

Making sense of collaboration at work: A thematic discourse analysis of workers' accounts of  
collaboration

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### Abstract

Collaboration is characterised as a critical tool for modern organisations and is much theorised in Organisational Psychology. Despite the theoretical understanding, there is little examination of how people make sense of collaboration in workplaces. This study investigates the concept of collaboration in the workplace using thematic discourse analysis of 16 interviews with people engaged in professional services work. Interviews focused on workers' understanding and experiences of collaboration. Thematic discourse analysis of interview materials identified a broad in-principle/in-practice contrast, where descriptions of the nature of collaboration did not align to descriptions of how collaboration occurred in practice. The in-principle/in-practice contrast was used as an organising principle for the thematic analysis, distinguishing themes that related to the nature of collaboration from those that reflected the experience of collaboration in practice. Six themes were identified – three related to descriptions of the nature of collaboration: 'Bringing different workers together', 'Addressing a specific and appropriate purpose', and 'A shared positive experience'; and three related to collaboration in practice: 'Collaboration as business-as-usual', 'Collaboration as rhetoric' and 'Collaboration as hampered by systematic barriers'. The findings are discussed in relation to existing theories of collaboration and the implications for collaboration in the workplace.

*Keywords:* Collaboration, thematic analysis, organisations, qualitative analysis, discourse

### Declaration

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published except where due reference is made. I give permission for the digital version of this thesis to be made available on the web, via the University of Adelaide's digital thesis repository, the Library Search and through web search engines, unless permission has been granted by the School to restrict access for a period of time.

October, 2019

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.1 Overview**

Collaboration is characterised as a critical tool of modern management and is a much theorised phenomenon in Organisational Psychology. The aim of this study is to further understanding of how collaboration in the workplace is experienced in practice. Interviews with Australian staff members employed in an international professional services organisation<sup>1</sup> were designed to elicit descriptions of specific experiences of collaboration. These descriptions were subjected to thematic discourse analysis, consistent with a social constructionist approach. The aim of analysis was to examine how the concept of collaboration was constructed by workers, specifically focusing on how the range of discourses produced might provide insight into how collaboration plays out in practice.

### **1.2 The collaboration imperative for organisations**

Collaboration is regularly touted by management journals as the key to maximising resources and capability in modern organisations, and as the solution for increasingly complex problems (Gardner, 2016). Globalisation and digitisation have been cited as drivers of the emphasis on collaboration (Wageman, Gardner, & Mortensen, 2012), as has greater role specialisation (Bihari Axelsson & Axelsson, 2009). Through a series of case studies with six global professional services organisations involved in law, consulting and accounting, in which the financial outcomes of projects were considered in relation to the number of different experts

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<sup>1</sup> Professional service is defined as a service requiring specialised knowledge and skill usually of a mental or intellectual nature and usually requiring a license, certification, or registration (Merriam-Webster Legal Dictionary, 2019). The Professional Services industry includes various professional, scientific and technical services offered to a range of markets, including management consulting, engineering consulting, legal services and accounting services (IBIS World, 2019).



involved, Gardner (2015) demonstrated that revenue increased as the number of different experts working together increased. This finding was argued to support the notion that organisations that bring together different experts in the organisation to collaborate have higher financial returns. Interviews with 150 senior executives across 40 professional services organisations have also found that clients increasingly expect collaboration, and the innovative and creative solutions that are considered to come from collaboration (Gardner, 2016). Leading global organisations are also reported to be investing in web-based technology to promote collaboration and provide the tools to collaborate more effectively (Anders, 2016).

### **1.3 The collaboration challenge for organisations**

Despite the evidence in favour of organisational collaboration, studies have shown that it can be difficult for organisations to accomplish effectively. Gray (1989) argued that collaborations often fail at doing what they were established for: developing more creative solutions and generating collective action. A number of action research studies on collaboration in management contexts in which theoretical insights were drawn from the researchers' direct engagement with the organisation in an advisory capacity, described how, without deliberate action or intervention, collaboration tends towards a state of inaction or slow output, which they termed collaborative inertia (Eden & Huxham, 2001, Huxham, 1993; Huxham & Vangen 1996 in Huxham & Beech, 2003). It has been argued that collaboration requires design and dedicated management, however, what sort of design and management works best is still in question.

Public service managers in Wales interviewed about their understanding of leadership for collaboration described good collaboration as a frequent challenge for leaders (Sullivan, Williams and Jeffarres, 2012). Evaluation of the effectiveness of collaboration in the delivery of public management strategies have found that collaboration is defined inconsistently and

theoretically, making it a difficult concept to make sense of in practice (Gajda, 2004). Overall, the inconsistent and theoretical understanding of collaboration is argued to be a barrier to advancing collaboration in organisations, and there have been calls for research to take a more contextual understanding of how collaboration operates in organisations (Sullivan, Williams & Jeffarres, 2012; Wageman, Gardner & Mortensen, 2012; Patel, Pettitt & Wilson, 2012). It is this call for examining how collaboration is experienced in practice that the present study aims to address.

#### **1.4 Defining collaboration**

Collaboration is now reported to be one of the 4,000 most commonly used words in the English language (Collins English Dictionary, 2019). In terms of a dictionary definition, collaboration is “the action of working with someone to produce something”, and is synonymous with cooperation, alliance, partnership, participation, combination, association, concert, teamwork, joint effort and working together (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). In this sense collaboration would appear to be similar to teamwork. The traditional notion of teamwork in organisational theory, involving as it does the idea of static personnel dedicated to a single role or set of responsibilities, does not capture the nature of collaboration in modern organisations (Wageman, Gardner & Mortensen, 2012). In scholarly contexts, Gray’s (1989, p.5) definition of collaboration, in relation to multi-party problems, is one of the most widely cited in the literature. It involves the “process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (in Gray & Wood, 1991, p.4). Gray’s definition (1989), however, applies to inter-organisational collaboration (also known as collaborative alliance, supra-organisational collaboration and cross-sector partnerships). In inter-organisational collaboration,

personnel are from different organisations, bringing together capabilities that do not exist in individual organisations. In situations where multiple organisations would benefit from a combined effort. Much of the existing research has focused on this area of inter-organisational collaboration or collaborative alliance.

Collaboration within a single organisation, between different teams or divisions, with people collaborating internally across traditional organisational boundaries, does not feature prominently in the collaboration literature. The exception is in the medical profession, where collaboration between practitioners in a single hospital or clinical setting, known as inter-professional collaboration (IPC), has been the subject of an extensive body of research. While, the applicability of IPC research to non-medical settings is not considered in the existing literature, there is potential for similarities to the corporate or professional services environment. In both contexts, collaboration is occurring in a matrix organisation (Bihari Axelsson & Axelsson, 2009) between workers from different disciplines or professions in a structure where cross-discipline collaboration occurs in conjunction with traditional team-based work (Bihari Axelsson & Axelsson, 2009). For this reason, the findings of IPC research are considered in the following discussion of theory, together with studies specific to the professional services or corporate sector.

### **1.5 Collaboration theory**

A number of theories of collaboration have emerged from research across a range of industries: medical and healthcare, research and academia, non-government, and the corporate sector, including professional services. Of the studies focused on collaboration within corporate or professional organisations, quantitative studies based on surveys or financial analysis have focused on demonstrating the quantitative benefits of collaboration (discussed at section 1.2

above). A number of different theoretical frameworks have been developed to explain the processes occurring during collaboration. Gray (1989) proposed a three-step framework: problem setting, direction setting and implementation for inter-organisational collaborations. Ring and Van den Ven (1994) developed a cyclical framework involving negotiation, commitment, implementation and assessment. More recently, in the area of public management, Thomson and Perry (2006) developed a five-dimension model of governance, administration, organisational autonomy, mutuality and norms.

In the field of intra-organisational collaboration Patel, Pettit & Wilson (2012) recently identified seven factors: context, support, tasks, interaction processes, teams, individuals and other general factors as necessary for the establishment and ongoing management of collaboration. Each model involves a number of overlapping elements, as well as factors particular to the industry or workplace of interest. Such models are process-focused and have not generally considered how collaboration operates in practice or the experiences of workers.

The action research methodology has been argued to overcome the limitation of theory-based research to test the implementability of management theory and principles in practice. In research involving interview-based case studies, Huxham & Vangen (1996) reported agreement of collaborative aims, common aims, or a shared vision to be key factors of successful collaboration in corporate organisations. However, they also described how overly specific common goals can restrict and delay collaboration (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Such conflicting findings around successful collaboration reflect the complexity of applying a collaboration principle like 'creation of a common goal' in practice. In general, proposals of broad principles or factors associated with collaboration have been criticised for being too general or so obvious

that they lack the necessary detail to be implementable in workplace contexts (Huxham & Beech, 2003).

