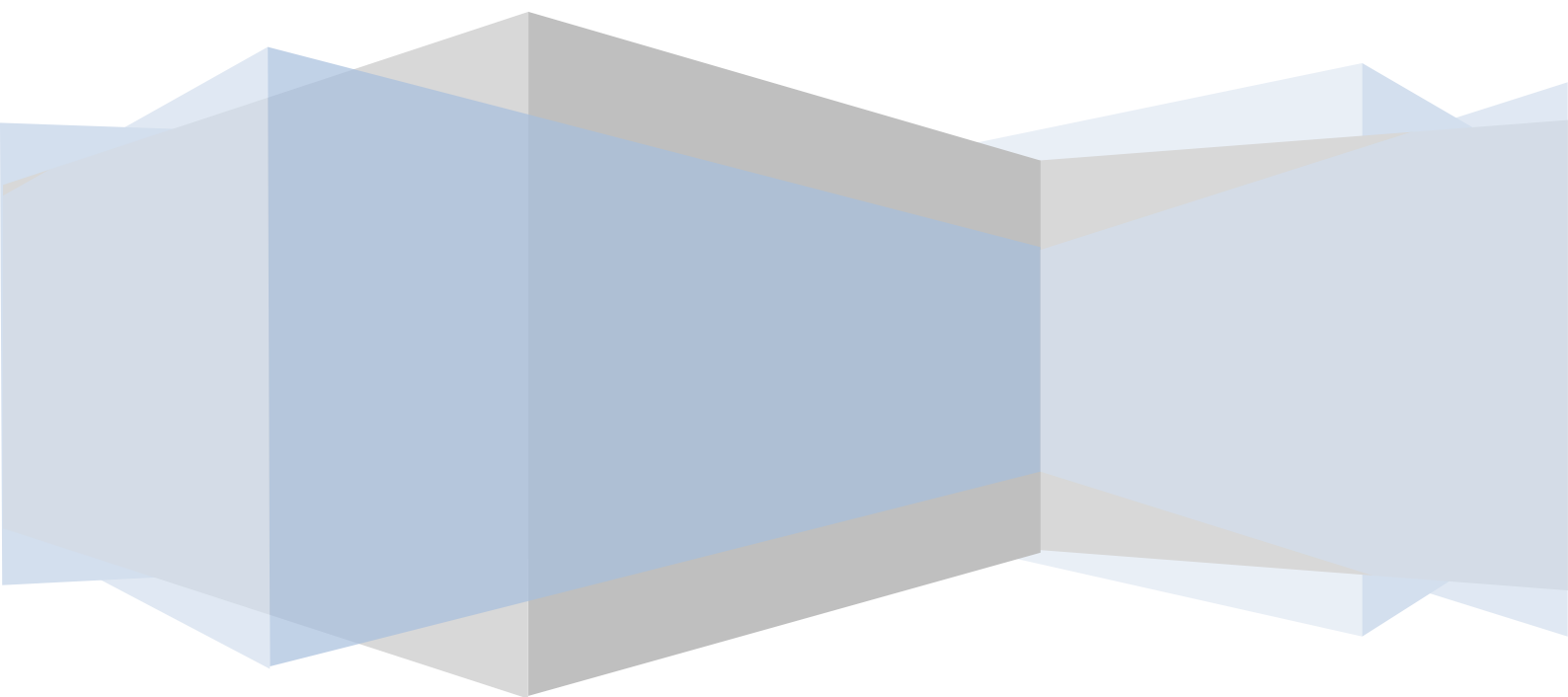


# Interim Assessment of Collaborative Working Practice

Part of an inquiry for the Future Analysts  
Network and the Horizon Scanning Centre

Steve Wells



## Scope

This report provides a snapshot of the collaborative working experience of Future's Analysts Network (FAN Club) members, taken between November 2008 and January 2009.

This phase – the Collaboration Health Check - is one part of a project to explore collaborative working practice in futures work across the FAN Club. The objectives of the overall project are:

- ❑ To explore how a collaborative working approach could bring practitioners of futures thinking together outside as well as inside existing FAN Club events, to increase the potential of the network itself and help enhance FAN Club members' futures work;
- ❑ To understand how well the network sustains itself between meetings (through productive collaborations or conversations, for example); and
- ❑ To make recommendations about how we can encourage collaboration across the network and between the network events?

Based on observations over a period of time participating in FAN Club events, my hypothesis is that a focus on collaborative working (within teams and between organisations) can help maximise the return on time investment in futures thinking; for example by sharing information, perspectives, assumptions, potential futures and the challenges and opportunities they present.

My expectation is that this work will answer some questions and will also pose more, but in doing so will raise a number of issues that are pertinent to how practitioners can progress their futures thinking work and their collaborative working practice.

