4

COLLABORATIVE INTELLIGENCE AND ORGANISATIONAL INTELLIGENCE

Introduction

Successful collaboration requires a number of personal and organisational attributes to come together. Individuals involved in collaboration—especially collaboration leaders—must evince a set of personal characteristics and capacities that extend beyond traditional professional skills and education. We have termed this set of characteristics 'collaborative intelligence' or 'CQ'. CQ is a predisposition to thinking more generously than is usually necessary in more conventional operating environments and encompasses those difficult to determine distinctive traits possessed by individuals who excel at collaboration. CQ is a collective asset that can be developed, modelled and shared in collaborative spaces. It is based on an implicit recognition that *people* collaborate and, therefore, interpersonal relationships are important building blocks of collaborative action.

The organisations involved in a collaborative arrangement must also exhibit capacities and structures that support the collaborative activity outside the normal operating environment. Indeed, genuine collaboration is achieved when the collaborators are focused on the problem being solved and when the methods used are flexible and fit for purpose—even where this fitness may deviate from normal operating arrangements. The role of the organisations involved and their leaders is to provide permission

and accept the risk related to such operating environments. This requires a level of *organisational intelligence* to support the collaboration effectively. Collaboration is not only a product of the individuals involved in collaboration; it is also a combination of the individuals and their authorising environments, or the CQ and the organisational intelligence of the entire collaborative effort.

In this chapter, we use CQ as a lens through which to examine the personal characteristics needed by those leading and acting in collaborations; we then examine the challenges associated with collaborations involving traditionally structured organisations and discuss how organisational intelligence affects the organisational licence to collaborate, or the stance that must be adopted by authorisers in these traditional structures for them to effectively support collaborations.

What is CQ?

Effective collaboration requires a special kind of emotional intelligence, which we will call 'collaborative intelligence' or 'CQ'. Collaboration makes demands of participants that take them outside their usual operational comfort zone. This can be challenging, especially for people whose dominant experience is of working in hierarchical, chain-of-command organisational cultures in which fidelity to process and protocol figures strongly. CQ is a set of values, behaviours and processes that are fundamentally 'relational' in nature, rather than 'transactional'. The CQ skill set allows individuals to build relationships with each other. This is important because it is people who collaborate, and those relationships are the foundation on which collaboration is built.

As one interviewee remarked on the nature of CQ:

> I think collaboration is often misunderstood as something that you just do. Or occasionally I hear the phrase 'barriers to collaboration', as if you've just got to break the dam and it will flow naturally. But, in my view, collaboration is a learned set of skills. It's hard; it's complex; it happens at various levels in various ways. It can happen a bit or it can happen in a very deep and enduring way. I think having a group of people that, if you like, learn on the job together how to collaborate was really critical to the success of this [project] both in development and implementation.

CQ is shorthand for describing the attributes of effective participants in collaborative environments. It encompasses a number of personal attributes, such as knowing when to take charge and when to let others lead, a willingness to listen and respond nimbly to changed circumstances or new information, a capacity for empathy and the ability to see things from other people's points of view, a deep appreciation of systems and how they intersect and interact, respect for the collaborative process itself and the ability to forge enduring relationships based on trust.

CQ also implicitly acknowledges that organisational cultures and hierarchies can inhibit collaboration; effective collaboration requires trust, transparency and the granting of opportunity for multiparty control—qualities that are difficult to realise in siloed, hierarchical systems.

CQ is also a product of maturity and experience and, where it is lacking, collaboration cannot be effective, as observed by another interviewee:

> We did have some pointy heads … who had no interpersonal skills … [T]hose are the sorts of people—and there's no other way to dress this up—that pissed people off. This supercilious, looking-down-your-nose arrogance. Some of these people were [in their] early twenties, 25, not terribly worldly … They'd never been in these sort of operational, real-world situations. We'd actually been out there and done stuff for 30 years; these guys come out of university with a degree.

There is broad agreement among those interviewed that successful collaboration relies on this kind of emotional intelligence. Without CQ, true collaboration cannot happen.

A CQ skill set

Everyone interviewed for the study was asked to nominate the essential skills or attributes that embody CQ and are necessary for effective collaboration. Although the responses varied somewhat in terms of expression, there was, overall, a high degree of consistency about the skills and attributes people considered important. Set out below is a list of personal attributes together with a list of hard and soft skills that should, ideally, be present in those charged with participating in collaboration.

