Collaboration in education interventions: learning from practice

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Melissa King, BRIDGE Knowledge Manager

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

> The key liberating innovation required for significant scale and positive impact within the scarred South African education landscape is without doubt "collaboration". There are so many people working hard creating pockets of real positive action and creating waves of real change – the ideas are there; the pilot studies are there; the models are there; the materials are there; the practices are there! Active and intentional collaboration is …. where the real action must focus.
>
> John Gilmour, Chairperson's Statement in the BRIDGE Annual Report 2011-2012

This statement illustrates that South Africa's education community has long recognised that collaboration and partnerships can increase the effectiveness and impact of interventions aimed at improving education outcomes. While work on isolated, small-scale programmes can offer models for change, it is also crucial to build shared understandings of different elements of a problem, mobilise resources to address these, and share collective learning which can lead to the spread of good practices in the system. These efforts must ultimately work in support of government's mandate to deliver quality education for all.

BRIDGE facilitates multi-sectoral innovation through bringing stakeholders together in communities of practice, and through collaborative partnerships in specific education projects. Over the years we have monitored and documented these collaborative activities, drawing out the lessons learned from the different types of collaborations in which we have played a role. This paper gives an overview of lessons learned from experience, underpinned by occasional research and a selective literature review, as well as suggestive findings from monitoring and evaluation processes commissioned by BRIDGE funders. The aim of this paper is to share these lessons with those who need to engage in planning, supporting, implementing and monitoring collaborative interventions.

While the study of collaboration is emerging as a discipline in its own right, the focus of this paper is on experiential reflections from practice rather than theoretical paradigms about collaboration. The context and goals of a collaborative intervention generally shape its features and dynamics in any case. Typologies of collaborations are, however, useful in understanding different types and levels of collaborations and how these play out in implementation, and some of these are explored.

For its own internal monitoring processes, BRIDGE has developed a basic mapping grid to document collaborative processes within specific projects or programmes. The details of two very different types of collaborations in which BRIDGE has participated are unpacked in relation to this framework.

The paper then goes on to explore those factors or conditions which enable and support collaboration, and those which hinder and undermine successful collaboration. While some of these enablers and barriers are 'generic' and commonly recognised in collaboration literature, others may take on very different characteristics and implications according to the education contexts in which an intervention is happening, or according to the nature of the players involved. For example, barriers in collaborative initiatives in the ECD field may be very different to those situated in formal schooling; or financial procedures which may be an enabler in one programme might become a barrier in a different programme with multiple funders. As with many processes and relationships in education, lists of collaboration ‘dos’ and ‘don’t’ need to be fleshed out by an understanding of context.

The paper closes with a brief comment on collaboration mechanisms, in terms of the various ways and means through which collaboration processes happen. All collaborations will ultimately require a combination of governance and process protocols, commitment to various forms of face-to-face interactions, and the support of diverse technologies and online platforms.

INTRODUCTION

Collaboration is a vital driver for achieving educational change. Collaborative partnerships are increasingly seen as a way of maximising the impact of social development interventions. Because the challenges in education are complex and multi-layered, working alone to identify a problem and implement a solution is not enough. Stakeholders need to work together to mobilise common approaches, share resources, avoid duplication, and address the magnitude of some of the challenges faced. Innovations can emerge from combining current practices in new ways; and small-scale projects can be leveraged by other implementers for greater impact in varied contexts.

Collaboration and partnerships can drive, support and enhance desired features of successful education interventions, such as:

- Systems change
- Sustainable change
- Impact
- Scale and replication
- Spreading of practice
- Innovation
- Increased return on investment.

As an organisation that connects people and shares ideas through communities of practice (CoPs), and frequently collaborates in project-based partnerships, BRIDGE has learned a number of lessons about collaboration. This overview shares some of these lessons, with the aim of contributing to debates on how to plan, implement, monitor and review collaborative efforts in education.

DEFINING COLLABORATION

At its simplest, collaboration is the act of working with someone to do something. Clearly, though, the units of analysis in this simple sentence have many layers of meaning. 'Someone' can refer to an individual, a team, another organisation, or a group of enterprises or agencies within and across sectors. The 'something' can also take a number of forms, from a concrete product to a desired impact. The degree of collaboration also varies in terms of type and intensity, ranging from low level to high levels. The type of collaboration will usually also determine what it means to 'work with' others: that is, the mechanisms which enable a collaborative process. This continuum could run from informal networking and information sharing through to structured roles and responsibilities within a formal partnership agreement.

The common-sense view of collaboration is to see it as '… a process through which people, groups and organisations work together to achieve defined goals and results.'

(BRIDGE/Zenex, Learning & Working Together: A Framework for Donor Collaboration, 2016)

The concept of collaboration itself as an object of study is a relatively new field, and cuts across a number of disciplines from the perspectives of both academic theorists and reflective practitioners. The following table gives a birds-eye view of the disciplines and contexts in which collaboration studies might be found:

COLLABORATION AS AN OBJECT OF STUDY

Description	***Examples***
INTERDISICIPLINARY	e.g. business management, public administration and governance,

	development studies, organisational psychology, ICT studies (especially in relation to collaborative technology platforms), health administration and service delivery, international relations, education …
KNOWLEDGE BASES	e.g. network theory, typology literature, systems frameworks, 'inter-organisational arrays' (constructs and variables), input-process- output systems …
ANALYTICAL LENSES	Ways in which collaborative undertakings can be described, e.g.: ▪ Life cycles or levels of maturity ▪ Degrees or typologies of collaboration ▪ Collaboration as processes ▪ Collaboration as structures ▪ Governance ▪ Platforms and mechanisms (technology-driven and people-driven) ▪ Stakeholder/ membership categories

Taken from 'Collaborating for impact in education projects: learning from practice'. 2017. Melissa King, BRIDGE, Open Education Global Conference: "Open for Participation", March 2017.

