown.

Figure 3 Driving into the unknown

The example comes from a paper by Smolović Jones et al. (2016). The paper adopts the case of a women's group in an unnamed Pacific country that, at the time of the data collection, was under military dictatorial rule. The women's group was in fact an umbrella organisation whose purpose was to try to unite a diverse group of women across the various communities of the country. The group wanted to encourage more women to participate in public life but also to develop policy ideas and submit official responses to government consultation.

Activity 1 Listening, interpreting and the unknown
Allow about 15 minutes

The following extract is an interview with an elder, indigenous member of the community (Filo, a pseudonym). As you read the extract, take note of the following:

- the identity communicated by Filo to the researcher asking the questions
- the gaps, pauses, contradictions and so on in Filo's language – what do these tell you about what she is trying to convey?
- the kind of things you would ask Filo in order to help her progress her thinking into the unknown.

Filo (F):	Speaking as someone indigenous of this country, the level of things that were going on in equality with every race [in the group] was OK. I understand and I accepted that. But... we were not recognised as indigenous... to give us some recognition.
Researcher (R):	Like special recognition?
F:	Yes... no... to take us away from the main... you know, to at least recognise that these are the first people of this country. Because according to this country development and things like that... within the rural areas and things... to understand us as a nation, or globally − they are left out.
R:	How, in your view, have other women failed to recognise you?
F:	My expectation is, for example, women from the rural areas to be... We cannot involve them, the transportation and getting them across is expensive. To go to them and see how they feel, how they view things. Mostly we are meeting on the level up here. A higher level.
R:	You feel that women from rural areas should also be included?
F:	Now and then to be represented… from the rural areas… from the grassroots level. There are some who are only in the rural areas, which are only indigenous. Mostly that's how I feel… Only the heads are coming.
R:	I see, but what was the reason for not voicing it with other women?
F:	I was thinking it was, like, selfish.
R:	How was it selfish?
F:	...Just because I don't want to be named like... They probably think otherwise, not the way I think. Sometimes when you say things, get involved emotionally… it touches.

Comment

The first thing to note here is that Filo clearly identifies as a member of the indigenous community. This is significant for two reasons. The first is that the context of the interview is a country that experiences significant tensions between indigenous people, more recent arrivals (many of whom have been in the country for a century or more) and a colonial past where both of these sections of the population were exploited. One valuable contribution of the women's group was to bring people together from across these communities to try to develop a collective voice on behalf of all women.

Filo is indicating that shaping a collective identity of women is in itself problematic for her. She feels that her indigenous perspective has been undervalued. Specifically, she is trying to communicate that the work of the women's group has not done enough to include poorer people from the country's more rural communities.

Crucially, *she cannot quite express* what it is the group should be doing differently. That is not the point. She is moving towards unknown territory for the group, signalling potential for further conversations. It is the role of her colleagues in collaborative leadership to help her explore this issue in more depth and support her in getting there.

Filo both stumbles over her words (unusually for her) and also brings her emotions to the fore (also unusual for her). Filo is stretching at the boundaries of the identity of the women's group and we can see this from the numerous pauses and changes of direction in her speech (marked by ellipsis in the text). Her emotional attachment to this issue is apparent in the simple statement, 'it touches'. There are also flashes of shame as she expresses trepidation at seeming selfish if she tries to discuss the issue with her group colleagues.

In the next section, you will consider some of the implications of this analysis.

2.2 Communicating the unknown

In the previous section, you read an extract from an interview with Filo, an elder, indigenous member of her community. You will now reflect on how you can support other people in your organisation in exploring unknown territory.

Activity 2 Helping others explore the unknown
Allow about 10 minutes

What kind of things could you do if you were confronted with a similar situation to this in your organisation: of someone trying to communicate something of importance to them but struggling to find the words?

Spend 10 minutes reflecting on how you might approach the situation.

Comment

Too often in organisations people are made to feel embarrassed if they want to speak up but stumble over their words. That is a shame because these moments are important – a sign that someone is circling something that matters to them but that they can't quite put their finger on. It is precisely at this point that people need the support of their colleagues. In the next section you will unpack some ideas as to how this support can be offered.

2.3 Supporting colleagues in exploring the unknown

Unknowns in leadership practice are most powerfully explored collectively. Hence why Carroll and Smolović Jones (2018) talk about the aesthetic experiences of partiality and disruption as opening possibility for new paths in leadership when people learn to explore together and are willing to expose themselves to challenge and new insight together.

Supporting your colleagues should come with some health warnings, however. We are not about to advocate the picking over of people's language in silly, microscopic ways – that would be a recipe for paralysis. Likewise, we recognise that some people are more fluent than others verbally. Some people may, for example, much prefer listening, thinking and then composing their thoughts, in order to re-enter conversations later, either verbally or in writing. It is important to be sensitive to the fact that sometimes people may simply feel unprepared or ambushed.

Figure 4 Making time for colleagues

Now to explore the practical implications of our analysis. Interrupting someone in full flow, even when they are stumbling, is usually a bad idea. Some people do so for the best of reasons – empathy usually. Everyone has floundered when speaking and it is often welcome for someone to come to your rescue when you do so. Others interrupt simply because they like to be heard. The key here is to allow people the space to express themselves and to feel secure in doing so.

Next, you might consider training your ears to pay attention to the way people express themselves, as well as to what they are saying. In the case of Filo, you would train yourself to pick out the points at which she stumbled and then see where she took her speech next. Did she try to change the subject or did she allow her thoughts to play out? If the former, then you could support her in revisiting those moments of uncertainty, conveying the fact that you are happy to explore uncertain and unknown terrain together. Remember that it is fine to not know the answer. Exploring the unknown together is the whole point.

You might also reflect back to where Filo became particularly emotional. Although it is a terribly British thing to overlook such moments and pretend that they did not happen, it may be more valuable to explore why people feel strongly about something.

Of course, you might also intervene along the way in subtle ways, particularly if you sense that the speaker's speech is in danger of collapsing entirely. Bear in mind, however, that silence is a subjective experience. What can seem like an age of silence in conversation for some can feel like merely a few reflective moments for others. Intervening acts might be as simple as some nodding of the head or a small affirmative noise expressing approval. You could repeat back what you have just heard the speaker say, inviting correction or an expansion of the point. Finally, you could ask a probing question in order to further open up the thinking of the speaker.

It is to this practice of asking questions that we now turn.

3 Stretch questions and exploring the unknown

You will end the substantive content for the week by thinking about the practice of asking questions in organisations as a way of supporting each other to explore the unknown. Asking questions may seem like an obvious, even basic, skill and yet it is surprising how infrequently enquiry is adopted within organisational settings. Meetings, for example, are usually dominated by people seeking to make a declaratory point (this means that you're *declaring* something to be the case, rather than questioning it: the sky is blue; the cat is sitting on the mat, etc.).

Hence meetings can become disjointed affairs, a series of sometimes connected, sometimes disconnected declaratory statements by people. Building on a point, exploring its dimensions, allowing space for something to be explored are things that happen too rarely.

Asking good questions is an essential leadership practice. Such a statement may seem counter-cultural when so much of leadership theorising and practice is wedded to the idea that leaders should be the people who already know – heroic saviours, if you like. This is an unhealthy way of thinking that restricts the range of ideas and solutions available in the wider organisation. If an important part of leadership is about exploring the unknown (what you don't know you don't know), then you will never be able to enter this territory without first asking questions of what you already know and think you don't know.

Of course, there are helpful questions and less helpful questions. Predominantly, you can think along the lines of open and closed questions. Closed questions can be answered with a 'yes', 'no' or a 'maybe'. Their effect, as is hinted at in their title, is to close down a conversation and allow it to cohere around a settled point. For example:

> Wouldn't you agree that given we have only three weeks until we submit this funding bid we really shouldn't be discussing volunteering strategy at this meeting?

Closed questions can often be declaratory points disguised as questions. These are strategies to close down discussion and debate. Closed questions can sometimes also be provocative, however, and used as a way of getting others to pay attention, although these are minority cases. One response to a closed question might be to fire an open question straight back: 'Why are you asking that? Have you thought about an alternative approach?'

Open questions are any kind of questions that you cannot answer with 'yes', 'no' or 'maybe'. These questions usually begin with a 'what', 'why' or 'how'. For example:

- 'What do you think about our volunteering strategy?'
- 'How do we convince more young people to sign up as volunteers?'
- 'Why are you so committed to that particular solution to our volunteering problems?'

Another way of thinking about open questions is that such questions should make you *stretch* for an answer. Fiona Kennedy, a researcher and leadership development facilitator at the New Zealand Leadership Institute, adopts the metaphor of a rugby match in order to convey this point. A good pass of the ball in rugby is a pass that a player has to

run into. As a player catches the ball, new space opens up and momentum develops within the team's movement. Good stretch questions perform the same function, Kennedy argues.

Figure 5 On the rugby field

In the next section we make the case that asking stretch questions is an important leadership practice as it re-shapes conversations in important ways, opens them up to possibility, to explorations into previously unknown territory.

A brief warning, however. We advocate stretch questions here as part of a package of leadership practice. Sometimes the practice of asking questions can get out of hand and groups can get stuck in seemingly endless enquiry – circling but avoiding decisions. Of course, we understand that organisations have to make decisions, sometimes quickly and decisively. That said, overall, not enough questions are asked in organisational practice, so we think the risk of such a practice going overboard is less pronounced than the counter-risk of enquiry being shut down.

4 Stretch questions and wicked problems

Week 1 discussed wicked problems – those that defy known, technical solutions. You can now progress your thinking around wicked problems a step further. When a problem is approached as a 'tame' problem (i.e. one that can be tackled with a managerial or technical approach), the tendency is to ask fewer questions or for the questions posed to be narrower in scope, focusing on refining a known approach.

Grint (2005) provides the decision by the United States government and its allies to invade Iraq in 2003 as a case in point. Grint outlines how George W. Bush and his advisors approached the problem of Iraq first as a crisis problem and then as a tame problem. Talking about something in crisis terms enables a response that tends to focus power in the hands of a commander who claims to know best: you are made to feel as though you are facing an immediate danger and hence are more prepared to sacrifice your discretion and even sometimes democratic rights in order for decisive action to be taken. The second move of Bush, according to Grint, was then to approach the war and its aftermath in managerial terms: fighting a traditional war with a definable beginning and end against a known and identifiable enemy.

Missing in Bush's approach, according to Grint, was the presence of stretch questions, open questions that could have redefined the very problem strategists and politicians believed they were trying to solve. Such questions would seek to make people think about the problem in more complex, less immediately solvable but, in the longer term, more helpful ways.

The chairs of voluntary organisations often see their jobs as asking these kinds of questions of their organisations: of exploring and even gently provoking staff into exploring what they do not know about a problem.

There are salient lessons here for leadership. Namely, that the leadership response of opening an issue up with a stretch question may be the course that is the hardest for people in positions of authority. But, then again, since when was leadership about taking the easy path?

Ideally, asking stretch questions is not the sole preserve of people in official leadership roles. On the contrary, you want to be in a situation where anyone within an organisation feels able to ask such questions and, furthermore, to be rewarded for doing so. More than any other practice, being able to collectively pursue a questioning approach is the hallmark of healthy, participative and collaborative leadership.

Activity 3 Stretch questions in your organisation
Allow about 15 minutes

Visit your learning journal, and spend 15 minutes reflecting on whether your organisation is currently equipped to allow people to ask stretch questions. If yes, then can you think of any examples or point to anything in particular in the organisation that seems to make this practice possible. If no, can you think of anything that might enable this practice to take root? Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 4 Activity 3.

