

**Collaboration in turbulent  
times:  
catalyst for integrating  
complexity and simplicity?**

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# What is the Collaborative Strategies Network?

- Builds on my report for UK Government on what makes for effective collaboration and partnerships, between, and within, organizations
- Global professional network: multiple disciplines, and all sectors, private, public, non-profit
- Common aim to explore, research, develop and promote collaborative thinking and practice
- Collaboration is an idea right for its time – if one recognises it has scope and limits. Often when it is most difficult, it is most necessary, e.g. climate change, sustainable development, etc.

# What is collaboration?

“Collaboration, by its very nature, means that traditional means of control — market and hierarchy — cannot be used to manage relations among participating organizations. Instead, it depends on the ongoing negotiation of relationships by individuals who are both participants in the collaboration and, at the same time, accountable to and representative of the diverse organizations and communities involved in, and affected by, it.”

(Hardy and Grant, 2005. Quoted in: Lotia and Hardy (2008) pp. 366-367)

# Collaboration is more like a conversation than a monologue or dialogue

*“Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don’t just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn’t just reshuffle the cards, it creates new cards.” (Zeldin, 1998, p.14)*

What makes for effective conversation is when all sides are prepared to listen to one another, are genuinely interested and are open to the possibility that they might be surprised or learn something new.

But this doesn’t mean that people have to change their minds and agree. So often in conversation, people don’t listen to what the other has to say but use what they hear as the trigger for what they want to say. This stifles the potential of conversation before it has begun.

# The tools may be the same, but are used differently

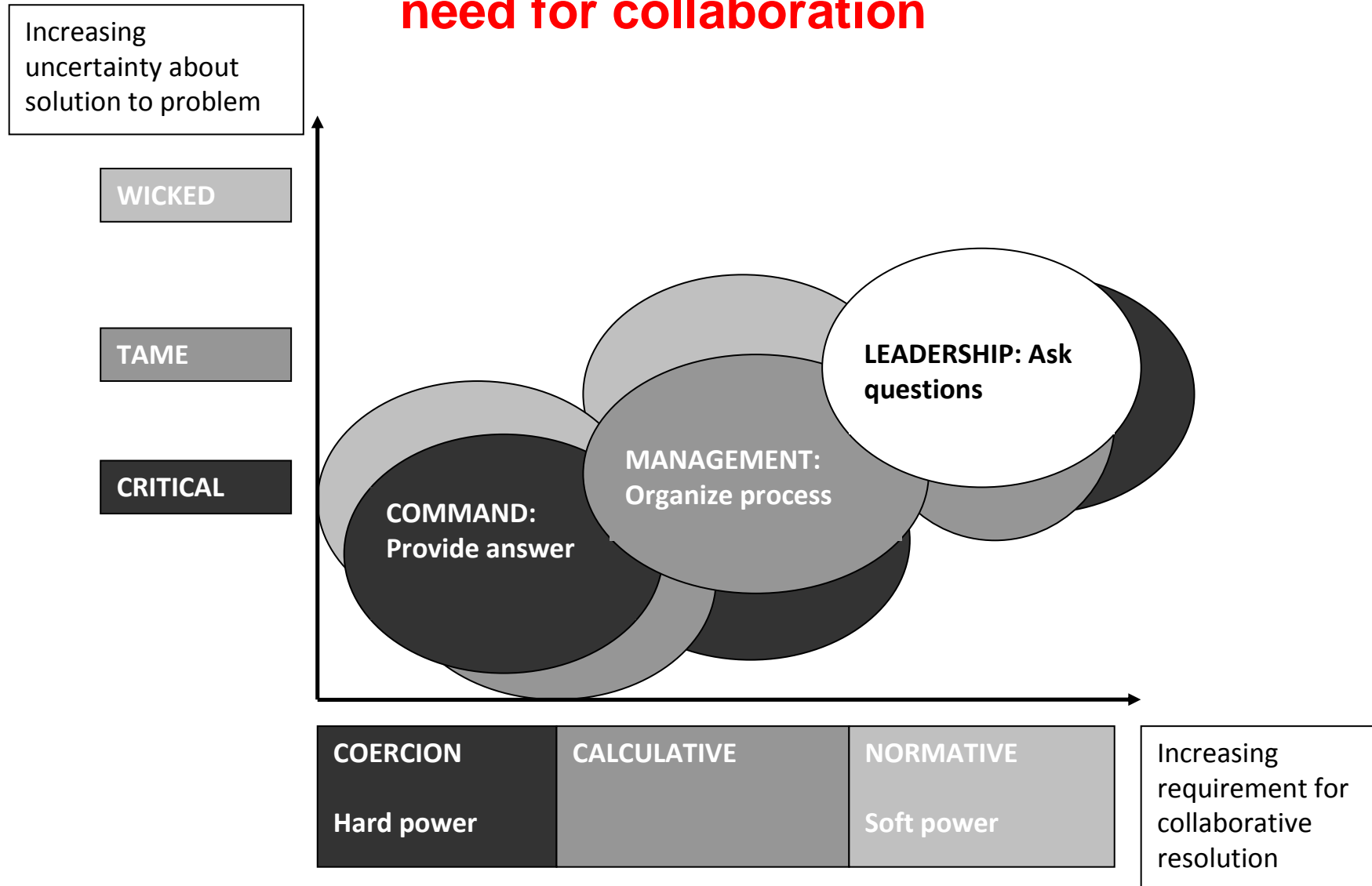
*A rabbi is shown the difference between heaven and hell. He's taken to hell first. He sees sad, angry and frustrated people sitting around a pot of delicious-smelling hot soup. Nobody is eating. He asks why. "The spoons are too long," he is told. "When people try to use them, they miss the pot or drop the spoon."*

*The rabbi is then shown heaven.*

*Everybody is talking, laughing — and drinking soup. It's the same pot and the spoons are the same too. But here the people are using the spoons to help one another drink the soup.*


Rabbinic tale.


