

ORGANISATIONAL COLLABORATION IS A PARTNERSHIP: FIRMS MUST LEARN TO GIVE AND TAKE

Collaboration is a critical competence for organisations. It offers the possibility of very tangible benefits - knowledge sharing, transfer, and creation for example. However, like any personal relationship, the process of collaboration can be a messy one, not clearly defined, difficult to manage and often a response to unplanned events or actions. It can lead to a very happy outcome - collaborative advantage - or painfully slow progress and even separation - collaborative inertia. New research, however, shows that firms can master the collaborative process and make it work to their advantage, if only they adopt the right approach.

"There are a number of possible outcomes from a collaborative process," says Chris Huxham, co-author of a new research briefing *Give and Take: Understanding Attitudes to Learning in the Collaborative Process*. "These can be polarised under two headings. In collaborative advantage the synergistic benefits of collaboration are realised. The more usual outcome, however, is that collaborations make marginal, slow and difficult progress -- collaborative inertia. Any help therefore that can steer a collaborative relationship towards a situation of collaborative advantage is invaluable."

Understanding the attitudes and approaches adopted towards learning in collaborative relationships, is an essential tool to help manage the collaborative process towards a happy conclusion for everyone involved. In the equivalent of marriage guidance for organisations, firms can use a theoretical framework outlined by the briefing's authors to help the partners involved, understand and explore attitudes to learning in collaborations. The result: a better chance of benefiting from their relationship.

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Some ground rules for collaborating organisations

Collaborative organisations need to be aware that:

- There are some basic attitudes towards collaborative learning that shape the relationship. Selfish-exploiting. Sharing-exchanging. Sharing-exploring. Sideline-excluding.
- The basic attitudes are a good starting point, but they are only a small part of the picture. Perspectives and attitudes are varied. Collaborative relationships are complicated.

Knowledge of both the attitudes involved, and which apply to which partner, is particularly important because:

- The attitudes adopted by the organisation, both explicitly and implicitly, affect the nature of the relationship and the way knowledge moves between the partners in a collaborative relationship.
- If the attitudes are mismatched or unfavorably shared, then it may have an adverse impact on the relationship.
- The stances adopted by the parties may indicate more general, unspoken, attitudes held by the partners towards one another.

Attitudes towards learning play a critical role in deciding whether the relationship between collaborating organisations blossoms into one of collaborative advantage, or drifts amid acrimony and argument towards collaborative inertia. As a result, the conceptual framework for exploring and understanding attitudes towards knowledge giving, taking and creating, should become an integral part of managing any collaborative process.

The report: *Give and Take: Understanding Attitudes to Learning in the Collaborative Process*

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Notes for Editors

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