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# **Understanding the Psychology of Collaboration: What Makes an Effective Collaborator?**



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March 2017

Commissioned by the **Institute for Collaborative Working**

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The researchers would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who gave of their time and expertise to further the research.

This includes all those who took part through face to face interviews. The contents of this report represent an important contribution to Collaborative Working Thought Leadership.

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# Foreword

I am delighted to introduce this research paper from Warwick Business School (WBS) commissioned by the Institute for Collaborative Working which represents a significant contribution to the collaborative working knowledge base which we expect to be of value to those engaged in collaborative ventures.

The work of the Institute in developing and promoting a systematic approach to collaborative working as captured and deployed via the British standard has shown the UK to be collaborative thought leaders. The migration of the National standard to the International standard – ISO 44001 – driven by the Institute fulfils one of the Institute's primary goals of global knowledge sharing.

Engagement with industry and Government has identified the value and benefits delivered through effective collaborative working – see the previous research project on Benefits Realisation published in 2015. Whilst the life cycle framework provides a robust platform on which organisations can build and develop collaborative working it has highlighted the need to enhance the skill base for those challenged with implementing collaborative approaches.

This year the Institute asked WBS to focus on identifying the key personal attributes required of practitioners charged with implementing collaborative programmes. This report will help us all to better understand the need to attract and develop the right people.

It is always gratifying when independent research supports the views that we as ICW have promoted. Most striking but to us not surprising was the overwhelming agreement around the need for strategic thinkers. All too often as organisations develop the processes, systems and drivers become narrower and very much task oriented but effective collaboration relies on being able to take a more holistic perspective. In this way we can consider not just the task at hand but more importantly how this sits within and impacts the bigger picture.

With the publication of ISO 44001 and considering the economic challenges ahead it is our belief that there is a significant role for collaborative working both at home and internationally for some years to come.

I hope you find this report interesting and as valuable as we have.

**Lord David Evans**

Chairman

The Institute for Collaborative Working



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# Preface

Collaboration isn't a new concept; it has always been a necessity since organisations work together. In today's age of hyper-specialisation, it has become even more important. As firms focus on what is core to their success while serving the broader needs of customers and service-users, firms must become better at collaborating. While standards like ISO 44001 provide organisations with frameworks and a common language to work together, it is also important to acknowledge that firms cannot collaborate. Firms are collections of individuals and it is between these individuals that collaboration takes place. Despite this logic, there is little research that has looked at collaboration between firms from the perspective of the individual.

We know from Robert Axelrod's work in the early 1980s that collaboration and cooperation tends to occur in situations of extreme difficulty. Whether that be WWI soldiers who developed a policy of 'live and let live' in order to elude combat to insects that work with others to stop their colony being destroyed. But, what about using collaboration as a mechanism for the good rather than to stop the bad? We know less about that. We also know as much (or as little) about what makes people in firms collaborative. This work begins to answer this, and related, questions.

It is important to restate that collaboration is interpersonal. It begins with people. Firms therefore need to know what makes an effective collaborator. These personnel can then be placed in areas where they will be most effective. After all, collaboration in today's world is important for firms to survive and thrive. This research is therefore an important step in enabling firms to recognise and marshal their collective resources to become more innovative, effective and efficient.



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# Background to Research

by **David Hawkins - ICW**

The recent publication of the international standard ISO 44001 highlights the growing interest in the effective adoption and exploitation of a systemic approach to embedding collaborative working into the operating practices of organisations. Since the introduction of the British Standard BS 11000 in 2010, the institute has had the opportunity to investigate first hand - with a large number of organisations from small companies through to Multinationals and Governments - how collaboration can add benefits but also what were the major constraints. What was clearly evident was that whilst most would see collaborative working as a potential differentiator and value generating approach the adoption of a process based system was less of a challenge than getting the right people and attitudes in place to ensure its success.

In his book '*Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Build Common Ground, and Reap Big Results*, (2009)' Morten T. Hansen clearly presents the case for collaboration and recognising the changing trends towards wealth and strategic assets being more about creating value through knowledge and relationships rather than owning and controlling tangible things.

We often hear terms like corporate culture, ethos and since the advent of the genome project, the DNA of an organisation. One might therefore assume that the operating approach of an organisation is something that is a result of nature not nurture. The culture of an organisation is more likely a product of its operating structure and national identity, whilst the ethos is far more flexible and largely driven by those in authority through the governance they impose. Thus organisations can vary and adapt based on how they are managed, all of which influences those that it employs and deploys to meet its objectives. So the debate continues is it nature and osmosis or process and governance that formulate the collaborative profile and capability of an organisation to influence the behaviours of its personnel.

The concept of collaborative working has been around for a long time. However dependent on whom you speak with across various sectors of industry one may easily be convinced that collaborative working is either well established

and delivering results or alternatively a figment of executive management or marketing department's imagination. In reality neither is wholly true though it would be unfair not to recognise that there have been some examples of not only good practice but future practice, which have and are still delivering significant value.

