

The surprising things I'm learning about vulnerability from the people I'm coaching

When collaborating, I feel vulnerable because...	Therefore I...	Which results in...	A collaborative approach would be...
I might fail or make a mistake, or not know what to do	Micro-manage so nothing goes wrong Defend my actions at all times Rationalise my behaviour Seek to lay 'blame' elsewhere	Project paralysis Increased risk of mistakes because I can't think of everything Resistance to course corrections, to admit error and try something else. Damaged relationships Failure to seem honest and authentic	Work together to design small steps to take Test many approaches and focus on those that work best, learn from those that didn't work Be authentic and admit to failings Demonstrate that failing is learning Prioritise relationships over your own sense of 'rightness'
I might take unwarranted risks	Play it safe, don't try wild ideas, minimise the input of people whose ideas I don't quite trust	Choosing familiar conversations with familiar people, resulting in familiar outcomes. Nothing changes.	Reframe risks as experiments, opportunities to learn together Embrace diversity and the new ideas and possibilities that emerge Recognise that diversity and novelty are where ideas come from
I might damage the reputation of me or my employer	Stick to the straight and narrow approach while deflecting criticism or questions	Playing it safe at all times Being committed only to those actions and outcomes that make us look good	Embrace and acknowledge uncertainty, with the associated potential for failure Be transparent always Recognise that reputation comes from trust, which comes from being honest and from taking risks together
I might not manage the project well. The approach might be criticised	Create a 'quality' project plan based on previously successful project and stick to it like glue Have a precisely defined scope Define milestones and objectives	Being driven by the Gantt chart, not allowing for emergence, co-creation, divergence or novel ways of working Limiting innovation and new ways of working Investing my energy in forcing the project to stick to the plan. I control the definition of the problem and the range of solutions I limit the input and ownership of others	Recognise that in complexity there must be room for emergence Co-design the process at every step, rather than do a process 'to' them Experiment together on process as well as content Co-define the dilemma and continue to do so together as you go Co-design the process ie milestones and objectives Share control with collaborators
Collaboration is hard so I might leave people worried or struggling or unsure	Give people the answers, rescue them, show them, solve it for them, minimise their struggle	They constantly look to me for answers They learn dependency rather than how to work together They never work through the tough stuff to find and own solutions Me shouldering the load for how everyone feels	Help people feel ok about the struggle Use the struggle to generate productive heat and light Build your collective skills and safety to work through tough issues to resolution
I might waste people's time, money or energy	Drive for outcomes, strive to meet milestones, cut to the chase and get on with solving the problem	Rushing Limited learning, sharing or deliberation The need to keep going back over issues People frustrated by moving ahead before they are ready	Go slow to build relationships so that you can go fast on the issues Invest in relationships as much as content/problem solving Explore the dilemma before trying to solve it
I'm not sure who the right people are to be involved in this	Do lots of planning to work out who 'right' is	Me controlling whose voice is heard, which limits the opportunity for others to get their fingerprints on the process and reduces the diversity of the group My stakeholder assumptions and prejudices prevail	Start with who you have and allow collaborators to grow the list of 'who' Invite in those you feel most uncomfortable about Trust people Actively seek diversity and difference
I might not get commitment to the process	Sell the vision, do lots of great coms, explain why this is important, try and convince others to get on board	'Sales' rather than collaboration Getting frustrated when they can't see it my way They feel they are being 'done to' again, not listened to Their commitment to the process is limited	Recognise that commitment grows from the experience of being listened to and trusted Don't tell them why to be involved, give them the experience of collaboration and let them choose commitment