In the context of education, 'collaboration' is most often viewed from a school-level perspective, in the guise of 'collaborative learning' at classroom level, peer learning and team teaching for teachers at school level, or the benefits of collaborations between schools or other institutional networks. But collaboration in education can take many other forms, including project-driven collaborative service provision or collaborative innovations for a wide range of desired outcomes, impacts or outputs.

Most general definitions of collaboration stress the idea of groups (of individuals or other entities) working towards a common goal. What becomes clear from looking at the literature, however, is that 'defining collaboration' is not necessarily useful: collaboration always takes place in a context, and its features will be shaped by the dynamics and players in this context. To understand the dynamics of any particular collaborative project, it is useful to map out the who, why and how of collaboration in the context of practical delivery aspects of that programme.

TYPES AND LEVELS OF COLLABORATION

There are different types of collaboration with different degrees of intensity; these are frequently determined by the purpose of the collaboration and, significantly, the institutional or organisational authority driving the collaboration. Various 'collaboration typologies' have been developed. Here are some examples of ways in which collaboration is described:

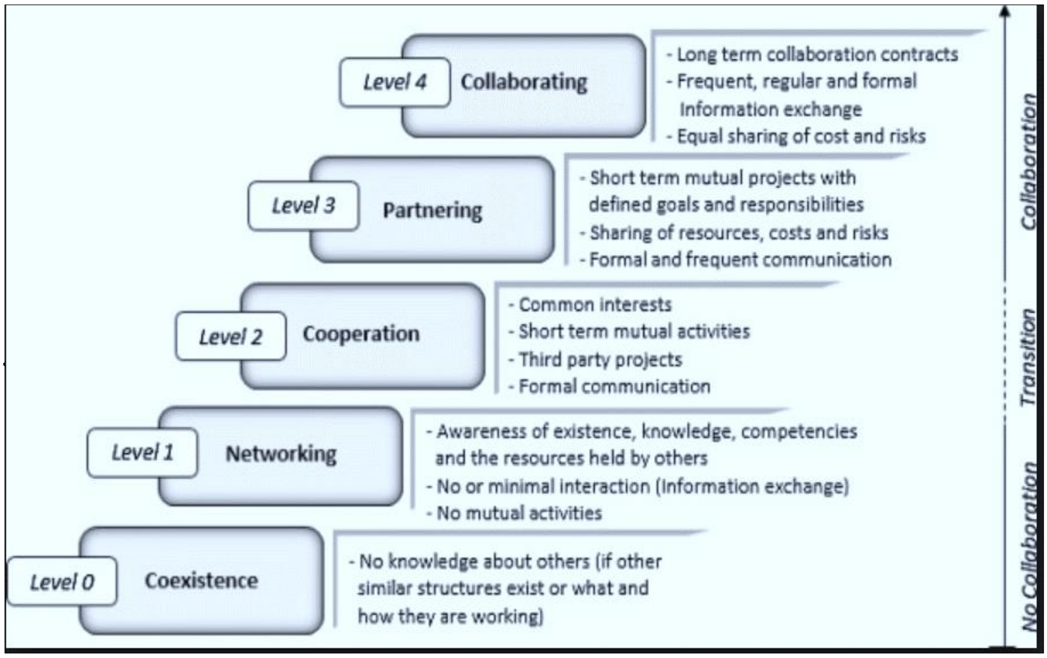
Main Focus	***Examples***
LEVELS OF DELIVERY	Programme-centred or client-centred collaborations. Client-centred integration happens often in the health and social services sectors, which might coordinate services such as immunisation and screening for social grants; in education a 'whole school approach'

	intervention is an example of collaborative delivery addressing different needs in the school ecosystem.
GOVERNANCE	Structures such as joint committees or joint design and leadership of programmatic objectives.
STAGES AND GROWTH	Tracking of the different stages in the life cycle of a collaborative effort, through its development, growth, expansion and maturity. Some of BRIDGE's Communities of Practice can be viewed through this lens.
THE PURPOSE CONTINUUM	Categorising according to the purpose often defines the degree and nature of the collaboration. Depending on their purpose, collaborations can be placed on a continuum ranging from informal, networking arrangements to formalised, contractual obligations. These arrangements could apply to individuals, individual service providers, funders or other agencies, with different types of collaborations involving different types of management processes.

USING COLLABORATION TYPOLOGIES

Any of these typologies can be useful for planning a collaborative project, for monitoring the success or otherwise of collaborative delivery, and for contributing to the overall monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of a process, programme or project.

The illustration below of a continuum of levels applies to collaboration in the engineering field, but could be equally relevant to ways of cooperating and collaborating in any sector.