Collaboration research has also focused on identifying barriers to collaboration. Collaborative outcomes are reported to be compromised when workers are not dedicated to a single collaborative project (Cummings & Haas, 2012), and in competition-incentivised workplaces (Beersma, Hollenbeck, Humphrey, Moon, Conlon & Ilgen, 2003). Quantitative measures have been criticised for not considering contextual features of the collaborative process (Detienne, Baker & Burkhardt, 2012). It has been argued that there continues to be a gap between how researchers study collaboration, and what workers in real organisations do (Wageman, Gardner & Mortensen, 2012). Bresnen and Marshall (2002) argued that the existing literature on collaboration assumes collaboration is a technical task that can be planned using an appropriate method, which underplays the complex, dynamic, social context within which collaboration occurs. For this reason it has been suggested that researchers need to conduct more descriptive research using qualitative methods to better understand the organisational context within which collaboration occurs (Wageman, Gardner & Mortensen, 2012). Klimkeit's (2012) case study of internal collaboration in professional services found contextual features of an organisation, including informal organisational systems and structures, and culture, to have a strong impact on the success of collaboration.

There has been some qualitative inquiry into collaboration in IPC research, through grounded theory and thematic analysis, focusing largely focused on barriers to collaboration. For example, Bihari Axelsson and Axelsson (2009) reported structural barriers (legislation, organisational rules, regulations, administrative boundaries) and cultural barriers (language, attitudes and values that make communication difficult) based on a review of the literature on

organisation, leadership and collaboration. Haddara and Lingard (2013) took a discursive approach to analysing texts dedicated to IPC education in clinical care, identifying two distinct discourses: ‘utilitarian’ and ‘emancipatory.’ The utilitarian discourse focused on practitioners’ explanation of collaboration as an important tool in achieving good client outcomes, whereas the emancipatory discourse constructed collaboration as having an equalising effect on the power balance between senior clinicians and nurses. Macfarlane (2017) undertook discourse analysis of the existing literature on collaboration in university-based research, identifying six key interpretative repertoires of collaboration, which he grouped according to two sides of a moral continuum of self-regarding interpretations (or individual goals) and other-regarding (collective goals). Macfarlane argued this demonstrated a paradox where collaboration could be motivated by individual and collective motives. These discourse studies of collaboration demonstrate the possibility of multiple interpretations of collaboration by the same workers. Understanding more about different discourses around collaboration may assist in its uptake and success in practice.

### **1.6 The present study**

The present study uses a discursive approach to explore professional services workers’ constructions of collaboration in the workplace. Thematic discourse analysis was used to examine the accounts of workers who had participated in collaboration. Better understanding of how “good” collaboration is made sense of in work settings has the potential to contribute to supporting better collaboration in organisations. The specific aims of the study were to:

- 1 Identify constructions of collaboration drawn on by professional services workers
- 2 Explore what counts as “good collaboration”, and how quality in collaboration is characterised
- 3 Examine constructions of challenges to collaboration.

## **Chapter 2: Method**

### **2.1 Design**

Thematic discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Taylor & Ussher, 2001) was used to examine constructions of collaboration drawn on by interviewees. The aim was not to collect evidence for a particular hypothesis or theoretical framework of collaboration (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). In considering interviewees' accounts of collaboration, the aim was to understand how collaboration is described and made sense of.

### **2.2 Participants**

Participants were all employees of an Australian professional services organisation. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants who had experienced a "recent collaboration" at their workplace, defined as "having participated in a project or activity that involved people from different teams, disciplines or business units in the last twelve months." Staffs from a range of positions and levels within the organisation were invited to participate. An invitation was distributed via staff email asking for volunteers to participate in an interview on collaboration at work. All volunteers were informed that their identity would not be divulged and they would remain anonymous in the reporting of the study. Overall, 17 participants were recruited (nine male and eight female). Six were junior staff members, seven middle management and four senior leaders. Participants came from eight different work divisions across the organisation.

### **2.3 Thematic Discourse Analysis**

Thematic discourse analysis, according to Braun & Clarke (2006), involves a search for themes or patterns across a dataset. The discursive element of thematic discourse analysis comes

from its constructionist theoretical position, where it is assumed that people actively construct reality through their representations, descriptions and meanings (Gergen, 1999).

### **2.3 Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews were used as the method of data collection. An interview schedule was developed according to Forrester's (2010) guiding question of "What do I need to ask this interviewee in order to understand their experiences?" Relevant questions for this type of analysis focused on asking interviewees to describe everyday activities and experiences.

It has been argued that where interviews are focused on specific examples of the concept being studied, the tendency for interviewers to elicit generalised and idealised accounts is reduced (Burkitt-Wright, Holcombe & Salmon, 2004). For this reason, the interview guide included a number of preliminary, general questions about collaboration, but largely asked the participant to recall and talk about recent specific experiences of collaboration in the workplace.

In developing the interview schedule, the aim was to produce a number of overarching questions, with supporting prompt questions to draw on as required, depending on the length and detail of the interviewee's responses (Forrester, 2010). The interview schedule was therefore a list of prepared questions that the interviewer anticipated asking in the interview, but that could be asked in a different order or manner in response to the progress of each interview.

### **2.4 Procedure**

Interview schedule questions were practiced by the interviewer to limit the need to refer to the interview schedule, allowing for a more natural conversational style and to allow the interviewer to focus on, and respond to, the answers of interviewees (Forrester, 2010).

A pilot interview was conducted to test the questions for clarity and how they fitted into the planned timing for the interview (30-45 minutes).



Interviews took place in a meeting room at the interviewee's place of work or in a private area of a cafe, and lasted between 23 and 68 minutes (mean = 49 minutes). All interviews were conducted by Mercedes Ramsey, Honours student in the School of Psychology at the University of Adelaide. Interviews were recorded on an iPhone 6S using the voice memo feature. Back-up copies were stored on a password-protected second device.

The interviews commenced when participants were welcomed and thanked for their time, and ethics procedures completed – see section 2.5 below for detail. A brief introduction was given at the start of each interview (Interview guide, Appendix C). Interviews commenced with the question “Tell me what collaboration means to you”. The aim was to elicit detailed accounts from interviewees and, to this end, the interviewer avoided closed questions and interruptions, thus encouraging a dialogue (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). To ensure the words and ideas were the participants', leading questions were also avoided (Taylor & Ussher, 2001).

On reflection, there were times where the interviewer engaged in social dialogue with the participants, which could have been seen to encourage certain responses through positive feedback to initial answers. At times the interviewer may have interrupted too early, and summarised or paraphrased on behalf of the participant before they could do so in their own words.

Participants were offered an opportunity to debrief with the interviewer at the conclusion of the study through a short 10-minute phone call. At the time of finalising this paper, no debriefing offers had been taken-up.

## **2.5 Ethical considerations**

The study was conducted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (updated 2018) and approved by the University of Adelaide Human

Research Ethics Committee (approval ref 19/60). A Participant Information Sheet (PIS), outlining provisions for informed consent, right to withdraw, storage of information and maintaining confidentiality, and consent form, was submitted as part of the ethics application (Appendix A). Participants were provided with the PIS in the recruitment email and the meeting invite for the interview, as well as at the commencement of the interview. Participants were informed about the recording and how this would be used, and were directed towards the consent form and asked to sign, following which confirmation was sought again that they agreed to continue.

## **2.6 Analytic strategy**

Analysis was carried out according to the procedures and protocols for thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), supplemented with specific requirements for a thematic discourse analysis (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). Interview recordings were transcribed according to the conventions of standard orthographic transcription, supplemented with some features of Jeffersonian transcription where relevant to the analysis (Jefferson, 2004). Although there has been some criticism of the simplistic nature of orthographic transcripts, the alternative Jeffersonian transcription convention more commonly found in discourse analysis and conversation analysis can detract from the focus of the analysis where it does not need to be concerned with the non-talk features, such as pauses and intonation (Forrester, 2010). Given the thematic nature of this analysis, an orthographic approach was taken, supplemented with some of the more relevant features of Jeffersonian convention, as per the directions of Braun and Clarke (2006). The following table summarises the conventions used.

*Table 1: Jeffersonian transcription conventions used in this analysis*

<b>Transcription element</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
{}	Overlaps, cases of simultaneous speech or interruptions
[comment]	Analysts comment about something going on in the talk
(.)	Small pauses

*Source: Forrester, 2010, p. 11 based on Psathas (1995).*

Anonymity was maintained by using pseudonyms in typed transcripts, and by changing features such as names of places, projects and colleagues that might have made participants identifiable. Following transcription, the materials were coded, first line-by-line, and then grouped into a thematic level using procedures described by Braun and Clarke (2006). A theme can be identified in a number of ways, including by its prevalence within each data item<sup>2</sup> and across the data set (generally there will be multiple instances,), or how it responds to the overall research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In identifying themes, the following principles were adhered to:

- Themes were identified at the interpretative level (not just at the semantic level), requiring examination of the discursive elements that may inform the semantic content, as is the approach in thematic discourse analysis
- Themes were prioritised in terms of how they answered the research question, and so do not necessarily describe and reflect the themes of the data set overall

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<sup>2</sup> In this study a data item is defined as a single transcript.

- Initial codes were identified in an inductive way, driven by what was occurring in the transcript data, with themes subsequently identified in relation to the theoretical understanding of collaboration in the literature

Transcripts were examined for patterns, variability and consistency, and for the function and effects of specific discourse (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Overall, the analytic approach is summarised in Table 2. This was not a completely linear process, as there was movement between various stages, as recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006).