Comment
Of course, we are not naïve idealists. We recognise that asking tough questions can be hard. This is especially the case when the person asking the question has little or

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no official positional power. Such people can be labelled troublemakers (and sometimes they are!). It is therefore of absolute importance that organisations think about how they can make such behaviour not only acceptable but also desirable. You might work in an organisation, however, where this kind of stretch questioning practice is simply off limits, for one reason or another. If this is the case but you would still like to practice in a safe environment, you could always adopt the strategy of stretch questions informally with friends or family – think of it as training to better equip you for work in the next organisation you join.

4.1 Stretch questions in practice

You will now spend some time thinking about and practising asking stretch questions. Asking questions is a real craft and it will take some time to become really good at it, but we are all more than capable of excelling in this practice.

Activity 4 Problems facing your organisation
Allow about 30 minutes

Visit the discussion forum. Spend 30 minutes thinking about a problem facing your organisation that needs some serious thinking. Start a post describing the problem (no more than 100 words). Make sure you post your comments within the correct thread for this activity. Now find the post of a fellow learner and pose an open question to that person, something that might help the learner think about their problem in a different light. To get you underway, we have posted something about a current issue facing the OU at the present time – so please feel free to practise on us before having a go with your own organisations.

Comment

Asking good questions takes time and practice, so don't be surprised if it takes you a couple of attempts before settling into a rhythm. We will keep an eye on your contributions and help push you in the right direction where we can. Onwards into the unknown!

Practice for the week: stretch questions

Try to find opportunities this week to practice stretch questions with your family, friends and colleagues (you may want to warn them that you are doing this!) As with anything (art, sports, music), leadership takes practice. Keep at it. You might want to talk to colleagues at work about the possibility of experimenting with asking more questions in meetings, or simply in general. Make a note of your experiences in your learning journal, – you will appreciate recording these thoughts, as they will provide you with a valuable record of your progress that you can revisit in the future.

5 Week 4 quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 4 quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

6 Summary of Week 4

This week you were asked to think about the unknown – the things that you don't know that you don't know. Conceptually, this is one of the hardest things to think of in leadership. This approach to the unknown was divided into two sections. First, you looked at a practical way of analysing the language used in organisations, as a fruitful means of approaching unknown problems and possibilities for leadership work. Second, you considered an approach to asking wicked questions, which should open up new spaces of thinking.

http://www.open.edu/openlearn/languages/chinese/beginners-chinese/content-section-0?utm_source=openlearnutm_campaign=olutm_medium=ebook

Week 5: Generating good conflict in collaborative leadership

Introduction

This week takes the provocative step of arguing that we need more conflict in leadership. By 'conflict' we mean those interventions where people in organisations push and question one another. Conflict is often something people shy away from, that they think of in negative terms, as associated with arguments and general unpleasantness. This is true up to a point. We will not be talking about very personal conflicts, or conflicts that are conducted to undermine people behind their backs. Such conflict makes for toxic organisations, places where none of us want to work.

Instead, this week is going to address the importance of constructive conflicts – a form of conflict that opens new possibilities. Such conflicts are usually targeted at issues that matter for organisations, or at issues that *should* matter for organisations. In addition, they are also connected strongly to identity – this is because good conflict inevitably means that you are exploring the gaps and limitations in the way each of us sees the world. Good conflicts stretch identity and leadership practice.

You could read the material this week as a manager who wishes to manage a more challenging ethos of collaborative leadership amongst teams and partnerships; you could read the material as someone who wants to generate more challenge in a hands-on way; or you could read the material with both ends in mind.

This week will be divided into two sections. The first will address ways in which you can generate good conflict within your organisation – in discussions with colleagues and as a means of stretching and improving upon ideas and values. This is about viewing conflict as an everyday practice. The second will address challenging as something that happens between organisations, in particular, in the relationship between voluntary organisations and government. This is about approaching challenging as a guiding ethos.

By the end of this week you will be able to:

* define agonism and agonistic conflict in the context of the voluntary sector
* experiment with agonistic practices at work
* reflect on your experiences and plan for future agonistic practice
* reflect on the potential for agonism as an ethos that can inform the relationship between the voluntary sector and other organisations.

Figure 1 Good conflict is central to the healthy functioning of organisations and society

1 Ellen reflects on the challenge of offering robust conflict

Before you get started, listen to this audio extract from Ellen of Family Time.

Audio content is not available in this format.

In this extract, Ellen reflects on conflict within her organisation and external to it. She wants her staff to be bolder in terms of how they talk to her and how they relate to her: to be more open about what they stand for and believe in. Such an approach, she hopes, would lead to more helpful insights and ideas. Ellen recognises that she could do more to create the kind of culture and atmosphere that would enable such ways of working but needs to reflect more on how a more challenging workplace might be achieved. Equally, she is frustrated that some of the bigger picture issues her organisation is concerned with are not being addressed. Ellen wants her collaboration to be more challenging, in terms of the people around the table pushing one another more, but is rightly nervous about how to go about doing so.

Before getting underway with the two sections on conflict in practice, you will be introduced to the basic concept of conflict for voluntary organisations and a perspective known as 'agonism' as a useful way for thinking about the issues ahead.

2 Introducing agonism

The idea of agonism originates in political studies (Connolly, 2002 and 2005; Honig, 1993; Mouffe, 2009 and 2013), but does hold wider implications for voluntary organisations and the voluntary sector. Agonism does, in fact, have implications for any organisation that has some kind of community focus or advocacy role. The critique posed by agonists is that too much of politics and public life is concerned with finding consensus and seeking harmony. For example, Mouffe (2009) is critical of New Labour for trying to collapse ideological differences between left and right. What Mouffe (2013) calls the 'passions' of politics are vital for any kind of political engagement – party politics, community politics or organisational politics – and too much of politics, in her view, suppresses these feelings and commitments.

Figure 2 The passion of politics

The result, one could argue, is the occasional explosion of *antagonism*. Note here the difference between *antagonism* and *agonism*. Antagonism refers to hostilities between people who do not share the same basic foundational commitment to the norms and practices of liberal democracy. This means freedom of expression, some kind of expectation of participation in civic life, the right to vote and certain basic human rights.

Mouffe's argument is that repressing the differences between ideologies or moral commitments leads to a build-up of resentment that can explode in unpredictable and even violent ways. As grievances, differences and fears are not aired, they fester and are then channelled in occasional violent outbursts (violent in linguistic and/or physical terms). For example, the aftermath of the 2016 UK referendum on membership of the EU also witnessed a parallel increase in the number of reported race hate crimes in the UK. You could debate the causes of such acts and feelings all week, but the important thing here is not the ideological vehicle for antagonism, nor its roots, but to note the fact of its existence.

Thinking about antagonism inside organisations, it is common for deep concerns to be silenced or for people to assume in advance that they should not voice their grievances openly. The outcome is often more insidious than open disagreement and conflict: a gnawing cynicism that grips people's identifications with their organisations and those in charge.

Agonism, then, is a directing of conflict in democratic ways. Its starting premise is that each person engaged in an agonistic process holds a basic belief in liberal-democratic norms (Mouffe, 2013). You might disagree ferociously but, when all is said and done, you respect others' right to oppose and to speak up. You live to fight another day.

These principles of agonism have been translated to the development of leadership by Smolović Jones et al. (2016). They point to empirical evidence within cross-organisational collaboration in the voluntary sector to argue that the leadership of these groups works well when participants are able to robustly debate direction, values and assumptions in ways that challenge deeply held social and political norms and 'common sense'. Without such conflict, leadership can grow stale and stagnate.

Agonism also has a strong identity dimension. As all of identities can be thought of as incomplete and dynamic, agonists argue that it is important to engage in debate and conflict that challenges passionately held beliefs. In this way, an agonistic conflict can appear as quite intense because it can involve questioning the relevance or ethical robustness of someone's strongly held identity in relation to a particular issue, and staking

a claim for an alternative identity. As hinted at in Week 3, agonism also emphasises the importance of being critical of one's own identity, of coming to terms with its limits and being prepared to explore alternative positions. Smolović Jones et al. (2016) demonstrate the connection between agonism and identity by showing how groups often hold the identity of who and what they are prepared to accept as a 'leader' as something open to re-interpretation according to debate and the perceived needs of an organisation. People will not necessarily express their views directly but will express what they value from a leader and leadership in subtler ways – talking in terms of guiding or teaching rather than directing. Such articulations can shape the kinds of leader and leadership identity an organisation will tolerate and can be held up for agonistic challenge as circumstances or feelings change.

In conclusion, agonism is both an ethos and a practice. It is a practice because it describes a way of going about everyday work. It is an ethos in that it can inform this practice but also a stance and strategy towards other organisations, including government.

3 Generating conflict within the organisation

This section deals with conflict within organisations, discussing ways in which you can encourage and develop more and better challenge. Before you proceed, think about the last time you decided *not* to speak up about something that was important to you at work. Was this an opportunity lost? Or did you find an alternative way of approaching the issue? Further, when was the last time you actively went looking for a dissenting opinion within your organisation? Did this opinion add anything valuable to your thinking?

It is the view of the course authors that organisations need far more constructive conflict. Everyone holds different views and comes to work with different expectations about what their organisation is there to do. Little is gained by sitting on these concerns. In fact, organisations where there is little challenge can be dissatisfying and boring places, places where important things are left unsaid.

Figure 3 What makes conflict constructive?

Pragmatists recognise that relating to one another in agonistic ways might not always be possible. In our other course, *Developing leadership practice in voluntary organisations*, we discussed the issue of narcissism amongst leaders. It is certainly the case that narcissists, who are very sensitive to any kind of criticism, would find an agonistic approach intolerable. Others might be worried about falling out with colleagues or about the kind of time adopting this agonistic approach might eat up. In relation to narcissistic bosses, agonism need not only be a process engaged in with those at senior levels but can also be practiced between peers. In terms of the other two concerns, the next section discusses some practical ways in which you can instigate more agonistic challenge within the organisation.

4 Getting on with agonistic conflict

The most obvious way in which you can instigate more agonistic conflict in your workplace is *introducing the practice into meetings and also into informal conversations*. The next time you think a discussion or meeting is falling flat, why not try a more conflictual approach? Say out loud that you disagree with something or that something is making you feel uncomfortable or express a contrary view. Of course, you might want to share with colleagues in advance that you have decided to adopt this strategy as a result of this course, so that they know you're not being difficult for no apparent reason.

You could *set time aside in people's diaries in order to have a proper debate about an issue*. Ask people in advance to prepare cases, rooted in evidence, experience and good ethical reasoning. Such sessions can be formally structured, as you would in an organised debate, or be much more informal, with the general expectation that there will be some good natured challenge taking place. You might want to conduct such a session away from the normal meeting room, in order to symbolise a different space and dynamic. Finally, you would want this debate to really be about something that matters to people. Holding a debate about something most people accept or about something trivial risks undermining the process and making it seem synthetic.

If you are working on a project that means a lot to you but is also challenging, you could *adopt a critical friend to provide you with tough feedback*. A Masters project that course co-author, Owain, recently marked was based around a large change project at a university concerning childcare. The student concerned very cleverly identified the biggest sceptic within the organisation and made a point of meeting this person frequently throughout the project in order to debate the issue and receive feedback. The point here is not to try to convince sceptics that they are incorrect but to genuinely be open to an alternative point of view. It also helps if this person is capable of such engagement.

Recognise power differentials and adapt your strategy accordingly. Not everyone is equal in terms of power and status within most organisations and certainly not everyone within any organisation *feels* equal in terms of power and status. If you are in a senior position or able to influence the culture of an organisation, then you do need to bear power differentials in mind. Some people will simply not feel safe in expressing their views publicly and agonistically. You need to seek out alternative ways of encouraging people to speak up. People need to feel safe and valued before they can express themselves. You might consider smaller-scale and informal ways of encouraging people to express challenging viewpoints or model such practice and invite them to do likewise. Or, an agonistic approach might just not be for everyone – some people prioritise other things in their lives other than work, come to work to quietly get on with it and would rather not get any more involved. This is their right and it is proper that their wishes are respected.