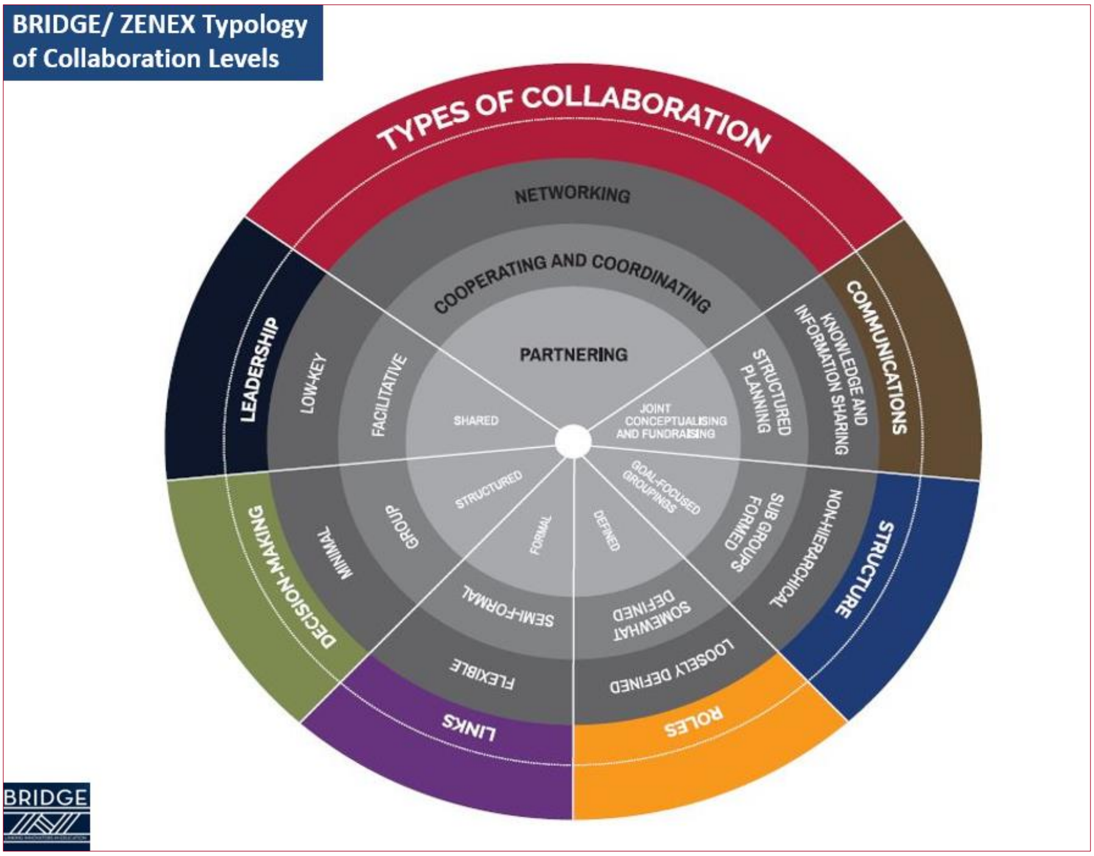

Level 4
Collaborating
- Long term collaboration contracts
- Frequent, regular and formal information exchange
- Equal sharing of cost and risks
Level 3
Partnering
- Short term mutual projects with defined goals and responsibilities
- Sharing of resources, costs and risks
- Formal and frequent communication
Level 2
Cooperation
- Common interests
- Short term mutual activities
- Third party projects
- Formal communication
Level 1
Networking
- Awareness of existence, knowledge, competencies and the resources held by others
- No or minimal interaction (Information exchange)
- No mutual activities
Level 0
Coexistence
- No knowledge about others (if other similar structures exist or what and how they are working)
Collaboration
Transition
No Collaboration

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0923474817304307. Memon et al. 'Inter-InnoLab Cooperation: an investigation of the diversity and interconnection among innovation laboratories'. In Journal of Engineering and Technology Management Volume 47, January-March 2018.

A useful typology relating to donor collaboration was developed by BRIDGE and the Zenex Foundation in 2016, viewing 'collaboration' as an umbrella term covering three types of collaborative relationships:

1. **Networking**
2. **Cooperating and coordinating**
3. **Partnering**.

The various permutations of these relationships are illustrated below.

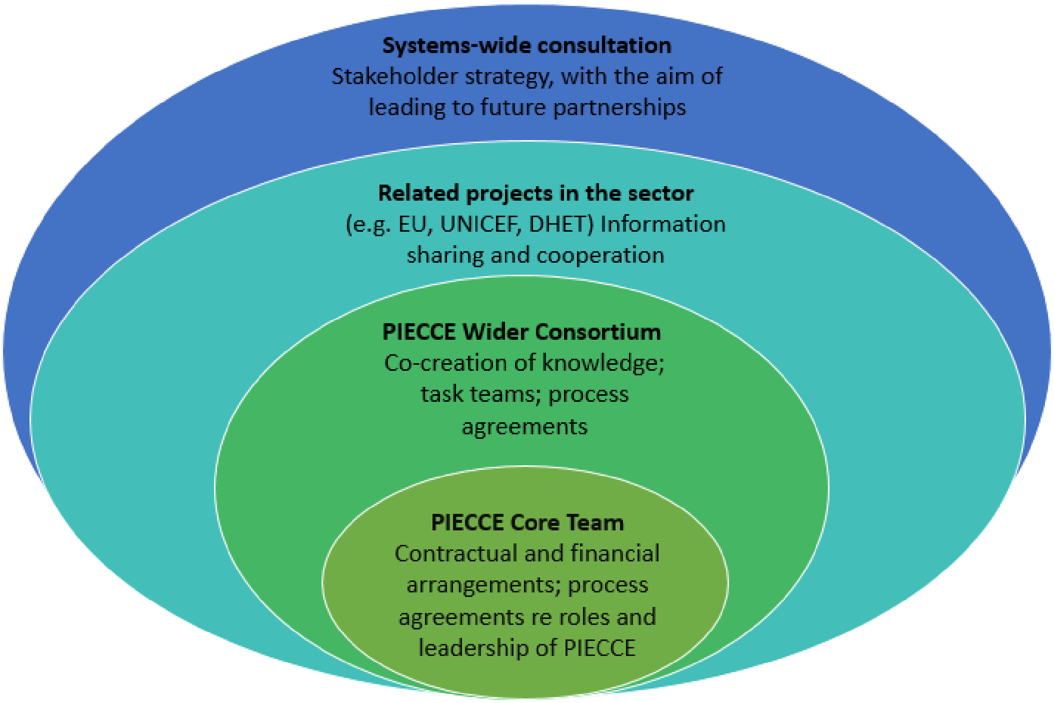

BRIDGE/ ZENEX Typology of Collaboration Levels
TYPES OF COLLABORATION
NETWORKING
COOPERATING AND COORDINATING
PARTNERING
LEADERSHIP
LOW-KEY
FACILITATIVE
SHARED
COMMUNICATIONS
KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION SHARING
STRUCTURED PLANNING
JOINT CONCEPTUALISING AND FUNDRAISING
STRUCTURE
NON-HIERARCHICAL
SUB GROUPS FORMED
GOAL-FOCUSED GROUPINGS
ROLES
LOOSELY DEFINED
SOMEWHAT DEFINED
DEFINED
LINKS
FLEXIBLE
SEMI-FORMAL
FORMAL
DECISION-MAKING
MINIMAL
GROUP
STRUCTURED
BRIDGE

BRIDGE and Zenex Foundation. Learning and Working Together: A Framework for Donor Collaboration. January 2016. http://www.bridge.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Donor-Collaboration-Report-final-print-version-Jan-2016.pdf.