Personal qualities

Interviewees for each of the cases emphasised the importance of the personal character attributes of effective collaborators. These are not typically the qualities one might expect to see in a selection criteria or a duty statement. In Table 4.1, we have listed the attributes identified by participants as essential to effective collaboration—the attributes associated with a strong CQ. Perhaps expectedly, maturity and commitment were high on the list of requirements, as were honesty, integrity and flexibility. However, so too were characteristics such as openness and humility, adaptability and generosity, while a willingness to share power and to credit success to others were also identified as critical.

Table 4.1 Attributes of a person with high CQ

Maturity and judgement (life experience)	A person with high CQ will demonstrate mature judgement based on their professional and lived experience. This has less to do with a person's chronological age and more to do with their ability to understand the needs and motivations of others and to work with that knowledge in honest and constructive ways.
Commitment and passion	Commitment to the collaboration 'mission' and an emotional, as well as intellectual, engagement with the problems at hand are essential; they provide the 'fuel' needed to sustain collaborative intent.
Honesty and integrity	Honest dealing is an essential foundation for building trust within collaborations (for example, between collaboration partners), trust between the collaboration and participating organisations (for example, assurance) and with external stakeholders.
Interpersonal skills	Collaborations bring together people, groups and organisations with diverse interests, motivations and preferred communication styles. The ability to connect with others, to see things from other points of view and to harness the capacity of others to focus on collaborative purpose is indispensable.
Charisma and the capacity to inspire	Of all the components of CQ, charisma is the most elusive simply because it cannot be taught. It can, however, be recruited for, and deployed to collaborative purposes. Charismatic personalities can bring people along on the collaboration journey. They are often best paired with someone who is more strategic and methodical in their approach—someone who acts as a stabilising force for the purpose of providing internal and external assurance.
Consistency and follow-through	'Say what you intend to do and do what you say': Trust in collaboration—particularly for external stakeholders—resides in accountability for action. This means acting in a manner consistent with the mission and values of the collaboration, as well as following through with commitments and obtaining internal and external support (or consent) for necessary changes in emphasis or approach.

Openness and humility	Share doubts, be honest about failure and error, do not overclaim, be upfront about underdelivery, listen to advice and accept criticism. These are strengths, not weaknesses. Importantly, these qualities have greater potency when they occur in a supportive authorising environment that recognises and accepts the risks inherent in collaborative working.
Willingness to share power and credit	Give credit where credit is due and, sometimes, be prepared to give credit even where it is not entirely due. Delegate authority whenever possible to those nearest the coalface, but without sacrificing accountability or performance. Build trust in, and commitment to, collaboration by letting others share in collaboration successes; this might predispose collaboration partners to accept shared accountability for occasional failures.
Generosity, patience and compassion	These qualities most embody the spirit of collaboration. The generous person exhibits mature judgement, but is not judgemental; the patient person accepts that collaboration is a 'long game' and understands that most people come to collaboration from quite different starting positions; the compassionate person cares about outcomes and strives to understand the positions of those who might not wholly embrace the collaboration and its aims.
Problem-solver and self-starter	Collaborative action does not always wait for 'permission'. Often, formal sanction for collaboration gains traction when individuals have been collaborating 'covertly', exercising creativity and exhibiting personal commitment by addressing problems that they—and those in their personal and professional networks— have a capacity to influence. Collaboration does not follow a predictable trajectory; collaboration partners need to be nimble and entrepreneurial.
Courage and emotional resilience	Collaboration needs courage—for example, to challenge the status quo and to respond constructively to stakeholder reticence, organisational inertia and executive indifference. Collaboration is hard work and requires large investments in relationship-building and communication. It can be tiring and dispiriting at times. Therefore, emotional resilience is very important, as are supporting strategies within the collaboration to relieve the strain on colleagues.
Flexibility and adaptability	An ability to 'roll with the punches', to identify and capitalise on opportunities and to change course is essential, as are being open to new ideas and receptive to signals in the operating environment and the community.
Creativity, lateral thinking and reflectiveness	Collaboration rests on creative thinking: considering problems from different perspectives and working towards a new synthesis or a 'new normal'. Creativity rests on 'thinking outside the box', taking time to reflect (and encouraging others to reflect) on the collaboration journey and, importantly, identifying the lessons learned along the way and weaving those lessons into your collaboration practice.

Hard and soft skills

There is also a set of hard and soft skills that complement and enhance collaborative processes. By and large, these skills can be learned but they are also moulded by the presence of the character attributes identified above. The hard skills relate to some of the more common capacities that are required to operate within a corporate environment, while others are very much focused on interpersonal skills and capacities. Clearly, the ability to work with others, communicate and build trust is absolutely crucial to collaborating effectively.