# Grint's model of increasing problem complexity and need for collaboration



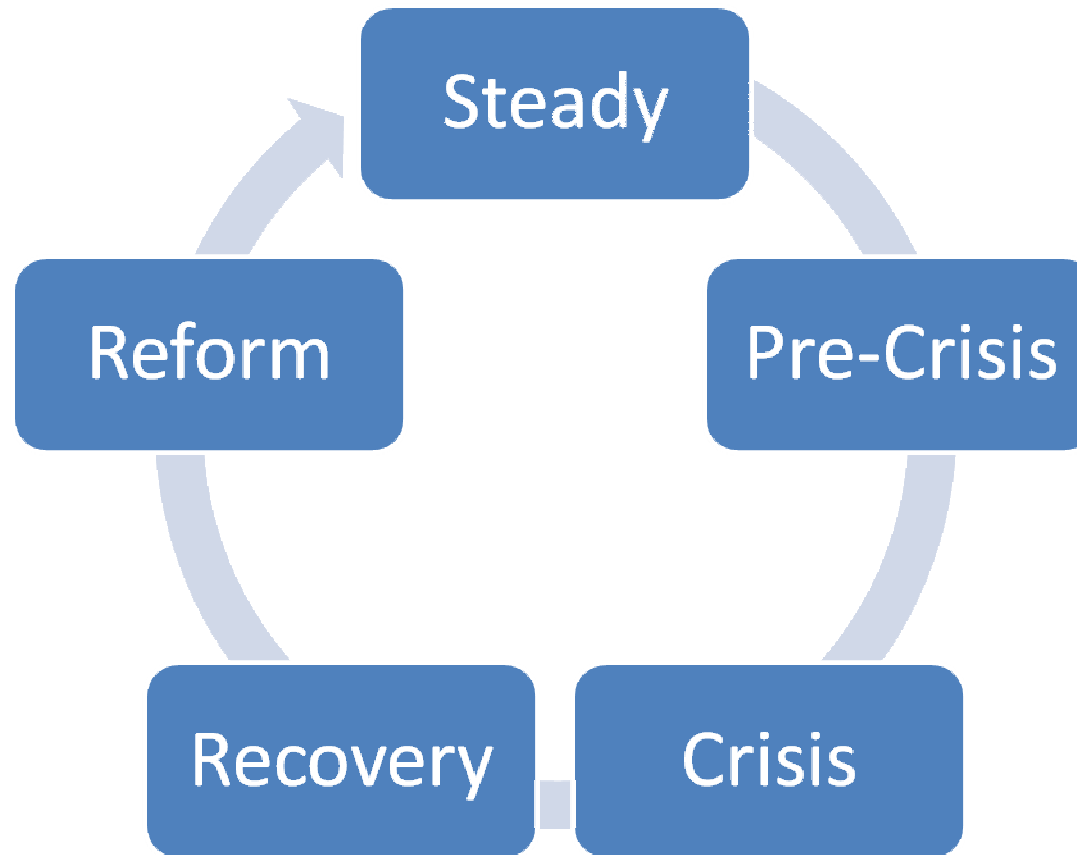
# Collaboration and the drive towards engagement