The following sections are included in this report:

1. Introduction
2. Executive summary
3. Observations and signals
4. Consolidated *Collaboration Health Check* scores
5. Appendix

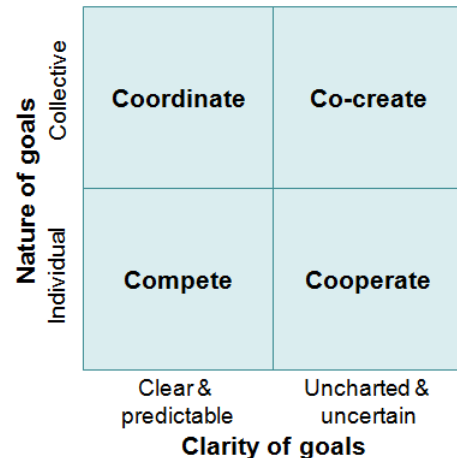
## 1. Introduction

There are a plethora of words and phrases to describe joint working and therefore one of the biggest challenges when engaging in collaborative work can be coming to an understanding about the sort of relationship we are about to embark upon.

To avoid conflict later in the engagement and as the relationship with a new partner is developing, it is critical to be clear about what it is we are trying to achieve together, why we have opted to work together and how we will work together from early on in the collaboration process. For example, where collective goals are uncharted and uncertain new approaches and adaptation will be required. Where individual goals are clear and predictable, accepted 'best practice' approaches can be applied.

This model can be helpful in understanding how collaborative we need to be given the nature and clarity of the goals we are seeking to achieve.

- ❑ **Compete** or go it alone – where the situation and solution are clear and the focus is on self and individual goals.
- ❑ **Cooperate** – where the situation and solution are unclear and the stakeholders working to individual goals.
- ❑ **Coordinate** - where the situation and solution are clear and the stakeholders are working to common goals.
- ❑ **Co-create** or *partner* - when the situation and solution are unclear and the stakeholders are working to common goals.



For the purpose of this project, I am using the word *collaboration* to describe a range of joint-working interventions.

### Methodology

This part of the project is focused on gaining a sense of the relative level of collaborative working capability across FAN Club members.

The Collaboration Health Check - an Excel based diagnostic questionnaire - asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with 35 statements (see Appendix). This approach provided each respondent with an opportunity to review their own collaborative working profile based on five themes: Collaborative Behaviours; Collaborative Working Process; The Value of Collaboration; Engagement; and Relationship Development.

By consolidating the scores from each individual profile we have been able to generate an overall collaborative working profile for the FAN Club – or at least those members that have responded – and conduct additional analysis by looking across sectors (e.g. public sector, private sector). We can also draw conclusions about where there may be capability development need by looking at the scores within each theme.

To help understand the feedback from the tool, definitions have been developed for each collaborative working theme:

### **Collaborative Behaviours**

Collaborative behaviours are a range of joint working and relationship development behaviours exhibited by the collaborating parties to support effective collaboration. The core behaviours are honesty, respect and mutuality and are applicable to both the formal and informal aspects of the relationship. Often, the informal or social aspects of collaboration are overlooked with the focus almost exclusively on the more formal contractual arrangements.

## **Collaborative Working Process**

The collaborative working process is a means by which participants can be guided throughout the journey from early relationship development, through to closure and review of an effective collaboration. A four stage process of *connecting* to form relationships; *contracting* to set clear goals and guidelines; *collaborating* to deliver the objectives in the agreed manner and *closing* to review success and agree next steps is advocated.

## **The Value of Collaboration**

The value of collaboration is more complex than other forms of business relationship. Not only is the value that we expect to accrue to our own organisation important, but also the value that we expect to accrue to our partners and their organisation and possibly our joint stakeholders too. Benefits can be “softer” including improving / new relationships, reputation; or more commercially focused things like revenues, cost reductions, access to skills and capabilities not existing in your own organisation.

## **Engagement**

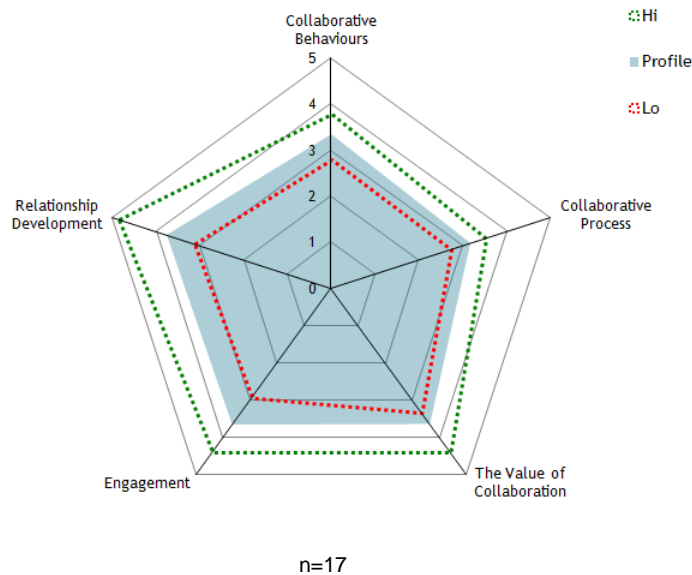
Interacting with colleagues in our own and our partner’s organisation in an open and transparent fashion to share ideas, insights, and intentions and co-create the collaborative working initiative are critical. Demonstrating a commitment to collaborative working through deed as well as words builds trust between the collaborating parties.

