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*Contesting Citizenship and Civil Society in a Divided World*

***Escaping parochialism – emerging principles and logics for  
re-membering local service provision***

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**Introduction**

*They are not attempting to go back to any lost paradise. Nor are they falling into nostalgia or revivalism. In fact, they are dissolving the historical break imposed by modernity. Their search for continuity gives them the spirit of old wine. But they are not merely new bottles. They are coming from different grapes; the wine is different. Their initiatives are so new, in fact, that we have to go beyond modern words to express them in their own terms. Formal modern categories are irrelevant or useless. We clearly need new discourses to articulate the wide variety of contemporary grassroots initiatives. The new discourses are not reinventing the wheel, as does the “education” of the “social minorities.” ...The people’s experiences are concretely located – or, better yet, rooted in particular soils. They belong to local space and cultures. That is why the modern attempt to reduce them to a single global discourse is both impossible and preposterous.*

(Esteva & Prakash 1998: 192)

We have begun this paper with a quote from Esteva and Prakash (1998) because it expressed to us the process that is used by local human service practitioners as they confront the glocal (global/local) and parochial discourse that is dis-membering human service provision as it has been known. The specific vision and interests of the proponents of the glocal discourse are generating new territorial, organisational and political dynamics that are dividing and threatening communities' experiences of place and identity. In their own local space, these human service practitioners are reacting against and resisting these processes by re-membering services through *transformational collaboration*. In a conflictual/divided world struggling for unity, *transformational collaboration* appears to offer pathways to synergy and harmony.

Within this re-membering there is an increasing emphasis on transformative collaborative ways that define, differentiate, distinguish and re-member the culture of place – ways that are grounded in the particular soil of the local context. These ways of organising rely on norms, structures and processes that are associated with the Third Sector. For each place, the global and local dynamics will play out differently in the development of idiosyncratic guiding principles and logics for local ways of organising that reflect the individual and often conflicting value-bases and visions of the community's members. These are considered 'new' ways of organising because of vastly different funding regimes and policy environs of the new (dis)order and not necessarily because they are new models of organising.

There is a growing and significant literature on the theory and practice of collaborative and collective ways of (re)organising human service provision (Greca 2000; O'Looney 1994; Williams & Thorpe 1998). Within this literature there is an enormous confusion about the language and ideas associated with approaches to collaboration and partnering. Many of the ideas are not new but rather have evolved over the past two to three decades and developed further with each 'iteration' of incoming governments. Policy initiatives and research have focussed on the state-third sector relationship at the macro policy-level and on articulating partnering at the micro service-level. While the basic mechanics of collaboration and partnership (stages, lifecycles, elements or necessary ingredients) are increasingly researched through analysis of collaborative outcomes (Gray 1989) or more generally breakdowns in collaborative endeavour (Takahashi & Smutny 2002) there has been limited focus on the more nebulous collaborative action around meso-level multiple (and diverse) local issues and for multiple (and sometimes conflicting goals), that is, the re-membering of ways to (re)organise. To date there have been limited studies of principles and logics for building collaborative structures within human service provision that enhance *citizenship and civil society* and increase the scope and effectiveness of collaborative efforts in the changing human services environment.

This paper will report research findings on the principles and logics envisioned by human service providers in one place (Cairns, Australia) as the ways to (re)organise local structures and processes for collaborative action, to engender harmony and synergy in a divided world. These principles and logics tell us something of the way in which human service providers are learning to deal with the nation-state – the way in which they are '...taming its impulses and softening its agony' (Esteva and Prakash, 1998: 199).

They are the dialogue that emerged through an action learning process where participants walked through and spoke of what they are learning about how to manoeuvre and navigate around the global discourses of the parochial elite.

### **This site**

The Cairns (Australia) Human Services Sector, an important local service and employment sector, is experiencing considerable ongoing organisational change. Collaborative ways of organising are increasingly promoted by government as the preferred mode of organisation for this sector. There is a growing need to generate a conceptual framework for collaboration and for action processes for improved reflective practice in Cairns.

*I think the bottom line is for people who have worked in human services for along time is that there is no one single agency that can tackle some of the issues they are dealing with. So there is no other alternative but to work with other agencies, if a lot of them, or a few of them, because agencies just can't simply do it on their own. (Project participant)*

The Cairns Human Services Collaboration (CHSC) Project was initiated in February 2002 and set out to undertake an action learning process with local human services practitioners. The project was funded under the James Cook University Industry Collaborative Research Grant Scheme 2002. The industry partner was Queensland Department of Families, Cairns and Tablelands Region (now Far North Queensland Department of Communities).