*Table 2: Coding process*

<b>Coding stage</b>	<b>Description of process undertaken</b>
<b>Data familiarisation</b>	Read transcript once in entirety (printed copy of transcript allowing for noting any initial ideas in the margins) and repeatedly re-read
<b>Initial codes</b>	Code interesting features of the data in a systematic way across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
<b>Initial themes</b>	Collate codes into potential themes, collating all data relevant to each potential theme
<b>Review themes</b>	Check the themes in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2)
<b>Define themes</b>	Refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
<b>Identifying extracts</b>	Select clear and compelling extract examples, complete final analysis of selected extracts, relate back to the research question and literature, and finalise report.

*Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87.*

Coding was completed manually by copying and pasting sections of numbered lines of text under headings in a Word document. As per Braun & Clarke (2006), coding in the first phase

was broad, coding for as many themes as possible, and coding inclusively, keeping some of the surrounding data, and coding data items in multiple themes where applicable. This process continued until all data had been coded and collated. Codes were sorted into initial themes with associated data extracts. An initial analytical hypothesis was created in the form of an argument frame. Themes were refined, collapsing related themes together and creating sub-themes where distinctions emerged. Data were reviewed at the level of coded data extracts first, and then at a data set level.

### Chapter 3: Analysis and Discussion

This study explored professional services workers' accounts and descriptions of collaboration in the workplace. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify six themes that represented interpretative repertoires around collaboration in interviews with 16 professional services workers. These themes were broadly organised in relation to talk about how collaboration should occur in principle (in-principle themes) or about how collaboration occurred in practice (in-practice themes). These 6 sub-themes were labelled as follows: For collaboration 'in principle': (i) Bringing different workers together (ii) Addressing a specific and appropriate purpose, and (iii) A shared positive experience For collaboration 'in practice': (iv) Collaboration as business as usual (v) Collaboration as rhetoric and (vi) Collaboration as hampered by systematic barriers. The overarching, in-principle/in-practice contrast identified in the interview materials was both an organising principle for the thematic analysis and a repeated practice for talking about collaboration. The following analysis is presented in two parts – (1) Collaboration in principle and (2) Collaboration in practice.

In order to acknowledge the active role played by the researcher in identifying themes, and also selecting which to report and how to report them (Braun & Clarke, 2006), in the following analysis, all extracts used to illustrate claims are presented together with the interviewer's preceding question or comment that initiated the interviewee's response.

#### **3.1 In-principle / In-practice contrast**

An over-arching theme identified in the interview materials involved an in-principle / in-practice contrast. The contrast was evident when examining responses to the interviewer's direct questions about the meaning or definition of collaboration and comparing this talk to interviewees' subsequent descriptions of their specific experiences of collaboration. The

definitions of collaboration given in interview responses were largely positive and typically included the three in-principle themes described in section 3.1 above as elements of collaboration. All but two interviewees commenced their interviews by discussing their support for the concept of collaboration and talking about it as a positive or worthwhile objective within the organisation. In one sense, this should not be surprising as it could be argued that collaboration is socially normative in a modern work environment. There were a number of instances where interviewees made a clear statement about being a collaborative person, for example ‘I would hope to think I am quite a collaborative person’ (Jenna, Transcript 8), assigning themselves to the category of ‘collaborator’, before qualifying this position with a negative aspect of collaboration. The in-principle themes were relatively consistent across interviews and reflected a general position on what collaboration is (or how it should be), and its purpose and utility within the workplace. This was in contrast to talk about personal experiences of collaboration in practice. An ‘ideal’ of collaboration was often contrasted with what occurs in practice, evident in the three different themes discussed in section 3.2. Interviewees’ descriptions of what collaboration was, and how they defined it, were not consistent with their accounts of their own collaboration experiences. This presented a contrast between how collaboration *should be* in comparison to how it *plays out in practice*. This contrast structure functioned as a way for interviewees to demonstrate their understanding of good collaboration and align themselves to the normative expectations of collaboration in the workplace, while distancing themselves from the suggested causes of poor collaboration. It demonstrates a possible disconnect between collaborating in principle, and the complexity of putting this into action.

### 3.2 Collaboration in principle

From the 16 interviews with professional services workers undertaken for this study, three themes were identified that related to the talk about the definition and purpose of collaboration. This descriptive talk about collaboration is summarised in terms of the following three themes: (i) Bringing different workers together (ii) Addressing a specific and appropriate purpose, and (iii) Working in a supportive way. Themes (i) and (ii) were present in all interviews. Theme (iii) was less frequently discussed, but was identified in approximately half of the interviews.

#### **(i) Bringing different workers together**

Collaboration was described across all interviews as being done in order to bring different people together for the purpose of assembling a range of skills or expertise that would not generally be found in a single team or part of the organisation. In this sense, collaboration was described as involving people coming from outside a core team or division. In such accounts, collaboration was constructed as distinct from the day-to-day team work that characterises normal activity. The result of this collaboration was described as combining strengths and abilities to best meet the challenge at hand. Metaphors drawn on to demonstrate the nature of these different people and abilities coming together ('cross-pollination of ideas' (██████████ Transcript 1), 'meeting of minds' (██████████ Transcript 16) 'we all have a part to play' (██████████ Transcript 10), created a sense of assembling people who bring different ideas or perspectives to a problem. In the following extracts this theme of 'bringing different people together' can be seen in response to the interviewer's request to explain what collaboration meant to the interviewee.



**Extract 1: [REDACTED] Transcript 1, Lines 3-24**

3 Interviewer: *words omitted*... I'm just keen to hear in your words what collaboration  
 4 means to you (.) What do you think of when I say the word collaboration?  
 5 [REDACTED] Yep, ok, soooo, there's a couple of things (.) I think the first thing is like mutual support (.)  
 6 um yeah well yeah, that's what I think of when I think of collaboration (.) um and it's to achieve (.)  
 7 a common goal (.) Um I also think of it being people from perhaps (.) well in our context it might  
 8 be different disciplines or people who don't work together like they are not in the same team (.)  
 9 its people coming together (.) potentially (.) with different (.) ummm (.) what's the word (.) ahh drive (.)  
 10 well drivers (.) *...lines omitted*...  
 11 But they're there because of the common goal if that makes sense?  
 .. *lines omitted*...  
 20 I see collaboration as people coming together from those different  
 21 segments, to to operate on a common goal (.) Having said that, even my experience  
 22 in government (.) I would say the same thing (.) So collaboration to me would be people from  
 23 whether it's from different departments different branches within a department who normally  
 24 don't perhaps work together (.) so not in the same team.

**Extract 2: [REDACTED] Transcript 11, Lines 2 to 14**

2 Interviewer: Firstly (.) I just wanted to get um in your own words what do think about collaboration (.) like  
 3 what does it {actually mean}.  
 4 [REDACTED] {what does it mean to me}  
 ...*lines omitted*...  
 8 [REDACTED] (.) so I think of (.) I think of collaboration in the sense of interacting and working with other  
 9 people who have I guess different skills and experiences to enable um me or or us to solve um  
 10 client challenges or or or and work on projects and so forth.  
 11 Interviewer: Yep yep.  
 12 [REDACTED] Cos we're kind of (.) we're set up in different specialists groups who often have very similar and  
 13 consistent skills and as we well know (.) client problems are complex and don't necessarily align  
 14 neatly with those groupings if you like (.) is that enough?

In Extracts 1 and 2 above, the theme of bringing different workers together is expressed in terms of workers coming from different parts of the organisation: different ‘segments’ or ‘disciplines’ (Extract 1, Line 8), ‘branches’ or ‘departments’ (Extract 1, Line 23) or ‘groupings’ (Extract 2, Line 12 and Line 14). Participants in a collaboration were also described as coming from outside a traditional ‘team’ structure (Extract 1, Line 8 and Line 23/24). What different people bring to a collaboration is described in terms of bringing together ‘skill sets’ or ‘experiences’ (Extract 2, Line 9). These different characteristics required in collaboration are also described in terms of people having different ‘drivers’ (Extract 1, Line 10).

This framing of collaboration as bringing together different types of people, or people with different attributes, also involved an element of achieving an appropriate balance of the relevant skills and expertise. Bringing together the right mix of people was described in terms of targeting workers with the most relevant or appropriate skills or expertise to join the collaborative effort, as well as in terms of ejecting people who were not demonstrating appropriate skills to contribute effectively to the collaboration. There were differences in how these skills were discussed, with some interviewees focusing on technical skills and knowledge, and others discussing social skills or behavior, and some mentioning both. The consistent point across such accounts was the idea that there was an optimal combination of workers that went beyond a simple collection of different skills. This framing is demonstrated in Extract 3 in the context of attributing a successful collaboration outcome to identifying the particular skills required and targeting workers in the organisation with those attributes. It is also illustrated in Extract 4 and 5, in the context of poor collaboration that was explained in terms of a failure to assemble the right people at the outset of the collaboration (Extract 5) and failure to eject the wrong people from the collaboration (Extract 4).

**Extract 3: [REDACTED] Transcript 10, Lines 155 to 171**

155 Interviewer: so to get the most out of this (.) and really get people collaborating (.) you had to set a bit of  
156 ground work (.) in a sense you were selling in a way and giving them some useful content about...

157 [REDACTED] Yep it was all about providing the context and why their time and knowledge would be adding  
158 value.

159 Interviewer: do you think that was key to getting the response that you did?

160 [REDACTED] Yep (.) Yea (.) definitely (.) people are not just going to collaborate or work on something for  
161 the sake of it.

...Some lines omitted...