The personality attributes are what make it possible for individual collaborators to build trust between themselves, while the hard and soft skills give the individuals the knowledge to negotiate in an informed manner within the limits of their power to be able to act on collaborative ideas. As observed by the director of a Children's Team in New Zealand:

> I think you need to have people in those [relationship-building] roles who've got the ability to see the strategic angle of things so that they can understand the ecosystem and how the bits work and how those levers work, some of which are informal levers and some of which are formal levers. But they also have to be able to actually understand from a transactional level how to get things done and to make sure that happens.

It should be noted that the levels of collaboration skills represented around the table are often uneven; as such, for collaboration to be effective, it is a prime objective of the collaboration process to raise the CQ of all of those around the table, and this requires insightful, skilled leadership. The skill level of the whole group becomes greater than that of its parts. Collaboration is all about relationships, and those groups of individuals with the high levels of maturity and flexibility that we term CQ are able to create stronger relationships that allow them to use these skills and common language to build CQ within the team and create strong collaborative efforts.

The hard and soft skills that are useful to collaboration are listed in Table 4.2, and are paired with questions that are designed to help identify these skills in individuals.

Table 4.2 Hard and soft skills

Connectedness (within communities and communities of interest)	To what extent do the people involved in collaboration have existing relationships of trust within affected communities? Do they have the capacity to leverage trust in the objects of the collaboration via their standing within affected communities?
Corporate memory and knowledge	Do those involved in collaboration have a strong understanding of the history and culture of the communities, organisations and interests operating in the policy space or of the impact of the problems that are the focus of the collaboration? Are they aware of past initiatives and/or failures and able to weave learnings from those experiences into present challenges?
Systems knowledge and capacity to cultivate networks	To what extent do the people involved in collaboration understand the 'ecosystem' in which the collaboration is to occur?
Stakeholder relations	Do collaboration partners have a strong understanding of the various internal and external stakeholders affected by collaboration, including their respective interests, priorities, points of difference and the issues that unite them?
Negotiation, facilitation and conflict-resolution	Do they understand the possible sources of cynicism and doubt, as well as the sources of support, and do they have the skill and personal integrity to manage complexity and win trust? Are they able to offer themselves as honest brokers to encourage trust and manage differences of opinion among stakeholders?
Governance, assurance and risk management	Is there a strong understanding of, and commitment to, the application of effective governance, the identification and mitigation of risk and the importance of providing assurance to internal and external stakeholders to protect the integrity and core purposes of the collaboration?
Interpersonal communication and relationship-based practice	Do the individuals involved in a collaboration possess the ability to engage in respectful, constructive, non-conflictual communications with collaboration partners and external and internal stakeholders, including the executives of partner organisations?
Recognising when change is needed	Do individual collaboration partners understand what needs to change and why, and can they make a persuasive case for change and win support for necessary actions that give effect to sustainable change?
Outcomes focus and understanding of impact measurement	Do collaboration partners have a practical understanding of the desired/intended outcomes to be achieved and how they might be measured and supported? Do they accept the necessity and importance of impact measurement and the practical means for gathering and reporting evidence of impact?

What the cases tell us

The skills and characteristics associated with individuals who are successful and effective collaborators also serve to inform our sense of what collaborative arrangements should look like. However, collaboration—because it is problem-centric and involves diverse participants—is also a complex activity in terms of its structure and processes. In this section, we examine this phenomenon.

Many people have a preconception of what collaboration should look like. Often, this picture is one of formality: structure, authority and process are often thought to be clearly delineated within a documented modus operandi. Collaborative frameworks are also expected to be reciprocal, operate predominantly across public–not-for-profit sector boundaries and entail the clear articulation of aims and the means by which they will be pursued.

These primary expectations are also in line with the extensive academic literature on cross-sector collaboration. Therefore, in instigating this research, we were expecting to see evidence of the prioritisation of these structures in examples of effective collaborations. However, it quickly became apparent, both in the process of case selection and in the course of the investigation of the cases themselves, that the reality on the ground did not neatly align with this initial—and what we came to appreciate as somewhat simplistic—framing of collaboration. In truth, collaboration occupies a broader and more diverse spectrum of forms. We were forced to conclude that there is no single one-size-fits-all organisational model for effective collaboration.

However, the investigations did conclude that there are two broad sets of characteristics that are common to, and necessary for, effective collaborations. These are:

1. Collaborative *practice*—the behaviours, attitudes and values that support and sustain collaborative endeavour, which are part of CQ.
2. An authorising environment that creates the organisational spaces within which collaboration can occur.

The existence of CQ and organisational intelligence—or an *amiable* authorising environment—together is a necessary precondition for successful collaboration.