## **Relationship Development**

Relationship Development is the act of developing a longer-term association between two or more people and based on regular business interactions. As trust develops, participants in the relationship will become more open to influence and challenge. Informal interactions become as important as formal ones and avenues of communication are always open.

## 2. Executive Summary

A consolidation of the submitted Collaboration Health Checks reveals a profile that shows FAN Club members erring toward agreement that their collaborative working practice pays attention to all the attributes required for successful joint working.



Of particular interest are the highest (Relationship Development) and lowest (Collaborative Working Process) ranked attributes. These collaborative working themes were also the ones with the greatest variance between minimum and maximum scores (Relationship Development) and the smallest variance (Collaborative Working Process).

### Relationship Development

Feedback suggests that colleagues agree strongly that, “we are clear about the value to us of forming relationships with other stakeholders”. Agreement was less clear about having good quality relationships in place ahead of collaboration; about exploring further possible collaboration as part of a process to review existing work; and the assumption that relationships improve through collaborative working.

But there was a neutral response with regard to the statements about paying specific attention to the relationship with potential partners and being clear about expressing wants and offers at the start of a collaborative engagement.

Collectively, respondents may be clear about what’s in it for them, but reluctant to be truly transparent with potential partners, perhaps because of a desire to be the dominant partner and not prepared to give something up; control for example.

### Collaborative Working Process

Collaboration happens; that’s clear from the completed Collaboration Health Checks. But feedback suggests that there is limited agreement with the statements around Collaborative Working Process, bringing into question the robustness with which collaborative working arrangements are adopted.

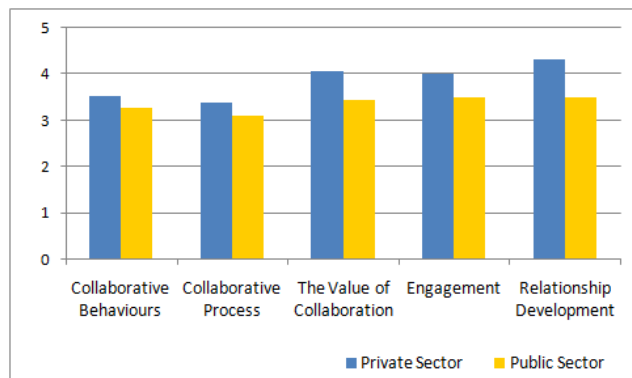
Collectively, there is disagreement with the statement that, “we always seek to review and where necessary revise our contract with our partner(s) during our collaboration.” Does the process adopted provide scope for re-contracting? Interestingly, this statement attracted the lowest score of the exercise.

Highest scores indicating some agreement were attributed to taking collective responsibility - with partner(s) - for maintaining focus on achieving mutually agreed goals and when reviewing a collaborative initiative, seeking to learn from the experience rather than attributing blame for things that went wrong.

### Analysis by stakeholder group

As well as looking at the information by collaborative working theme there are some interesting differences when the feedback is analysed by stakeholder group.

The aggregate scores attributed to the statements by colleagues working in the Private Sector (mainly consultancy) were approximately 15% higher than those attributed by Public Sector FAN Club members.

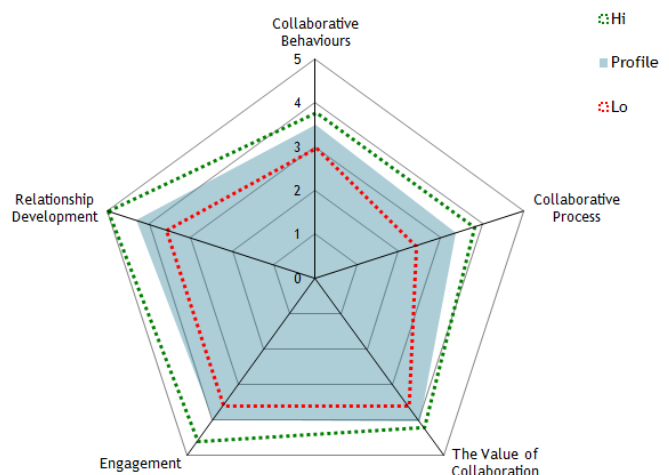
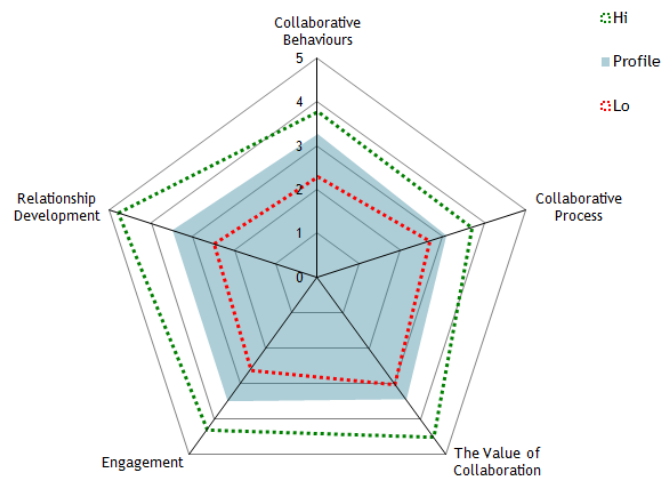


Differences varied across the collaborative working themes; from 7% for Collaborative Behaviours to 24% for Relationship Development.