Government engages with 'others' (nongovernment) differently across the three main arenas: *policy and planning*; *funding and monitoring*; and *service provision* (Table 1). These arenas have different histories and contemporary experiences of collaborative arrangements. They have involved different players and different functional areas of government and nongovernment organisations (Table 1). In each arena there is a specific need for collaborative effort. Collective dialogue is needed around policy and planning. Agreements are needed around funding and monitoring. Service integration is needed in the service provision arena.

The focus of collaboration in each arena has also been distinct (Table 1). Within policy and planning, collaborative effort has focussed on building the capacity of different parts of the human services sector to engage in policy and planning dialogue. Collaborative effort in the funding and monitoring arena has focussed on developing the capacity of provider organisations and funders to sustain the organisational infrastructure required for accountability (in relation to both funds and outcomes). The capacity of service units (government, nonprofit and forprofit) to ensure available, certain, continuous and appropriate service provision has been the focus of collaborative effort in the service provision arena.

**Table 1. Key 'arenas for collaboration' in Cairns, Australia**

<i>Arena for collaboration</i>	<i>Policy and planning</i>	<i>Funding and monitoring</i>	<i>Service provision</i>
<b>Players</b>	Nongovernment sectors (nonprofit and forprofit) Government sector	Nongovernment organizations (nonprofit and forprofit) Government funder units and nongovernment funders	Service units (nonprofit, forprofit, and government)
<b>Nongovernment functional area</b>	Policy and advocacy	Fund seeking and management	Programs
<b>Government functional area</b>	Social planning	Community and nongovernment funding and agreement monitoring	Programs
<b>Need</b>	Nongovernment within sector dialogue State-nongovernment dialogue	Individual or collective resourcing and accountability agreements	Service integration
<b>Focus</b>	Capacity of all players in the human services sector to engage in policy and planning dialogue	Capacity of provider organisations and funders to sustain the organisational infrastructure required for accountability (funds and services)	Capacity of service units to ensure available, certain, continuous and appropriate service provision
<b>Forms</b>	Nongovernment networks State-nongovernment partnerships State-State partnerships	Alliances Coalitions Partnerships ...	Protocols Memorandums ...
<b>Modes of governance</b>	Network	Market (Reality is competition)	Network Hierarchy
<b>Normative basis</b>	Complementary strengths and trust	Contract	Complementary strengths and trust Employment relationship
<b>Means of decision-making</b>	Relational	Price (Haggling)	Relational Routine
<b>Locus of decision-making</b>	Individual members Partners	State (monopsomy) Nongovernment organization (monopoly)	Individual members State control (statutory)

Each arena has distinct forms of organisation, modes of governance, normative bases, and means and loci of decision-making (Table 1). In the policy and planning arena networks have been formed in the nongovernment sector and partnerships have been established within the state sector and between the two sectors. The mode of governance has been based on the network model that emphasises complementary strengths and trust with decision-making using a relational model (with power vested in the membership). Alternatively the trend in the funding and monitoring arena has been towards the formation of alliances, coalitions, partnerships or other such arrangements to engage in more market-like relations using agreements of contracts. In these situations power (over decision-making) can rest with the state if they have a monopsony (they are the single funder) or with the provider if they have a degree of monopoly. Finally in the service provision arena, service integration has been achieved through protocols, memorandums and other forms of agreement. Service integration has been based on network relations (between organisations) or hierarchical routines (within organisations).

Enhanced ability to engage in effective collaborations within and between these arenas at regional and local (non-urban) levels will help re-membering. Learning how to further develop and maintain effective collaboration (and partnerships) at the meso-level in the three arenas through the development of a conceptual framework and reflective practice is considered to be essential as many existing analyses are urban-developed and based (Jones & Little 2000; Newman & Verpraet 1999).

## **Methodology**

The researchers are using a grounded theory approach (Creswell, 1998) in the overall research program. At each site, the researchers engage with an action learning group to identify and authenticate principles and logics of importance in local deliberations on ways of organising for collaboration. Action learning brings together a group of people with a shared concern for the purposes of reflection, learning and action (Kember and Kelly 1993; Revans 1984). A process of reflection on existing practical cases of collaboration (non-local and local) and their potential use in the local context is used to stimulate dialogue about principles and logics that informed participants own re-membering and (re)organising. The emerging findings are providing a broader analysis of collaboration from a simplistic *instrumental collaboration* focus to *transformational collaboration* (Himmelman 1996).

Eleven people committed their energy to the project. The local participants self-selected for the project after receiving information on the project from the researchers through a range of sector networks. They shared practice experience across government and nonprofit organisations and in policy, management, funding and service roles. They were assisted by two co-researchers from JCU, Dr Wendy Earles and Robyn Lynn, and Jill Knell (Jakel) as co-researcher from the Queensland Department of Communities.