Assign someone a conflictual role. This is a sub-optimal strategy as it suggests that disagreement should be something that is manufactured. Nevertheless, if an organisation is unaccustomed to behaving in agonistic ways, assigning someone a role of challenge-generator can be a useful first step. They can adopt this role in meetings or even informally.

Activity 1 Experimenting with agonistic conflict
Allow about 30 minutes

Now that you have reflected on some of the ways that you could instigate more agonistic conflict in your workplace, you should actively experiment with this way of working and then reflect on how it went.

Think about an issue at work you judge could benefit from some more agonistic engagement. Now think about how you could go about generating some constructive challenges on this issue: Will you apply any of the approaches discussed above this activity? The next step is to try it out in practice at work. You might want to let your colleagues know about your thinking in advance; they might even want to try it too. Finally, spend 20 to 30 minutes writing about your experiences in your learning journal, . Describe what you tried and why. Then reflect on what went well and what did not go so well. Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 5 Activity 1.

Comment

We hope you gained some useful insight from your experiment with agonistic challenge in your workplace and, furthermore, gained value in reflecting on the experience in writing afterwards. Rather than view the experience as an isolated one, why not plan in more depth how your organisation could become more challenge-friendly? You might want to make a plan and then report back in your learning journal about how your interventions are going.

5 Working with conflict outside your organisation

Our attention now turns to conflict and the relationship of voluntary organisations to other organisations. We will specifically address the issue of campaigning. Campaigning can, and we argue should, involve a high degree of challenge. After all, a campaign exists in order to change a status quo in one way or another – the very purpose of a campaign is to challenge something. In particular, we are going to ask what it means for a voluntary organisation to be in agonistic relations with others: how might we think about campaigning differently in this light?

There has been much controversy within the sector concerning both how organisations relate to government and the role of the sector in providing a critical voice in relation to government policy. The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 (and who said government legislation was lacking catchy titles?) has been controversial, with well aired claims that the Act resulted in a muzzling of the sector's voice in relation to government policy and that the government of the time over-reacted to valid concerns. In turn, the government claimed that it was simply trying to focus charitable organisations on delivering for their particular causes.

In 2016, a report from the Civil Exchange (2016) was particularly vociferous in claiming that the voluntary sector's independence had become compromised. Such a compro-mising of the sector's status and position can be tracked, so the argument goes, to a greater role played by voluntary organisations as providers of services previously delivered more directly by government. The report particularly highlighted 'no advocacy' clauses in grants awarded via taxpayer resources as problematic for the sector. This is because it is claimed that such clauses will prevent charities from voicing concern about issues that matter to their users. Civil Exchange director Caroline Slocock, launching the report, argued that the sector needed an alternative, agonistic (although she did not use this word directly) approach:

> More than ever, the voluntary sector must work together to develop a new and more self-confident narrative which stresses the distinctive qualities of an independent sector, challenges the status quo and shows how it can be even better at delivering its mission.

In 2017, a further report from the Civil Exchange continued to cite 'on-going erosion of voluntary sector independence' through factors as diverse as the Lobbying Act, commissioning processes, and an environment set by government that, the report argues, undermines the ability of voluntary organisations to deliver services and advocate for vulnerable groups in society (Civil Exchange, 2017). Again, the report argued that the sector needed to find a more confident, challenging and independent voice.

Figure 4 A shared society?

The idea of agonism, we argue, provides one way of thinking through the challenges and opportunities of the sector in discovering an independent voice. The language of partnership, so common in the New Labour years, was welcome in one sense, in that it encouraged the voluntary sector to work more closely with government in order to tackle some major issues. On the other hand, as discussed earlier, this language of harmony

can actually be counter-productive. This is because it can conceal a range of legitimate grievances and can also dampen the role and importance provided to critique within a society.

So how might a more agonistic sector manifest? We do not pretend to have the solutions, but can start to frame the discussion.

5.1 The Trussell Trust and campaigning

The Trussell Trust is an interesting example of an organisation that has maintained a high degree of independence, providing trenchant critique of the government's policies in relation to poverty in the UK. The Trust won the Overall Award at the 2016 Civil Society Awards, with the chair of the judges praising the organisation for its 'constructive' work with government and its campaigning.

Figure 5 The Trussell Trust logo

Nevertheless, the evening witnessed some drama as the Trust's chief executive, David McAuley, in accepting the award took the opportunity to challenge the UK government. He said:

> I want to thank you for putting me in front of a government minister. We can't get in front of government ministers because we are so vocal and we give the people a voice. And we actually put people up to say that this has to stop happening in the fifth most powerful economy in the world. We have got to do something to make a difference in the lives of these people. They are not spongers and scroungers and feckless. They are hardworking people.
>
> I want to make a difference and I want to help people. I want to sit down with government and challenge them to do things slightly differently, and give people a chance.

(Civil Society, 2016)

This episode is perhaps characteristic of a debate concerning poverty and foodbanks in the UK that has become highly politicised. In 2019, the Trussell Trust continued to challenge government policy, leading a campaign against the five week wait for Universal Credit, #5WeeksTooLong. Labour politicians believe there is a legitimate case to answer regarding the impact of austerity and Conservatives believe that these problems are not new and that Labour has hijacked and amplified the issue. Is such politicisation a bad

thing, though? Is the generation of a great deal of political heat around issues something that should be avoided? Not necessarily.

An agonistic approach to collaborative leadership in the voluntary sector does not simply suggest a more conflictual approach behind closed doors, but also opens the possibility that organisations can learn to be more vociferous in public as well.

An agonistic approach might involve actively campaigning for or against certain things that organisations know will run counter to a particular government's prevailing political preferences. Collaborative leadership need not mean bringing others with you in a consensual relationship, and could mean persuading others of the urgency of a problem or solution in conflictual ways.

In practice, organisations should consider a balanced approach that adopts strategies of agonistic challenge, but also ways of 'quietly' influencing government and other organisations from the inside.

That said, agonism provides an alternative ethos to that of partnership and it is worth reflecting on what such an approach might mean in practice. This is precisely what you will do in the closing activity of the week.

Activity 2 Debating independence and agonism for the voluntary sector
Allow about 45 minutes

You will find two threads in the discussion forum for this activity. The first asks what it means to be an independent voluntary sector. The second asks what kind of practices you might follow in order to become more agonistic in your approach with other organisations. Bear in mind that agonism does not mean open hostility but an engaged form of challenge filtered through the norms of liberal-democratic practice. Spend 15 minutes writing in one of the discussion threads (or both if you like). Please do share your experiences, as well as your opinions, and answer the points made by other learners (we have allowed 30 minutes of your time for this).

You might also want to reflect on the topic of agnostic practice. What would it mean to be more agonistic in your approach to other organisations? Reflect on this question and make notes unders the following headings.

• Where would agonism usefully unpack issues that are currently covered over?
• How would you retain a constructive relationship with another organisation, whilst engaging in agonistic challenge?

Comment
There is of course no one correct answer to issues around independence or how you might become more agonistic in your work. What is vital here is your experience and your willingness to experiment with different approaches. Our role in this process is to introduce an alternative guiding ethos to that of partnership. We are not saying that partnership is redundant: people, of course, need to be able to work effectively together to tackle some of the great problems facing our communities. One can also find good examples of challenge within partnerships. However, agonism provides an alternative and democratically necessary framework for envisaging how you might plan your engagements with external organisations.

Figure 6 The Trussell Trust provides emergency food and support to people in poverty

Practice of the week: agonistic conflict

Agonism is both a concept and a practice. It is informed by theories of democratic practice within an environment of liberalism. Agonism can be viewed as a practice that encompasses micro-interactions – i.e. those between people in a single organisation – and also something that informs an ethos. How agonism manifests in various contexts will vary significantly.

6 Week 5 quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 5 quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

7 Summary of Week 5

This week discussed conflict and, specifically, the need for more of it in work. You were introduced to the idea of agonism, a channelling of your passions and even antagonisms in ways that are consistent with a liberal-democratic philosophy and approach.

Introducing the idea of conflict within organisations, the case was made that such challenge can be a constructive and useful device, even if it is frequently uncomfortable, and you were introduced to some ways in which you can make your work more challenge-friendly.

The week concluded with a discussion of agonism in its broader context, that of the sector as a whole. Approaching the notion of sector independence and the campaigning work of voluntary organisations, you considered whether agonism provides a useful counter (or supplement) to partnership as an ethos informing how the sector interacts and plans its relations with external organisations.

http://www.open.edu/openlearn/languages/chinese/beginners-chinese/content-section-0?utm_source=openlearnutm_campaign=olutm_medium=ebook

Week 6: Collaborating across organisational boundaries

Introduction

Welcome to Week 6 of our course on collaborative leadership. This week explores collaborative leadership across organisational boundaries. You will consider whether working across organisational boundaries places particular demands on those who lead voluntary organisations, and explore the challenges and tensions of leadership in inter-organisational contexts. You will reflect on your own leadership to consider how you negotiate the challenges and tensions of working across organisational boundaries. The key practice for this week is 'nurturing' inter-organisational relationships.

By the end of this week, you will be able to:

- identify some of the distinctive challenges of working across organisational boundaries
- identify issues that arise for leadership in inter-organisational contexts
- offer a critical account of three ideas about leadership in inter-organisational contexts
- reflect critically on the significance of identity for inter-organisational collaboration
- apply the idea of nurturing inter-organisational relationships, and reflect on the insight this gives to your own working practice.

1 Working across organisational boundaries

Listen to the sixth instalment of Ellen's account of her Family Time experience.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Like Ellen, many leaders of voluntary organisations spend large amounts of their time collaboratively working with colleagues from other organisations – collaborating formally and informally to make things happen. Sometimes working with other organisations

involves funding, contracts, a clear agreement as to how organisations will work together. At other times, there is a more open agenda to explore ways of working together to make things happen in a locality, improve services for people in need, offer integrated information or make a small corner of the world a better place – whether through the arts, the environment or aid.

2 Why focus on organisational boundaries?

Working across boundaries is a common feature of voluntary sector life, often in an endeavour to address some of society's most complex challenges – taking care of vulnerable children, providing support for older people, tackling environmental issues and promoting healthy lifestyles. These are the issues that Grint refers to as 'wicked' (Grint, 2005). They are also described in the academic literature as 'relentless' (Weber and Khademian, 2008). They are too complex for any organisation to address alone. Indeed, they are ultimately problems which persist, are unresolvable and tend to change their form over time. They therefore require the continued attention, resources, expertise and energies of multiple organisations from different sectors over an extended period of time. This is one of the key reasons that this course's authors and colleagues at the Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership argue that voluntary organisations need to move on from an individual, person-centred approach to leadership to develop boundary-crossing collaborative leadership practice (Terry, et al., 2019).

Figure 1 Working together to clean up the environment

Of course, inter-organisational collaboration is not confined to such serious social issues. Voluntary organisations collaborate to deliver cultural festivals and celebrations, to enhance physical space, to encourage creativity and to entertain. Even comparatively small organisations, such as self-help and residents' groups, find themselves collaborating with other voluntary organisations and public agencies to address such aims. Community art groups collaborate with the local gallery to deliver an exhibition; residents groups collaborate with the council to manage the local community centre; and youth clubs join together to deliver a programme of holiday activities. All of these require individuals to reach across organisational boundaries to make something happen, which their organisation could not have achieved alone – we see this as a place for leadership.