Despite these differences in the Collaboration Health Check aggregate scores, the profile outlines are similar for both sectors although the range of scores within theme is generally wider in the Public Sector feedback compared to the Private Sector, perhaps reflecting a broader range of collaborative working experiences, skills and capabilities.

This analysis raises the question of why FAN Club members from different sectors should record such a significant difference in their assessment of their own collaborative working practice:

- Are there differences to what colleagues mean by collaboration between the public and private sectors?
- What interventions are in place to support colleagues – whatever their operational definition of collaboration – in developing and implementing joint working initiatives with external stakeholders?
- Is collaborative working a more discrete part of *doing business* for private sector colleagues?



### 3. Observations and signals

In this section we'll look in more detail at the responses by collaborative working theme, with a particular focus on the Public Sector respondents.

For each theme a chart accompanies a description of the observations. The numbers across the horizontal axis refer to the statement number from the Collaboration health Check (see Appendix for a list of the statements in numerical order) and the colour coding indicates the level of agreement or disagreement respondents have shared in their feedback. Green / light green indicates strength of agreement, amber is neutral and red / pink indicates disagreement.

#### 3.1 Public Sector

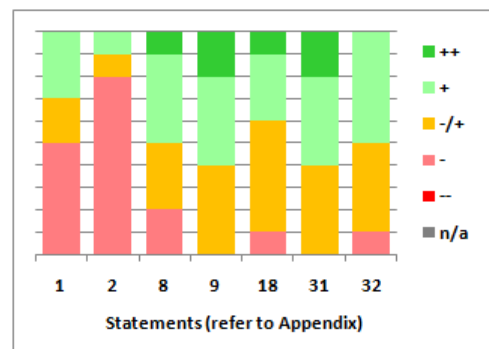
Public Sector respondents gave their highest rating to Engagement and Relationship Development based on their own collaborative working experience. Collaborative Working Process attracted the lowest rating, potentially indicating a capability development need.

##### Collaborative Behaviours

Overall, Public Sector respondents returned a neutral rating with regard to Collaborative Behaviours.

Within that score though, there tended to be more agreement with those statements relating to giving something up in order to progress collaborative working and being open to feedback from the collaborating party.

There was less agreement with adopting partner's ideas, providing them with honest feedback and about how equitable the relationships feel when working with other parties.



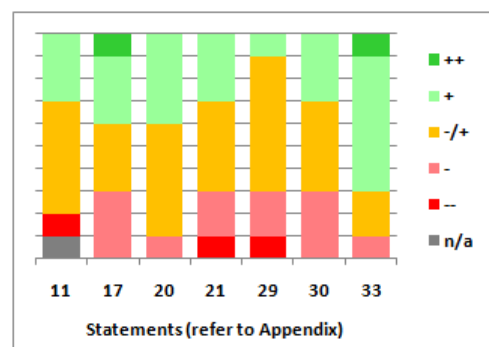
Responses suggested that sharing assumptions about partners with partners is not common practice and that there could be more clarity about the facts known and assumptions held about partners.

##### Collaborative Working Process

Feedback on collaborative working process saw the lowest score – of neutral - attributed to the theme by respondents.

While there was strong agreement that the collaboration review process is undertaken with a view to learning from the experience rather than attributing blame, the overriding sense was one of limited formal process.

There was no feedback either way with regard to joint governance; including joint monitoring of progress against shared objectives and an explicit closing phase for the initiative.

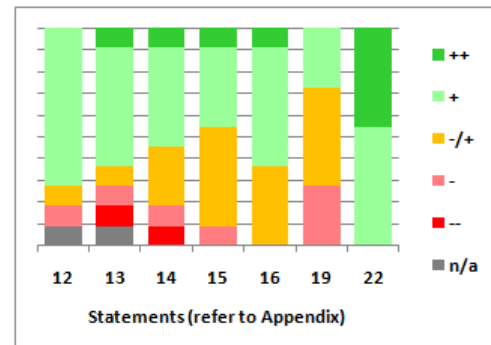


Feedback suggests that formal co-creation of a collaborative initiative; the review and where necessary revision of a previously agreed contract during collaboration and a review of the collaboration's performance against mutually agreed objectives is not common practice.

## The Value of Collaboration

Overall, there was some clarity about the *value* of collaborating for Public Sector respondents; although other research suggests that the *value* can be hard to measure or often based on inputs rather than outputs / outcomes.

There was very strong agreement that, “when we work collaboratively, we create new possibilities that would not have been created by working alone” and strong agreement that there is clarity about the potential benefit(s) that will accrue to “us”. There was some agreement on understanding the level of investment required from partner(s); some clarity about the potential benefit(s) that will accrue to partner(s) and to the stakeholders of both parties.