169 [REDACTED] Rather than just a message going out to all [team name] or a whole service line or  
170 whatever (.) we knew where the knowledge was (.) we knew what we wanted (.) we knew who to  
171 talk to (.) so I guess it was really making it really specific in the request.

**Extract 4: [REDACTED] Transcript 4, Lines 46 to 58**

46 Interviewer: So there's an end goal that everyone is sort of subscribed to (.) and then there's an  
47 opportunity to try things out and potentially (.) you know (.) fail or get things wrong along the  
48 way (.) um with...

49 [REDACTED] Yeah and sorry to interrupt but I also think it's about also having the from a  
50 leadership perspective (.) the guts to (.) you know (.) to in those collaborative situations not  
51 all the players are necessarily on the same page, so it's also about having the guts to  
52 remove or redeploy those who are not, those who don't have the right kind of  
53 engagement and, ah I guess, honesty and authenticity to actually be concerned about  
54 the end goal and not just about themselves.

...some lines omitted...

57 And honestly, [interviewer name], move the wrong people out. I think is even more  
58 important, quite quickly.

**Extract 5: [REDACTED] Transcript 15, Lines 83 to 99**

83 Interviewer: How did that group (.) of people end up being (.) ummm being the group that is  
84 actually doing the collaboration?

85 [REDACTED] So (.) part of it was who was put on the proposal as we tend to do (.) So (.) there

86 wasn't a lot of thought about our (.) whether or not the group could come together  
87 and collaborate (.), it is going to be for three years (.) so it is a long term project and it really  
88 does require collaboration because everything has to align (.) there are twelve  
89 different reports (.) so we can't have one going off...  
90 Interviewer: Doing their own thing...  
91 █████ Umm and availability and experience (.) So it wasn't really thinking about how the  
92 team would work together because the budget kept getting cut back and back and  
93 back by the client and because of the way we work (.) not just because of the client (.)  
94 to really develop how that (.) how we are going to work together (.)  
95 Interviewer: So (.) a combo (.) there was a bit of thinking about what skills or experience we might  
96 need but it kind of came down to who was available (.)  
97 █████ And (.) the skills and experience we need was really in the technical side of  
98 things (.) rather than the softer skills of who could do the work rather than who could  
99 get in the sand pit.

Whereas Extract 3 discusses technical skills or expertise, Extracts 4 and 5 focus on the social or behavioural attributes of participants, rather than technical skills or expertise. The right mix of people is described in Extracts 4 and 5 in terms of social characteristics, including 'honesty and authenticity' (Extract 4, Line 53), 'right kind of engagement' (Extract 4, Lines 52, 53) and 'softer skills' (Extract 5, Line 98). In Extract 5, technical and social skills are specifically contrasted when the interviewee raises the problem of selecting collaborators based on technical skills rather than their 'softer skills' which are described as their ability to 'get in the sandpit' (Extract 5, Lines 98, 99). This focus on social attributes was less common than descriptions of people in terms of 'knowledge' and 'experience'. The need to have the 'right' people involved can also be seen in Extract 4, from the perspective of ejecting the wrong people from a collaboration. This extract is taken from a longer passage of dialogue where the interviewee had

been describing a negative experience of collaboration: a lack of action in resolving the mix of people was associated with the negative experience by the interviewee.

**(ii) Addressing a specific and appropriate purpose**

The second theme identified in interviewees' descriptions of collaboration was the 'need to address a specific and appropriate purpose' to collaborate. The purpose was often described in terms of a problem or challenge to be solved. This problem or challenge was generally described as a complex, and as requiring a range of different skills or expertise in order to be solved. The purpose for collaboration was also framed in terms of achieving a better outcome than would be possible without collaborating. This pattern is particularly evident in Extract 6, which illustrates the theme of collaboration as achieving a better outcome than would have been possible otherwise. In addition to the theme of achieving a specific or appropriate purpose being evident in descriptions of positive experiences of collaboration, it was also evident when interviewees discussed instances where collaboration had been unnecessary or unproductive. Overall, collaboration was described as an approach that was suited to specific circumstances. Unnecessary collaboration was seen to impact negatively on the perception of collaboration in the organisation and its utility. In Extract 7, the interviewee describes the negativity associated with collaboration when it is used unnecessarily.

*Extract 6: ██████ Transcript 10, Lines 4 to 9; 17 to 19*

4 ██████ So (.) to me (.) collaboration is all about working together to achieve an outcome or solve a  
 5 problem. So how can we achieve some particular outcome or end state better by doing it with  
 6 different people or people with different skill sets. So could be (.) you know (.) from any kind of  
 7 environment (.) work (.) sport (.) umm (.) you know (.) doing any kind of you know (.) task with  
 8 someone else (.) Sharing the load to make sure the task is done as efficiently and effectively as  
 9 possible

... some lines omitted...

- 17 ■■■ ...bringing together different skillsets to I guess approach a problem or  
18 situation strategically, to think what are the skillsets that we need and who brings them and how  
19 can they work together to get the outcome in the best way possible.

**Extract 7: ■■■ Transcript 11, Lines 23 to 37**

- 23 Interviewer: And what about from a (.) any sort of feelings or reactions to the terms collaboration when you  
24 see it.
- 25 ■■■ Um (.) it's a (.) well it's a term that get bandied about a lot I think(.) that with collaboration  
26 brings um better outcomes (.) and on the flipside without collaboration um it doesn't necessarily  
27 work. I think there's a whole bunch of challenges (.) which I'm sure we'll talk about (.) but there's a  
28 whole bunch of challenges to collaboration as well (.) which probably didn't answer that very  
29 well...
- 30 Interviewer: No (.) so it sounds like there's a reaction of there's an opportunity there (.) but maybe a little bit  
31 of hesitation about... I mean there's not an overall...
- 32 ■■■ I think sometimes we (.) there's a push for collaboration and we try and make things complex  
33 and bigger than they are which is not necessarily the outcome that our clients want. So we need to  
34 collaborate when its appropriate and right to collaborate (.) but there's this kinda underlying push  
35 for collaboration.
- 36 Interviewer: For the sake of it.
- 37 ■■■ For the sake of collaboration.

Extract 7 demonstrates the recurring notion that collaboration was an approach that was suited to a specific purpose and that it was not always necessary (Lines 33, 34). This extract followed from a dialogue where the interviewee had described his support for the concept of collaboration, and had acknowledged the benefits of collaborating. At Line 25 and 32, he expresses some scepticism about the need to collaborate to the extent expected in the organisation, making reference to collaboration as 'a term that gets bandied about.' This

skepticism is representative of a pattern of talk that could be described as orienting to an idea of ‘over-collaborating’, where interviewees cautioned against collaboration for the sake of collaboration, despite acknowledging its benefits. This overuse of the term or concept of collaboration is reflective of the findings of Thomson and Perry (2006, p.28) in their five-dimension model of collaboration, where they articulated the perils of ‘collaborating for collaboration’s sake’, and argued that this would likely result in wasted time and effort. Thomson and Perry argue that collaboration shouldn’t be entered into without considering and committing to the intensive nature of collaboration. A similar point was made by Huxham and Macdonald (1992, p.50), who argued that the complexity of collaborating can create a “fine line” between achieving greater benefits from a collaborative effort and creating a worse outcome.

In Extract 7 the completion of the task, or achievement of the goal, in a way that was better, described in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, is presented as an appropriate purpose for collaboration. The talk around collaborating in order to produce a better end-product was also expressed in terms of ‘higher quality deliverables’ (██████ Transcript 15, Line 128), or ‘more robust, thoughtful analysis’ (██████ Transcript 2, Line 131).

### **(iii) A shared positive experience**

Whereas the two themes described above largely relate to practical or structural elements of collaboration, a third theme identified in the data related to the positive shared experience of participating in a high-functioning collaboration. Interviewees’ descriptions of this type generally indicated a way of working that went beyond the usual collegiate work-team relationship. In interviews where some version of this shared experience was described, there were elements of sharing, learning, and supporting. The shared experience of collaborating summarised in this theme also involved reference to a sense of energy and cohesiveness between collaborators. The

following extract exemplifies this theme, and is taken from a description of a recent successful collaboration.

*Extract 8: ██████ Transcript 5, Lines 15 to 24*

15 Interviewer: Yeah great (.) So (.) there's lots there about sharing the experience (.) the idea's and skills about  
 16 an outcome of some kind about a common (.) a common outcome or goal (.) achieving an outcome at  
 17 the end of it (.) And potentially people coming together from different spaces (.) Is there (.) are there  
 18 any feelings that come to mind?  
 19 [blank line in transcript]  
 20 ██████ Positive (.) Yeah exciting (.) Yeah (.) Like quite exciting (.) you feel quite energized by it (.) Yeah (.)  
 21 You feel like you're (.) again (.) achieving something so you feel successful (.) You feel like you're  
 22 Learning (.) It's kind of a growth (.) growth mindset or experience (.) And I think it can be rewarding (.)  
 23 because you're sharing and you're being supported (.) and you're supporting other people (.) So I feel  
 24 like it's sort of a cyclical thing (.) If everyone is kind of contributing at the same level (.) Yeah (.)

