COLLABORATION | SOLVING THE PUZZLE OF COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE

From Vision, to Alignment, to Action

Community change leaders spend numerous hours at collaborative planning tables seeking to create more impactful solutions for their neighbourhoods, communities, or networks. And yet, the practice of collaborative governance remains challenging.

There is a substantive amount of literature about collaboration and collaborative work but relatively little that identifies the nuts and bolts of collaborative governance including process, structure, accountability, engagement, and effectiveness.

A foundation for my approach to collaboration is David Chrislip's collaborative premise:
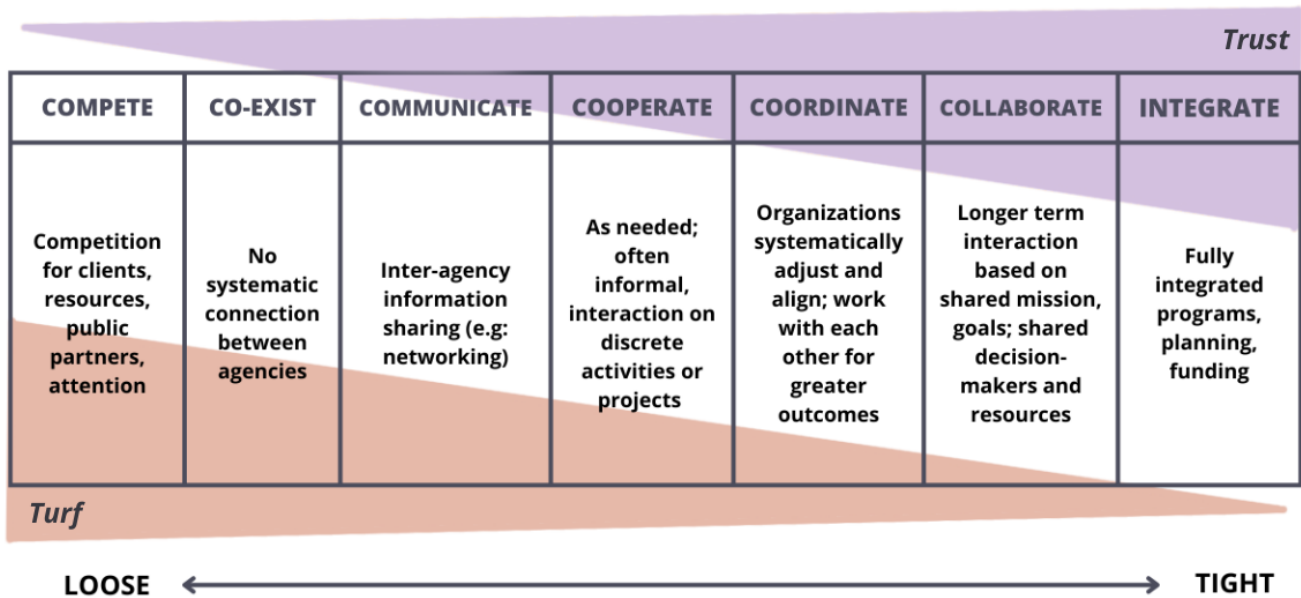
> *"If you bring the appropriate people together as peers in constructive ways with good content and context information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organizations and the community."[1]*

The premise involves uniting the appropriate people effectively, providing valuable information, and supporting htem in creating authentic visions. Each of these elements is critical to effective collaboration… but what about collaborative governance?

Collaborative governance is a formal or informal process where partners representing different interests make decisions together, share resources, and strategically align to solve problems.

Tamarack, several years ago, developed the [collaboration spectrum](#)[i] which distinguishes seven different levels of collaboration. This offers groups a range of options to consider in deciding the level of collaboration that is best suited to advance their collective work.

THE COLLABORATION SPECTRUM

Trust

COMPETE	CO-EXIST	COMMUNICATE	COOPERATE	COORDINATE	COLLABORATE	INTEGRATE
Competition for clients, resources, public partners, attention	No systematic connection between agencies	Inter-agency information sharing (e.g: networking)	As needed; often informal, interaction on discrete activities or projects	Organizations systematically adjust and align; work with each other for greater outcomes	Longer term interaction based on shared mission, goals; shared decision-makers and resources	Fully integrated programs, planning, funding

Turf

LOOSE ⟷ TIGHT

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Balancing the Process, Product and People

The level and degree of formality of collaborative governance models and structures is often connected to the following factors:

- context of the community, including the number of collaborative efforts currently underway
- history and experience of collaboration in the community and between community partners
- complexity of the problem or issue being addressed
- availability of resources to support the collective effort
- pre-existing relationships, connection, and trust between the partners