2.1 An organisational perspective

Figure 2 Refugees queue as they wait for assistance

A contemporary example of a wicked and relentless problem that requires the attention of many organisations is the ongoing refugee crisis. Public agencies see their contribution to the collaborative effort to resolve the refugee crisis in terms of national concerns about immigration, welfare, school places, law and order. International aid agencies manage the delivery of aid, and continue to call for the collaborative effort to step up as the crisis worsens, and local citizen groups act to meet the immediate needs of the displaced.

Activity 1 Organisational differences
Allow about 5 minutes

Read the article '
The refugee crisis requires collaboration between big and small charities'
(Morley, 2015), in which the author argues for the need for collaboration between informal citizen groups and large voluntary organisations in the face of the refugee crisis. As you read, consider the following questions:

* what different resources and expertise does the smaller citizen group and the large voluntary organisation each bring to addressing the refugee crisis?

* how might they work together?

* what challenges might arise?

Comment

The potential for coordinating the response of different organisations to the refugee crisis is clear. However, this example illustrates how differences in expertise, timescales, aims and motivations, together with the inclination for organisations to control and manage human actions and passions, become potential areas of challenge and conflict.

2.2 A service user perspective

Figure 3 Joining up

Communities and individuals facing complex challenges expect organisations to provide services which are 'joined-up', rather than fragmented and disjointed. For example, when facing the challenges of complex healthcare situations, no one wants to spend time negotiating organisational boundaries. From a service user perspective, the most important thing is to be able to access services without jumping over multiple organisational hurdles.

Activity 2 Joined-up services
Allow about 20 minutes

Read the article, 'Light bulb moment: Barbara Gelb on joined up thinking' (Gelb, 2016), in which a chief executive of a voluntary organisation describes how she realised the importance of joining up services across organisational boundaries when she met the parent of a dying child.

In your learning journal, write about an experience you, a member of your family or someone you know has had (or draw on an example you have seen in the media), when engaging with services that don't join up. You might want to think here about accessing a package of care for an older person or a child with a disability; or having to complete two lots of paperwork with identical information for the purposes of reporting to different parts of the state system – or any other area of life where services don't appear to talk to each other. How did this make you feel? Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 6 Activity 2.

Comment

Most of us would agree − service users and carers should not have to negotiate the minefield of services delivered by different organisations. Indeed, there have been many attempts to integrate services across organisational boundaries through service co-location, one-stop shops, shared referral mechanisms and other attempts to 'hide

the wiring' behind service delivery. However, many of us know from experience that the challenges of accessing integrated services across organisational boundaries continue in spite of the endeavours of collaborating organisations and successive governments. Why is collaboration across organisational boundaries so difficult? And what kind of leadership makes things happen in these collaborative contexts?

3 Leadership

In this section, you will be introduced to three ideas about leadership in boundary-crossing collaborative contexts:

- participants, processes and structure are all 'leadership media' that 'make things happen' (Huxham and Vangen, 2000)
- integrative leadership involves designing and aligning structures and processes to achieve the shared purposes of collaborating organisations
- leading in inter-organisational contexts is a continual process of negotiation, compromise and trade-offs between competing tensions.

(This course can only offer a brief introduction to these ideas. You can read more in Crosby and Bryson (2005) and Huxham and Vangen (2005) – both are very readable books with a strong practice focus.)

Each of these approaches has something different to offer – each may be appropriate and useful in particular circumstances. Indeed, these approaches may overlap in practice, but they are kept separate here for the sake of offering different ideas you may find useful. A key point to note is that inter-organisational collaboration is characterised by organisational identities – differences in purpose, culture and practice, as well as overlapping purposes – and competing as well as shared interests. Both similarities and differences between collaborating organisations are significant for leadership.

3.1 Leadership media

The academic literature recognises the importance of leadership in creating and maintaining collaboration across organisational boundaries (Crosby and Bryson, 2010; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). As has been suggested in previous weeks of this course, this leadership is not confined to those with management positions or titles – it is enacted by participants at all levels, 'champions' who commit to the collaboration and engage others to do the same (Bryson et al., 2015). Influence can come from all sides in an inter-organisational collaboration. For example, in my (Carol's) own research, I have observed small specialist voluntary organisations influencing powerful public agencies on the basis of their expertise and relationship with service users and communities (Jacklin-Jarvis, 2014).

However, in a collaboration, leadership, in the sense of setting the agenda, influencing the direction of the collaboration and achieving outcomes, is not entirely in the hands of participants (Huxham and Vangen, 2000). The structures and processes of collaboration also shape what it is possible (and impossible) to achieve. Furthermore, participants may have limited potential to influence structures and processes, because these are determined by outside factors, including government policy. The significance of structures and processes is particularly evident in formal collaboration arrangements, such as inter-organisational partnerships, with terms of reference, operating rules, and established processes for communicating. Huxham and Vangen (2000) describe participants, structures and processes as leadership 'media' that are all significant in 'making things happen', and determining the outcomes of collaboration.

Furthermore, leading across organisational boundaries adds a further layer of complexity to collaboration because each organisation has its own interests and purposes.

Collaboration is possible because there is some overlap between those interests and purposes, but the distinctive identities of each organisation limit that overlap. Collaborative arrangements must both develop shared identity and respect and protect individual organisational identities (Jacklin-Jarvis, 2014).

Activity 3 Collaborative champions
Allow about 20 minutes

Watch the video discussion with Liz Gifford of Milton Keynes Council and John Cove from MK Dons Sports and Education Trust (SET).

Video content is not available in this format.

Now answer the following questions in your learning journal,

- what purposes do the council and MK Dons SET share?
- how might those purposes differ?

Liz and John highlight the importance of relationships between collaborating participants, but is there any indication here of the kind of processes and structures that might shape collaboration between a public agency and a local voluntary organisation?

Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 6 Activity 3.

Comment

Liz and John champion the potential of collaboration because they each believe that more can be achieved for local people by working together. They recognise the importance of identifying where their organisational purposes overlap (expressed by Liz as serving the public), and the potential for bringing together their different organisational resources. However, they also recognise the different objectives and interests of their organisations and the inevitability of conflict. They each highlight the importance of building strong relationships with individuals from different organisations and sectors for the inter-organisational relationship to survive beyond such conflict.

3.2 Integrative leadership

The integrative leadership model (Bryson et al., 2015; Crosby and Bryson, 2005a; Crosby and Bryson, 2005b; Crosby and Bryson, 2010) highlights the challenges of aligning or integrating structures and processes to enable collaboration. This challenge is familiar to anyone who has participated in an inter-organisational forum or project. In the early days, collaborative projects can be dominated by discussions to determine terms of reference, agree decision-making processes and accountability structures. These processes and structures then contribute to the continuing leadership of the collaboration – they make certain things possible, and others impossible (Huxham and Vangen, 2000).

Activity 4 Aligning processes and structures
Allow about 15 minutes

Think back to a recent example in your own experience, and consider how much time the group spent constructing terms of reference, agreeing how to work together, determining how to make joint decisions and how each collaborating organisation is accountable to the other. (If you cannot think of an example from your experience, then think about the Local Planning Group in this week's instalment of Ellen's story. What processes would it be important to agree in the first instance? How might these processes enable or limit future collaboration?)

- how did this initial work enable further collaboration?
- what processes was it important to put in place?
- what limitations did the agreed structures and processes place on the continuing collaboration?

Comment
Clearly, it makes sense to take time to determine *how* to collaborate, for example whether decision-making will be through consensus, majority decisions, or by authorised individuals. It is also important to reflect on how collaborative projects and forums will account to the collaborating organisations, without being dominated by organisational interests. This is a key task for leadership. However, this is not to suggest that it is possible to reach a point beyond organisational interests. Instead, the integrative leadership model suggests that collaborations should be deliberately designed to take account of different interests, strengths and weaknesses, so that organisations complement each other in the endeavour to focus on that which is shared – achievement of a shared project, delivery of integrated services, transformation of a neighbourhood, service or community of need.

3.3 Leadership as the management of tensions

This third idea explores leadership in collaborative contexts as the management of tensions. At the heart of this idea is the concept of a tension between 'collaborative

advantage', and 'collaborative inertia' (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Organisations enter collaborations to achieve collaborative advantage, something they could not achieve alone. But in practice, all too many collaborations fall into collaborative inertia – they progress slowly, achieve little, disintegrate into sectional interests and fail.

For example, the collaborative advantage of coordinating support for refugees might be that a greater number of refugees receive help, or that the needs of refugees are met more holistically than organisations could achieve if working alone. Identifying the actual or potential collaborative advantage of a collaboration is an important task for those involved in leading collaborative projects, working groups and partnerships. Indeed, if it is impossible to identify the potential collaborative advantage of a specific collaboration, then you may want to ask why it is happening at all.

However, all too often collaborative partnerships and projects become stuck in discussions about structure (terms of reference, membership, accountability, etc.) and the processes of decision-making. Individuals find it impossible to reconcile the demands of their organisation and the need to achieve collaborative arrangements which involve compromise, and the ceding of power. Discouraged by slow progress and lack of achievement, individuals disengage from the collaboration, reinforcing the tendency to fail. The challenge for leadership is to manage the tension between the potential for collaborative advantage and the tendency towards collaborative inertia (Huxham and Vangen, 2005).

Activity 5 Advantage and inertia
Allow about 15 minutes

Identify one example of collaboration with another organisation which features regularly in your diary (or select an example from Ellen's Family Time story). You will work on this example through the rest of this week's study. Try to identify an example that is part of a long-term inter-organisational collaboration. For example,

- participating in an inter-agency forum
- managing joint service delivery
- delivering an inter-agency plan for clients with complex needs
- negotiating and delivering a shared action plan with organisations working in a locality
- designing, delivering and monitoring a joint funding bid
- developing a joint needs assessment that informs the ongoing work of collaborating organisations.

First, identify the potential collaborative advantage of this collaboration. Write this down in 50 words or less.

Now identify the potential areas of collaborative inertia. Again, write this down in 50 words or less.

Finally, identify any actions you might take that increase the likelihood of collaborative advantage and reduce the tendency towards collaborative inertia. Try to focus here on what you *can* do, rather than on the factors that constrain your actions.

Vangen and Huxham (2003) write about the dilemmas which the advantage/inertia tension raises for individuals. They argue that tackling these dilemmas at times involves engaging simultaneously in activities which appear diametrically opposed to each other.

On the one hand, these activities are focused on supporting the involvement and engagement of all of those collaborating, making sure everyone has a say and that all points of view are represented ('in the spirit of collaboration'). On the other hand, they are focused on making things happen in a very pragmatic way, so that the collaboration does not become stuck – this sometimes means taking a less than inclusive approach which Vangen and Huxham (2003) describe as 'collaborative thuggery'. Collaborative leadership therefore involves managing a tension between a spirit or ideology of collaboration and pragmatism. In other words, there is a compromise or trade-off to be made between a very inclusive participative approach and a pragmatic focus on getting things done in an effective way that does not consume too much time and resources.

Although Vangen and Huxham's original research focused on the activities of partnership managers, we suggest that the approach of managing tensions is a useful one for anyone 'leading' in collaborative contexts, including 'champions' from voluntary organisations. It helps to reflect on the trade-offs and compromises you are willing to make (on your own behalf and behalf of your organisation) to make things happen through inter-organisational collaboration.

For example, in a study of voluntary sector leaders collaborating with public agencies, I (Carol) found that these leaders encounter a tension between distinctiveness and incorporation (Jacklin-Jarvis, 2015). On the one hand, collaboration with the powerful public sector puts them at risk of incorporation into that sector's agenda; on the other hand, too much emphasis on the distinctiveness of the voluntary sector risks exclusion from the resources and opportunities which the public sector brings to the collaboration table. Therefore, voluntary sector leaders working collaboratively with public sector partners can be seen negotiating a continual trade-off between assertions of voluntary sector distinctiveness and acceptance of the public sector's agenda and priorities.