The idea of collaboration creating a particular energy is evident in Line 20, and the supportive nature of collaboration, both from the perspective of feeling supported and supporting others, in Line 23. The element of learning or developing is also present in Line 22. The feeling of cohesion and support generated by collaborating was found to be a recurring element across the interviews, sometimes named explicitly, as is the case in Extract 8, and at times using metaphor or analogy, for example describing working 'shoulder to shoulder' (████████ Transcript 4, Line 33), or in terms of the collaborators being 'galvanised' (████████ Transcript 4, Line 33). The analogy of a sporting team was also used, for example in Extract 9.

*Extract 9: ██████ Transcript 15, Lines 195 to 200*

195 Interviewer: Have you seen elsewhere (.) ummm (.) either being part of or seen (.) this kind of (.) high  
 196 functioning collaboration at play?



199 [REDACTED] *lines omitted*... you see it on sporting fields when it just hums (.) When people know where someone  
200 else is going to be on the field and people are really working together as a unit (.)

In Extract 9 the interviewee uses the analogy of a sporting field (Line 199), describing how the team members anticipate each others' moves and work together as a collective unit (Line 200). The description of how the team 'hums' (Line 199) is representative of the feeling of collaboration captured by this theme. This idea of there being a 'feeling' of collaboration that involves learning and a sense of satisfaction has similarities to Hackman's (1987) attributes for successful group work, which involves satisfying internal and external clients, developing capabilities to perform in the future, and providing meaning and satisfaction in the group (Hackman, 1987).

### **3.3 Collaboration in practice**

In the following section, three in-practice themes are discussed. These themes were identified in interviewee's descriptions of their specific recent experiences of collaboration. Three recurring accounts of how collaboration worked in practice in the workplace were: 'Collaboration as business as usual,' 'Collaboration as rhetoric' and 'Collaboration as hampered by systemic barriers.' As will be discussed below, these thematic accounts often contrasted with the descriptions of collaboration in principle described in section 3.1 above.

#### **(iv) Collaboration as business as usual**

The construction of collaboration as a day-to-day norm is the first in-practice theme identified. In this framing of collaboration its utility and potential for better outcomes is acknowledged, and in this way it tended to be presented as an obvious choice for tackling the problems faced in professional services work. In describing their experiences, interviewees positioned collaboration as a useful and successful way of working. This included talking about

collaboration in terms of simple procedural steps such as planning, communication and execution. The idea of collaboration as being business as usual was also made by interviewees rebutting the notion that collaboration required more effort, or that it was overly complex. Interviewees described instances that demonstrated the ease with which collaboration was established and carried out, and the beneficial outcomes that followed. In this way, collaboration was described as the norm in terms of the way work was conducted in the workplace. When collaboration was discussed in this way poor collaboration was commonly attributed to poor planning. Extract 10 demonstrates this way of describing collaboration as an obvious and practical way of achieving an outcome.

*Extract 10: [REDACTED] Transcript 2, Lines 190 to 207*

190 Interviewer: We talked a little bit about how the collaboration(.) how the group sort of worked(.) or  
191 how some of the behaviours in the room(.) but just keen to get a sense of(.) and it might be  
192 about how just (.) you and your colleagues worked together? Or how both sides of the  
193 team did (.) What that looked like(.) how you worked together(.) like(.) you know(.) what you  
194 did together? What was the process of actually (.) you know (.) collaborating?  
195 [REDACTED] Sure (.) This was probably an instance where the collaboration arose from a  
196 Need (.) It didn't arise from a want (.) it arose from a situation of having to do this(.)  
197 because we needed to have the stakeholders on board(.) Yeah (.) Otherwise (.) we  
198 weren't going to drive a good result (.) So we were very much working from that  
199 position to begin with (.) And from there (.) everything kind of fell into place(.) because  
200 we're working towards the right(.) we have to get this done(.) And we need to do a  
201 quality job(.) otherwise(.) we're not going to achieve our objectives(.) Yeah (.) So we  
202 had that common understanding(.) And then it's really just planning and execution of  
203 a workshop (.) which we've all kind of done(.) Yeah (.) a million times (.) So I think from  
204 that perspective (.) we're all comfortable with that process(.) Yeah(.) we're comfortable  
205 with iterating (.) We're comfortable with receiving feedback and giving feedback

206 and tweaking things until we arrive on to what we feel is going to be the most mutually  
207 beneficial outcome (.) For everyone involved (.)

The description, in Extract 10, of collaboration as arising from a need (Lines 196, 197) in order to address the particular challenge of aligning stakeholder interests (Line 197), is reiterated in Lines 197, 198 where the interviewee notes the negative result that would have ensued if they did not collaborate. The way the interviewee attributes the success of the collaboration to planning and execution (Line 202) and describes the practical steps of collaborating, including in this instance, ‘iterating,’ ‘giving feedback ‘ and ‘tweaking’ until reaching the ‘beneficial outcome’ (Lines 205 to 207) is illustrative of the pattern of talk describing collaboration from the perspective of being a business as usual tool in the workplace. The interviewee’s assessment of how comfortable the team was in taking these steps (Line 204), and their assertion of the number of times they had done this (Line 203), demonstrates a key aspect of this theme: the perspective that collaboration is part of the everyday way of working in this workplace, or in other words, is business as usual.

This theme shows similarities to the ‘utilitarian discourse’ identified by Haddara and Lingard (2013) in their critical discourse analysis of Interprofessional Collaboration (IPC) literature in medical education and clinical care. The central idea of utilitarian discourse of collaboration, with its language focused on efficiency, effectiveness, outcomes and evidence, is that it is argued to produce better patient care through the ability to consider multiple perspectives, and therefore to improve patient outcomes. In the professional services context examined here, collaboration was similarly described as more effective in solving complex client problems and as producing better client outcomes. Overall, the theme of ‘collaboration as

business as usual' captures talk about collaboration that positioned it as a preferred, and not overly complex, way of working.

Not all interviewees drew on this view of collaboration, however. The expectation that collaboration should be the status quo ('business as usual') contrasted with talk about some people not having the disposition to collaborate, and that involving such types of people was the reason for some collaborations not being successful. This framing also involved descriptions of the need to be selective in establishing a team for collaboration. This view that collaboration should be selective, in contrast to the 'business as usual' framing described above, is highlighted in the following extract.

*Extract 11: ██████ Transcript 13, Lines 577 to 606*

577 Interviewer: ...lines omitted...In the last bit I guess (.) I just want to ask you  
578 two last questions. The first is(.) talking about all that and those two experiences and the different things  
579 that went on(.) what do you think that we could change or needs to change to make collaboration  
580 better than it is or more fruitful here in the way we work(.) or it might be things in terms of the  
581 second example or even the first(.) but what might be the things that might be getting in the way of  
582 us collaborating better or what might we need to do to make it better?  
583 ██████ one of the things about collaboration I think is as I said everyone is different (.) and I don't think  
584 everyone is meant to me working with everyone else. What I mean is that is that I think that some  
585 people who are really good at working on their own and we shouldn't force those people to do work  
586 with teams (.) and that I think(.) because people are very good at naturally at being in bigger group  
587 and exchanging and bouncing ideas and literally there's nothing and they think of something and  
588 some people are just focusing on their stuff on their own(.) and just delivering something really good  
589 that those environments would be be so great(.) that they wouldn't be comfortable(.) and where I  
590 am going is that collaboration is great(.) and from my experience I get better product out of it  
591 because I always rely on other people and I need that other views and angles(.) but I don't think we  
592 should force people into it and acknowledged they are different type of employee and I think trying  
593 to push some of those introverted(.) but that's what I mean by that(.) those people better working

594 on their own(.) not trying to force them to work in teams or if we do(.) trying to make sure their  
595 piece of work they are responsible for(.) we are letting them working on it and giving it back later to  
596 the team(.) not trying to make them(.) you can't transform everyone into a good collaborator(.)  
597 umm I don't think that's possible(.) I don't think that's.. is that's why I would say in [organisation  
598 name] we have all those bigger. We all should be working together and one [organisation name] and  
599 blab la bla(.) and don't get me wrong its great we should all be working together(.) we should have  
600 everyone working in their concern(.) we should all be working together(.) but at the same time we  
601 should be acknowledging it's not for everyone working in [organisation name] and that's ok as  
602 well(.) You know(.) so(.) in other places I work we call them gurus(.) so people with massive massive  
603 experience(.) massive amount of knowledge(.) you ask them about that thing they tell you a whole  
604 story(.) so very knowledgeable(.) very intelligent people(.) but really bad in group stuff(.) in group  
605 settings(.) like horrible(.) and the thing is it wouldn't work for them(.) and it will actually no be  
606 good for the rest of the group as well(.)

Although collaboration is described as the preferred way of working in Extract 11 (Lines 594 to 595), the interviewee also acknowledges that this is not the working preference of all workers and that the organisation should not enforce this as a way of working for everyone (lines 588, 596, 598). Overall, this framing of collaboration as 'business as usual' was generally consistent with descriptions of collaboration in-principle. In particular, the elements of 'bringing people together' and 'a specific and appropriate purpose' were present in or consistent with the 'business as usual' view of collaboration. The discussion of the next theme demonstrates instances where the in-principle themes conflict with interpretations of how collaboration is experienced in practice.