Collaborative governance requires the right balance between process and product. The process should be defined enough so that those involved are aware of the overall organizing structure, their individual roles, and accountabilities, an understanding of how to contribute to shared decision-making, progress
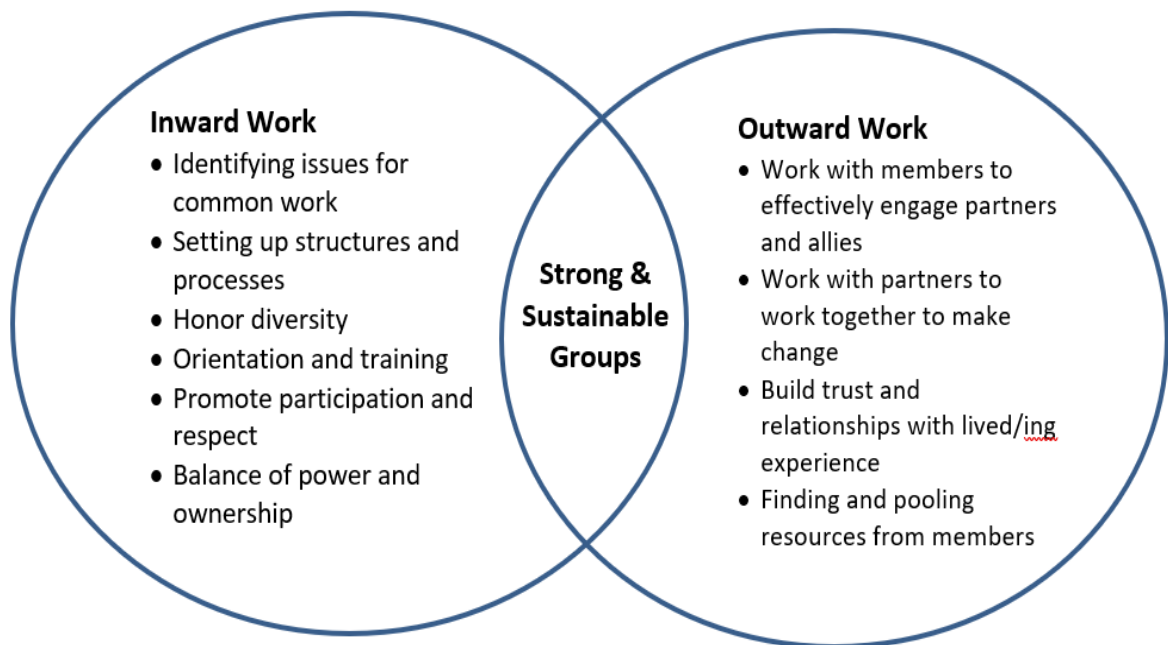
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and impact, and a sense of alignment and commitment between their personal and/or organizational and the co-developed and shared agenda of the collaborative effort.

Equally, collaborative efforts must also understand the pre-existing relationships, connections, and trust between partners. This will be different for each collaborative process. In some communities, there will be strong connections and ties and in other communities there will be lower levels of trust and connection.

Our Deepening Community team at Tamarack identify the following as "people challenge". A common mistake that groups make is that they focus on the *doing* and not on maintaining relationships. Maintaining partnerships is really about the relationships and trust.

There are two functions that partnerships and collaborative efforts need to do no matter what type of approach to collaboration they take:

Figure 2: Source: FD Butterfoss (2007)

Inward Work
- Identifying issues for common work
- Setting up structures and processes
- Honor diversity
- Orientation and training
- Promote participation and respect
- Balance of power and ownership

Strong & Sustainable Groups

Outward Work
- Work with members to effectively engage partners and allies
- Work with partners to work together to make change
- Build trust and relationships with lived/ing experience
- Finding and pooling resources from members

1. **Inward work:** these are the actions or activities that are needed to build, nurture, and maintain the group. This includes building the vision and goals, recruitment, training and retaining members. This is where building relationships and trust fit.

2. **Outward work:** these are actions that lead to achieving the goals of the group. These will focus on implementing the actions that will lead to the jointly established outcomes.

> Outward work effectiveness will depend on the quality of the internal coordination of the coalition and the level of trust developed by the inward work. [ii]

Collaborative Governance Models and Structures

There is not a one-size fits all model for collaborative governance. Collaborate CIC in the UK published a recently report called Forms and Features of Collaboration[iii] in which they describe seven different approaches such as coalitions, collective impact, network collaborations and systems collaborators. For each example, they describe the value of that approach, the focus, the purpose, the mechanics, and the form or make up of the collaborative. Collaborate CIC provides a case study example which illustrates that form of collaboration in action.

It is useful to recognize that there can be many different models and structures to choose from when designing your specific collaborative governance approach.