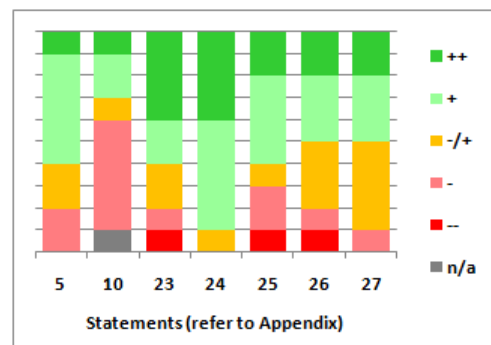


But there was limited agreement on the clarity of the level of investment, “we are required to make” or on the value of the “difference” a partner could bring as a source of creativity and innovation.

There is perhaps a sense here of, “we know what’s in it for us and it’s up to them to decide if there’s anything in it for them,” rather than exploring the issue of *value* openly with the partner(s).

## Engagement

Respondents agreed strongly that relationships develop “as we work together.” There was agreement that partners are engaged early enough in the process to incorporate their thoughts and ideas and that generally the challenges and potential value in collaboration are understood by other colleagues. One of the benefits of collaboration – embracing external stakeholder’s input to and providing a different perspective of our work – was common practice.

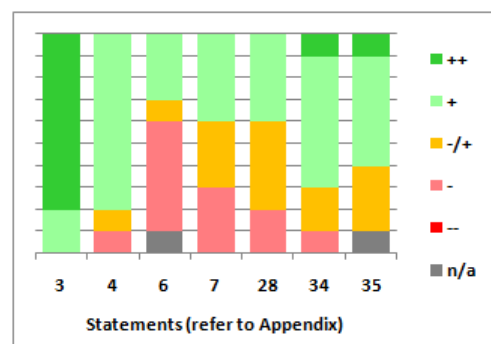


Respondents gave neutral feedback on regularly sharing insights gained with other interested stakeholders and engaging colleagues from different departments to gain their perspective on collaborative work. However, while partners are engaged to determine what the collaboration is expected to deliver, there is less explicit dialogue about “how” the collaboration will work; e.g. governance and behaviours.

## Relationship Development

Relationship Development received the highest aggregate score of any theme suggesting broad agreement about the significance of relationships in effective collaboration.

There was strong agreement about the underlying value of forming relationships with other stakeholders and that it is within the context of good existing relationships that effective collaboration can be built. Exploration of future potential collaboration with partners is a common component of the review process.



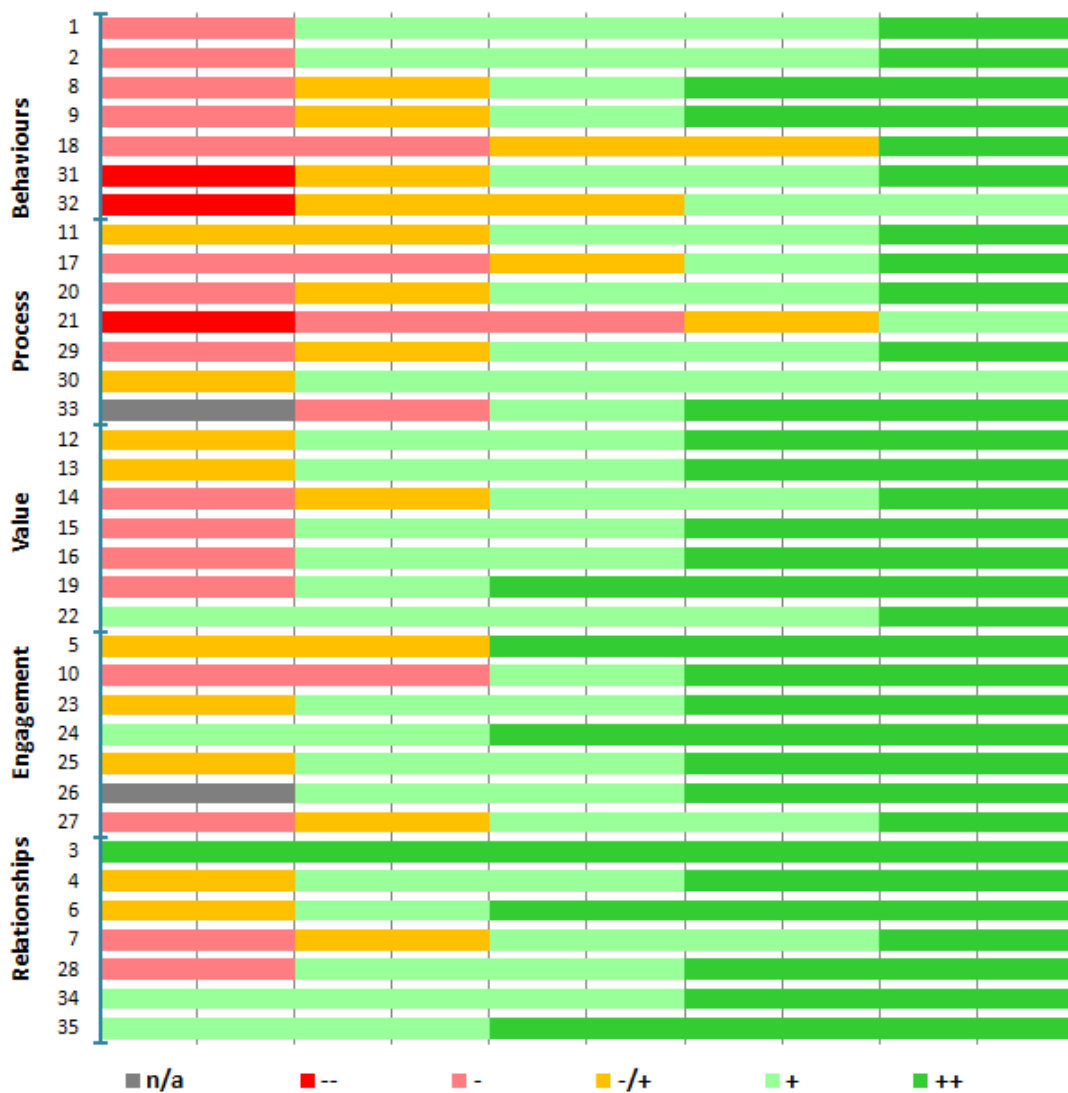
But the feedback was neutral on how successful collaboration can in itself improve the quality of relationships and on open communication channels between collaborating stakeholders to aid issue resolution effectively and efficiently. There is also a question mark over the how much attention is genuinely paid to the quality of relationships through the initial connecting stage of collaboration.