#### **(v) Collaboration as rhetoric**

Another theme identified in the data constructed collaboration as rhetoric – something talked about but not put in to practice often or well. In this framing, collaboration was

described as a positive or constructive concept in principle, but specific examples were regularly drawn on to demonstrate how collaboration did not occur consistently or to the full extent possible in the workplace. In framing collaboration as rhetoric there was also an element of skepticism in some interviewees' talk about the application of collaboration in the professional services context, and of the commitment of leaders to making collaboration work. In examples of collaboration given by interviewees, good intentions to collaborate were described as not necessarily resulting in collaborative results. Some raised doubts about whether they had been involved in true collaboration, describing similar concepts like coordination, collation of inputs, or good teamwork. Interviewees described their support for the organisational imperative for collaboration, which they identified as being prominent in organisation-wide communications, but lamented the lack of guidance on how to collaborate successfully in the professional services environment. Overall, there was a strong recurring pattern of collaboration being something organisations talk about, but as something that does not necessarily get executed well. Extracts 12 and 13 demonstrate this construction of collaboration as 'rhetoric'.

*Extract 12: ██████ Transcript 4, Lines 7 to 20*

7 Marissa: [paraphrased to omit identifying information: In my career] I can honestly say the best  
8 experiences (.) and most financially rewarding (.) organisationally and personally (.) have  
9 been when true collaboration exists (.) but I don't think (.) in my experience (.) I don't think  
10 that exists um very often in that true sense

11 Interviewer: ok

12 ██████ ... sometimes it is very much about this is what the organisation says it wants and  
13 so this is what we pretend to do

14 Interviewer: ok

15 ██████ Um (.) so I think when it really does work (.) but I don't think it really does work very  
16 Often (.) has been my experience (.) and I think (.) for me (.) the disconnect is that we talk

17 about [collaboration (paraphrased to omit identifying information)]...  
 18 ...we say these are the things that are  
 19 important to the organisation (.) and you know (.) collaboration is number one (.) you know (.)  
 20 trust (.) these things...

**Extract 13:** [REDACTED] *Transcript 4, Lines 67 to 68*

67 [REDACTED] ...this whole kind of push for collaboration (.) we talk about it (.) we  
 68 all wear the t-shirt (.) and we all have it on our screensaver and whatever (.) um (.) you know...

The interviewees' statements in Extracts 12 and 13 are illustrative of the interpretation of collaboration as rhetoric (Extract 12, Line 9; Extract 13, Line 7). In Extract 12 this description is explicit: 'it is very much about this is what the organisation says it wants and so this is what we pretend to do' (Lines 12, 13) and 'the disconnect is that we talk about collaboration' (lines 16, 17). In Extract 13, the interviewee draws on a metaphor to get the same point across: 'wear[ing] the t-shirt' or 'we all have it on our screensaver'. The term 'collaboration in inverted commas' ([REDACTED] Transcript 1, Line 49; [REDACTED] Transcript 9, Line 79) was also used to describe a sense of inaction in relation to collaboration. In this way, the notion of collaboration being talked about, but not put into action, was described. Extract 14 also exemplifies the pattern of framing collaboration as an organisational imperative that is not consistently actioned.

**Extract 14:** [REDACTED] *Transcript 10, Line 187 to 214*

187 [REDACTED] ...lines omitted... I think the consistency in messaging around the need to collaborate to get  
 188 the higher outcomes (.) that comes from a higher level (.) sort of makes people aware of the  
 189 value (.) or why we want to do it and the benefits of actually collaborating when or wherever  
 190 possible.  
 191 Interviewer: And you felt like you were hearing those messages relatively consistently here?  
 192 [REDACTED] yeah  
 193 Interviewer: what are the kinds of things that you...

194 ■■■■■ ahh yeah (.) you hear a lot about the more service lines we bring to a client the better (.) so it  
195 kind of goes to that saying but (.) the more of [organisation name] we have at (.) working on client  
196 problems (.) that means the broader the problems are and generally more interesting the  
197 engagements.

198 Interviewer: And you'd assume the better the solutions we come up with

199 ■■■■■ Yeah that's right

200 Interviewer: and do you think that you hear that um like is it consistently heard from different people from  
201 across the organisation (.) or do you feel like you kind of get your messaging from one particular  
202 place or...

203 ■■■■■ Um (.) no I think it's that sort of higher level leadership around the need to collaborate.

204 Interviewer: Yep.

205 ■■■■■ There's not as much probably communication on how.

206 Interviewer: yep (.) the how...

207 ■■■■■ on how we should collaborate (.) it's more about yeah collaboration's good (.) without really  
208 providing much guidance on how to collaborate.

209 Interviewer: do you think that would be helpful?

210 ■■■■■ I think so (.) I think and I've seen a couple of times where at the quarterly updates (.) where  
211 they give case studies of where teams have come together to deliver a client problem or client  
212 solution (.) and they're always the good news stories (.) you quite often (.) they're the ones we want  
213 to promote (.) they want to pump up the stories of where we're bringing the best of  
214 [organisation name] to the client(.) and that's always multiple service lines.

In Extract 14, the interviewee acknowledges consistent communication from the organisation about the benefits of collaboration but identifies a lack of guidance about how to collaborate. At lines 7 to 8, the interviewee talks positively about the idea of collaboration and recalls positive messages from leaders about collaboration ('collaboration's good'), but then describes the messaging as lacking in detail (Line 205, 208). Like many of the interviews, the participant was able to articulate the organisation's imperative to collaborate (for example, at line



188 to line 191), but was less confident about how to achieve this or whether they were successfully collaborating. This uncertainty about what collaboration looks like in practice is also evident in Extracts 15 and 16 below. In these examples the interviewees express doubt about whether the activities they have been participating in are true examples of collaboration.

**Extract 15:** ██████ *Transcript 12, Lines 23 to 33*

23 Interviewer: Yep (.) gotcha (.) any feelings that come to mind? About collaboration?  
24 ██████ So there are two feelings (.) two diametrically opposed feelings that come to mind  
25 when I think about collaboration (.) one is an inward groan (.) almost like a umm ah (.)  
26 and that probably reflects the way that it is often applied and then there is a sense of  
27 sort of enthusiasm and excitement which is about the opportunity of genuine  
28 collaboration when it comes to my mind (.) I am not saying I haven't had it (.) and we will  
29 talk about that later (.) but it's like the term co-design or co-development or  
30 consultation (.) these are all terms that are quite often used by organisations and  
31 bureaucrats that basically mean I am going to tell you stuff and you are going to listen  
32 and I might listen to what you have to say but then I am going to piss off and do  
33 whatever I want anyway.

**Extract 16:** ██████ *Transcript 15, Lines 138 to 161*

138 Interviewer: Do you (.) think anyone has thought about what this could look like if we did this different?  
139 ██████ No.  
140 Interviewer: So, the idea of let's collaborate is a bit of a, is more of a process step...  
141 ██████ Yep.  
142 Interviewer: Rather (.) than how this could help us to do something better.  
*...lines omitted...*  
145 ██████ We say collaborate when we mean teamwork.  
146 Interviewer: Teamwork.  
147 ██████ A hundred percent.  
148 Interviewer: Yeah.

149 ■■■ Which is good (.) We do good teamwork (.) We have good teams (.) but we don't  
150 necessarily collaborate (.) We have good teams (.) you do this (.) you do this...  
151 Interviewer: What do you think we need to do to get to that next level? Is there anything we can do  
152 or, are we hampered by structure and system a bit?  
153 ■■■ Ummm. I think it needs some brave individuals to do things just a bit differently in  
154 the way we do what we do now (.) in the way we do kick-off meetings internally (.) How  
155 do we (.) how do we structure those conversations? We tend to get straight down to  
156 business (.) is that how we really do what we need to do? Ummm (.) thinking about  
157 time (.) how can we give people more time to do that? Help people realise that it is  
158 going to feel a bit crappy (.) And that (.) is okay (.) Because (.) I think if we do start to  
159 have those conversations that are a bit uncomfortable then we tend to be on the  
160 threshold of collaboration (.) we want to get back to process and get an outcome and  
161 move on. I think being uncomfortable is a bit helpful.

In Extract 15, collaboration is grouped together with other business buzzwords that are similar concepts, including co-design, co-development and consultation (Extract 15, Lines 29 to 30). The interviewee argues that organisations often make a commitment to these types of things in order to generate stakeholder support, but with no intention of actually working in this way. Extract 16 demonstrates a slightly different framing of skepticism towards collaborative action. The interviewee does not doubt the commitment to collaborate, but questions whether actions that are labelled as collaboration are in fact collaboration. She describes the term collaboration as being used mistakenly to describe everyday teamwork (Extract 16, Line 145; and again Lines 149 to 150). Consistent with the pattern of responses demonstrating this view, teamwork is referred to positively, but is not considered to be the equivalent of collaboration. This is evident in Extract 16 where an example of teamwork is described as 'being on the threshold of collaboration' (Line 158).

The challenge of identifying true collaboration was identified by Gajda (2004) as a barrier to good collaboration in the context of strategic alliances. Gajda argued that if workers could not recognise or see examples of good collaboration, it made it difficult for them to put in to practice successfully. Gajda also argued that overuse of the term collaboration to describe lesser concepts could de-value collaboration, and prevent it being recognised as a useful tool (2004).

**(vi) Collaboration is hampered by systematic barriers**

The third ‘in practice’ theme constructed collaboration as hampered by systematic or organisational barriers. The most commonly identified barriers were the disincentive created by individual performance metrics and organisational divisions or silos. These two sub-themes are discussed in turn below.