Participants in the Cairns Human Services Collaboration (CHSC) Project had a shared concern for *exploring 'models' of collaboration that provide examples of 'sustainable', 'effective', and 'responsive' ways of working that are 'outcome-focussed' and build*

'connectedness'. They recognised that in an age where the focus in the human services has been on competitiveness in the funding arena, cooption in the policy arena and integration in the service arena organisations are struggling to manage these tensions. They were experiencing the difficulties of building effective ways of working together and sought to address this.

Local members of the project group contributed their practice knowledge, experience of existing and historic local collaboration efforts, and critical analysis of the material gathered by the researchers. The researchers' contribution to the learning partnership was material on collaboration derived from literature, relevant case study material on collaborative ways of working gathered from non-local sites, and a progressive summary of the group's shared learning.

The project group committed to meet five times for three hours each session. They used a process of action learning which involved a cycle of connection, planning, doing and reflecting. Throughout the process the researchers mirrored the many components of the shared learning for the group.

In the first session, participants discussed their individual interests and knowledge in collaborative ways of organising. They shared their responses to three questions: *What involvement have you had in collaborative ways of organising in the Cairns area?; What are/were their strengths and challenges?; and What organisational (and wider government and sector) policies are you aware of in relation to collaborative ways of working (past and current)?* The group then addressed the following key question: *What additional information do we need on collaborative ways of organising in the Cairns area?*

The first session was also used to develop a common focus for the action learning process. Participants individually answered two questions and then shared their responses with the group: *What more do you want to learn about collaborative ways of organising?; and What do you want to get out of participating in this action learning process?*

In the second session, participants examined available cases/models from wide literature searches (10) and from local digging (4) and devised an analysis framework for examining the cases/models. In developing a framework for the action learning analysis of cases/models participants drew on questions that they felt were useful from their practice, questions from cases presented in the first part of the session, and questions from handouts on definitions and key elements of collaboration from literature.

The third, fourth and fifth sessions were used to explore the chosen non-local (3) and local (3) cases/models using the analysis framework. The local case studies were compiled from interviews with local practitioners and the non-local case studies were sourced from existing literature. Non-local cases/models included: *Strengthening Families - A case study of a Third Sector partnership* (Walker 2001); *Modelling collaboration and social services integration* (O'Looney 1994); and *Service integration:*

*Something old and something new* (Hassett & Austin 1997). Local cases/models included *Family Resource Service, Mental Health Help and Project 300*.

Group dialogue was taped and the transcripts and other materials generated in the action learning sessions represented the data for this project. After each project group meeting the researchers analysed the transcripts by looking for recurring themes in the dialogue. These were compiled as summary transcripts and were circulated to members before the next session and affirmed or enlarged at that session.

At the completion of all the sessions as a post-field analysis stage, the three researchers reviewed all material produced by the action learning group to develop themes around guiding principles and logics for collaboration. The process was extensive, in-depth and iterative as the researchers entered their own action learning cycle with the data. Each researcher separately reviewed all of the summary transcripts and developed a preliminary list of themes under guiding principles and logics. These themes were linked to specific quotes in the summary transcripts from the participants. The researchers then met to share their lists and dialogue on an initial master list of themes. At this meeting, each full transcript from the five sessions was allocated to two researchers for further authentication of the themes by evidence from the participants (quotes). The researchers then met to discuss each theme in detail and identify key points to be made under each theme. In this process some themes collapsed (due to limited evidence to support them), some shifted from logics to principles or back again (as these very concepts changed), and some themes were reframed under new terminology (as higher order concepts emerged from the grounded analysis).

At this point the researchers went back to the participants to ensure the authenticity and trustworthiness of their analysis. A sixth (and final) session was held with participants approximately one year after the fifth session. This final session involved a dialogue at the analysis level, beyond the individual case study/theory level. A draft report was prepared for the participants and circulated prior to the session. All participants had experienced a range of collaborations in the interim year and this led the discussion. The researchers then introduced each theme, provided evidence from the group and opened the forum to discussion. This session was also taped and transcribed.

## **Findings**

A preliminary set of guiding principles and logics to guide *transformative collaborative* practice within the Cairns Human Services was identified (Table 2).

A **principle** for the way of organising for collaboration within Cairns Human Services refers to a guiding sense or essential quality of the collaborative action. Alternatively, a **logic** for the way of organising refers to the basic design elements for the form (or lack of form) of collaborative practice within Cairns Human Services.

**Table 2. Summary of Draft Principles and Logics**

The Cairns Human Services Action Learning Group desires the following **principles and logics** for the practice of collaboration within Cairns Human Services

seeks to be in a **state of equanimity**;

recognises its abstract **fractal** oneness;

creates and honours **relational synergy** and **groundedness**;

is **consciously sustainable**;

enters a space of **liminality** so that new possibilities can emerge;

is dependent on its **transformational capabilities** and the use of **authentic power**;

uses **edge space** to manifest the form/action of **synergistic goals**.