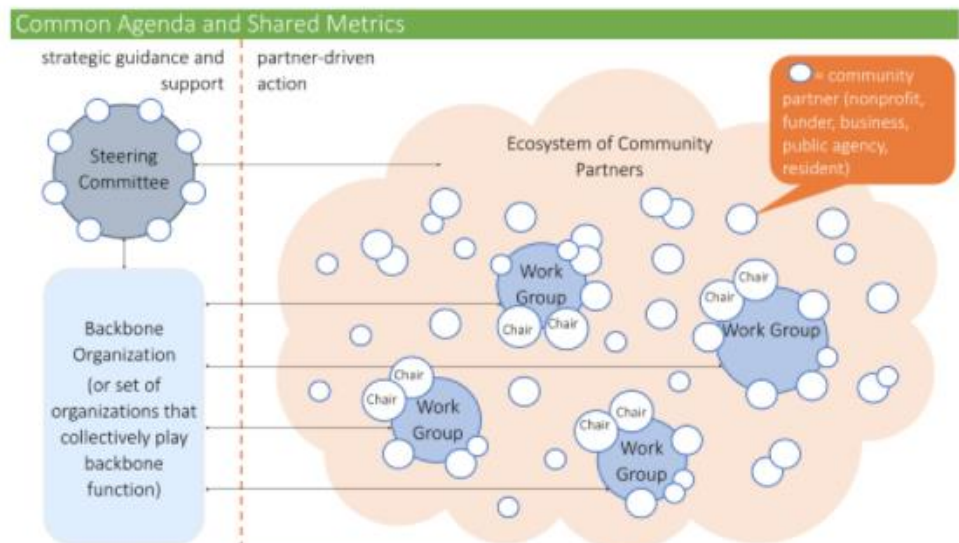A model that we often refer to at Tamarack is the Constellation Model of Governance. [iv]Tamarack has modified the constellation governance model to a horizontal in design. This means that the collaborative table and community eco-system are equal in power and connection but have different areas of focus. The leadership table (Steering Committee)

Structuring for Intentionality and Uncertainty

table provides a strategic guidance and oversight approach while also looking to leverage the eco-system of community partners and actors. In the eco-system of community partners, some affiliate with the work, while others might be drawn in at a later date.

Another key feature of the model is that it takes a lightweight or high-level approach to developing governance documents. In the collaborative context, where constant shifts and changes are the norm, having a core set of lightweight operating documents is key to success.

Tamarack supports a network of 400 Vibrant Communities collaborative tables across Canada and the US. To support their work, Tamarack suggests the following as a set of governance documents to advance collaborative work. Each of these documents describes an important aspect of the core work and approach of the collaborative. These core documents are useful resources when orienting new members to a collaborative table or when seeking funding or other support. They should be revisited

and updated annually since the collaborative's work is continuously evolving. They may also require adjustments as the nature of the collaborate effort or people involved evolve or change over time.

Six Key Tools for Collaborative Governance

1. Governance Structure – A visual document which details the overall governance structure, roles of the different parts of the structure and accountabilities. The governance structure document might also include terms of reference or memorandums of understanding if these documents are required.
2. Principles for Working Together – Every collaboration should develop a core set of principles for how the partners would like to work together. This, when done at the initiation of the collaborative, should be revisited regularly and can be a guide when the collaborative goes off track.
3. Decision Making Strategy – This can be included in the governance structure document and in the Key Milestone document, but it is important that the collaborative agree to a decision-making strategy to guide their work.
4. Plan on a Page – This document is a synthesis of the core aspiration / common vision of the collaborative and provides high level details about the approach.
5. Key Milestone Report – During the course of a collaboration lifespan, the group makes choices or undertakes strategies. The key milestone report is a living document that reflects the purpose and key decisions which have informed the progress of the collaborative.
6. **Regular or Annual Progress Update** – Nothing builds momentum more than a group making progress and impact. An annual progress report is a time for reflection, sense-making and learning together. It also helps the collaborative reflect on what worked well and where the collaborative might focus next. An outcomes diary can be a helpful tool in tracking progress and reporting on results.

[i] Tamarack Institute. The Collaboration Spectrum Tool. TOOL | Collaboration Spectrum (tamarackcommunity.ca)

[ii] Coalitions and Partnerships in Community Health. Francis Dunn Butterfoss. Jossey Bass. 2007.

[iii] Collaborate CIC. Forms and Features of Collaboration. https://collaboratecic.com/forms-and-features-of-collaboration-50e9aef9525

[iv] Centre for Social Innovation. Constellation Model of Governance. https://socialinnovation.org/about/innovations-publications/constellation-model-of-governance/

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