***Individual performance metrics disincentivise collaboration***

Individual performance metrics were commonly mentioned as a barrier to collaboration. Interviewees’ descriptions regularly drew an explicit, causal link between performance metrics and poor or anti-collaborative behaviour. The dominant view was that staff were measured on performance criteria that were counter-productive to effective collaboration. Interviewees described how the organisation largely measured ‘utilisation’ – that is, the productive time worked that could be directly allocated to a paying client – and that this incorporated little time for genuine collaboration because it incentivised quick outcomes. The other key performance metric discussed was ‘individual sales,’ which was generally described as the total value of client work that could be attributed to an individual. This was said to disincentivise collaboration by encouraging individuals or individual teams to guard their opportunities in order to achieve their own personal targets. This was said to be reinforced through bonus structures and practices of

recognising individuals for achieving their individual targets rather than recognising the efforts or outcomes of a group. The incentive to act in self-interest and the barrier this presents to collaboration is the focus of Extract 17, below. In this extract the individualised metrics – identified here in the reference to ‘cost centres’ that track individual revenue – are identified as a barrier to collaboration (Line 94). The interviewee describes how the performance system acts as a motivating factor to choose not to collaborate (Line 99).

*Extract 17: █████ Transcript 9, Lines 91 to 101*

91 Interviewer: Thanks (.) Ummm (.) Anything else about collaboration in general (.) like the concept of  
92 it ummm before I ask you to talk about a specific experience?  
93 █████ Ahh not really (.) but I think I can (.) I guess identify the barriers here and that  
94 really (.) around our structure and cost centres (.) being like (.) your performance is  
95 individual (.) it's not as a team or as a whatever (.) it always comes back to you as an  
96 individual (.) so therefore I guess you do what is in your own best interest (.) is the  
97 motivating factor (.) than doing whatever is in the interest of that team or particular  
98 project or client (.) or you know (.) whatever it has to be (.) then the motivators are to  
99 not do it rather than to do it (.) and in fact you could end up disadvantaging  
100 yourself potentially if by doing it (.) if that is what your (.) if that is the way you were  
101 sort of driven (.) not everyone is driven that way.

In Extract 17 the interviewee described self-interest as the dominant motivating factor in choosing how to work and who to work with (Lines 93 to 96). The reference to disadvantage (Lines 99,100) further demonstrates the view that collaboration in this context could lead to poorer individual performance outcomes. Dissatisfaction with the performance management system is a common feature in examples given of poor collaboration experiences.

Beersma et al. (2003) reported that individualised metrics contribute to a competitive environment, and competing individuals or teams tend to place their own goals above those of the team or broader organisation. Competition within an organisation is argued to be more likely when there are clearly defined criteria for 'winning,' consistent reward, and an emphasis on performance differences (Beersma et al., 2003). Naidoo and Sutherland (2016) considered how various reward structures drive competition or collaboration, comparing the various factors contributing to each. They found that performance measures and individualised performance-based incentives were the strongest drivers of competition, with performance motivation and continuous improvement cited as the greatest benefits. Collaboration, on the other hand, was argued to be driven by interrelated goals and leadership behaviour, producing knowledge-sharing for better practice outcomes. Although describing opposite drivers and benefits, Naidoo and Sutherland (2016) presented a best-practice hybrid model of moderate competition and high collaboration that they argued would result in higher levels of sustained organisational performance. They noted that tensions between the two approaches could create confusion, and where this is not clarified, internal competition would rise as the dominant force. Interviewees' descriptions in the present study, about the negative impact of individualised performance, are consistent with Naidoo and Sutherland's findings.

This theme also supported theoretical positions in the collaboration literature about the need for collective identity as a basis for collaboration. In particular, Macfarlane's (2017) qualitative analysis of collaboration in universities identified two key interpretations – other-regarding (collective goals) and self-regarding (individual goals), that underpin the conflicting motivations that arise in academic collaboration. Macfarlane argued that the measurement of individual performance through publication numbers and attempts to 'count' collaboration

through jointly published papers is creating greater competition between academics. This is said to be negatively impacting on other-regarding forms of collaboration such as intellectual generosity, mentoring and the higher order goal of scientific discovery, in favour of shallower forms of collaboration based on reaching joint publication targets. Collaborating to generate creativity and innovation in responding to client challenges in professional services could be seen as a similar higher-order goal that is in conflict with the pursuit of personal achievement.

The frequent discussion of performance metrics by interviewees demonstrated the value being placed on performance and recognition in this workplace, and is potentially reflective of the competitive nature of professional services. Discussion of the individualised nature of performance measurement as presenting a barrier to collaboration typically concluded with interviewees indicating that performance metrics needed to change to better reflect the collaborative behaviours the organisation aimed to promote.

***Organisation-wide collaboration can be thwarted by divisional ‘silos’ or team loyalties***

In addition to individual reward and recognition, a competing allegiance to a pre-existing team or reluctance to work across divisional boundaries was also identified as a barrier to collaboration. This included examples of ‘patch protection’ or ‘land grabbing’ (██████████ Transcript 8, Lines 122, 255), or descriptions that involved behaviour focused on keeping particular opportunities within a known group or team. The need to impress or support a direct manager or pre-existing allegiance was also a feature of collaboration framed in this way, with descriptions of individuals or teams acting in the interests of a pre-existing team or manager, rather than looking to share opportunities and collaborate across teams or divisions. This team-based competition was described as anti-collaborative. Extract 18 is illustrative of the way collaboration was framed as hampered by the divisional structures within the organisation.

*Extract 18: [REDACTED] Transcript 11, Lines 291 to 303; 397 to 410*

291 Interviewer: so when we said (.) you sort of were mentioning that ultimately you do need someone  
292 responsible (.) there needs to be some hierarchy and structure (.) and how [organisation] works that  
293 can be hard sometimes (.) if you could just elaborate on how the incentive structure works  
294 [REDACTED] Individuals have (.) so individuals have targets for sales and performance, service lines  
295 and divisions also have similar targets (.) for yep (.) so collaborating across those groups and being able  
296 to (.) um (.) groups tend to focus (.) there's a risk that individuals or groups tend to focus on  
297 themselves rather than the broader good (.) or the broader organisation (.) because we haven't (.)  
298 although we (.) although we talk about collaboration at the highest level (.) our underlying our  
299 underlying structures and measurement arrangements are not aligned to the overall goal (.)  
300 They're getting better (.) I think they're getting better and I think we're getting better at  
301 recognising collaboration and working across groups and so forth (.) And when things are going  
302 well it all goes much better (.) when things are not going so well...

*...some lines omitted*

397 Interviewer: is there anything else you can think of in terms of those structural or system based barriers or  
398 the way we set things up here that are might be getting in the way?  
399 [REDACTED] well I think the move to (.) in terms of management consulting (.) the move to the service  
400 groups will help because there's a aggregation of service lines to services groups (.) where we're  
401 making services groups responsible for outcomes which I think is good (.) I think the barrier (.) there  
402 are still barriers across divisions that are not helpful as well (.) and I think there are certain division  
403 are more (.) are less collaborative than others (.)  
404 Interviewer: Than others? Do you think that comes down to how they are structure or leadership or what do  
405 you think is the key difference is?  
406 [REDACTED] yeah leadership (.) I think their behaviours is driven by the leadership of the past (.) and how  
407 they perceive things to operate (.) I think (.) sometimes certain divisions attract a certain type of  
408 individual who are less (.) who are maybe less collaborative (.) who think they are smarter or  
409 broader or able to do everything (.) and I don't think that's (.) I don't think that's good for meeting  
410 client outcomes and being successful as an organisation

In Extract 18, pre-existing group interests are described as trumping those of the broader organisation interests in the collaboration (Lines 292, 293, 294). Extract 18 also illustrates the common theme of organisational structures inhibiting collaboration. The interviewee noted that despite good intentions to collaborate and strong encouragement to collaborate from the highest level of the organisation, structures were not aligned to the goal of collaborating (Lines 294, 295). In this extract, divisional walls are identified as a particular barrier to collaboration (Lines 293 to 294). This is said to be exacerbated in some areas of the organisation where teams have a history of working in a particularly competitive or siloed way. This is described as a behaviour or style of leadership that is hard to overcome in the interests of collaboration (Lines 298 to 301).

Bihari Axelsson and Axelsson's (2009) paradigm of territorial and altruistic behaviour describes two motivational factors where team work either flourishes or is thwarted. Territorialism is associated with protecting the individual and 'home' team, accruing points or wins for that team, and preventing organisation-wide effort. Altruism is the motivation to overcome this dynamic to act in accordance with the best interests of the client or organisation as a whole, providing the imperative to collaborate. Bihari Axelsson and Axelsson recognised territorial behaviour as a key barrier to collaboration, and the traditional performance metric framework as being at odds with advancing collaboration in an organisation. They argued that territorialists focus their energy on defending territory and thwarting collaboration; and altruists see beyond the individual goal and can drive the collective agenda. This paradigm is evident in this framing of collaboration in the dataset, and the underlying tension in this study of individual and collective motivations impacting on the experience of collaboration. Collective or altruistic motivations appeared to underpin more positive, 'business as usual' perspectives of collaboration and an openness about the potential to collaborate when it was not working optimally. This is in



contrast to the need for individual recognition and individual goals that were a feature of negative experiences and views of collaboration as being challenging or even impossible in a context driven by individual performance and divisional competition. These differing perspectives on collaboration presented a contrast between in principle-in practice constructions of collaboration.