The principles and logics are emergent and in no way fixed. They are imprecise conceptual tools and do not necessarily provide a logical rational sequence but rather can all co-exist at the same time while still being different. This part of the paper provides a definition and a brief summary of evidence for each principle or logic.

### ***Principles***

*Basically principle is a word we use all the time, the way we look at principle is the classic dictionary model. ... that guiding sense or essential quality of collaboration. It is not a rule, but more an essence. What is really the essential qualities, what are we actually looking for.*

*We used the word principles, because ideals are something, personally to me they are something to create whereas principles are something you use to guide your decision-making.*

**State of equanimity:** is the balance between engagement, negotiation, planning, action and reflection processes required for beneficial outcomes. It assumes the use of emotional, intellectual, worldly and spiritual intelligences – the ability to work with head, hands, heart & spirit.

The need for a state of balance between goal, action and reflection was evident in the frequent dialogue about the lack of time for reflection and the continual focus on action. It was noted that this action focus didn't always lead to product.

*... or we are planning all the time, but we never get the money to actually do anything. We have had a discussion that there was a need to do something and we have done the planning but there is no money to make it happen.*

The imbalance was experienced as a tension about these processes (or lack of processes) in these areas and a strong recognition of the need for a balanced cycle.

*... it is too easy to jump to tasky projects and loose the wider project of a more holistic reason for the collaboration and jump to the tasky stuff and allowing it to dominate all your meetings, activities and engagements with people. So it is about who is doing what when as opposed to all that other building of where are we actually trying to go ...*

For a state of balance there needs to also be different types of people for different types of work.

*One of the other things was the clear recognition in your dialogue that people have different styles and are drawn to different types of work and in a collaboration you need those different types of people. There were the task people, the action people, the more systematic planners, people who had that more reflective style and drawing on those styles and valuing and recognising them. That within a collaboration ... you didn't have to have everyone systematically doing every thing.*

Members clearly recognised hindrances to the connectedness and continuity needed for this cycle to be fruitful.

*... there is lots of this little connection stuff happening but it is not feeding back into the reflective cycle and I think it is that monitoring stuff and things will hive off and happen but because there is no formal, well okay what was the result of that, let the group learn about that, let's all hear about, so at the end of the next month, well those things were achieved, these things were stalled, why have they stalled. Lots of little action things shooting off but no cycle – what did that teach us about the way we should do the next thing – it seems to be action, action, action.*

There was a sense that funders in some cases were recognising the need for active reflection.

**Fractality:** is an abstract oneness that exists conceptually and intellectually in the mind. Fractals do not exist in our shared, external reality, which are defined by time and space. Fractals inspire independent and interdependent temporal and spatial actions that each operate as if it were the ‘whole’, a ‘oneness’ in connection and aspiration that allows collaborations to manifest and self-organise according to the individualistic dynamics of time and space. Fractals have a unity of purpose with diversity in action at different scales of focus according to the specific temporal and spatial circumstances.

The concept fractality was adapted from the work of (Levick, 2002).

*The concept of fractality cannot be grasped other than by the human mind simultaneously holding to the notion of the individual being fractally both himself, his family, community, city, state, nation and humankind in its global entirety.*  
(Levick 2002: 171)

The group worked from a premise that there are multiple models of collaboration and with that a complexity. That was experienced as an overload/disempowerment, a discontinuity of action.

*It becomes very disempowering because it is like well I can't keep up so I might as well not try at all.*

Within the dialogue there appeared to be a search for oneness and wholeness within the complexity. There was a desire to recognise and value multiplicity and complexity while also embracing oneness and wholeness within that diversity. Participants expressed a sense of isolation despite valuing networks and networking but recognised that there were times for individualism/isolation and times for collectivism/community.

*I heard it more as a sense of wanting some connection, feeling isolated and recognising the need to be isolated at times but the strong desire for connectedness. That is what I heard coming through.*

There was a strong need expressed for a ‘sense of community’ – an acknowledgement of ‘connectedness’.

**Relational synergy:** is an epiphanic connection that is generated through the ‘stock’ of trust, identity and resources that exists between individuals, local organizations and groups and the energy that draws people together. These combine to form connectedness with others to work together on a project of interest.

There was recognition of a need for relational synergy because people are basically disconnected. There was seen to be a need to break down barriers between individuals and organizations. Some members commented on their feelings of isolation.

*Even though I am working with people all the time I still feel quite isolated.*

Yet, there was also an acknowledgement of historic high levels of trust and quality relationships.

*One of the things that I have got to say , with those ... and the way they worked up here, I think that was largely because of the relationship that the workers have up here or the departments or the way people get on up here. It doesn't matter what protocols or how many memorandum of understanding you can develop which happened in other areas of ... and yet they weren't as successful and I think a lot of that really comes down to the quality of the key stakeholders and their relationships with one and other.*

The development of relational synergy appeared to hinge on the recognition of ‘epiphanic moments’. That is, the recognition of the moment of beginning and movement ‘outside boundaries’.