Command: authority is assumed  compliance

Management: authority is justified  consent

Leadership: authority is conferred  engagement

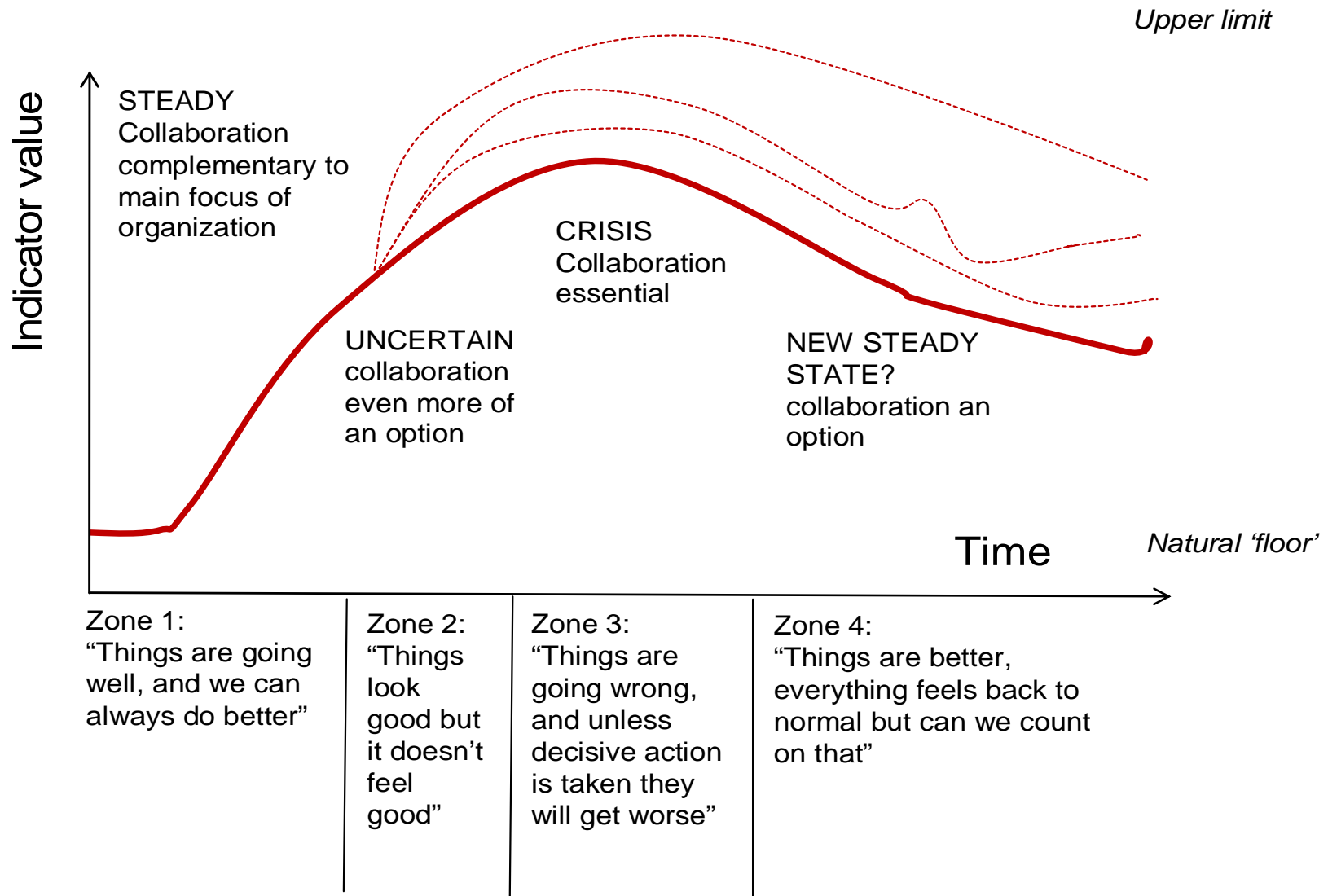
# Cycle of Organizations: Steady State or Crisis?



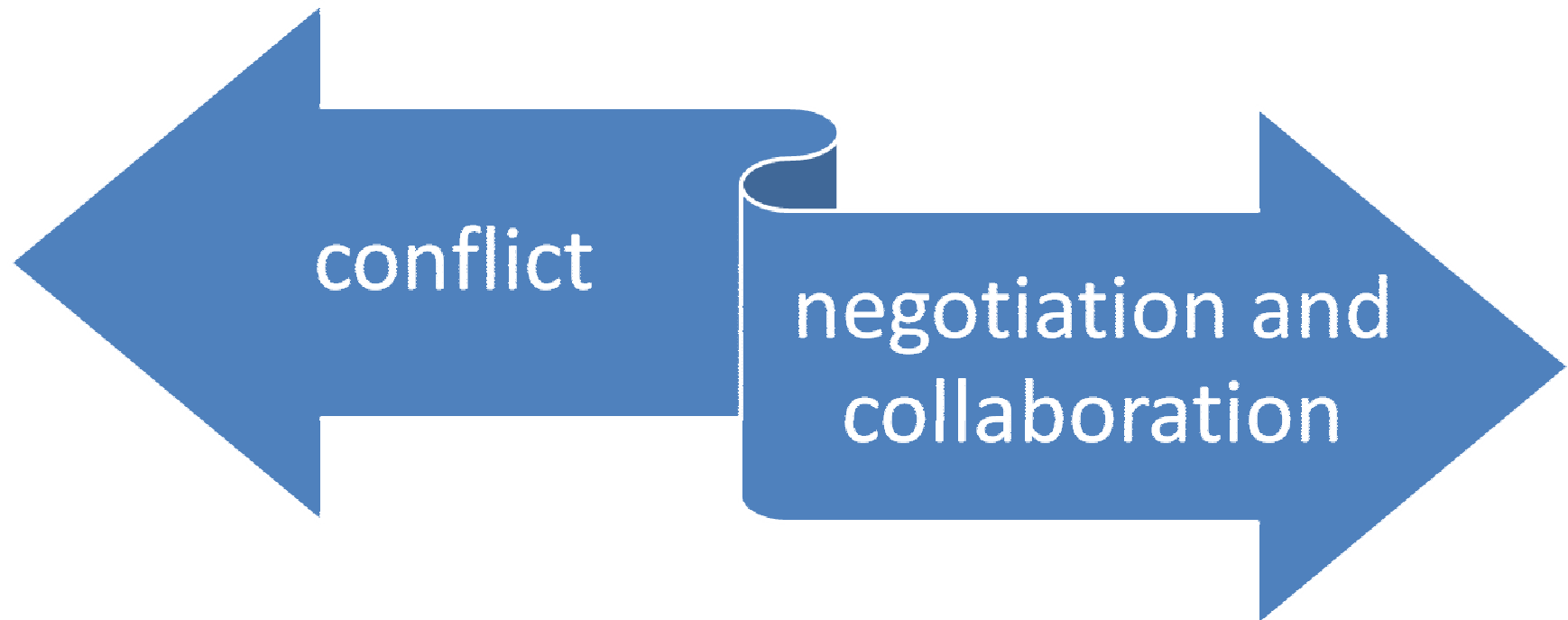


# Collaborative partnerships model

(Source: Hudson, Dodd, Marsay, Stamp & QinetiQ, 2008)