### **Chapter 4. Conclusion**

These findings contribute some insights into how collaboration is experienced by workers in an environment where collaboration is actively encouraged. Examination of interviewees' talk about collaboration demonstrates how a contrast was regularly built up between collaboration in-principle and in-practice. The aim of the study was to consider how collaboration in the workplace was made sense of by workers. The analysis suggests that although collaboration is typically described as a consistent, coherent concept in the workplace of professional services, there is more complexity surrounding how it is described as being achieved in action, with multiple, sometimes contradictory, discourses being drawn on. Despite consistent descriptions at a definitional level, involving workers coming together for a specific purpose in a cohesive way, when describing its implementation, collaboration was constructed in different ways, for example, as business as usual, as a developing capability, and as hampered by systematic barriers. Descriptions of tension between the goals of the individual and the collective were a recurring feature of accounts. A specific barrier in this sense was considered to be created by the performance structure of a corporate professional services organisation which is based on individual metrics.

These findings may assist organisational leaders in understanding more about how calls for collaboration are interpreted and experienced by staff. Consideration of how systems of individual performance in organisations may act as a barrier to best practice in collaboration might be beneficial. In addition, considering how to motivate from an altruistic rather than territorial or siloed perspective, and balancing competitive and collaborative drivers, could provide incentives to collaborate. This study contributes to the literature on collaboration by

including findings for professional services where collaboration is one of the most frequent forms of workplace activity, and where there is evidence for a strong imperative to collaborate.

Collaboration is an emerging work practice and studies like this may provide insight to organisations in how collaboration is interpreted and constructed and in turn, how best to communicate about collaboration. If organisations can recognise the different ways in which staff routinely construct and make sense of a concept like collaboration, it may facilitate the future collaboration – and in turn, improve work outcomes and the experience of staff involved.

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## Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET****PROJECT TITLE: What is collaboration in the workplace?****HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL NUMBER:** [REDACTED]**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Assoc. Prof. Amanda Le Couteur****STUDENT RESEARCHER: Mercedes Ramsey****STUDENT'S DEGREE: Bachelor of Psychological Science - Honours**

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

**What is the project about?**

This study aims to examine how collaboration is perceived and experienced by people in the workplace.

**Who is undertaking the project?**

Ms Mercedes Ramsey, an Honours Psychology student at the University of Adelaide, is conducting this project.

The research forms the basis for the Degree of Bachelor of Psychological Science – Honours, at the University of Adelaide, under the supervision of Assoc. Prof. Amanda Le Couteur.

KPMG has agreed to take part in the research project by allowing staff members with experience in recent collaborative projects to participate in an interview on their experiences.

**Why am I being invited to participate?**

You are being invited to participate in this project as you have been identified as having taken part in a collaborative (cross-service line or cross-discipline) project in the last 12 months.

**What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to take part in a face-to-face interview conducted by Mercedes Ramsey. The interview will be audio-recorded and a transcription of the interview will form data for the research project. Transcripts will not be identified by name, and any information within them that might serve to identify individuals will be removed or altered to ensure anonymity is maintained. The interview will take place at a location that is convenient for you.

**How much time will the project take?**

The interview will take approximately 30-45 mins to complete.

**Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?**

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this project. However, if you do experience emotional distress at any time while participating in the study, please let the researchers know.

**What are the benefits of the research project?**

This study aims to broaden knowledge about workplace collaboration, particularly in terms of how it is experienced and perceived by people in the workplace.

**Can I withdraw from the project?**

Participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time.

**What will happen to my information?**

The researchers will store audio-recordings and interview transcriptions on password-protected devices for five years, as required by the State Records Act for the storage of primary research data. Information you provide will be analysed to form a report that will be written up as an Honours thesis. It is possible that general themes may be identified in the data that will be included in a research article, as well as de-identified transcript extracts, for publication in a scientific journal. Participants' identities will remain anonymous. A summary of the results will be available to all participants at completion of the study.

**Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?**

If you have any questions about the project, please contact any of the following researchers:

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

**What if I have a complaint or any concerns?**

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Adelaide (19/60). If you have questions or problems associated with the practical aspects of your participation in the project, or wish to raise a concern or complaint about the project, then you should consult the Principal Investigator. Contact the Human Research Ethics Committee's Secretariat on phone +61 8 8313 6028 or by email to [hrec@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:hrec@adelaide.edu.au) if you wish to speak with an independent person regarding concerns or a complaint, the University's policy on research involving human participants, or your rights as a participant. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

We appreciate your interest in this study and hope to hear from you.

Assoc. Prof. Amanda Le Couteur  
Mercedes Ramsey

Appendix B: Consent Form



Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

**CONSENT FORM**

1. I have read the attached Information Sheet and agree to take part in the following research project:

<b>Title:</b>	What is good collaboration? A thematic analysis of accounts of collaboration in the workplace
<b>Ethics Approval Number:</b>	██████

2. I have had the project, so far as it affects me, and the potential risks and burdens fully explained to my satisfaction by the research worker. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the project and my participation. My consent is given freely.
3. Although I understand the purpose of the research project, it has also been explained that my involvement may not be of any benefit to me.
4. I agree to participate in the activities outlined in the participant information sheet.
5. I agree to be audio recorded  Yes  No
6. I understand that as my participation is anonymous, I can withdraw any time up until the completion of the interview.
7. I have been informed that the information gained in the project may be published. I have been informed that in the published materials I will not be identified and my personal results will not be divulged.
8. I understand my information will only be disclosed according to the consent provided, except where disclosure is required by law.
9. I am aware that I should keep a copy of this Consent Form, when completed, and the attached Information Sheet.

**Participant to complete:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher/Witness to complete:**

I have described the nature of the research to \_\_\_\_\_  
(*print name of participant*)

and in my opinion she/he understood the explanation.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Interview Guide

**Interview protocol and question guide**

What is collaboration? A thematic analysis of accounts of collaboration in the workplace

**Welcome and introduction**

- Thank you for participating
- Please read the information sheet
- Please indicate your willingness to participate by signing the consent form
- You can withdraw your consent at any time
- As noted in the information sheet I will now start recording the interview

**Overview of the research project**

- This study aims to consider the views and accounts of people in the workplace who take part in collaborative projects or collaborative ways of working
- The aim of the study is to:
  - Consider understandings of “collaboration” and experiences of participating in collaboration in a professional context

**Consent**

- Are you comfortable to continue with the interview?

**Semi-structured interview questions****NOTES TO INTERVIEWER: REMEMBER:**

- What do I need to ask the participant in order to understand his or her experiences?
- Want people to describe and account for their experiences
- Want to understand what their experiences have been
- Push and question once given an answer – don't assume you know what they are talking about
  - *What exactly do you mean when you say xxx?*
  - *Can you tell me more about xxx?*

General/ice-breaker questions

- The focus of this interview is your specific experiences of collaboration, but to get started, can you first tell me what collaboration means to you?
  - **Prompt:** what words, feelings or experiences come to mind?
- When you volunteered to participate in this interview was there anything in particular that prompted you to participate?

### Experiences of collaboration

- I'll now ask a series of questions about your experiences in collaborating in this workplace; I want to hear about the nature of the collaboration, the nuts and bolts of it
- Take a moment to think about/recall a specific experience of collaboration
  
- Can you tell me a bit about this collaboration?
  - Prompts: Firstly, can you tell me how this collaboration came about?
  - How did you come to being part of the collaboration?
  - Was there an explicit aim to collaborate at the outset?
  - Describe what you sought to accomplish by collaborating?
  - Do you think you accomplished this
  
- Can you describe how the group collaborated?
  - Prompt: Can you tell me about how you worked together?
  
- How would you describe the overall experience of collaborating in this example?
  - Prompts if needed:
  - What was good about it?
  - What was bad about it?
  - What was difficult?
  - What were the outcomes?
  - What would you do differently next?

[If example above was a **good** experience collaboration]
  
- Overall, would you say the collaboration went well?
- What was good about it?
  - Prompts:
  - How did you interact with each other?
  - What did you say to each other?
- How did you know you were doing it right/well?
- What were the outcomes?
- How was this different to when you have worked solo?
- Can you think of another experience where the collaboration didn't go so well?
- What was different about this?

[If example above was a **bad** experience collaboration]

  
- Can you tell me about why you think that was?
- How did it feel at the time?
- Did you know at the time the collaboration wasn't working? Why was that?

- What was the outcome?
- Do you think it was/ is possible to reach a good outcome without the collaboration itself feeling good? Or visa versa?
- Can you think of another experience where the collaboration went well?
- What was different about this?

Defining and measuring collaboration

- In your experience, how has your team or the organisation defined/ measured the quality of collaboration?
- How have you or do you measure your own efforts in collaborating?

Overall experience of collaboration in this workplace

- Overall how would you describe the experience of collaborating in the workplace?
- Why do you think that is?
- What is the attitude of your colleagues to collaboration?
- What do you think would need to change to make collaboration [**depending on sentiment**: possible/ more fruitful/ even better than it already is]?