This typology does not need to be limited to collaboration between donors only, but can be adapted for other types of stakeholders or players. What is useful in the schematic above is the mapping of the elements of collaborative categories in Ring 2 (that is: communications; structures; roles; links; decision-making; and leadership) to different descriptions according to the type of collaborative relationship taking place. The use of this analytical lens can be helpful in understanding collaborative processes, and structuring or adapting them according to need.

Another example illustrates widening circles of collaboration, with tight contractual agreements binding a core group which collaborates within a wider consortium and further into the sector. Understanding collaboration circles and levels can help with formulating a Communications Strategy for a project. The graphic below relates to the Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE), a three-year collaboration funded by the European Union and DHET. PIECCE includes universities, NGOs (including BRIDGE) and TVET colleges and is focused on teacher development for practitioners in the ECD sector. PIECCE is an example of cross-sectoral collaboration working at different levels within the ECD sector, as illustrated below.

Different levels of collaboration by the PIECCE Consortium



Systems-wide consultation
Stakeholder strategy, with the aim of leading to future partnerships

Related projects in the sector
(e.g. EU, UNICEF, DHET) Information sharing and cooperation

PIECCE Wider Consortium
Co-creation of knowledge; task teams; process agreements

PIECCE Core Team
Contractual and financial arrangements; process agreements re roles and leadership of PIECCE

Presentation at PIECCE Collaboration Reflection Session, Mid-term Review Workshop, July 2018.

MAPPING COLLABORATION: TWO CASE STUDIES

These typologies illustrate that, clearly, not all collaborations are the same. There is no one-size-fits all formula for successful collaboration.

> … if different types of collaboration can exist, then not all collaboration can be the same. [There is] … evidence that collaboration is not a singular, monolithic interaction. Rather, collaboration may at best be construed as a highly flexible, adaptable and fluid form of interaction.
>
> John C Morris and Katrina Miller-Stevens. The State of Knowledge in Collaboration. In Advancing Collaboration Theory. Routledge, 2016.

BRIDGE's own experience of collaborative relationships and partnership projects bears this out. A simple 'mapping grid' helps delineate and monitor different types of partnerships. The grid below is a work-in-progress[1] which BRIDGE uses to map and monitor a number of its collaborative partnerships.

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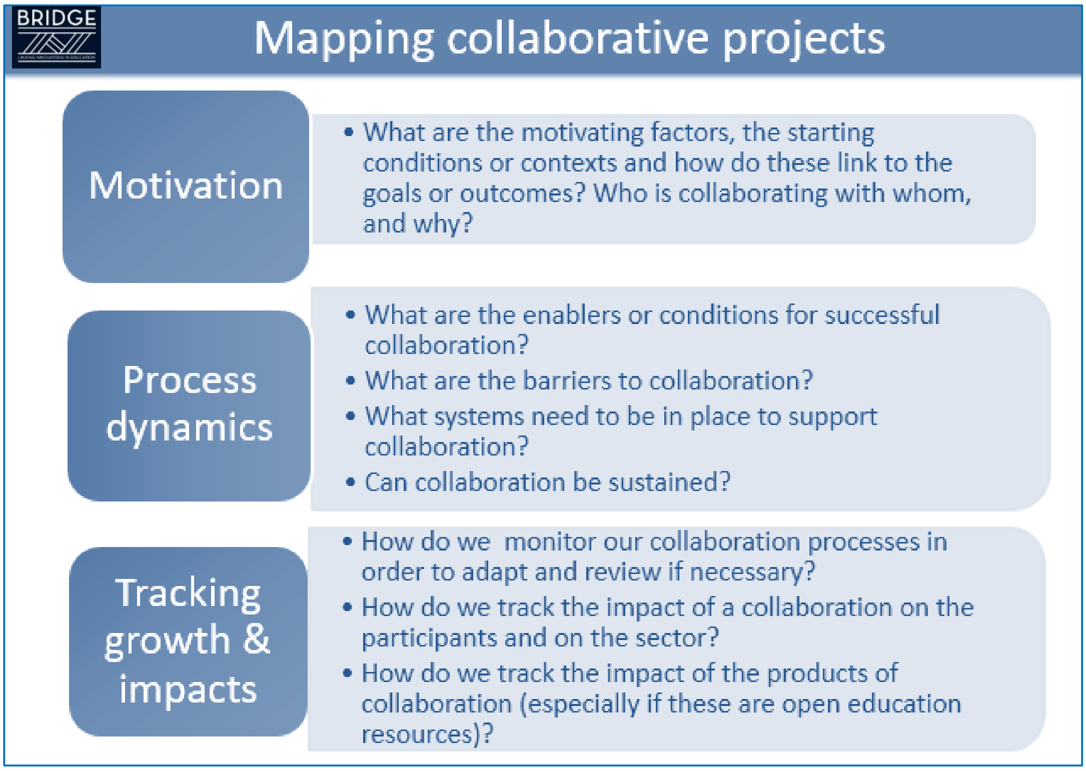
[1] The learning questions used here are sometimes rephrased in the context of different collaborative efforts.



Mapping collaborative projects

Motivation

- What are the motivating factors, the starting conditions or contexts and how do these link to the goals or outcomes? Who is collaborating with whom, and why?

Process dynamics

- What are the enablers or conditions for successful collaboration?
- What are the barriers to collaboration?
- What systems need to be in place to support collaboration?
- Can collaboration be sustained?

Tracking growth & impacts

- How do we monitor our collaboration processes in order to adapt and review if necessary?
- How do we track the impact of a collaboration on the participants and on the sector?
- How do we track the impact of the products of collaboration (especially if these are open education resources)?