*A common need that people identified that couldn't be met by an individual agency and then people sort of moved out of their formal role as a direct service provider and went outside of the boundaries of their responsibilities.*

Relational synergy also hinged on a ‘readiness’ to engage.

*... you have to assemble people that are ready to make a leap of faith and that is incredibly important because we don't do things as they were done before. We have got to stand at the edge of the cliff, hold our nose and jump in to the water. They call it a take-off task, whereby you do something that is totally out of your comfort zone and be prepared to do it. To take on risk in order to build trust.*

This readiness was equated with valuing networks and networking.

**Groundedness:** is strategies and activities well-rooted in the communal and cultural soils of local groups, recognising the local context, local ownership/power and control, and local leadership.

A strong importance and emphasis was given to local community control of decision-making. There was a considerable feeling that strategies and activities should be grounded in historical obligations and relationships. For local organizations there was a strength and power in the identity of their name and separateness. There were concerns about taking on another name in the case of joining a bigger peak.

There was some differentiation in what decision-making should be locally controlled.

*But this wasn't a blanket thing that everything had to be locally controlled. It was tied to the energy thing, that there were some things that critically needed to have more local control like design of services and things but then it wasn't necessarily that the local had to control everything. Again, it was a conscious act, the act of decision-making.*

Groundedness was contrasted with mandate in the dialogue. Similarly, groundedness did not necessarily imply representativeness or legitimacy.

Groundedness was expressed in the practicality of people being prepared to give an activity energy. Something happens if there is an authentic wish for it to happen.

*... if something was to happen it would only happen if there was an authentic wish for it to happen. So it would happen because a group of people would say we will make it happen. So even if you had a goal, it might not happen but something else might happen because that is what people came together around. So it was grounded in the fact that people were prepared to give active energy to it so that is where the groundedness came from.*

This shifted (or widened) the lens for group members and enabled the group to acknowledge grounded activity outside and often in spite of government intervention. This aspect of groundedness recognised the different sources of creativity that lead to collaborations.

**Conscious sustainability:** is a conscious ability and process of continually reading the dynamics of a complex world and frequently reframing and reorganising the corporational components according to the changes in those dynamics in order to form, grow, evolve, reproduce, flourish or die according to its life cycle.

Dialogue about sustainability was focused on conscious sustainability of purpose, activity, and innovation rather than conscious sustainability of an organization.

*... directly drawn from ecological ideas about sustainability but the word conscious is very critical as well. In the dialogue in the sessions there was a lot of focus on sustaining your purpose for your goals, your activity, sustaining innovation and a lot of rejection of sustaining organisations.*

It raised questions about what needs to be sustained and whether the phase/stage of a project/group is part of its lifecycle or a way of being. If a 'way of being' became entrenched, a group could lose its momentum.

*... they had achieved something and there was this flailing about why are we still here and what is it all about. There is a cycle in this and a way of being, because sometimes in your dialogue it was like maybe we should just kill it off, maybe that shouldn't happen anymore or meet anymore unless there is something to meet about. So there was a sense that collaborations came together to do a job and so we did the job, we used existing organisations or whatever we could lay our hands on, ...*

There was considerable dialogue about the need for or necessity of conscious extinction – recognition that maybe the job has been done and there is no need to be together anymore. There was considerable reflection on the ongoing existence of particular groups/organisations and their inherent worth.

There was a strong consciousness about not creating organizations, not incorporating, not institutionalising and in preference developing a sustainable model – a recognition of using what exists in an epiphytal way, not being a burden on an organisation but using their infrastructure and connections.

*Yeah, one of the words that came out was epiphytal in a sense that collaborations, if they can attach themselves to existing organisations without becoming a burden on them...*

There was recognition that through institutionalisation, energy and creativity could be stifled.

*They can draw energy from then without draining the host. And the host can draw energy from them as well. And if collaboration was about creating new structures and new institutions and so forth then a lot of the creativity and energy has been stifled. So collaboration was about being very conscious about sustainable use of infrastructure and not creating entities that would just fall over once the energy had gone.*

However it was acknowledged that collaboration did require infrastructure.

*So it is sort of like we see something that is working and then we overload so it is not working and then we look for somewhere else.*

*So the question of sustaining we come back to all the time, we tend to do it informally from existing agencies and wonder how long we can actually sustain that without formalised funding without clear recognition that this work has costs involved with it.*

## **Logics**

*The logic is the basic design elements, the how. Given that these are the essential qualities, every collaboration is going to look different but they will have some critical design elements so we are not talking about one form or one perfect model. We are talking about what are some of the basic design elements present for it to be successful or effective and particularly there it says, the basic design elements for the form, what is it actually going to look at or particularly lack of form because a lot of collaborations we are looking at are ephemeral things, they are not structures, they are not legal things.*

**Liminal Space:** is open, unfinished, decentred – a mental, emotional, spiritual, physical space of possibility and transition where the participants are in transition from one place of meaning and action to another. It is a space of fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, a space of movement and difference, striving after new forms and structure, a gestation process where the established order of service delivery can be turned upside down so that new possibilities can emerge.