# Strategy: Conflict, Negotiation and Collaboration?



# Collaboration's benefits



Exploits synergies



Avoids and reduces duplication



Generates new options

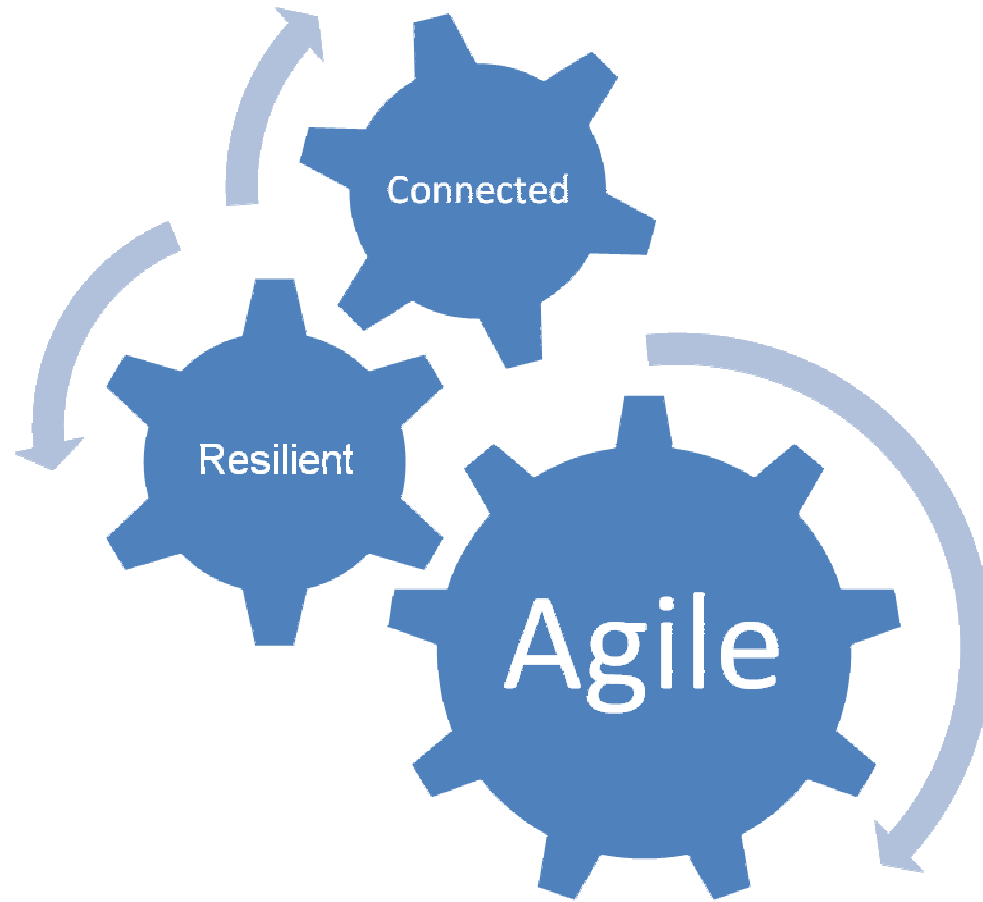


Taps negative correlation

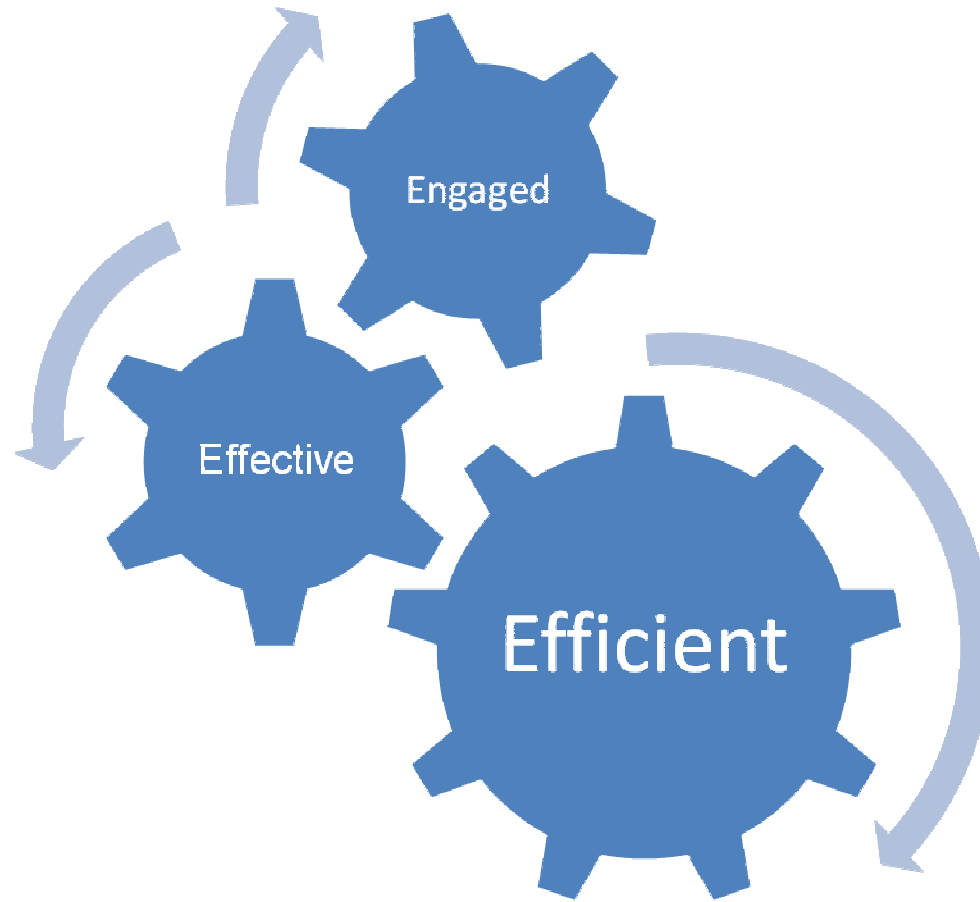
# What collaboration isn't- and what it could be

- Not cosy consensus
- Not compromise on basis of lowest common denominator
- Achieve together what one can't alone