Using the learning questions for the three categories to interrogate a specific project is helpful in extracting different types of lessons for different types of collaboration. The two case studies below illustrate this, with some suggestive (though not exhaustive) points. While the examples below are both from the ECD sector, BRIDGE has used this grid to map projects in other areas such as teacher development and school leadership, with partners which include government, funders, and other NPOs. Examples include: BRIDGE's work with the New Leader's Foundation (NLF) Data Driven Districts (DDD) Dashboard, in which BRIDGE supports school principals in using the dashboard; participation in the South African Extraordinary Schools Coalition and its peer review processes; and BRIDGE and the Standard Bank Tutuwa Community Foundation's five year programme, aimed at capacitating school leaders through mentoring, professional learning communities and peer reviews in nine schools. BRIDGE's communities of practice in different focus areas also exemplify a range of diverse purposes, processes and outputs in their collaborative nature when mapped against this grid.

While collaborations can promote change in terms of both scale and sustainability, these connected but different topics are not explored in depth here. There are many possible ways of understanding what is meant by 'scale' in education programmes: these can range from the idea of impacting on increasing numbers of target beneficiaries (such as number of schools or learners involved), to replication of a model for different contexts, to the notion of 'scaling up' through influence on a sector. While 'going to scale' might sometimes be the defined goal of a collaboration (especially collaborations with government), implementation of any innovation or programme at scale at a systems level brings in a number of other factors beyond the scope of this paper. This is also true for the sustainability of project outcomes, whether quantitative or qualitative. Sustainability essentially means that any changed behaviour or result of an intervention (such as improved skills or processes) continues after a project has ended. This can only truly be confirmed once the change has been 'mainstreamed', or institutionalised as part of the system. What can be looked at through collaboration typologies, however, is the sustainability post-project of the collaboration itself, in that partners go on to collaborate on other projects, or the collaboration generates new partnerships.

Mapping Categories and Learning Questions	*Case Study Example 1:* *The ECD Practitioner Quality Reflection Tool (QRT) is a product that came out of debates on 'quality in ECD' in the ECD CoPs, which is itself a collaborative space. It was piloted, refined and distributed as an OER.*	*Case Study Example 2:* *The Project for Inclusive Early Childhood Care and Education (PIECCE) is a three-year collaboration between universities, NGOs and TVET colleges focused on teacher development for practitioners in the ECD sector.*
Motivation *What are the motivating factors, starting conditions or contexts and how do these link to the goals or outcomes?*	▪ This was not an intentional collaboration, but rather one of organic growth; there was no external requirement from funders, and the QRT was not a pre-determined output. ▪ The collaboration was mission-driven with shared goals around improving quality in ECD, and grew organically from provincial and national CoP member inputs. ▪ The product evolved through iterative feedback from CoP members, and from the QRT pilot. ▪ The pilot used volunteer partner organisations from the CoP, including their sites and personnel.	▪ Collaboration with specified sectors/ institutions was a requirement from both funders, the European Union (EU) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). ▪ The shared purpose of the consortium was to professionalise the field with a standardised programme framework, and to break down silos in the ECD field. ▪ Different organisational types partnered in the consortium for different roles.
Process Dynamics • *What are the enablers or conditions for successful collaboration?* • *What are the barriers to collaboration?* • *What systems need to be in place to support collaboration?* • *Can collaboration be sustained?*	Enablers (in particular for the pilot stage) were: ▪ high degree of trust ▪ clearly defined roles for BRIDGE and pilot partners ▪ volunteerism, and willingness of partner organisations to spend time and use their resources ▪ consistency of CoP participants. Barriers: ▪ funding issues: much of the early work was not funded, and different funders came in at different stages, which affected development time frames ▪ limits of volunteerism in the QRT production phase ▪ moving to scale.	Enablers: ▪ personal relationships ▪ commitment to the ECD sector ▪ shared purpose sustained throughout the project ▪ defined roles and responsibilities ▪ strong, consistent and centralised project management ▪ systematic communication between consortium partners ▪ improved attitudes towards collaboration that evolved throughout the project. Barriers: ▪ lack of time for collaboration reflection sessions due to shifting deadlines

	BRIDGE will continue to collaborate with the ECD CoP in general, and the pilot partners in particular, in tracking uptake and usage of the QRT.	▪ different organisational cultures and protocols ▪ unequal workloads ▪ new participants entering the project at different stages, destabilising existing understandings ▪ different OER policies (potential barrier) ▪ demands from funders ▪ issues relating to cost allocations due to different organisational structures ▪ issues relating to financial management and disbursements of funds. The idea of using a Community of Practice focused on teacher education in ECD to sustain collaboration beyond PIECCE is under consideration.
Tracking Growth and Impact • *How do we monitor our collaboration processes in order to adapt and review if necessary?* • *How do we track the impact of a collaboration on the participants and on the sector?* • *How do we track the impact of the products of collaboration (especially if these are open education resources)?*	The idea of collaborative work was assumed rather than explicitly formulated throughout the development of the QRT. Collaborative work in the pilot phase was supported by: • project management from BRIDGE • good communication between BRIDGE and its pilot partners. The impact of the collaboration product (the QRT) was tracked during the pilot phase through: • training and systems in place for mediator feedback • an internal M&E process and pilot data analysis. BRIDGE is currently in the QRT distribution phase, and plans to work with the CoP on getting some feedback on the collaboration product, i.e. the QRT.	The development of a Collaboration Process Model for co-creating programme frameworks was an explicit output for this project; processes for tracking collaboration were therefore instituted from the start of the project. These include: ▪ An iterative process of self-reflection and feedback loops, built into the consortium workshops. ▪ An agreed-upon set of collaboration principles that was workshopped with the consortium, and is the baseline for reflecting on the programme's collaboration processes. ▪ The use of a range of tools for monitoring collaboration at different stages of the project. ▪ A range of knowledge management processes.