The most significant area of disagreement was around sharing "wants and offers" in the early stages of engaging with a potential partner; an issue that can give rise to a mis-match of expectations later in the collaboration.

### 3.2 Private Sector

Private Sector respondents gave their highest rating to Relationship Development.

Like the Public Sector FAN Club members, Collaborative Working Process attracted the lowest rating albeit at 9% above the aggregate rating given by their Public Sector colleagues. Also like their Public Sector colleagues, the Private Sector feedback showed Collaborative Behaviours ranked second lowest, perhaps suggesting there may be some common capability development needs in both areas.



The high rating noted in Private Sector feedback might relate to the collaborative approach that many management consultants claim to adopt in their client work. But in reality perhaps a more accurate description of their approach is *inquiry based*. Certainly with an inquiry based approach the consultant can get close to their client, develop a detail understanding of the client issue which in turn supports the development of client focussed solutions. Perhaps there is an issue here about the definition of collaborative working, we work to.

### **3.3 Other research**

Other research conducted by informing choices (in healthcare) suggests that it is the relationship between very few individuals that drive successful collaboration. Process - such as it is - tends to govern financial approval or allocation of resources in both organisations, and does not extend to effective assessment, qualification of opportunities and contracting.

In addition to ongoing capability development in collaborative working, there were four important themes identified through our research into the NHS / pharmaceutical industry collaborative working landscape that are relevant here.

#### **Focussing on Similarities**

Focussing on similarities rather than the differences (between potential partners) can provide the basis for dialogue as a precursor to collaboration. There is enormous pressure on the performance of operating affiliates from the centre; be that corporate HQ or central government. There is often increasing public scrutiny, concern for reputation and increasing competition across both public and private sectors. Identifying common issues can bring each sector to the same conclusion; that collaboration can help to resolve some issues.

#### **Motivation for Collaboration**

Focusing on the outcomes that are of benefit to shared stakeholders often leads to the most effective collaboration opportunities. But the importance of individual motivation to work collaboratively is very striking from pharma industry and NHS feedback. Where personal commitment overlaps with organisational commitment - including support for the individuals engaging in collaborative working - then significant progress can be made to institutionalise the approach.