Liminal space was adapted for our purposes from the work of Turner (1982,1990).

*Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure, a gestation process, a fetation of modes appropriate to anticipating postliminal existence. It is what goes on in nature in the fertilized egg, in the chrysalis, and even more richly and complexly in their cultural homologues.*

(Turner 1990: 12).

*The liminal period is that time and space betwixt and between one context of meaning and action and another. It is when the initiand is neither what he has been nor what he will be.*

(Turner 1982: 113).

There was a strong desire evident to be able to find/have a space – a creative space, a betwixt and between space beyond an information sharing network in which to be able to think differently – outside and beyond the ordinary. It was not where they had been or where they would be.

While the group agreed liminal space was needed, it seemed unobtainable. There was a perception of exhaustion around (and lack of space for) collaborative activities.

*... and they are tired, they are really tired, so this money is still there.*

*... the basic work you have to do just to sustain your existing practice is going up and up and up.*

Yet some members were aware of its existence (or partial existence) in their practice.

*It is funny where you do it too cause I was just thinking I don't have time for that stuff but then I thought, no I do. When I go for a walk I do it, when I go to a coffee shop I do it, so there are places, but you don't necessarily deliberately create it. ... and you don't value it. ... You move beyond it very quickly ... Yeah, the reality is that we have to do this and do that. So we censure ourselves and each other.*

Liminal space was viewed as a way of operating, an alternative modus operandi

*... and one of the strengths is that it actually allows much more creativity because nobody is actually saying this is what we have to achieve. So what is achievable becomes completely open.*

The logic of liminal space enabled eclecticism to be valued in itself.

*It is hit and miss. Some things might come out of the mud and come really valuable and powerful and targeted but some things may just never emerge and die a slow and painful death and take a lot of energy with them.*

Members linked the need for liminal space to the perennial but critical issue for agencies, ongoing management.

*Because at the moment management committee are so taken up with the management stuff, I mean there are two groups of people, the people who want to do that and the people who want to get involved in the more innovative, exciting*

*ideas stuff and really management committees all over the place are doing the same boring piece of crap. Wherever it is, it is the same stuff.*

They also highlighted the need for pre-existing or latent liminal space. In essence the fulfilment of this logic required a culture of liminality.

*It is not necessarily something as well that it is here and it is not here, it can be something that continues to be there even though all the actions are going on as well. So it might be a space that you create for a particular moment ...*

**Edge Space:** is the living space between various entities and bodies. These spaces are the interfaces. The edges are not lines of separation but ‘zones of interaction, transformation, transgression and possibility’ between the overlapping organisational systems. They are sites of greater diversity, productivity, interaction and exchange than either of the overlapping systems alone. It is the site where form/action is manifested and the edges themselves change.

The edge space contains the actors, core infrastructure becomes apparent, critical enablers are engaging, resources and transformational capabilities meet and there is creation and co-option in order to transform – a space where things start to connect and take form.

*It is not controlled by either party, it is almost, not like a neutral zone, but a zone where different forms can evolve so a bit of this and a bit of that but not stuck in the old structures.*

There was a sense of a need for strategic collectiveness without killing off the energy generated by that collectiveness with structure. Within the edge space there was recognition that community or connectedness could so easily be stifled with structure. The question emerged ‘do we need more structure in order to be able to do what we do?’ There was a strong emphasis placed on the invisibility (and need for visibility) of mechanisms that could engender more connection and unity between services.

Strategic collectivism was also identified as being required for different functions but also more powerful in some instances around particular functions. While there has been a history of collaboration in relation to community development there has been less collaboration around service delivery.

*... it is really hard to go that next step to collaborative service delivery, a bigger step to maintain that.*

*That we still think single agency governance or management of the service...*

The creation and sustenance of edge spaces were hindered by service delivery pressures experienced day-to-day. It was also hindered to some extent by the variable successes of previous unitary models of coordination and an aversion to umbrella bodies. At the same time collective/collaborative work within the edge space was recognised as exhaustive work that required the necessary transformational capabilities (see later logic).

*... and it is not that one is better than the other, but they are different but you are saying that one became very exhausting in the sense of trying to keep some sort of cohesion with the group.*

**Synergistic goals:** is an open and honest combining of goals to affect greater than the sum of the parts. Goals are implementable ideas that may be different but must not be in conflict.