- Assertion *and* co-operation
- Similar to advanced negotiation, in that an agreement is reached that can be implemented *and* preserves relationships
- Give to get: enlightened self-interest based on self-respect and mutual respect (sacrifice is necessary, altruism is possible)

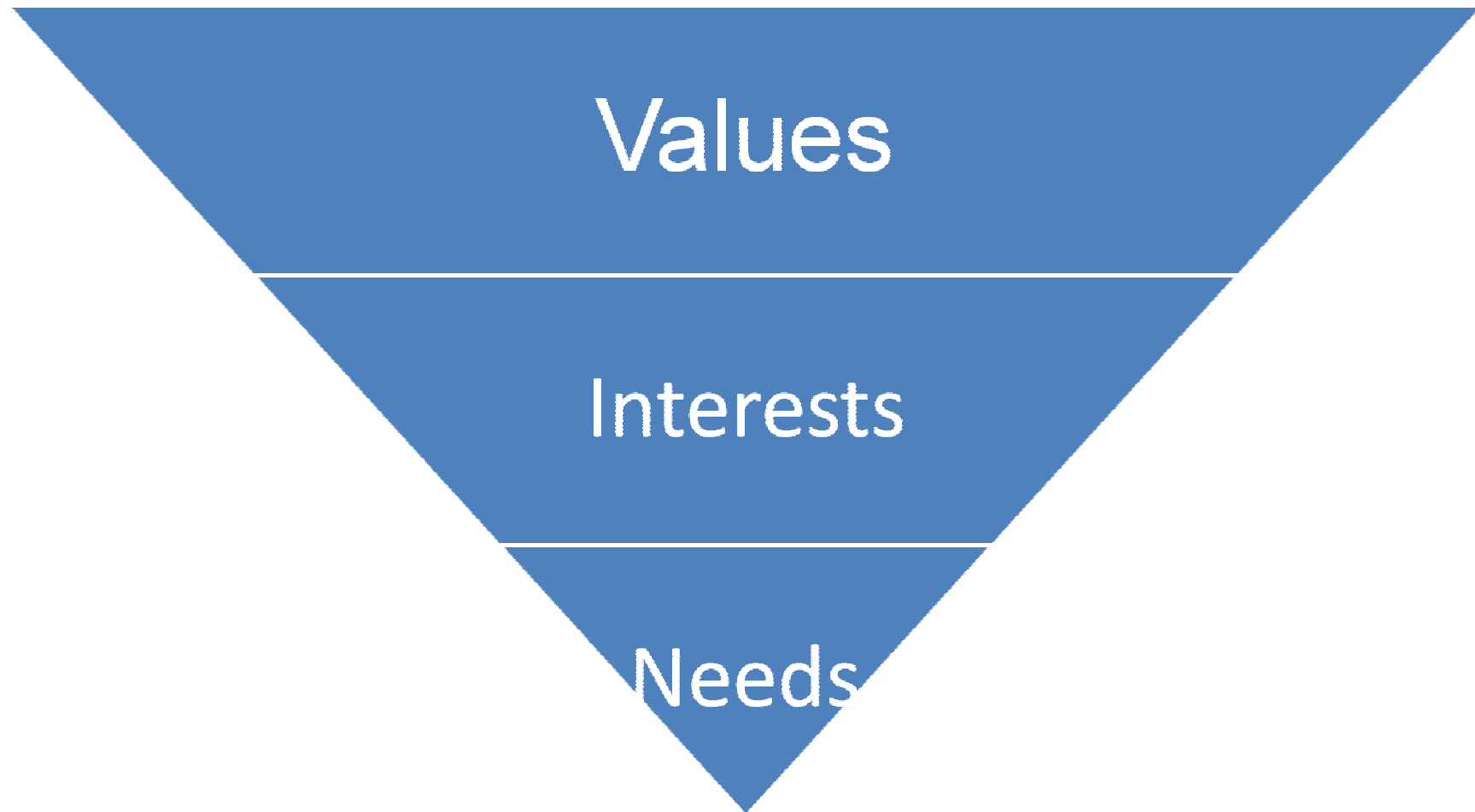
**Adaptive organizations: shape and respond to change, making calculations about competition and collaboration**