#### **Collaborative Working through Account Management**

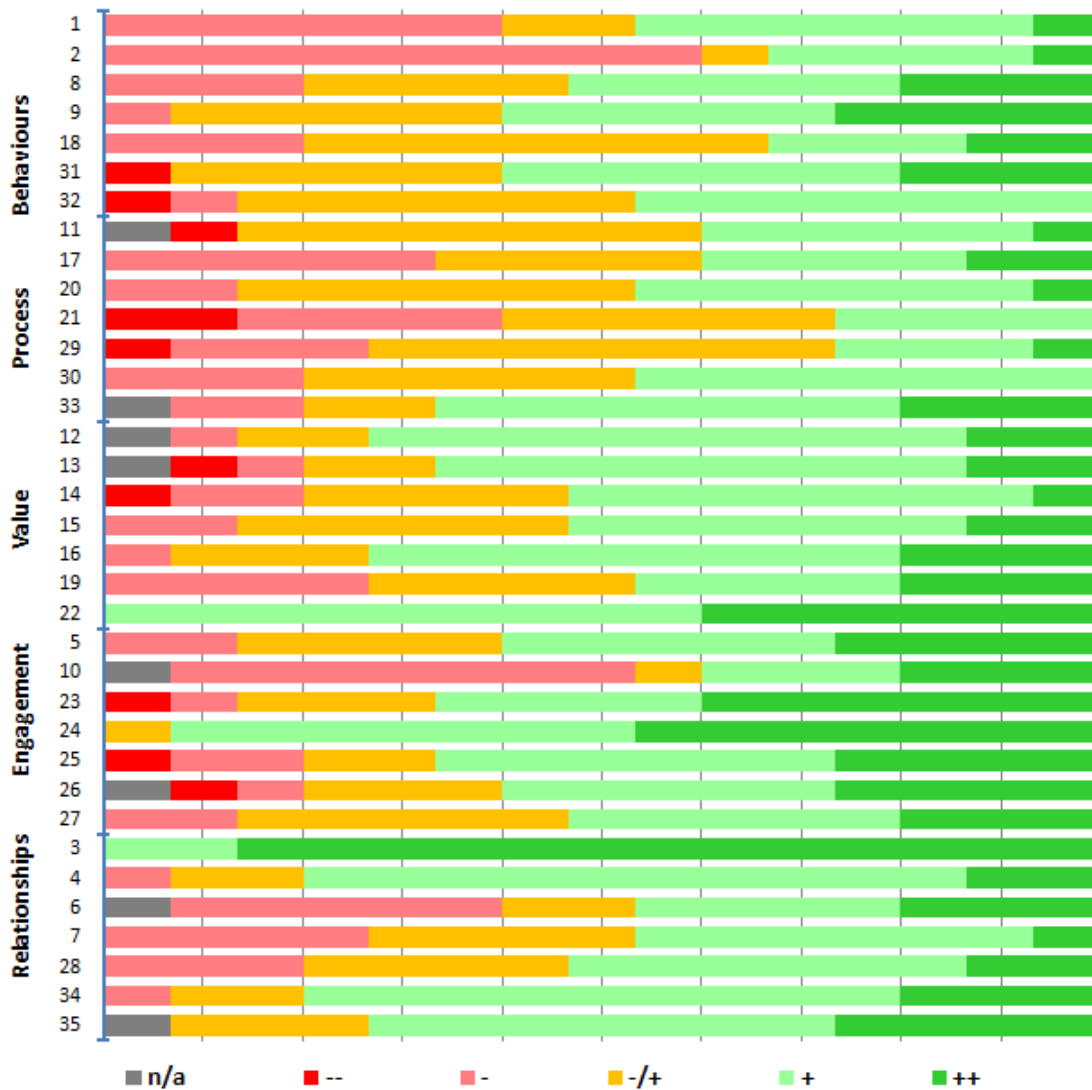
Account Management and the principles of account working are being increasingly adopted by pharmaceutical companies to help develop, nurture and maintain good relationships with their customers and to collaboratively implement health initiatives. Companies are seeking to generate competitive advantage through the configuration of products and services based on customer / stakeholder needs determined through dialogue and the development of long term relationships. There are some questions about how effectively Account Managers are able to interact with the rest of their own organisation, how well supported they are and what degree of local accountability and responsibility do they have. But they are increasingly at the cutting edge of collaborative working with the NHS. What might the equivalent models look like for inter-departmental collaboration on futures work?

#### **Measuring Success**

In many cases success measures remain traditional (revenue, cost efficiency, profit) or very qualitative (interactions with stakeholders, feedback, insight generation) despite the adoption of collaborative working. But Performance Management - if addressed – could help organisations to imbed collaborative working into their culture. For example, the question may be: ‘How can colleagues in different organisations work effectively together to develop and implement innovative futures programmes?’ For which the answer could be: ‘by introducing incentives to colleagues in both organisations to achieve the same objectives in the same way.’”

#### 4. Consolidated Collaboration Health Check scores.

Here is the consolidated analysis looking at the degree of agreement and disagreement with the 35 collaborative working statements, within collaborative working theme. As in the charts used in Section 2, green / light green indicates strength of agreement, amber is neutral and red / pink indicates disagreement.



Here are the individual statements sorted by consolidated aggregate score within collaborative working theme. A score of above 3 indicates agreement and below 3 indicates disagreement.

#### Collaborative Behaviours

- We regularly share the assumptions we hold about our partner(s), with our partner(s). [2.8]
- We are clear about the assumptions we hold and the facts we know about our potential partner(s). [3.1]
- When we are working with our partner(s) it "feels" like an equitable relationship. [3.3]
- We are honest with our partners(s) in giving feedback. [3.3]
- When working with our partner(s) we are genuinely open to adopting ideas expressed by them. [3.5]
- We are open to honest feedback from our partner(s). [3.7]
- We are prepared to "give something up" in order to progress an opportunity to collaborate. [3.8]

## **Collaborative Working Process**

- We always seek to review and where necessary revise our contract with our partner(s) during our collaboration. [2.7]
- We always review the collaboration's performance against mutually agreed objectives. [3.0]
- When working collaboratively, we co-create the design of the initiative with our partner(s). [3.1]
- We and our partners are jointly accountable for project governance. [3.2]
- We formally close off a collaborative initiative with the full agreement of our partner(s). [3.3]
- During collaborative work, we take collective responsibility - with our partner(s) - for maintaining our focus on achieving our mutually agreed goals. [3.4]
- When we review collaboration we seek to learn from the experience, rather than attributing blame for things that went wrong. [3.5]