Essential to the form of collaborative practice was the existence of a goal but the goal had to be beyond information sharing. The goal had to be action oriented. This was in contrast to some networks where a lot of people attended but there wasn't usually a focus – 'the morning tea and chat' which was perceived as information exchange.

*...but now that the group hasn't got a common goal but is still meeting, it is sort of a bit lost. This sort of air of dividing, the vibes have gone. And my feeling when I am part of that group or when I sit back and look at this group is that it needs a new mission. A project.*

The multiple nature of collaboration goals in practice was noted.

*... where there are existing agencies that have to work together around a particular client group so it is not a collaboration that is seeking to achieve one aim but there might be a whole series of combinations.*

There was a clear notion that the aspect of synergy sometimes meant the acceptance of the ambiguity of goals.

*... but I couldn't really put my finger on what they had actually done or were doing.*

*It seemed to me that everyone was coming together because they had a common target group but everyone had a slightly different agenda.*

Cohesion was considered to be a pre-requisite or necessary condition for synergy.

*Because of the diversity and the varying different levels of knowledge and understanding it was almost a nightmare to have cohesion.*

There had to be enough commonality to keep people together but also recognising that there is a lot of 'uncommonality' as well.

*... they just sit on the edge and see where it went so it wasn't actually a tension but it didn't have enough to grab them in, but they might move in at a particular time if the project looked like it might have something for them. So you didn't have to buy into the whole project 100%, you could buy in bits of it that you had in common and commit to working on those bits.*

Within the process of goal agreement existed the tension/possibility that sometimes you exhaust people's energies. This logic therefore could be considered to involve synergistic actions alongside synergistic goals

*We didn't necessarily have to have the final dialogue of what our goal is because this is the stuff about the tension between action and goal dialogue, we could actually start doing stuff even if the goals were quite ambiguous at this point.*

**Transformational capabilities:** is dependent on energy, and wider capabilities and infrastructure that can activate and sustain organizations and their collaborative endeavours.

The transformational capabilities required within the Cairns Human Services Sector and the necessity for these was a significant component of the dialogue. There was also clear recognition of existing dependencies: government or private funding, and volunteers. The lack of energy was such a focus in the dialogue, it was apparent that energy was a critical transformational capability. Continuity was also a critical transformational capability.

*Now this role I am in now is also funded by ... and is about developing a regional infrastructure for ... . It is looking at trying to develop an infrastructure in order to enable these micro-collaborations. Yes and it is focusing on projects, but the problem with projects is that they have a lifecycle.*

The provision (and then withdrawal) of resources for core infrastructure was considered to have the potential to severely impact transformational capabilities.

*I think in the long run it was the death knell for them because it didn't continue. ... People became dependent upon it. ... Because the ... which has existed since ... for instance died at the same time as a result of that federal funding for the ... so that grassroots stuff disappeared because there was this resourcing coming in from this ... but it only lasted ... years and since then we haven't recovered in terms of grassroots.*

The existence of critical enablers was seen to be an important transformational capability.

*... you have got a very progressive ... government there, that ties people together, that resources positions that really wealthy ... governments don't even consider resourcing, such as community development workers, indigenous liaison workers ...*

Another important transformational capability was critical organisational infrastructure for a range of functions.

*... often the rationale for collaboration is that it is more efficient, but in fact it is actually more costly but you might get better outcomes. Unless you resource it appropriately, you just can't get the work that needs to be done to put in the frameworks.*

Members gave accounts of the need for existing local formal organizations to provide organisational infrastructure for initial service delivery. They also raised the need for peak or lead local organizations as enabling auspices. These recognitions on service delivery and service development organisational infrastructure were duplicated in relation to critical organisational infrastructure for enabling. There was a renewed call for the creation of specific organisational infrastructure for supporting agencies, but no agreement on how. Members identified the constant threats to “enabling managerial resources’. There was also recognition that community management was in crisis in some areas.

Shifting the focus from organisational infrastructure as a transformational capability, members recognised the important transformative role played by key actors, champions, workers, and drivers.

*There has to be someone driving it. I mean even in the ... network, it is the same thing there, and when ... was on the scene, she was the one who drove it and kept it going and when she left it just fell into a hole for a while until someone else came in and took up because you need that one person.*

Each of the capabilities could be enabling or disabling in different situations. The key aspect was their potential to be transformative.

*So they are organising around spending the money rather than looking at what are their real issues.*

*And people could get together and have a big feed and talk about lots of stuff without any real money there, but when it is associated with money there is power imbalances.*

*... and you need funds and you don't need funds but you need funds at the right time.*

**Authentic Power:** is a multi-directional and multi-level flow of power that is diffused/expressed through multiple sites to enable shared power with rather than power over. It is local decision-making that is non-pyramidal and people driven – the power coming from, the doing together.