COLLABORATION DRIVERS: ENABLERS AND BARRIERS

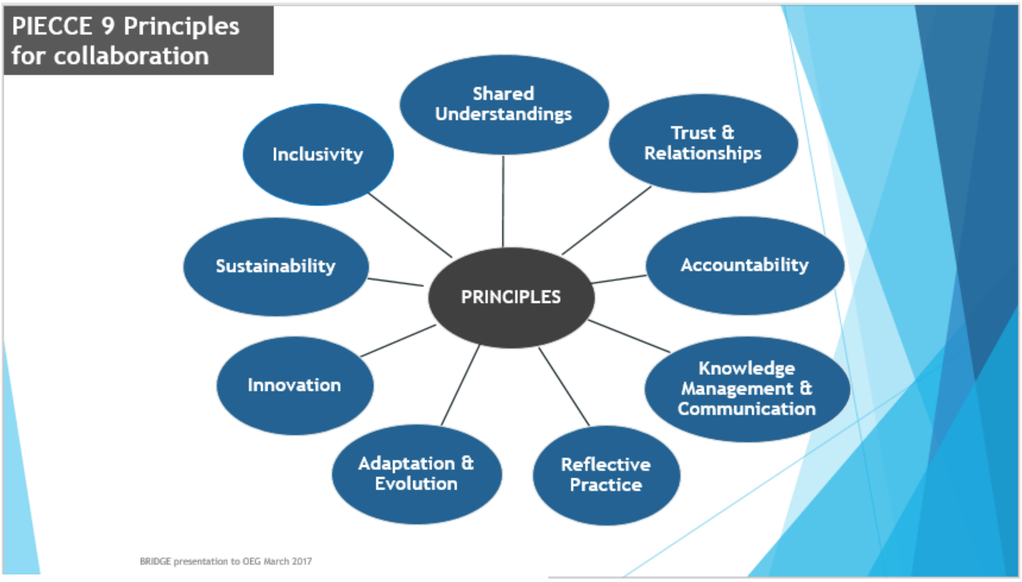
Collaboration literature stresses, and experience reinforces this view, that collaboration (except at the most informal, networking level) does not just happen by itself. It is a time-consuming and defined process based on a number of drivers.

Examples of Collaboration Enablers

Commitment to shared goals and principles

Successful collaboration requires an **explicit commitment** involving a mutual understanding of the purpose and benefits of collaboration, and a desire to share resources and information for the common good of a programme.

One way to start this conversation is to jointly develop a set of project principles, such as the example below.



PIECCE 9 Principles
for collaboration

PRINCIPLES

Shared Understandings

Trust & Relationships

Accountability

Knowledge Management & Communication

Reflective Practice

Adaptation & Evolution

Innovation

Sustainability

Inclusivity

BRIDGE presentation to OEG March 2017

Developed by the PIECCE consortium, 2017.

Each of these principles can be developed into a set of protocols or procedures for the project, and used as a baseline for tracking barriers and enablers as the project unfolds.

Allocation of dedicated time and budget for collaboration

Time and energy are required for active planning on how to collaborate, implementing various aspects of collaboration, and reflecting on and reviewing collaborative processes. This means that collaboration carries concrete **costs:** these might speak to additional commitments in terms of time, engagement and follow-through, or to resources such as collaborative platforms, technology or written guidelines.

Mutual trust

The **development of trust** between partners is often identified as a crucial element of collaborations. In Morris (2016), Mayer and Kenter cite a number of views on the issue of 'trust' in collaborations.

… trust building must be seen as an ongoing process and a necessary element throughout all phases of collaboration.

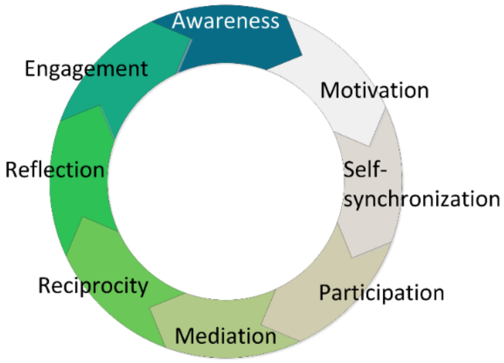
(Ring & Van de Ven, 1994, cited in Mayer & Kenter in John C Morris, Advancing Collaboration Theory: Models, Typologies and Evidence, Routledge 2016, page 94)

> Trust can be defined as a "willingness to take risk" through vulnerability that one party has to another in a relationship (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman 1996, p 172). Trust between partners in inter-organizational arrangements is based on mutual understanding and confidence that all partners are working towards collective action (McNamara, 2012, p. 397). Stakeholder face-to-face dialogue … is imperative to develop trust and, in turn, the social capital necessary to perpetuate a process of encouragement and goodwill (Morris et al., 2013).
>
> Trust-building is a time-consuming, challenging and frequently the most critical part of an early collaborative (Ansell & Gash, 2007; Bryson et al., 2006; McNamara, 2012; Thomson & Perry, 2006; Thomson et al., 2009). Trust, shared responsibility and social capital are strongly correlated, and with the absence of one, the likelihood of a collaborative working well and being successful decreases significantly (Lasker et al., 2001). [Morris 2016, pages 93-94)

A collaborative mindset

In addition to the development of trust, successful collaboration is enabled by a **particular mind-set** that often has to be 'grown' through the practice itself. Many listings of these kinds of attributes or predispositions have been developed. Here is one example:

AIIM's Life-Cycle Collaboration Model



- Awareness – We become part of a working entity with a shared purpose
- Motivation – We drive to gain consensus in problem solving or development
- Self-synchronization – We decide as individuals when things need to happen
- Participation – We participate in collaboration and we expect others to participate
- Mediation – We negotiate and we collaborate together and find a middle point
- Reciprocity – We share and we expect sharing in return through reciprocity
- Reflection – We think and we consider alternatives
- Engagement – We proactively engage rather than wait and see

http://www.aiim.org/What-is-Collaboration

This suggests that those involved in collaborative projects must be prepared to 'buy in' to the kinds of interactions demanded by these enablers, many of which are to do with 'soft skills' or EQ skills. In BRIDGE's experience, the initial interactions when setting up the collaboration are crucial: these should take place in a face-to-face context, and should be facilitated by an experienced mediator. In some projects we have experienced initial resistance to the idea of spending time crafting collaborative processes, and reflecting on these. Giving time to collaborating mindfully, and to then describing and exploring these processes, takes time away from the priority of concrete 'content work' leading to the required outputs. Understandably (especially in the context of tight timeframes), reflecting on collaboration becomes de-prioritised in the light of the task at hand. However, we have also seen that explicit and facilitated reflection on the benefits of collaboration at key points in the process engenders more positive views as the programme evolves[2]. The corollary to this observation links to one of the points made above: collaborative mechanisms should be more than just an agreement to collaborate – they need to be shaped and designed within a project, and need to have time and money allocated to them *over and beyond* time given to 'content work' on the output.