**Efficiency & effectiveness cannot  
therefore be separated from genuine  
engagement**



## Engagement's drivers: adapting Maslow



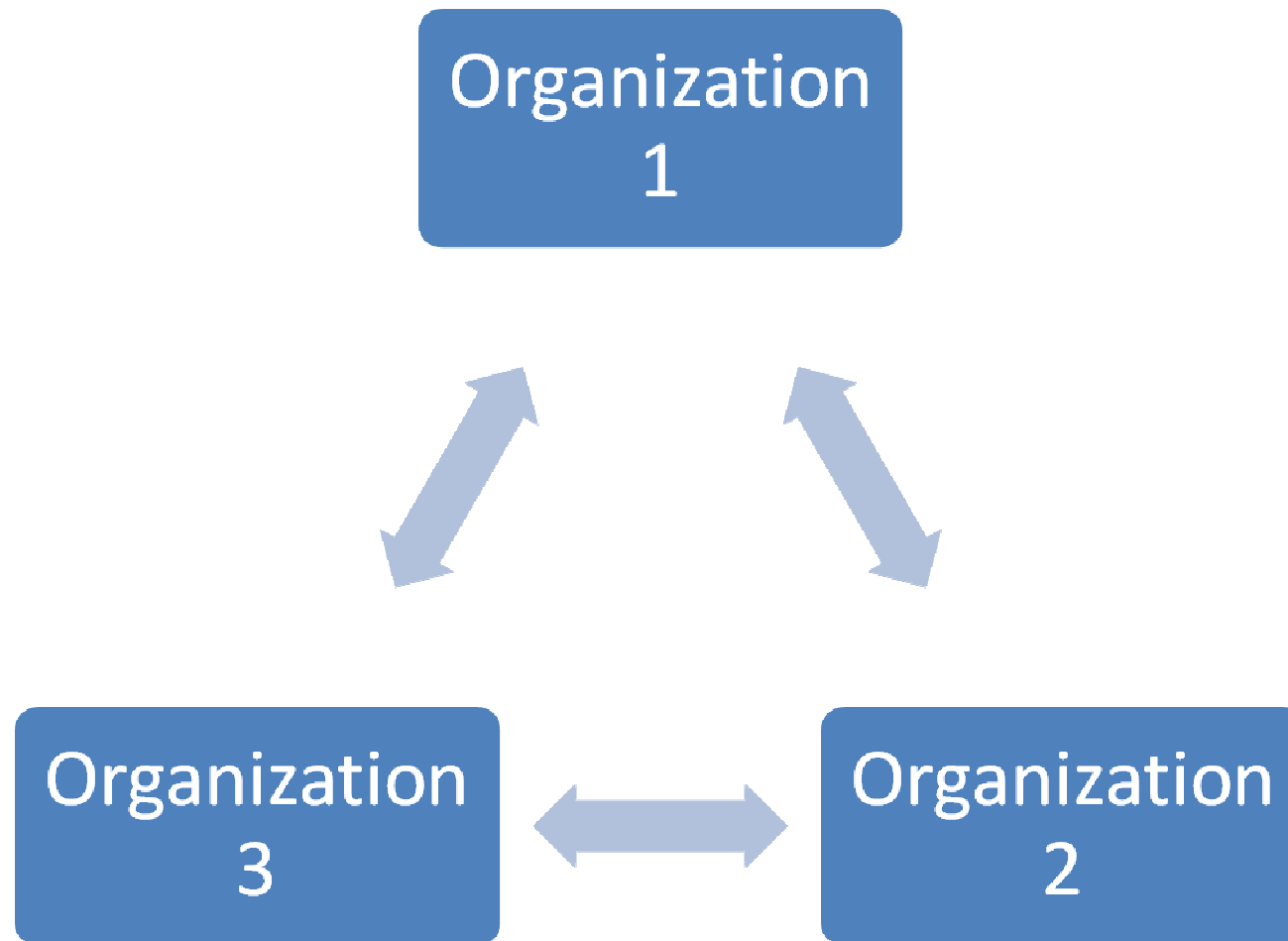
# Lenin's "What is to be done?" Combining collaboration, complexity science and innovation

What can collaboration and innovation learn from complexity science?