## **The Value of Collaboration**

- When we collaborate we are clear about the benefit(s) that will accrue to our shared stakeholders as well as to our own stakeholders. [3.3]
- When we collaborate we are clear about the level of investment we are required to make. [3.4]
- We acknowledge and value "difference" as a source of creativity and innovation when working with other stakeholders. [3.4]
- When we collaborate, we are clear about the potential benefit(s) that will accrue to our partner(s). [3.5]
- When we collaborate we are clear about the level of investment required from our partner(s). [3.6]
- When we collaborate, we are clear about the potential benefit(s) that will accrue to us. [3.9]
- When we work collaboratively, we create new possibilities that would not have been created by working alone. [4.4]

## **Engagement**

- When agreeing the activities and resourcing for a collaborative project, we also explicitly address "how" we will work together. [2.9]
- We regularly engage colleagues from different departments in our own organisation to gain their perspective on our collaborative work. [3.5]
- Colleagues across our organisation understand the value and challenges presented by working collaboratively. [3.6]
- We regularly share the insights gained from our own work with other interested stakeholders. [3.7]
- When collaborating, we engage with our partner(s) at an early stage to ensure we incorporate their thoughts and ideas. [3.7]
- We value and embrace the challenge presented by seeking an external stakeholder's input to and perspective on our work. [3.9]
- Our relationship with our partner(s) continues to develop as we work together. [4.4]

## **Relationship Development**

- In the early stages of engaging with potential partners, we share our "wants and offers" with them. [3.1]
- We start a collaborative working initiative by paying particular attention to our relationship with our partner(s). [3.3]
- Avenues of communication are always open with our partner(s) ensuring we resolve issues that arise effectively and efficiently, while we collaborate. [3.5]
- Our relationships tend to be better with our partner(s) when we have collaborated on an initiative than they were before. [3.8]
- We tend to have a good existing relationship with our stakeholders before we collaborate on a particular initiative. [3.9]
- In reviewing our experience of a collaborative initiative, we explore the possibility of future collaboration with our partner(s). [3.9]
- We are clear about the value to us of forming relationships with other stakeholders. [4.9]

## 5. Appendix

### Collaboration Health Check statements

The Collaboration Health Check asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with 35 statements by entering: 0 - don't know / not applicable; 1 - disagree strongly; 2 - disagree; 3 - neither agree or disagree ; 4 - agree; or 5 - strongly agree.

- 1) We are clear about the assumptions we hold and the facts we know about our potential partner(s).
- 2) We regularly share the assumptions we hold about our partner(s), with our partner(s).
- 3) We are clear about the value to us of forming relationships with other stakeholders.
- 4) We tend to have a good existing relationship with our stakeholders before we collaborate on a particular initiative.
- 5) When collaborating, we engage with our partner(s) at an early stage to ensure we incorporate their thoughts and ideas.
- 6) In the early stages of engaging with potential partners, we share our "wants and offers" with them.
- 7) We start a collaborative working initiative by paying particular attention to our relationship with our partner(s).
- 8) When working with our partner(s) we are genuinely open to adopting ideas expressed by them.
- 9) We are prepared to "give something up" in order to progress an opportunity to collaborate.
- 10) When agreeing the activities and resourcing for a collaborative project, we also explicitly address "how" we will work together.
- 11) When working collaboratively, we co-create the design of the initiative with our partner(s).
- 12) When we collaborate we are clear about the level of investment required from our partner(s).
- 13) When we collaborate we are clear about the level of investment we are required to make.
- 14) When we collaborate we are clear about the benefit(s) that will accrue to our shared stakeholders as well as to our own stakeholders.
- 15) When we collaborate, we are clear about the potential benefit(s) that will accrue to our partner(s).
- 16) When we collaborate, we are clear about the potential benefit(s) that will accrue to us.
- 17) We and our partners are jointly accountable for project governance.
- 18) When we are working with our partner(s) it "feels" like an equitable relationship.
- 19) We acknowledge and value "difference" as a source of creativity and innovation when working with other stakeholders.
- 20) During collaborative work, we take collective responsibility - with our partner(s) - for maintaining our focus on achieving our mutually agreed goals.
- 21) We always seek to review and where necessary revise our contract with our partner(s) during our collaboration.
- 22) When we work collaboratively, we create new possibilities that would not have been created by working alone.
- 23) We value and embrace the challenge presented by seeking an external stakeholder's input to and perspective on our work.
- 24) Our relationship with our partner(s) continues to develop as we work together.
- 25) We regularly share the insights gained from our own work with other interested stakeholders.
- 26) We regularly engage colleagues from different departments in our own organisation to gain their perspective on our collaborative work.
- 27) Colleagues across our organisation understand the value and challenges presented by working collaboratively.
- 28) Avenues of communication are always open with our partner(s) ensuring we resolve issues that arise effectively and efficiently, while we collaborate.
- 29) We always review the collaboration's performance against mutually agreed objectives.
- 30) We formally close off a collaborative initiative with the full agreement of our partner(s).
- 31) We are open to honest feedback from our partner(s).
- 32) We are honest with our partners(s) in giving feedback.
- 33) When we review a collaboration we seek to learn from the experience, rather than attributing blame for things that went wrong.
- 34) In reviewing our experience of a collaborative initiative, we explore the possibility of future collaboration with our partner(s).
- 35) Our relationships tend to be better with our partner(s) when we have collaborated on an initiative than they were before.