Organisational intelligence

Organisational intelligence refers to the collective understanding of an organisation and the structured permissions from leaders of organisations that enable collaboration. Organisations with organisational intelligence support collaboration by creating systems that help collaboration thrive and provide clear, unambiguous authority to the collaboration team—often outside normal operating processes. These organisations will also have an understanding of the challenges to collaboration, the relational nature of collaboration and, therefore, some patience for collaboration. We can see how important this organisational intelligence and permission is by discussing the operating spaces in and around which collaboration works.

Primary and secondary operating spaces

For the most part, collaboration occurs in a secondary (informal) operating space in which many of the conventions of the primary (formal) operating space do not apply in quite the same way. This 'dual operating system', which Kotter (2012) identified, comprises a 'management-driven hierarchy' and a second operating system, which is 'devoted to the design and implementation of strategy, that uses an agile, network-like structure and a very different set of processes' (Kotter 2012: 46–47). This second operating space is more nimble than the primary space, which allows it to 'address the challenges produced by mounting complexity and rapid change' (Kotter 2012: 46).

Furthermore, the operational and behavioural norms that will apply in this secondary operating space are to a large extent undefined—at least at the outset—and need to be co-designed and coproduced by participants. For most participants, this means *unlearning* old norms and attitudes while creating and signing up to new ones. This can liberate individuals and information from 'silos and hierarchical layers' and enable the second operating space to flow with far greater freedom and speed (Kotter 2012: 50).

These new norms might apply only within the collaboration space and thus require participants to become, effectively, bicultural as they transition back and forth across a shifting boundary between secondary operating spaces and the primary operating spaces where the dominant, normative operating culture of partner organisations resides and within which formal authorisation for collaboration occurs.

This second space is important as it 'permits a level of individualism, creativity, and innovation that the bureaucratic hierarchy cannot provide', and it is essential that the secondary space does not come to be viewed as a 'rogue operation' by the primary operators but is 'treated as a legitimate part of the organisation, or the hierarchy will crush it' (Kotter 2012: 51).

Indeed, one interviewee told us:

> A typical bureaucratic behaviour is that once something starts to happen that you don't like, you divest yourself from the process and you start to brief upwards about the negative effects of it. If they get wind that somebody's going to come into their patch and start to change the way they do things and break down their happy little fiefdoms—that's just my language—you end up with an internal political problem. (Throughcare)

Internal 'political problems' can inhibit the development of collaborative work, especially when collaboration is seen to impinge on established lines of managerial demarcation. Secondary operating spaces also establish bounded areas in which experimentation can occur: operating spaces in which occasional failures are acceptable and the risks of failure are minimised. The flexibility or nimbleness of such a space allows for collaboration between groups to grow.

Authorising environment

The kind of authorising environment in which any collaboration is set is also a determinant of success or failure. Having the right authorising environment is important: a supportive authorising environment is one that exhibits the qualities of 'interagency collaborative capacity' (Bardach 1998)—one that is capable of devolving authority to the leadership of a collaboration and that allows time to build relationships of trust between collaboration partners and empowers stakeholders to establish a governance framework adapted to the specific needs of the collaboration.

It might be expected—in fact, it is highly likely—in collaboration settings that participants will bring to the table different expectations, framings, norms, skills and priorities. These can act as barriers to working collaboratively in some settings as priorities and areas of focus become sources of tension. On the other hand, agreeing not to be fettered by particular organisational, cultural and/or disciplinary legacies can liberate imaginations and stoke enthusiasm and commitment.

The siloed behaviour of public sector organisations represents a significant barrier to effective collaboration insofar as it impedes the kind of authorising environment necessary to create a 'licence' for collaboration. The notion of a licence to collaborate applies as much to the negotiation of collaborative relationships between partner organisations as it does to the relationship between the collaboration and the affected constituencies of interest.

Similarly, bureaucratic rigidity and prescription can act as an impediment to collaboration. This is often evident where collaboration partners wish to pursue localised responses that depart from standardised approaches. Here bureaucratic actors can behave like 'gatekeepers'. As one interviewee observed, bureaucracies often forget that they are a 'resource'; they are not the 'main game'.

A critical aspect of authorising environments in which collaborative approaches can take hold is the extent to which collaboration partners enjoy executive backing. Executive backing confers political and operational licence to collaborate and offers protection for collaborative spaces. However, as Merchant (2011) observes, the fluidity and absence of hierarchy in collaborative settings can be uncomfortable terrain for executives, which shows the importance of developing organisational intelligence through an understanding of collaboration and what it needs to thrive.