That *difference* is the engine for leading strategic change, provided it is accepted or worked through



# Even in competition, there's collaboration – and vice versa

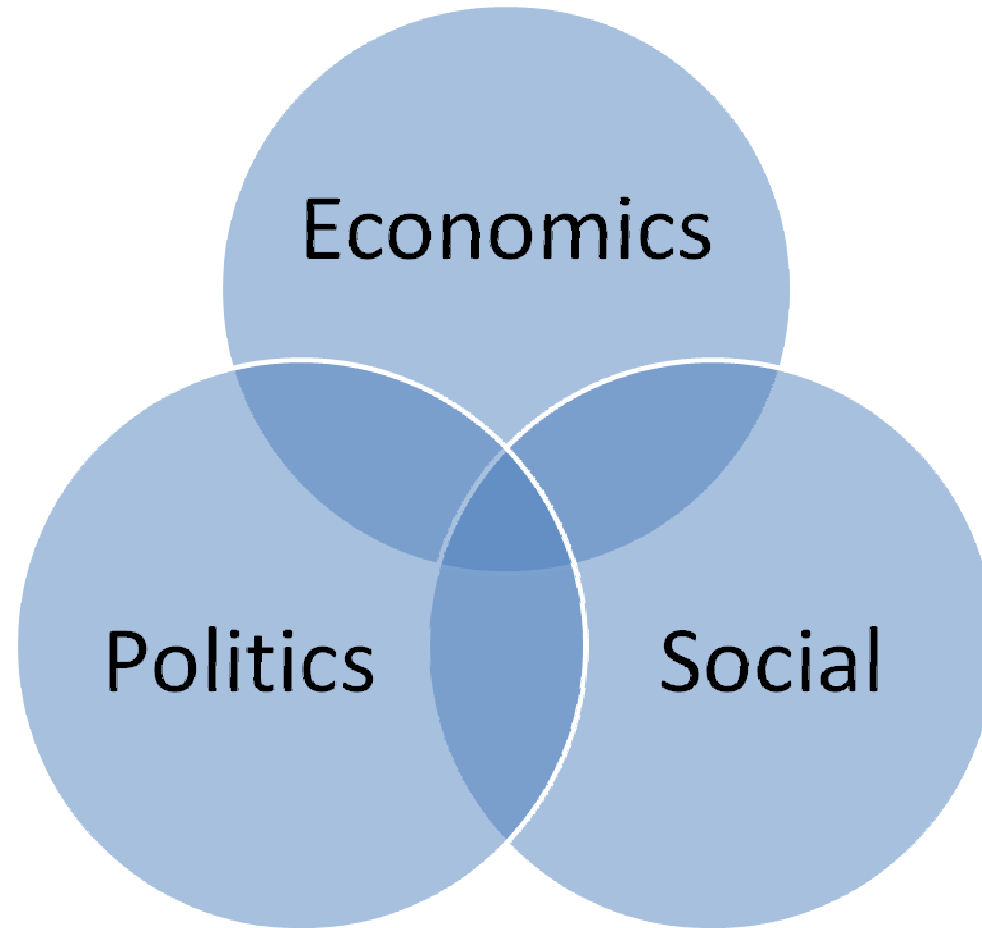


# Purchasers and suppliers: Rowling's use of collaborative strategy

Where the supplier could add additional value to the purchasing organisation, there can be shortcomings in a traditionally negotiated deal. Collaboration creates opportunities:

- **Market strategy:** Both boards want to enter a new market or region yet wish to reduce risks of entry. By collaborating at a board level, the purchasing organisation guarantees a supply line and the selling organisation guarantees at least one customer in the market
- **Research and Design:** The purchasing organisation wishes to develop an innovative product. There may be innovative products, technologies or methods that already exist within the supplier organisation that would provide innovative stimulus to the purchasing organisation. Alternatively, the supplying organisation may be prepared to work with the purchasing organisation at the research stage to create the new product.
- **Brand development:** The purchasing organisation want to launch a new product but is concerned that consumers might not recognise the inherent qualities of the product during the marketing campaign. Using the supplier brand can add weight to the purchasing organisation brand. Eg "Intel Inside" campaign.

**If collaboration is to be valuable, it must satisfy multiple interests**



**If reality is complex, our response must manage the twin demands of complexity and simplicity**

- Sense-making : never one perspective-  
Dodd/Stamp's "Open Eyes/Open Minds"
- Perspectives shape definition of problem, and therefore scope for options and solutions
- Systems interact and are dynamic
- Requirement for both method and spontaneity, pursuing task and developing relationships
- Uncertainty has downside, but also upside-  
therefore needs to be built into every decision

# Collaboration's challenges 1

## Focus

- Achieves what no organization alone can
- Every party has a stake

## Momentum

- Adapts to and shapes its environment
- Each party is mobilised and interacts with others

## Inclusion

- Strengths are built on; weaknesses supported
- Develops ties with other organizations and networks

# Collaboration's challenges 2

When focus and momentum are not aligned, groups risk being:

- Sidetracked (the collaboration has momentum, but loses focus)
- Hijacked (it has focus and momentum, but is not carrying everybody with it)
- Polarised (momentum is cancelled out as the collaboration tears itself apart)
- Fragmented (focus and momentum are dissipated)

# Collaboration's challenges 3

## Trust

- Trust as “conscious regulation of dependence on the other”
- Trust's 3 Tests: Truth, Competence, Connection