There was recognition that the whole policy environment is setting situations where there isn't that opportunity for authentic power. The new environments were perceived to be particularly hostile for small community organizations. The potential for loss of power was evident and takeover/mergers were seen as the main way in which local power was lost. There was a sense of loss of power as major church organizations become like a monopoly that is primarily run through Brisbane or Sydney. There was a strong need for smaller and medium organizations to experience control over their activities rather than being controlled from somewhere else.

*A meeting was called and everybody got together and it was decided that they wanted that service to be auspiced by a Cairns organisation and there was some opposition to that in Brisbane. They wanted the ... to auspice that at some stage. A group of people actually got together and wrote to Brisbane saying unless it comes to a Cairns organisation we don't want it and it came to a Cairns organisation.*

There was a common value around the necessity for power sharing and a style of leadership that was not controlling, a recognition of the benefits of new power from collaboration.

*So that was another one that leapt out for me, fair distribution in the partnership. We talk about equal power, but this is down to the nitty gritty of tasks, equal credit, leadership sharing...*

There was a debate around mandate and its link to authentic power.

*... on the other hand having a mandate could be a positive thing – it has empowered you ... to be the decision-maker or to be involved in that decision-making and know that you have a mandate to commit your organisation. ... and take some responsibility for the outcomes and some ownership otherwise you say well I would love to, and I can do what I can ...*

*It is a talkfest! But I haven't got any power or authority so I can't commit my organisation to anything so the whole thing doesn't go anywhere. So a positive mandate in having the legitimacy to be there as a representative of your organisation. ... and to be able to commit resources.*

At another level there was a real concern about the risk of collaboration, of sharing power and responsibility.

*... what if one of those organisations doesn't come up with the goods and they can just bludge off the others.*

Authentic power not only came through collaboration but also through action – the action authenticated the power. Countenancing, ratification or authentication of decisions seemed to be heavily dependent not on the making of a decision to do something but whether someone was willing to do it. A decision to undertake an action can be made by a group but it holds no authenticity if nobody is going to carry it out.

*Decisions to do something just seems to be if someone is willing to do it, it happens. It is not like a decision, will we or won't we get involved. It is if someone is willing to do it, we will.*

Authentic power could also be expressed through non-action.

*... and sometimes that is very powerful as well, say for instance a funding body might come in and say we want this community to collaborate around x, y and z and the community say, no way, it is not a priority for us, we don't believe it will work.*

*So the authenticity comes from the 'no' action and powerful by the message it sends and validating people's knowledge.*

### **Discussion and reflection**

The principles and logics as presented in this paper were derived from a higher order level of analysis than the summaries that were provided to participants during the field stage of this project. This level of analysis included a deficit model approach. The dialogue was often about the need for something or the absence of something. It was through the discussing of what was absent that we were able to come to the concept of what was needed as a principle.

The group members described their sense of the principles and logics as concepts as 'feelings' or 'thoughts that prompted feelings'.

*These are principles, qualities that guide, that you are seeking to guide decision-making. So if you are feeling that there is a total absence of relational synergy, your position then is to say, hang on a minute, this is not a sound thing for me and maybe we need to step back. If there isn't a groundedness, that there is heaps of money being thrown into this community and you are saying well there is no local people here, where is the connection. They are making you look at your actions and thinking hang on a minute.*

*Whereas the logics, which is the next step are your basic design elements, this is not so much a how to, but a sense of things that need to be there as part of the how.*

The possible uses for this emerging theory were a point of reflection for the group. While it was in some way considered a framework for reflective practice, it was not considered a checklist for success. Participants viewed the emerging theory as a new way of working for people dealing with intransigent issues at different levels - personal, organisational and societal. It was honoured with the title of 'alternative' framework, not as in a dichotomous relationship with a competitive framework but as a means to find ways forward.

*I think it gets back to what ... was saying, we should talk about this together so the principles aren't the opposite to a competitive environment but are an alternative framework. ... And use it to manage the competitive tensions.*

This research project is part of a broader research program that aims to contribute conceptual advances on collaborative ways of organising in the Third Sector. Findings from the first site (Mareeba-Dimbulah Irrigation Area) were presented in a paper at ANZTSR 2002, Auckland (Earles and Lynn, 2002a). The process used in the first site was presented in a paper at ISTR 2002 Capetown (Earles and Lynn, 2002) and was refined and customised for this site.

The challenge for the researchers in subsequent projects is to move beyond our comfort zone to new analytical spaces such as in the environmental and economic production sectors and to engage with different actors, perhaps forprofit organisations and individual social, economic and environmental entrepreneurs.

A further challenge will be to consider common threads and disparities in idiosyncratic principles for organising amongst the diversity of actors and actions and the transferability of (dis)logics for organising across sites and contexts in order to draw wider theoretical contributions. An even greater challenge will be to begin to relate the theoretical development within this research program to other theoretical developments on translation and transformation.

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