You will continue to explore this idea of managing tensions in the next activity.

Activity 6 Tensions, compromises and trade-offs
Allow about 15 minutes

Return to the collaboration you identified in Activity 5. Respond to the following questions in your learning journal, (or, if you focused on an example from Ellen's story, then try to imagine yourself in her position in this activity):

- what kind of tensions arise in this context?
- what compromises and trade-offs do you find yourself making?
- are you comfortable with these compromises from your own perspective and from the perspective of your organisation?

Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 6 Activity 6.

Comment

Understanding the advantage/inertia tension at the heart of collaboration helps you to understand that compromises and trade-offs are inevitable. Differences that draw organisations to collaborate are also the differences that have potential to pull them apart. So leading in these contexts is always about working with difference, trying to make things happen in a context where there are competing interests and objectives, as well as shared purposes. Sometimes this means that a participative and inclusive approach to leadership is not possible because it is simply too slow or resource

intensive. To make things happen, it can be necessary to be pragmatic or even authoritative, taking as many people with you as possible.

The tensions approach to leadership is a complex idea, but fortunately, Huxham and Vangen (2005) offer an accessible way of thinking about this through the metaphor of gardening, comparing leadership in collaborative contexts to the nurturing of a garden that is lovingly tended and ruthlessly pruned.

Figure 4 A well-tended garden

In order to create a beautiful garden and avoid a wilderness, all gardeners know that they must pull up weeds, prune branches, and sweep away leaves, as well as feed and protect tender plants. In a similar way, working collaboratively across organisational boundaries requires continual attention – or nurturing – to build and sustain relationships and achieve something together that each organisation could not have achieved alone – collaborative advantage.

In the following activity, you will work with the idea that leading within a collaboration can be thought of through the metaphor of nurturing a garden. You will apply this metaphor to your own context.

Activity 7 Nurturing the collaboration garden
Allow about 30 minutes

In this activity, you will continue to think about the collaboration you identified in Activity 5, creating a picture of a garden to help you reflect on how the organisations and individuals involved in this collaboration contribute to its nurturing.

- First, reflect on what this example of inter-organisational collaboration is trying to achieve, and give your collaboration garden a name that reflects this purpose. For example, the garden of child wellbeing in Leicester or the garden of an active older life in York.

- Next, think about the kind of plants that the organisations involved in the collaboration are trying to grow together. Label these plants in the diagram. For example, a tree might represent a shared database or an agreed plan of action. Flowers might represent a healthier local population, more children engaged in sport or better access to art, heritage or the theatre. Try to be as specific as possible as you label the plants in your garden.

- Think about how the participants involved in the collaboration bring different skills, resources, and expertise together to nurture the garden. This is the watering, feeding and tending of the garden. Draw in these activities.

- Now reflect on activities through which different participants act in a more pragmatic way to get things done – perhaps making decisions behind the scenes, leading in a directive way, excluding others, or playing the politics, as Vangen and Huxham (2003) suggest. Draw these into your diagram as the pruning and weeding activities.

Try to be as creative as possible in drawing your garden, then take a photo of your picture and post it on the discussion forum. Add a comment on how drawing your garden has helped you think about the nurturing of this particular example of inter-organisational collaboration. Make sure you post your comments within the correct

thread for this activity. You may also want to write about this at greater length in your learning journal.

Comment

An example of collaborative working represented as a garden:

Figure 5 Collaboration represented as a garden

4 Back to identity

Figure 6 Who am I?

Like individuals, organisations have identities that change and develop. In this discussion of inter-organisational collaboration, we have talked as if the identity (interests and concerns, values and priorities) of collaborating organisations are fixed. However, experience and history both tell us that this is not so – organisational identity shifts over time. Voluntary organisations which provide services for children and families provide an example of this.

Many voluntary children's organisations began life as orphanages. As society has changed its thinking about childhood, welfare and poverty, these organisations have changed to deliver community services to families and support parents in taking care of their children. At the same time, many of these organisations separated from the faith, political and philosophical contexts in which they were established: they now reflect the more secular and multi-cultural nature of contemporary society. Some have entered into contractual relationships with public agencies, and this too impacts on their priorities and ultimately their identity.

As voluntary organisations change, they bring different values, priorities and interests into their collaborations with other organisations. So, the relationship between children's voluntary organisations and local public agencies, for example, can be seen as a continually shifting dynamic relationship, in which the changing identities of each impact on the other (Jacklin-Jarvis, 2014). The interesting question is, then, how do these changing identities impact on the endeavour to work and lead collaboratively?

Activity 8 Changes in identity
Allow about 20 minutes

Think about the voluntary organisation you work for (or one you know well). Can you see changes in its organisational identity in its recent past or longer history? How might those changes impact on that organisation's collaboration with other organisations? Comment in the discussion forum how you see the relationship between shifting identity and inter-organisational collaboration. Make sure you post your comments within the correct thread for this activity.

Comment

There are numerous reasons for changes in organisational identity. As indicated above, such changes can be understood as relating to changes in wider society, but they also relate to the ways in which the individuals involved in organisations interpret and respond to societal change. In other words, organisations and collaboration between organisations are continually re-made by people and by the processes

through which people engage with one another. One way of understanding this continual re-making is to see it in terms of leadership practice.

Practice of the week: nurturing

We hope you have fun designing your collaboration garden, but there is a serious point to be made (honestly!). As you continue to collaborate on behalf of your own organisation with colleagues from organisations of different sizes, with different cultures, purposes and values, we suggest you reflect on the following questions, but also allow these questions to impact on the way you contribute to the nurturing of collaboration:

- Who is doing the nurturing? Is this a task for a specific individual (for example, a partnership manager), or are individuals from different collaborating organisations nurturing the collaboration?

- Is anyone doing the pruning and weeding? It is all too easy to avoid tackling some of the difficulties in order to avoid confrontation. Why are some organisations pulling their weight more than others? Why do some never send a representative to the meetings? Who represents which organisation anyway? And when will we stop talking and get something done? These are some of the difficult pruning questions that are often avoided when working across organisational boundaries.

- How is this nurturing impacted by the different organisations involved in the collaboration? Or is it simply a result of the energies and commitment of individuals?

- How can I contribute to the nurturing of collaboration – both by tending and by pruning and weeding?

5 Week 6 quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 6 quiz

To open in a new window, right click on the link above and select 'Open in new window'.

6 Summary of Week 6

This week, you have begun to explore the challenges of leading across organisational boundaries. In this inter-organisational collaborative context, leaders find themselves managing tensions because the interests and purposes of collaborating organisations are not the same – even when they share an overarching purpose. This means that a certain amount of pragmatism is perhaps inevitable when leading collaboratively across organisational boundaries. For leaders of voluntary organisations, it may also mean challenging their own organisations as well as the organisations they collaborate with.

Throughout this course, you have considered ways in which individuals lead, not because of their position, but rather through practices which probe, question and challenge, rather than accepting the status quo. You will continue to explore this questioning and challenging approach to leadership in next week's studies.

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Week 7: Collaborative leadership and power

Introduction

This week you will explore the idea that power is an important feature of collaborative working, and one which collaborative leaders will need to negotiate. You will explore how a collaborative approach to leadership might help develop a positive approach to influencing the ideas, priorities and activities of other organisations.

After listening to an extract from Ellen's story, you will explore the idea that a key purpose of many voluntary organisations is to 'speak truth to power'. This phrase (which originates with the Quakers) encapsulates the idea that the voluntary sector has a role to play not only as a deliverer of services and activities, but also as an advocate – for communities, for the excluded, and for (some) social policies (and against others).

Following this, you will explore the idea that inter-organisational collaboration implies a sharing of power. However, in practice, collaboration frequently takes place in a context in which there are differences of power between collaborating organisations. These differences are referred to as 'power asymmetry'.

The final section of the week introduces Huxham and Beech's (2008) concept of 'points of power' as an idea that helps individuals think about how to enact influence in contexts of power asymmetry.

Throughout this week's studies, you will be asked what each of these ideas means for a collaborative approach to leadership of voluntary organisations.

Before going further, let's stop to think about what is meant by 'power'. Power is a difficult concept, and it is impossible to rehearse here all the academic arguments about what power is and how it operates. For the purposes of this course, you will draw on two key ideas. First, the idea that power is associated with social influence. This is an important idea for thinking about power in the context of collaboration, and you will draw on Huxham and Beech's definition of power in collaborative contexts as 'the ability to influence, control or resist the activities of others' (Huxham and Beech, 2008, p.555). The exercise of power is therefore seen in relationships and interactions between people, and the focus here is on the processes through which power operates, how influence happens, and the implications for leadership practice.

You will also draw on the (perhaps more familiar) idea that the power of different organisations is associated with their respective resources, knowledge and expertise, importance or position. In simple terms this means that in many collaborations the larger, better-resourced and positioned organisations have the potential to determine the priorities and direction of any collaboration. Again, the purpose here is to help you think about how to enact influence in these contexts.

By the end of this week, you will be able to:

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- identify and reflect on asymmetries of power in collaborative contexts
- reflect on issues that arise for leadership in collaborative contexts
- offer a critical account of the 'shared power' and 'points of power' approaches to collaboration
- reflect critically on how influence happens
- apply this learning to your practice.

1 Power and influence

Listen to another extract from Family Time's Ellen.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Ellen expresses concern that collaborating with other organisations means that they will have power over Family Time's future. Her time and priorities are impacted by external agencies, and she struggles to see how she will be able to influence the regional partnership.

Figure 1 Working together

Although Ellen's story is fictional, it reflects stories we have heard repeatedly about how it feels to work with, and endeavour to influence, larger organisations that have power to shape the focus and future of smaller voluntary organisations. Ellen's thinking reflects the two ideas about power that were introduced in this week's introduction. First, she recognises that larger, better resourced and positioned organisations (particularly those in the public sector) have the power to shape Family Time's future. Second, she begins to think about how she can work through relationships with key players – colleagues in different organisations – to influence the direction of travel of new collaborative partnership arrangements.

2 Influencing others

The purpose of the following task is to help you think about whether influence always happens in expected directions when people from different organisations or departments come together. It is being introduced at the beginning of the week, as you will need to allocate time to complete it during the week.

Practice of the week: influencing

Your task is to observe a meeting and reflect on how individuals influence one another. Select a 'safe' meeting from this week's diary where you can tell other participants that you are conducting a small research project without jeopardising the interests of your organisation. Ideally, try to identify a meeting that is part of an ongoing inter-organisational collaboration, but if you feel uncomfortable with this, select an internal meeting.

You have two tasks:

1. Take notes to record the interactions between individuals. Don't worry if you do not capture all interactions, but try to capture the flow of a series of interactions. For example, *Jo asks a question about the finances. Helen replies defensively but gives the financial details. Jo smiles, verbally welcomes the details, then comes back with a much more detailed second question challenging the figures.*

2. Reflect on your notes afterwards. Did influence always happen in the direction you would expect, or was it sometimes surprising? For example, perhaps junior staff influenced more senior staff or representatives of a small voluntary organisation influenced the representative of a larger or better-resourced organisation. What was the source of that influence? For example, it may have been the expertise of a particular staff member or organisation – or perhaps their local knowledge or relationship with the local community.

Like many of the practices explored in this course, influencing is a complex social practice. Paying detailed attention to the way influencing happens draws attention to the power of words and of meaning-making. It makes you think about who influences who, how they do so and why. Observing influence may also lead you to reflect on the broader context – for example, the importance and position of different participants, both inside and beyond the meeting room.

In this week's studies you will explore these issues further as we reflect together on collaboration and power.

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3 'Speaking truth to power'

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.