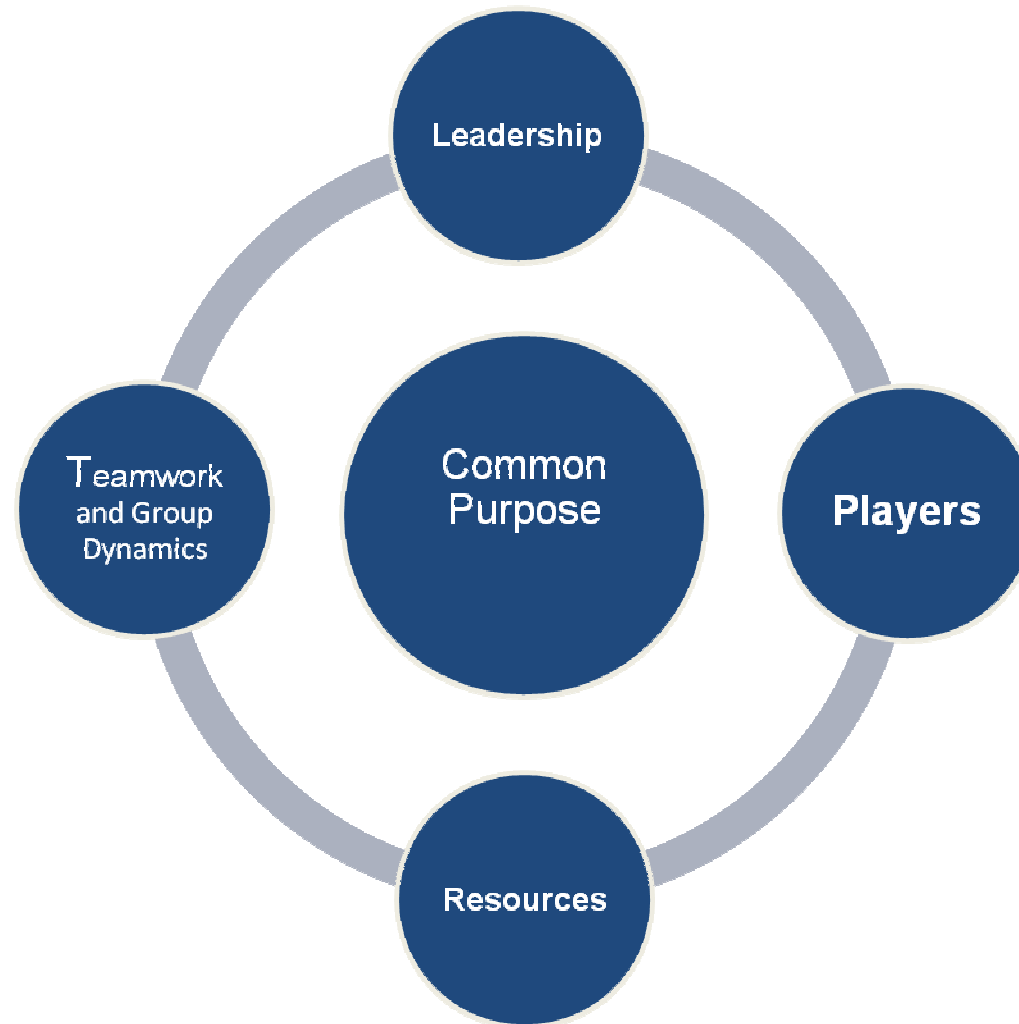
## Risk

- Threat or opportunity
- Reactive or proactive

## Complexity

- Embraced or denied
- Einstein's “Make it simple, not simpler”

# Effective collaboration: components





# Collaboration's critical success factors

## LEADERSHIP

- Focus on a single big idea/theory/plan
- Be firm about ends, flexible about means
- Put value on each party's contribution
- Connect strengths, support weaknesses
- Share and distribute leadership over time

# Collaboration's critical success factors

## TEAMWORK

- “Flourishing” vs “Languishing” teams
- Losada’s empirical studies
- Connected → Generative → High-Performing
- Attributes:
  - positivity/negativity
  - outward/inward orientation
  - inquiry/advocacy
- Losada’s 2.9 ratio

# Collaboration's critical success factors

## GROUP DYNAMICS

- Task: Synchronise ↔ De-conflict
- Participation: Depth and intimacy ↔ Breadth and range
- Agendas: Hidden/Implicit ↔ Explicit
- Resolution: Quick decisions ↔ Deliberation

# Building effective collaboration

- **Think of collaboration as part of a bigger picture.** The collaboration must be aligned with a strategy to deliver the best possible outcome. Collaboration can be at the heart of plan and it can also complement and reinforce other plans.
- **Achieve results with broad-based support.** Collaborators must combine effectiveness with legitimacy. This is particularly important if the collaboration cannot deliver changes by itself and relies on the combined effort of others.
- **Keep up the momentum and secure meaningful involvement from most partners.** Collaboration builders must manage complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity. At the same time, they must accept trade-offs to achieve a common end.
- **Experiment, evolve and improve.** Collaborators must adapt. The collaborative world is not about winning an argument but working together to do what's right.

# Collaboration in practice

A key test will be how the collaboration among all the international organizations working with the Afghan government and local communities can show Afghan citizens that reconstruction projects are sustainable.

Simon Anholt, an independent vice-chairman of the FCO Public Diplomacy Board, visited Afghanistan and makes the point that what is needed are deeds rather than words. “Small power generators were issued to villages and were regularly attacked by the Taleban. Then the local people were charged for the generators. We found that, now they had responsibility for them, the generators didn’t have to be replaced because they fought off the Taleban.”