An intentional communication strategy

Another major requirement is an **intentional communication strategy**, in the sense that communication does not simply happen in an ad hoc way but is based on a strategy and agreed-upon protocols. This also refers to communicating not just about the programme or project implantation or outputs, but in communicating about collaboration. Heath and Isbell (2017) posit that '… the subject of communication in collaboration has been somewhat underdeveloped', and that inter-organisational collaboration '… requires a specific communication language of practice'. They note that open communication about collaboration needs to be directive from the start of the collaboration, while at the same time it needs to develop according to need as the collaborative processes evolve.

Good communication thus becomes an enabler of many other elements of collaboration; as Heath and Isbell (2017) stress, 'Micropractices of communication are fundamental not only to collaborating across organizations, but also to fostering just and trusting relationships'.

> Too often, inter-organizational collaborations begin with the assumption that all parties to the collaboration know and fully understand the other collaborators' positions. But working from a basis of assumption is not helpful. Collaborators may hold dated or biased views of other collaborators' motives. Collaborators may mistake their lack of information about the other collaborators as the collaborators' unwillingness to share information. Simply, collaboration is a communication process, and it is challenging.
>
> Renee Guarriello Heath, Matthew G Isbell. 'Interorganizational Collaboration: Complexity, Ethics and Communication'. 2017. Waveland Press, Illinois. Page 30.

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[2] This evolution of changing attitudes to collaboration in a project is explored in more depth in the PIECCE output, A Collaboration Process Model for Programme Development.

Leadership, nurturing and curation

Collaboration also requires **leadership, nurturing and curation**, by a project champion with status and authority. Roles here would include the active promotion of collaborative activities and attitudes, and the structuring of space and time for collaborative activities.

Monitoring tools

The use of survey tools or other instruments which are explicitly designed to track attitudes towards collaboration, as well as the success or otherwise of various collaborative processes[3], helps to keep the value of the concept of collaboration front of mind in a project. In addition, feedback gathered from project participants helps to improve collaborative processes as the project unfolds.

Examples of Collaboration Barriers

The drivers set out above are generally seen as enablers for collaboration. It is also important, however, to be aware of possible barriers and disincentives to collaboration. Here again many factors have been identified, some of which are generalizable to any kind of collaborative effort and others that are specific to certain sectors, types of organisations or types of programmes. An illustrative sample is provided here.

Lack of shared understandings

There may be different understandings of the purpose, scope and goals of the collaboration, as well as of different implementing partners' roles and responsibilities.

Lack of trust and openness

This can result from dynamics such as any of the following: a spirit of competitiveness, fear of blame, over-attachment to one's own approaches, egos, hidden agendas, and so on.

Unequal power relations

There are different categories of actors in collaborations. These could include government, funders (of various types, ranging from international funders, to CSI, to foundations and so on), and the service providers, frequently NGOs/ NPOs or other institutions. The beneficiaries of an intervention make up yet another level. While all agents in a collaboration ideally should be seen as social partners, there are bound to be tensions in relation to perceived (and actual) power relations. These can undermine a collaboration if they are not well-managed.

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[3] BRIDGE developed some basic collaboration tracking tools to use with consortium partners at various stages in PIECCE.

Lack of time and resources

There may be insufficient time to commit to and participate in vital collaborative processes and critical reflective conversations, or a lack of human resources to support the collaboration processes. This could be due to tight time frames in a project, and a demand for collaboration without an understanding of the time (and money) needed to develop and maintain effective processes to support it.

Lack of explicit monitoring of collaborative processes

There needs to be a periodic check-in process on if and how collaborative processes are working (or not), so that these can be reviewed or improved as necessary.

Poor communication

Poor communication between partners or by a managing agency can leave partners feeling in the dark and disempowered; in addition, behaviours such as lack of responsiveness to queries or requests on the part of individuals involved in the collaboration also weaken commitment to collaboration.

Lack of understanding of context

In some instances, one or more of the collaboration partners may be far removed from the implementation context, which may lead to unrealistic expectations around outcomes, and frustration for those working on the ground.

Lack of buy-in and accountability

This can happen because of lack of advocacy for collaboration, or because of the imposition of collaboration on personnel. Participants can also be affected if there is no support from their board or management structures, and they find themselves with conflicting priorities. Conversely, it can happen that there is buy-in at the highest levels, but the collaborative project has not been ‘sold’ to participants working at other levels. A good example here would be district officials who are not proactive within their project roles and responsibilities, as they simply see these as additions to their workload.

Competition

Competing leadership roles from different individuals or organisations, or perceived competition between organisations offering similar services in a partnership, undermines the collaboration.

Lack of fit between organisational cultures

Participating organisations may have different organisational cultures: for example, some organisations may encourage initiative and quick decision-making in their implementers, while others may have bureaucratic and ‘refer back’ procedures which cause blockages.

Imbalances in skills or levels of effort

A perceived (or actual) imbalance in the amount of work being done by different partners could cause resentments, as could the lack of acknowledgement or valuing of different types of contributions to the collaboration. Unequal skills or resources in different collaboration partners, and/or a lack of willingness to acknowledge and address these, could also undermine collaborations. An example would be different skills levels in using technology and communication platforms which enable collaborative work.