(Attributed to Margaret Mead, anthropologist)

These words summarise a belief held by many within small (and not so small) voluntary organisations that they can make a difference in society. It is perhaps inevitable that this aspect of the purpose of the voluntary sector at times results in confrontation with other interests and groups in society. Voluntary organisations tell stories, surface issues, highlight alternatives and run campaigns that challenge established practices and priorities. We see story-telling, advocacy and crafting alternatives as leadership practices through which influence happens.

The history of voluntary organisations is littered with examples of 'speaking truth to power', and in the twenty-first century this advocacy role continues to be a part of many organisations' identity. In this section, you will reflect on two examples – the Hillsborough Family Support Group and the Living Wage campaign.

Figure 2 Speaking out

3.1 Changing the story

In this first example, you will read about how the Hillsborough families acted together to change a widely told story of football fans' behaviour and its consequences.

Activity 1 The football fans' story
Allow about 5 minutes

Read the account below of the Hillsborough memorial event. As you read, reflect on the collaborative approach adopted by the Hillsborough campaigners, and how this enabled them to influence powerful figures, including politicians, and to change the national narrative.

Thirty thousand people gathered in the streets of Liverpool on 15 April 2016 to remember the 96 fans who died at Hillsborough football stadium. There had been many vigils and memorial services over the years, but this one was different. After a 27-year long fight for justice, a jury had determined that the fans were unlawfully killed, overturning an earlier judgement of accidental killing.

From shortly after the disaster, family members and survivors joined together to support one another, but also to campaign for justice, forming the Hillsborough Family Support Group and the Hillsborough Justice Campaign. They refused to accept that their loved ones died accidentally as a result of fans' behaviour on that day, and took on the police and the British legal system in their attempt to prove that the actions of police and others contributed to the tragedy. They were not professional campaigners or legal experts, but were determined to go on with their campaign until they reached the truth of what happened. Eventually, their cause was taken up by MPs and other influential figures, but in the meantime they sacrificed other priorities to focus on their campaign for justice.

Twenty-seven years after their relatives died at a football match shown live on TV, family members stood on the steps of St George's Hall, Liverpool at a memorial vigil – also shown live on TV.

Comment

As I (Carol) watched the vigil live on TV, I was struck by the way in which a large group of individuals, unknown to each other before this tragic event, some unborn at the time, acted together to make a difference − for themselves, for each other, and for a principle of justice. In a moving testament to the power of sustained collaboration in the face of continual discouragement, these families impacted UK society, and our ideas of justice. They turned around a widely told story of the violence of football fans, and replaced that story with a legal judgement that exonerated the fans from any responsibility for the tragic events in the football stadium that day.

3.2 Campaigning coalitions

A second way in which smaller voluntary organisations exert influence is by collaborating in coalitions to amplify their voice. This model for 'speaking truth to power' has a long history in the UK. Think of the nineteenth-century anti-slavery movement in Britain. Although you may remember the name of William Wilberforce, you may forget that the anti-slavery movement took the form of a network of activists and campaigning groups. A contemporary example of the coalition model is seen in the work of Citizens UK and London Citizens. These are alliances of citizens, voluntary and community organisations, faith groups and schools, which have together generated a public narrative or discourse (and political response) around the issue of a 'living wage'.

Activity 2 A citizen coalition
Allow about 15 minutes

Go to the website of the Living Wage Foundation and read and watch the videos there that provide an account of the history of the living wage movement through the work of London Citizens and Citizens UK.

Reflect on the following questions in your learning journal,:

- how were citizen groups able to influence large organisations and institutions to adopt the living wage?

- what do you think this might mean for the leaders of each organisation within the coalitions?

Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 7 Activity 2.

Comment

In an article for _The Guardian_ (24 March 2010), Neil Jameson, Executive Director of Citizens UK, pointed to the significance of a shared model of leadership for coalitions like London Citizens – leadership constituted by leaders from across the coalition's collaborating organisations. This is a model of leadership that moves away from any tendency to highlight the voice of individuals and instead presents leadership as distributed between organisations and individuals.

Figure 3 Coalition

4 Collaboration and shared power

Last week, you were introduced to Crosby and Bryson's model of integrative leadership. This builds on an assumption that the twenty-first century world is one in which power is shared. At a basic level, this is a straightforward assumption for those living in the developed world. Increasingly, we acknowledge that no one organisation or group of people – including government – should determine the future, without engaging with other organisations, communities, experts, service users, businesses and citizens. As explored in the previous sections, we recognise the right of campaigning organisations and citizen groups to impact the ways in which society thinks about and addresses such issues.

Figure 4 Engaging citizens

This understanding of shared power is fundamental to the ways in which inter-organisational collaboration has grown and developed over the last 20 years, with a proliferation of 'partnerships', 'integrated services', joint working groups and opportunities for voluntary organisations and citizen groups to participate in co-producing public services, determining local priorities and influencing the future development of communities.

4.1 Partnership and participation

Sharing power implies enabling citizens to participate in the shaping of their community. In the next activity, you will explore one approach to enabling community participation.

Activity 3 Community mobilisers
Allow about 15 minutes

Watch this video from the Community Mobiliser Team from Community Action: MK, in Milton Keynes, in which they talk about their work to mobilise citizens to contribute to the shaping of their communities.

Video content is not available in this format.

As you watch, ask yourself the following questions, noting your answers down in your learning journal,:

- How do the mobilisers enable citizens to influence the way in which their community develops?
- How might the work of the mobiliser team influence the council and other public sector organisations?
- To what extent do you recognise the work of 'mobilising' as leadership as defined in Week 1 of this course? Copy this definition of leadership − 'Leadership is a collaborative, political and democratic practice that provides direction, energy and critical' − to your learning journal, Make notes about the key words from this definition that you recognise in the mobilisers' accounts of practice.

Comment

The community mobilisers may not describe themselves as leaders, but you can recognise leadership in their practice. They provide energy and engagement on issues that are important to local citizens. Their practice engages citizens with the political process, ensuring their voices are heard, as well as supporting citizens to shape their own community through the creation of residents' associations, community activities, and support groups. They influence which issues emerge in the local area and those which remain unexplored.

4.2 Power asymmetry

The work of the mobilisers could be described as a collaboration or partnership between the council, Community Action: MK and citizens, through which power to shape the local community is shared – albeit not shared *equally*. However, attempts to collaborate across organisational boundaries are not always characterised by a shared approach to power. Instead, collaboration may simply highlight power asymmetry – the differences in

resources (financial and otherwise), knowledge and expertise and the importance or position of collaborating organisations.

Figure 5 A shared approach to power

This asymmetry is often evidenced in the complex collaborative arrangements between voluntary organisations and public agencies. Before becoming a lecturer, I (Carol) worked in the children's services field in which collaboration between voluntary and public sectors was a daily reality in the endeavour to integrate services for families and increase child wellbeing. People with different responsibilities and positions from both sectors met regularly in planning forums and working groups, as well as on the frontline of service delivery. Much of this work was driven and sustained by government policy and funding channelled through public sector agencies to achieve that policy. In practice, this meant that the public agencies wielded power over the voluntary organisations through formal commissioning arrangements, but also through the ability to determine priorities in line with government policy.

The voluntary sector literature raises important questions about how power is shared (or not shared) in such contexts, and what the implications are for voluntary organisations, where collaborating organisations have different resources, knowledge and expertise, influence and importance. In particular, as explored earlier in the course, commentators have increasingly raised concerns about the impact on voluntary organisations and their independence when collaborating with public agencies. Some have proposed that collaboration *within* the sector provides a way forward to address sectoral imbalance. However, you may have some hesitation in accepting that in-sector collaboration is *necessarily* a way to tackle power asymmetries. This may be because experience tells you that even within the sector well-intentioned organisations and their leaders find themselves in competition and conflict with each other.

5 Influence, meaning-making and micro-level power

For many, working with power asymmetry is not comfortable. It is perhaps for this reason that many collaborative partnership meetings seem to avoid surfacing these asymmetries, and instead proceed *as if* power is shared equally, or as if 'partnership' in some way negates power.

In Carol's research, she noted a contrast between this public performance of collaboration and informal backstage discussions (Jacklin-Jarvis, 2014). Participants suggested that, even where they are well aware of the greater resources, influence, importance or position of the organisations with which they collaborate, they still believe they are able to make a difference, and they focus this belief on the relational aspects of collaboration. Huxham and Beech (2008) refer to power at this relational level as 'micro-level power'.

Micro-level power is seen in day-to-day activities, in 'points of power' which are played out in relationships between people as they collaborate. This contrasts with macro-level power, which is based on resources, importance and structural position (ibid.). In other words, in the context of inter-organisational collaboration, the macro-level power of an organisation is associated with its control of resources that others need; its importance to the strategic purposes of other organisations; and its position in the structures of collaboration. These all enable an organisation to wield power over others.

Figure 6 The power of the wind

Research shows that power is exercised more subtly at the micro-level through discourse and meaning-making. Discursive approaches focus on the use of language as a source of power. Although this may sound like a somewhat obscure academic concept, we all have

experiences that reinforce the idea that words have power. This is closely related to the concept of 'voice' (Hirschman, 1970). In the voluntary sector context, 'voice' is the ability to name, frame and campaign on issues of concern to the sector – rather than simply acting on issues which have previously been recognised by society. This approach also resonates with the idea in the leadership literature that leadership practice can be thought of as associated with meaning-making (Smircich and Morgan, 1982).

In one example, a research participant from a voluntary organisation explained that in local partnership meetings the first interpretation of national policy is often provided by voluntary sector representatives, as complex public sector bureaucracy is still determining an official line (Jacklin-Jarvis, 2014). This first micro-level interpretation impacts on the continuing interpretation and enactment of policy at the local level. It becomes embedded in the notes of meetings, is repeated by public sector managers, and played back into decision-making forums.

The work of London Citizens provides a second example of the power of discourse and meaning-making in the production of the 'living wage'. As you discovered in Activity 2, the living wage concept originated with parents in East London working two minimum wage jobs who were unable to support their family. In other words, the living wage started as a framing of a particular social issue by the people who encountered that issue in their daily lives. Through London Citizens, communities, businesses, campaigners and faith groups came together to campaign for wages which are good for business, but also good for the individual and for society. Over time, the living wage campaign developed its own identity as a national movement. The Living Wage Foundation has successfully persuaded employers of all sizes to implement a living wage for their staff, and the term 'living wage' has entered the political discourse.

Activity 4 Influencing words
Allow about 15 minutes

Look at the front page of a website of a voluntary organisation you consider to be influential. Select 10-12 key words from the web page that you consider influencing words. Write down the sentences in which these words appear. Now reflect on why these key words stood out for you. What is it about the language and the meaning they make that began to influence you?

Comment
Most people probably feel that their words are unlikely to have the impact of the living wage campaign. However, the history of the voluntary sector is littered with interpretations of policy and the naming of social need by small groups of people that ultimately change the way society understands itself and its limitations. Think here of the modern day slavery movement. At the turn of the twenty-first century, very few people would have accepted that 'slavery' was a significant social issue requiring changes in social policy. Surely, slavery had been confined to history? Now there is the Modern Slavery Act in England and Wales and the Human Trafficking and Exploitation Act in Scotland – all because a small group of individuals and voluntary groups raised their voices and offered a meaning of 'slavery' to make sense of relationships between people that are considered unacceptable in the twenty-first century.

So, how might you draw on the two ideas of micro-level power and leadership as meaning-making in your own leadership practice?

