

The Collaboration Fairy Tale

The collaboration narrative we tell ourselves	What's really going on	The consequences
<p>We get together</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We have a workshop every quarter - We have collaboration meetings - We'll get in the room together to sort this out <p>.....therefore we are collaborating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Focussing on collaboration 'events' gives us permission to stick with BAU 95% of the time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nothing changes
<p>We consider their needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We're working hard to get their buy-in - We're helping them understand what's to happen next - We've heard and responded to all their issues - We've got the right experts to answer all their questions - We ask lots of questions to try to understand - We ask them what they think - We try to hear all perspectives - We've heard all their issues and can show them the list <p>.....therefore we are collaborating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We continue to exert control and power while finding ways to rationalise it as collaboration. - We preference our world view, needs and expertise. We maintain our status. - We talk collaboration but act 'control' - We have the power so we get to ask the questions - Our questions are experienced as interrogation and as evidence of mistrust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The usual power dynamic dominates leading to the usual lack of progress - Trust never grows, meaning the hard issues remain insoluble - We blame them for the failure of our collaboration, further damaging relationships - No transformation
<p>We collaborate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We talk a lot about collaborating - Our contract says we are partners/ collaborators - We work together - We use the word 'collaborate' a lot <p>.....therefore we are collaborating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All talk and no walk - Business as usual with a new label - We want to change behaviours but we don't know what collaboration actually is or how to do it, so we keep doing what we always did - The boss says "collaborate" and the team tries to look like we are doing something different 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reputational damage – "you told us you would collaborate!" - Confusion about the approach - Feels duplicitous - Business as usual prevails with the same outcomes - Low morale and poor project outcomes
<p>We share</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We share all the relevant data - We give them whatever information they ask for - We share what they need to know - We try to be responsive to their requests <p>.....therefore we are collaborating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They don't trust us so they keep asking us for more data, more evidence - We keep giving them more data to convince them we can be trusted and to defend ourselves/ our project - We tell ourselves and them that responding to their requests shows we are collaborative - Our 'collaboration' is all about the data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stuck in an endless cycle of responding to data requests - We can never provide enough evidence - Huge time wasted in sourcing and providing data - The real work gets slowed down
<p>We talk a lot</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We have lots of meetings - We are always talking about things - We spend a lot of time explaining things so they understand - We talk a lot about the project, the data and issues <p>.....therefore we are collaborating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We imagine that more talk = collaboration, but it's all BAU - We carefully avoid talking about what's really going on (ie trust, relationships, power, control) - We keep having to talk more because we don't seem to be resolving difficult issues - We are talking but not sharing control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Real issues never resolved so we keep circling back - Talkfests waste time and delay project delivery - The relationship gets worse rather than better, so progress gets ever slower
<p>We're good at this</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We've done a great job on our messages - Our engagement team are highly proficient - We've designed a good process for engaging them <p>.....therefore we are collaborating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our engagement team do what they do – engagement, rather than collaboration. - We design and manage the engagement, which is another form of control rather than collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BAU engagement can't deliver what we need in a truly multilateral context - Stakeholders feel 'done to' rather than partners - They get blamed for lack of progress, because our 'collaboration' is good
<p>We're rational and sensible</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We don't get emotional - We park our feelings and get on with it - We keep focussed on the technical detail and don't get sidetracked by emotional people - We behave professionally <p>.....therefore we are collaborating</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We avoid difficult conversations - We ensure our conversations are about safe things, such as data, rather than dangerous things, such as trust, relationships, power and control - We don't pay attention to the important data about how everyone feels. - We avoid honest conversations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We never work on building a resilient relationship - We never trust each other - Sticky problems derail us because we don't have the relationships required to resolve them - Tensions simmer rather than resolve

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Shifting the narrative	Authentic collaboration looks like...	With authentic collaboration...
From 'we get together' to 'we think and act collaboratively'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration doesn't happen in 'events'. It happens all the time. It is the new BAU. - We don't wait for collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change is happening one conversation at a time - Our conversations look and feel different - We don't need permission to do things differently - We don't wait for collaboration
From 'we consider their needs' to 'we don't know and need your help'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We constantly seek to let go of our power and resist controlling the conversation - We listen as loudly as we speak - We make power dynamics visible and work together to level the playing field where possible - We ask for help - We stop being the "gorilla" and act like partners - We take responsibility for our mistakes (no blame) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People step up and find new ways together - We have a real partnership delivering real results - We learn from each other and deliver better solutions - We trust each other more
From 'we collaborate' to 'we are constantly learning to work together'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We actively invest in learning to collaborate together - We use the tools and skills of collaboration together - We talk about our collaborative process and design it together - We seek the capability to work differently and are supported to do so 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The walk matches the talk, so people trust us more - We see different behaviour reflecting the collaborative talk - Our collective energy is driving innovation - More genuine conversations get to the heart of the issues
From 'we share' to 'we all stay curious about what is really going on'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We say "I don't know" - We spend as much time working on the relationship and group dynamics as we do talking about the data - We make decisions about data together - We know building trust is a key part of the work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We are less suspicious and don't need to check - We can focus on what matters - We are not wasting time providing and checking data - We trust each other more
From 'we talk a lot' to 'we get great results together'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We collaborate by doing the work together, not by talking about doing the work together - Our collaborative actions speak more loudly than our words - We cut to the chase and stop avoiding the difficult conversations - They do more talking and we do less - We are more curious together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We are delivering results not just more talk - Our work is transformed
From 'we're good at this' to 'what we've been doing to date isn't sufficient'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We understand the important difference between engagement and collaboration and seek to build the necessary skills - People have the resources, capability and permission to do things differently - We design this 'with' our stakeholders, rather than do it 'to' them - We ask, we don't tell - We persist, even when collaboration seems challenging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This feels like a genuine partnership (equality, respect, transparent, doing 'with not to') - We get different results by going beyond 'engagement' - With our new skills we are more confident and capable
From 'we're rational and sensible' to 'we're human and empathetic'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We find safe ways to have hard conversations about the things that matter - We talk about feelings and acknowledge the role of emotions - We invest in building relationships - We listen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We can work with each other on difficult problems because we trust each other - Our relationships are much more shock-proof and resilient - Our relationship is transformed