Participant or staff turnover

New entrants to a collaboration (whether these are organisations or individuals) need to be brought on board, which takes time and sometimes disrupts existing understandings.

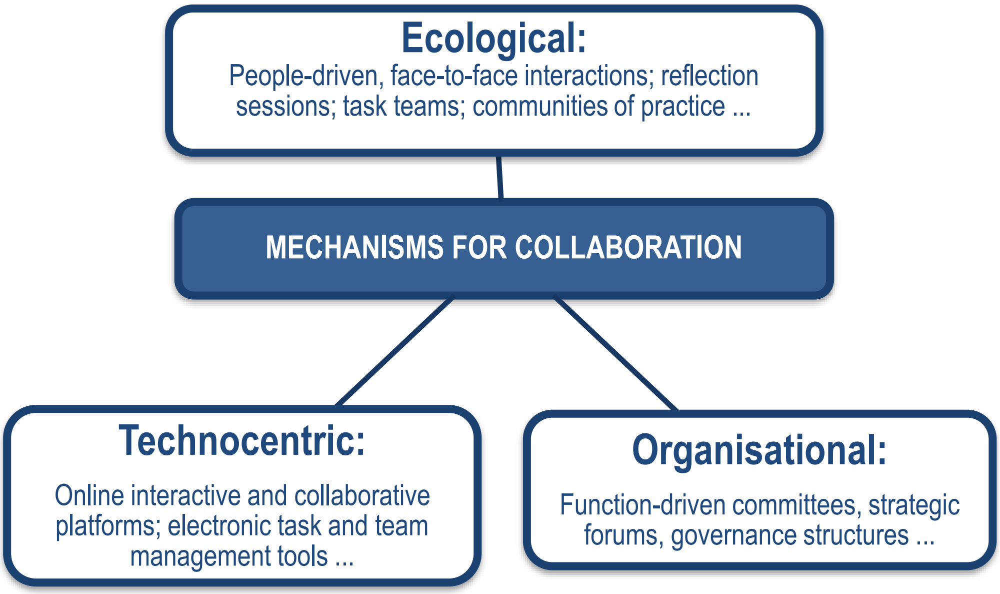
Financial and contractual imbalances or blockages

In a multi-partner project there will usually be a lead organisation managing disbursement of funds. There are however a number of dynamics in the area of finance and contractual agreements that can cause tensions. Different types of organisations or institutions may have very different financial and governance arrangements (such as procurement or auditing policies and procedures). In addition, the consequences of scope creep, delays in payment or other unexpected adjustments in the programme may have varying consequences for partners. An example here would be the impact of delayed payment on cash-flow poor NPOs, as opposed to large partner institutions such as universities.

The examples given above of both collaboration barriers and enablers obviously play out differently in different types of collaborations and contexts. These listings, can, however, serve as checklists in the planning and implementation stages of collaborative projects, and help in the development of monitoring tools.

COLLABORATION MECHANISMS

Clearly, different collaborative strategies and mechanisms co-exist in one collaboration, depending on the purpose and level of the collaborative activities. One approach to planning and driving collaborations is to describe collaboration mechanisms in three broad categories:


Ecological:
People-driven, face-to-face interactions; reflection sessions; task teams; communities of practice ...
MECHANISMS FOR COLLABORATION
Technocentric:
Online interactive and collaborative platforms; electronic task and team management tools ...
Organisational:
Function-driven committees, strategic forums, governance structures ...

Adapted from 'Knowledge Management the BRIDGE Way', 2017

Much of the business and human resource literature on collaboration mechanisms focuses on the many commercial applications of inter- or intra-net tools for communications, team planning and task allocation. There are a number of local and international platforms that are attempting to ensure collaboration and/or knowledge sharing in ways that support and drive forward collaboration between different players in an initiative or in a sector[4].

> Interagency mechanisms for collaboration are defined in the evaluation literature as "any arrangement or application that can facilitate collaboration between agencies" (Mihm, 2012, p.4). Organizational mechanisms for collaboration encompass an array of organizational capacities including: strategy, organizing for collaboration, leadership, personnel, organizational agreements, joint program efforts, communities of practice and collaboration technologies (Mihm, 2012). Conceptually, collaboration mechanisms serve many purposes. They are believed to be the foundation for enabling organizational factors like trust and leadership, and for establishing practices between organizations that make collaboration efforts more durable and lasting (Mihm, 2012).
>
> Brian Martinez, in John C Morris, Advancing Collaboration Theory: Models, Typologies and Evidence, Routledge 2016, page 354

In South Africa there are various efforts in education to promote collaboration in and across sectors. Corporate Social Investment players find a voice through Trialogue; one of the themes of the Trialogue Business in Education conference in April 2019 was collaboration in education, looking at issues ranging from advocacy, pooled funding, lessons learned and evaluation in education collaborations. A major player in the education sector is the National Education Collaboration Trust (NECT), formed in 2013 as a response to the call by the National Development Plan (NDP) for increased collaboration among stakeholder to improve educational outcomes. The NECT has developed its own framework for collaboration, and supports a number of collaborative initiatives, such as collaboration between different early grade reading and literacy interventions. The NECT also hosted the Education NGO Leadership Summit in 2016, an event which led to the formation of a steering committee, funded and supported by JET Education Services, which explored the possibility of setting up an association for non-profits to work more closely together. This has taken shape in the National Association of Social Change Entities in Education in South Africa (NASCEE). NASCEE is itself a collaborative structure, and one of its stated aims is to improve levels of collaboration between NPOs themselves, and between NPOs and government. Its founding conference, for which this paper was written, took place on 28-29 May 2019.

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[4] Consideration of these platforms is beyond the scope of this paper.

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This paper has been informed by BRIDGE internal discussions and strategic planning sessions. In addition, it has also drawn on various insights from funder-commissioned Evaluation Reports, including those undertaken by Feedback Research and Analytics (2014), Khulisa Management Services (2012 to 2015), and Benita Williams Evaluation Consultants (2018).