Thus, we can say that partner organisations need to offer clear, unambiguous authority to collaborate. It is essential that they acknowledge and accept that there might be an accentuated level of risk associated with the collaboration by virtue of the complexity of the operating environment. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the integrity of the collaborative process is a function of reciprocal flows of authority from the executive to collaboration leads and assurance from collaboration leads and partners to the executive; collaborators need permission and support while bureaucratic heads need assurance of appropriateness, likelihood of success and alignment of goals.

Successful collaborations are formed in a supportive authorising environment in which it is possible for the collaboration to forge strong relationships with key constituencies through a mix of formal and informal networks (Jupp 2000: 8; Bryson et al. 2009). Authorisers can enable collaboration to succeed by providing a licence to collaborate and support for building the relationships crucial to collaboration.

Although many people working in the public and community sectors exhibit a capacity for high CQ, differences in organisational culture can either encourage or inhibit its expression. In the community sector, whose authorising environment is shaped by fidelity to mission and values, CQ can flourish. In much of the public sector, however, with an authorising environment often shaped by fidelity to protocol and process, CQ can struggle to find expression. The success of collaboration can be reliant on organisational intelligence, which buffers the processes of collaboration and allows it to flourish.

If the environment for collaboration is lacking, no amount of CQ will be able to overcome an obstinate authorising environment. Part of a good collaborating environment is the attention given to the importance of long-term relationships between partners in collaboration. A supportive authorising environment is one that aids in the maintenance of these relationships over time and ensures that those individuals with higher CQ are involved in collaboration. Without a supportive authorising environment (see Chapter 3) and CQ, collaboration is unlikely to succeed as the relationships necessary for collaboration will not be built.

The quality of collaboration also depends to a significant degree on the program/partnership logics brought to the collaboration by partners—for example, organisations steeped in 'transactional' logics might struggle with many aspects of collaboration, whereas organisations that are more 'relational' in outlook might fare better.

Final observations

Interviewees across all cases spoke about the importance of relationships—and relationship-building—as the bedrock of effective collaboration. Constructive relationships—interpersonal and interorganisational—are the precursors of trust, credibility and legitimacy. Collaboration is all about relationships and, to win the confidence of stakeholders, participants need to have insight into the ways in which attitudes and conduct are shaped by organisational history, pre-existing networks, traditions, habits and learned behaviours. Partners in collaboration need the skill set of CQ to engage with others, instil trust, respond constructively to resistance or suspicion and diffuse tensions; to generate buy-in, reassure, persuade, upwardly manage, negotiate compromises and adapt to changing circumstances.

Effective collaborations can encourage multiple opinions and provide safe spaces in which to air differences. However, it is important not to underestimate the emotional labour that goes into building collaborative relationships and that fuels the willingness of people to be involved. A capacity for adaptation and a tolerance for changeability are important. Also important is the capacity to exploit cultural tensions within and between organisations towards collaborative aims. Workers at the coalface need to be skilled and empowered to incentivise and upwardly manage middle managers, who can be key blockers of collaborative effort.

It might be said that the personality traits and skills that make up CQ differ from the primary skill sets traditionally valued in many organisations. Most often, CQ is learnt 'on the job' as practitioners respond adaptively to the challenges of collaboration.

That said, CQ alone is not enough for a successful collaboration: a nimble and supportive authorising environment is vital for collaborative efforts to flourish.

CQ is an important ingredient in the collaborative process because it embodies the skills required to build trust and relationships between individuals and their organisations. After all, people, not organisations, build relationships and a supportive authorising environment is necessary to help maintain those relationships for successful collaboration over time.

Practice considerations

1. Does your organisation have honest and full discussions regarding the nature of and challenges associated with successful collaboration, including in relation to whether or not it would genuinely support a collaborative process?

2. Does it recognise and discuss the idea of CQ, including to identify where the traditional governance structures may restrict the opportunity for effective collaboration?

3. Does your organisation have a written resource describing collaborative processes, the challenges faced and potential mitigations needed to communicate effectively?

4. Does your organisation value, encourage and reward attitudes, behaviours and practices that are consistent with CQ, including in relation to its performance management processes and activities?

5. Can you identify those aspects of your organisation's culture or business practices that either: a) inhibit the expression of CQ, or b) recognise and foster CQ?

6. Does your organisation value and offer incentives for measured risk-taking and forging relationships with internal and external stakeholders?

7. Are there potential CQ exemplars in your organisation who might be enlisted to act as CQ 'champions'?

8. Do the recruitment practices and reward frameworks of your organisation support and reinforce personal qualities and attributes that are consistent with CQ?

9. What steps would you need to take to devise a 'CQ strategy' for your collaboration, and how might you capture the impact CQ has on collaboration success?

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