Beech and Huxham (2008) argue that every time individuals have the potential to influence the discourse or to take action within a collaboration, this can be seen as a potential source of power. Often, individuals are unaware of these 'points of power', but at this micro-level all participants can influence the direction of the conversation, the text of a document or the nature of agreed actions; they can resist the imposition of 'agreed' interpretations and offer alternatives. Micro moments of power can be impacted by any individual, with or without formal position. While this does not immediately impact on asymmetries of power at the macro-level, micro-level power will occasionally result in macro-level changes, as suggested by the living wage example.

Activity 5 Micro power
Allow about 30 minutes

Review your notes for Activity 1. You should now be able to see that here you are being asked to identify points of micro power. Can you identify the micro points of power in your notes? What do you see as the limitations of this approach to negotiating the power dynamics of collaboration? Comment on the discussion forum what you perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of the points of power approach. Make sure you post your comments within the correct thread for this activity.

Comment

One criticism of the micro-level approach to power is that, in focusing attention on language and relationships, it fails to address embedded structural inequalities. A related criticism is that it reduces power dynamics between organisations to the inter-personal level, and consequently gives space to dominant personalities to impose themselves on the collaboration. Join the discussion in the collaborative forum to share your thoughts on micro-level power and practices of meaning-making. You could also discuss this approach with colleagues at work, or in your meetings with other learners, if you are studying this course in a group. Is focusing on micro points of power a way to amplify voluntary sector voice, or a failure to take sufficient account of the power asymmetry in which the sector operates?

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6 Week 7 quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 7 quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

To open in a new window, right click on the link above and select 'Open in new window'.

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7 Summary of Week 7

You started your learning this week by thinking about different ways in which individuals and citizen groups exert influence and 'speak truth to power'. You have ended your learning with a focus on language and meaning-making at the micro-level – in the practices of the ordinary meetings, debates and discussions of ongoing collaboration.

Power is a complex issue, and the ways in which a collaborative approach is impacted by power asymmetries has only been touched upon. To be clear, our aim here is not to make a political point, but rather to raise your awareness of the issues of power at work, even as voluntary organisations develop a collaborative approach with individuals and organisations across the public arena.

Next week is the final week of the course, in which you will consider collaborative leadership in the context of long-term collaboration across different organisations and sectors and through multiple partnership arrangements and joint projects.

Week 8: Weaving the collaborative fabric

Introduction

Congratulations on reaching the final week of this course on collaborative leadership. We hope you have found the ideas you have encountered along the way interesting and thought-provoking. More importantly, we hope that these ideas have challenged you to reflect on your own leadership practice, and enabled you to adapt that practice to reflect the collaboration challenges of your current or future working environment.

In this last week, you will be asked to reflect on collaboration as a long-term endeavour to work across organisational, sector and professional boundaries, and on the implications of this long-term approach for leadership practice. Although the focus is on organisational boundaries, you will also find that many of the ideas you encounter here also apply to collaboration across departmental or team boundaries.

By the end of this week you will be able to:

- identify reasons for collaborating over the longer-term and the challenges that make long-term collaboration difficult
- reflect critically on the concept of collaborative fabric as a way of thinking about sustaining collaboration over the longer term
- identify and reflect on the issues that arise for collaborative leadership
- apply these ideas to your own working situation.

1 Continuing to collaborate

Now listen to the final instalment from Family Time Ellen's story.

Audio content is not available in this format.

Like Ellen, many individuals leading voluntary organisations spend a large percentage of their time collaborating with other organisations, but the form and structure of this collaboration changes over time. Informal cooperation becomes a formal agreement; a locality partnership forms, struggles and dissolves in response to policy changes; a leaders' forum is strong for a while but dissipates when key individuals move on. Individuals engage in multiple forums, working groups and joint projects – each with different participants, processes and structures, all of which are continually changing. The

organisation adapts to these different forms of collaboration, responding to the shifting priorities of its partners. It also pushes back, shaping the collaboration to reflect its priorities and mission.

Almost in spite of these changes, organisations within and beyond the sector do develop collaborative partnerships that endure. Think, for example, of the changing but enduring relationship between a residents' association and a town council. Initially, the residents' association forms to represent to the council the need for more green spaces in the locality. They develop a formal partnership to apply for Lottery funding to restore a derelict site in the town. The Lottery project lasts six months, but residents and councillors identify further land for development of allotments. The land is owned by the council which offers to lease the land to the residents' association, forming a binding contract between them. In the meantime, the partnership between the council and the residents' association becomes more widely known and both are invited to join the county forum for the development and maintenance of green spaces. In forum meetings, it is clear that the association and the council have quite different views on the ownership of green spaces. The residents' association partners with other residents' associations to campaign for council held land to be transferred to local communities, and so the collaborative fabric is woven across the locality. Interestingly, I (Carol) have observed in my research that in some places a dense fabric of collaboration develops – collaboration is normalised as a way of working. In others, such collaboration is relatively uncommon.

This week you will explore some of the factors that impact on the environment for collaboration, through the concept of the collaborative fabric. As with last week's study, you will undertake a mini-research project through which you will reflect on how collaboration is sustained over the longer-term, by mapping collaboration between your organisation and a key partner over an extended period of time, and through changing forms and structures. You will also reflect on what this longer-term focus might mean for your own leadership practice.

2 Nurturing over the longer-term

Earlier in the course, you reflected on Huxham and Vangen's (2005, p.80) advice to collaborative leaders to 'nurture, nurture, nurture' collaboration like a well-tended garden. This 'strapline for collaboration' is a reminder of a key point you have encountered throughout this course. Collaboration (whether within or between organisations) is not self-sustaining. Like any growing, adaptable and vulnerable entity, collaboration takes a lot of looking after. A key task of leadership in collaborative contexts is this nurturing of a fragile entity – keeping a partnership focused, encouraging active engagement in a joint project, negotiating goals, giving direction, challenging and playing the politics to keep the show on the road.

Figure 1 Nurturing growing plants

As you have seen in this course, this is leadership as a complex practice which involves difficult decisions, compromises and trade-offs, but also ongoing commitment, determination and persistence to make things happen and drive collaboration forward. For individuals (perhaps particularly individuals in the voluntary sector), this frequently involves engaging not simply in one collaboration or partnership, but rather with multiple collaborations within a locality, or inter-related collaborations focused on a social issue or a community or place of interest.

It is because collaborative practice requires this continuing level of commitment and energy that it is important to *keep* asking the question – where is the potential for collaborative advantage? Or, expressed in a different way – what is it you hope to achieve by working together that you could not achieve alone?

Activity 1 Collaborative advantage
Allow about 10 minutes

Think of a collaboration which you or your organisation have engaged with over an extended period of time. This might be a collaboration within your organisation (for example, between departments), or across organisational boundaries. Can you identify the *continuing* potential for collaborative advantage, or have you and your partners lost sight of this potential over time as the collaboration has changed its structure, membership or purpose?

> *Provide your answer...*

Comment

As we have previously suggested, one answer to the question 'where is the potential for collaborative advantage?' focuses on so-called 'wicked' (Grint, 2005) or 'relentless' (Weber and Khademian, 2008) problems that no one individual, department or organisation can address on their own. These problems require organisations and individuals to draw on the knowledge, expertise, resources, networks and sources of power of as many players as possible, and to do this over extended periods of time. However, we know that in general collaborative partnerships are not long-lived – they slip into inertia (Huxham and Vangen, 2005), or become dominated by personalities and factions; they fall apart due to the competing interests of collaboration participants,

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but also due to external changes, including government policy and priorities. As a result, collaboration continually fails to address these complex problems over the longer term.

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3 Reasons for failure

Of course, not all collaboration is focused on complex social problems, but the experience of struggling to sustain collaboration over the longer term is a common one.

Activity 2 Sustaining collaboration

Part 1

Allow about 15 minutes

Think of an effort you have been involved in to work collaboratively that failed to sustain itself over the long-term – by long-term we mean an attempt to collaborate over a period of years. For example, a long-term strategy to increase access to the arts in a locality which quickly ran out of energy; a cross-sector 5-year strategy to improve educational outcomes in a locality, which ended with changes in government policy; or an inter-agency plan to deliver an annual event over a 10-year period that ends after only two years.

In your learning journal,, list the reasons this attempt at long-term collaboration failed, and then uncover our responses in the comment below. Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 8 Activity 2.

Comment

Table 1 Reasons for long-term collaboration failure

Personality differences
Changes of personnel
Competition between collaborating teams/organisations
Changes in policy – at national or local levels
Political change in national or local government
Slow pace of progress
Failure to agree basic ground rules / terms of reference
Failure to achieve sign-off from senior managers
One partner pulls out due to changes in their organisation
No decisions are made
Powerful partners dominate
Structural arrangements for collaboration change
No one takes responsibility
Everyone is too busy
Nothing gets done
Collusion between other partners
Disagreement on the aims of the collaboration
Realisation that collaborating organisations each have different aims

| Too much time spent reaching agreement to act |
| The issue we were addressing together has changed |

You may have thought of more reasons than those we listed. In general though, we can summarise these reasons as follows:

- first, there are reasons concerned with the collaboration itself – the difficulty of reaching joint decisions and of doing that again and again; the realisation over time that collaborating organisations do not have the same interests or aims; the failure to take responsibility; the lack of clarity as to who is responsible for what; and competing accountabilities.

- second, there are reasons concerned with the external environment – the changing nature of government policy; changes in the collaborating organisations themselves; and the changing nature of the issue you seek to tackle together.

If collaboration is so difficult to sustain (and sometimes even to get off the ground), then it is perhaps unsurprising that Huxham and Vangen (2005) advise, 'don't do it unless you have to'. You might add 'stop doing it if you don't need to continue'. Paradoxically, knowing when and how to say 'stop' to a specific partnership or collaborative project which has lost its way might be the best way to maintain the potential of longer-term collaborative relationship. In part 2 of this activity, you will reflect on whether any of the collaborations you are involved in should be brought to an end.

Part 2

Allow about 20 minutes

Reflect – why does your organisation need to *continue* to collaborate with others? What is it that you can achieve together through inter-organisational collaboration that is sustained over 2, 5, 10 or even 20 years? Are there any partnerships or joint projects that you should end now because they have little value for the future?

Comment

It is never easy to bring a collaborative partnership to an end – and certainly not easy to be the one to stand up and say the collaboration has no future. However, as you have seen throughout this course, leadership sometimes means being willing to say difficult things.

4 Re-structure, re-structure

A frequent leadership response to the endeavour to achieve long-term collaboration is to continually re-structure the collaboration in an attempt to find a structure that will make things happen in a sustained way. One partnership ends and another begins; or a collaborative project is reorganised in an attempt to clarify the responsibilities of partner organisations, who reports to who and how decisions are made; or perhaps the structure changes to reflect policy change. Unfortunately, continued structural change can itself become a source of fragility. This is evident in the social welfare field where successive governments have introduced different structural partnership arrangements through policies that have impacted the way in which public agencies collaborate with organisations in the public, voluntary and private sectors.

For example, in this article for *The Guardian* (2014), Professor Bob Hudson, an expert on inter-organisational partnerships in the social welfare field, argued that the impact of 40 years of structural change in the NHS on its partnerships with organisations beyond statutory services has been 'instability and fragmentation which is inimical to settled joint relationships'.

This continual attempt to sustain collaboration through structure is also seen at a more local level. Research shows that membership of a collaboration changes frequently, and is often ambiguous – individuals and organisations move in and out of collaborative arrangements. The temptation is to think that *if* you can finally get the right partners around the table and clarify how they each relate to the other in a clear structural arrangement, then you will keep collaboration going. However, in practice, local partnerships, forums and alliances often adopt a structure that works for a period, but soon needs to be re-visited because of changes in the environment. A CEO interviewed for course author Carol's research described the experience of cross-sector collaboration in children's services as 'a washing machine of continual change' (Jacklin-Jarvis, 2014). An interviewee from a voluntary sector infrastructure agency described how voluntary sector representatives experience a roller coaster ride through continually changing policy-led collaborative forums and partnership arrangements.

Eventually, continued efforts to re-structure use up so much time, effort and resources that the collaboration runs out of energy and enters a state of inertia.

This sets up a dilemma. On the one hand, there is a need for long-term collaborative endeavours to address complex issues; on the other, specific collaborative arrangements (partnerships, working groups, joint services and projects) tend to be short-lived, subject to the internal dynamics of competing organisations *and* changes in the external environment. For leaders, the need to focus on short-term change (and its consequences) pulls time and energy away from a focus on the longer-term.

It is for these reasons, that in these final sections of the course you will be offered a somewhat different way of thinking about the nurturing work of collaborative leadership over the longer term. To do this you will leave behind the picture of a garden to draw on a different metaphor for collaboration – the 'collaborative fabric' (Jacklin-Jarvis, 2014; Jacklin-Jarvis et al., 2016).

5 Weaving the fabric

Imagine a large woven fabric, which is continually remade by multiple hands. Over years, successive weavers introduce different textures and colours; they fill in different sections of a developing picture; the pattern changes; threads are pulled out by accident or design; edges are frayed; but still weavers return to add their own distinctive contribution. Observers recognise an emerging picture, but their perceptions of that picture vary from one another. The fabric is always unfinished, the picture always emerging; yet the fabric itself endures – it is resilient if misshapen, the product of multiple weavers over a period of time. In leadership terms, the collaborative fabric is made through multiple practices that are often incomplete and partial; they are relational, creative, serendipitous and unexpected, as well as intentional, purposeful and planned.

Figure 2 Weaving together

Our research suggests that the experience of collaborating across organisational boundaries over the long-term and through changing structures feels something like participating in the weaving of continually remade fabric (Jacklin-Jarvis, 2014). For individuals this continual remaking involves engaging with four key elements of the collaborative fabric:

1. the processes of collaboration – attending meetings; determining and participating in decision-making processes; negotiating (formally and informally); keeping records and challenging records made by others; communicating across organisational boundaries
2. relationships – networking and building relationships with key contacts
3. policies – implementing, challenging and responding to policy change
4. identities of collaborating organisations – ensuring the organisation's identity is sustained through the challenges of collaboration.

But these elements of the fabric are not stable over the long-term. They change continually, whether by design or default, as they interact with one another to provide a continually dynamic context for collaborative practice.

You will be able to identify all of these in Ellen's story – changing government policies; the processes of the regional partnership; the relationships between individuals who make things happen behind the scene; and the continuing endeavour to maintain a distinctive identity for Family Time. You probably recognise this dynamic context for collaboration in your own practice.

How, then, might the picture of continually rewoven fabric help you to think about the leadership work of nurturing collaboration which, as in Ellen's example, is continually changing and adapting to a context in which process, policy, relationships and identity, are each themselves continually adapting and inter-relating?

The activity that follows is designed to help you think through a long-term approach to collaboration through the picture of the collaborative fabric.

Activity 3 Continuing collaborative relationships
Allow about 90 minutes

This activity takes the form of a mini-research project focused on a continuing collaborative relationship between your organisation and another organisation – whether within the voluntary sector or in a different sector.

To complete this activity you will first need to identify a collaboration between your own organisation (or teams and department) and another (or several others) that has endured over a period of time – an obvious example might be where your organisation has collaborated with the local council, or with a similar organisation in a neighbouring locality. You may need to search your organisation's archives and/or interview a couple of individuals who have been with the organisation for an extended period of time.

Once you have identified your example, download the Collaborative fabric template and follow the instructions below.

1.   Complete the sentence at the top of the template by writing down the long-term collaborative advantage that is the focus of this inter-organisational relationship.

2.   Mark on the timeline the dates of the collaboration – you may want to mark dates into the future.

3.   In the first box above the timeline titled 'Structures', add the different forms or structures that this relationship has taken. For example, it may have started as an informal agreement to act together, then formalised into a partnership with terms of reference, delivered a short-term project, then re-structured due to external factors. There may also have been contractual agreements between the two organisations and along the way, the two organisations may have entered collaborations with other partners, or participated in collaborative forums or partnerships. Mark all of these on the timeline.

4.   In the second box above the timeline titled 'Policy', add examples of national or local policy that impacted on how the collaboration progressed. These examples of policy might take the form of formal policy documents issued by public agencies, or a more localised interpretation of policy.

5.   Now, think about the individuals involved in nurturing this inter-organisational relationship. Who were they, how did they first meet, how did they communicate with each other, and with others in their organisations? Have the same individuals stayed involved with the relationship between organisations through its changing forms and structures, or have the individuals changed? In the first box below the timeline titled 'People' write in the names or job titles of these individuals.

6.   In the second box below the timeline titled 'Processes', write in the processes through which individuals from each organisation related to each other and then the processes through which they linked their own organisation to the collaboration. These processes may be formal meetings, terms of reference, informal discussions, email updates, meeting minutes, negotiating a formal agreement, shared newsletters or joint training. (Don't worry if you don't have all the detail available to you, just add as many ideas as you can.)

7.   Finally, return to the timeline, and use a different colour to identify any significant ways in which your organisation was changing over this period of time. These

might be changes in size or focus, significant new projects, or a more fundamental change of strategy or purpose, or culture. For the purposes of this exercise, we see these as changes that impact on organisational identity.

Check through your work – you should be able to identify issues related to people (and the relationships between them), processes (formal and informal), policy (national and local) and organisational identity. Think about how these interact, impacting on each other and on the forms and structures of collaboration that you identified on your timeline. You may want to take a different colour to mark-up these inter-relationships.

Share your work with a colleague. Ask them to reflect back on whether they recognise the pattern of change and development that emerges from this activity.

Comment

Don't be surprised if this 'map of collaboration' looks messy and/or incomplete (we would be surprised if it didn't). This messy and incomplete picture simply reflects the suggestion that inter-organisational collaboration resembles the continual reweaving of unfinished fabric.

The activity draws your attention beyond structure and form to four key elements of the collaborative fabric as they interact over time. These key elements are:

- the relationships between key individuals

- the processes through which individuals and organisations interact

- the policy context

- the changing identity of collaborating organisations.

The picture that emerges is likely to show individuals and organisations collaborating in multiple ways – through formal agreements, projects and partnerships; informal arrangements and interpersonal relationships; through processes that have been agreed and set down in writing and through processes that have emerged. It will also begin to show how this collaboration is impacted by change at the policy level and at the level of organisational identity.

The point of the exercise is to help you reflect on how this inter-organisational collaboration has been sustained over the longer-term. More specifically, reflect on how relationships, processes, policy and the changing identity of your organisation have impacted on the collaboration over time – bearing in mind that the exact nature of the inter-relationships between these elements may be hidden by time. We suggest you reflect on this first in your learning journal, in a post titled Week 8 Activity 3, and then discuss your map with a colleague.

6 Reflecting on leadership for long-term collaboration

So what does all of this mean for leadership? To address this question, you will return to some of the key underpinnings of the ideas about leadership which you have encountered in this course (you can also read more about our approach to leadership in our earlier course *Developing leadership practice in voluntary organisations*).

As you have seen, we think about leadership for inter-organisational collaboration as relational, concerned with process, related to context (and here specifically to the impact of policy within that context) and engaged in identity-making. We suggest that sustaining collaboration over the longer term requires leadership which interweaves the relational with process, policy and identity, each of which continually shifts and changes. This is a complex idea, and you are not expected to have a complete understanding of how the collaborative fabric develops and is continually re-made (we certainly don't – we are still learning about this). Instead you have been offered this as a metaphor for thinking about collaborative leadership over the longer term.

Activity 4 Leadership practices
Allow about 30 minutes

Think back through the course and the different leadership practices you have encountered. List all of those practices in the left hand column of the Leadership practices template here. This task has been started for you, but think of as many as you can, either mentioned explicitly in the course, or brought to mind by your reading.

Now, add brief examples from your own experience under each of the four elements of the collaborative fabric. Again, this has been started for you from some of our own experiences, which you can see below.

Table 2 Examples of leadership practices from each of the four elements of the collaborative fabric

Leadership Practices	Policy	Identity	Processes	Relationships
Asking challenging questions	Challenging local policy at a council committee			
Story telling		Telling stories about the impact of our work that change the way our partners see us		Telling stories about our work through key informal contacts
Building coalitions			Developing a joint training programme with the local authority	

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Advocating	Speaking on behalf of families in need at a meeting with the CGC			
Recognising points of power	Recognising opportunities to challenge policy			
Negotiating				

Finally, in your learning journal, write about how these practices impact collaboration for the longer-term. What challenges does this give you in your own practice for achieving long-term inter-organisational collaborative relationships? Are there some practices you need to develop further with a particular focus on the longer-term? Remember, in a distributed model of leadership, not all of these practices have to be your responsibility – think about how they are shared across the organisation (and beyond) over the longer-term. Make sure you title the post with the week number and the number of this activity, Week 8 Activity 4.

Comment

Bringing a longer-term perspective to the practices of collaborative leadership is challenging because it pushes against the factors that can cause collaborations to stutter and fail. However, as you have seen in this course, these practices can also deliver real change for communities and service users.

Your course ends with a final video in which Gamiel Yafai, Chair of the MK Diversity Council and a Trustee of the Parks Trust and of Community Action: MK, talks about his own engagement in a range of collaborative arrangements in the locality of Milton Keynes. He represents these different organisations in formal partnerships and informal collaborations with other voluntary organisations and public agencies. In the video, Gamiel talks about the way in which these collaborations are continually changing, even as they try to tackle social issues that are enduring and relentless. Gamiel was asked about the challenges, possibilities, and practices of leadership in this complex context. In his response, he draws on a different metaphor from the one used in this course and compares collaboration to a jigsaw puzzle.

Video content is not available in this format.

Gamiel pulls together a number of points of importance as you conclude this course. The metaphor of the jigsaw puzzle thrown into the air is apt because collaborative leadership can often feel like trying to make sense of a confusing jumble of demands, issues and personalities. Our belief is that collaborative leadership is not about 'solving' these issues (real complexity never truly disappears), but about establishing a way of working that keeps important tensions and issues alive while also moving forward. With this in mind, Gamiel helpfully highlighted diversity as crucial for collaborative leadership.

Drawing on diversity means that you will feel uncomfortable as you start to explore problems that were previously unknown to you, or at least consider problems in unknown ways – and this sense of working in uncomfortable territory will only be magnified as you collaborate beyond your organisational boundaries. We hope that we have introduced, over the duration of the course, a number of ways in which you can think about and harness diversity to lead collaboratively.

7 Week 8 quiz

Check what you've learned this week by taking the end-of-week quiz.

Week 8 quiz

Open the quiz in a new window or tab then come back here when you've finished.

8 Summary of Week 8

In this last week of the course, you considered how and why collaborative leadership might address the long-term through multiple collaborative arrangements that together constitute a continually changing 'collaborative fabric' of inter-related partnerships, agreements and working groups. Although focusing on the long-term is enormously challenging, leadership plays a key part in taking you beyond immediate concerns and complexities to make a difference in your local community, and to complex social issues.

We hope you have enjoyed travelling with us through our exploration of the challenges of collaborative leadership in the context of voluntary organisations. Our aim was not to offer easy answers, but rather to help you reflect on how you practise leadership, and to offer some ideas and examples that might stimulate your thinking and change your practice. We hope you are encouraged as well as challenged by the reading and activities in the course. To engage with us, and the teaching and research of the Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership, further please follow this link:

www.open.ac.uk/business-school-research/centre-voluntary-sector-leadership/ or email the CVSL team at oubs-cvsl@open.ac.uk.

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Week 8

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