The world is changing and at a faster rate than perhaps ever could have been envisaged. Globalisation is no longer an aspiration it is a fact of life. Emerging nations are changing the face of economics. The early research work undertaken by PSL resulting in the publication of Future Connections looking at business in 2020 clearly identified the trend towards greater reliance on alliances, partnership and collaborative networks. Subsequent work focused on the lack of skills development to manage in this arena and the wide variety of approaches being proffered as to how organisations should build these collaborations. The obvious outcome was the need to create a degree of uniformity through the development of a standard framework, which could address the key principles, accelerate engagement and provide a structure for skills development.

Historically it has been common practice to select and measure people based solely on technical parameters. This is supported by ICW's findings in terms assigning staff to collaborative programmes. More recently there is a growing



focus on the need to look at both logical-technical skills (so called left brain thinkers) and the intuitive (right brain thinkers). There is an upsurge in the focus on a balance of creativity and technical competence. Yet as ICW we struggled to align more established capability profiling tools to support the identification and development of collaborative individuals.

Developing an effective team focus is a challenge in most business environments but where the traditional command and control structure is replaced by cross functional operations the coordination and direction of activities is even more complex and one where motivation and influence are vital to success. It is frequently however also the single most common point of failure. Where complex relationships are driven and sustained by senior individuals on either side of these relationships they are particularly vulnerable when faced with a departure on either side. ‘Virtual teams’ by Lipnack and Stamps provides some valuable insights into team work for the 21st century.

many case the fostering of internal collaboration is equally important to maintain the focus on objectives and outcomes. The historical approach to many of these interface challenges has been to focus predominantly on culture of organisations, the behaviours of its people, to build and maintain those relationships which are both critical and fundamental to business success.

The challenge as many will have experienced is that investment in cultural and behavioural development and training initiatives is so often diluted or wasted when business processes kick in and effectively mandate by default “business as usual”. At the same time the more traditional behavioural assessment tools fell short in terms of identifying collaborative attributes against which organisations could recruit, engage and develop the skills and benchmark the behaviours needed to deliver success.

Thus if we can recognise the potential benefits of collaboration it was impractical to rely on individuals and osmosis to deliver collaborative working behaviours. This aspect was recognised

within the development of BS 11000 but over time it has been noticeable that in many cases the assumption that systems alone would address the issue. We also found that many organisations struggled to incorporate into the human resource policies and processes criteria and benchmarking that would identify the attributes and qualities necessary to fully exploit a systemic approach. This challenge was clearly identified in the development of the international standard and thus

ISO 44001 significantly increases the emphasis on competence and behaviours.

This current research was prompted by these valid concerns and provides the next step towards greater understanding of that special combination of capabilities that would drive the behaviours necessary to fully harness the power of collaborative working.

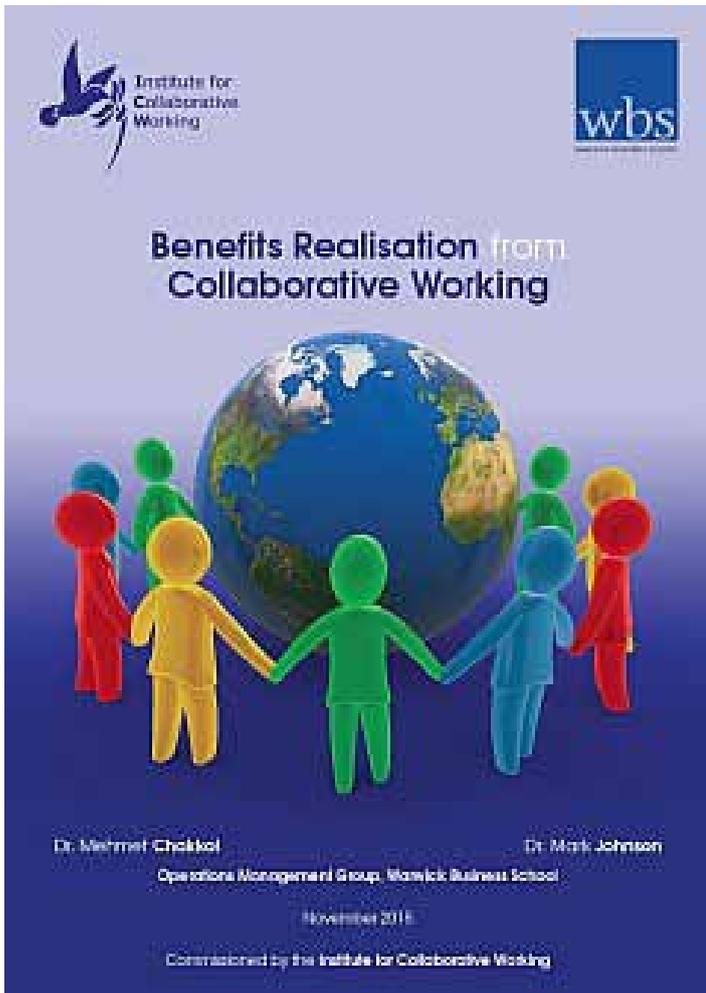
## Collaborative Capability Pathway



Collaborative leaders then need to recognise that their role is to be the advocate of the collaboration within their own organisations, which may often be at conflict with internal structures. Making the shift from a traditional master and slave relationship to co-creators often demands both organisational and personal realignment of thinking and approaches. In

# Research on Collaboration

Our research spanning many industries in the last two years has provided valuable insights into 'collaborative working'. Companies that build formal collaborations with their partners boost their business performance. It had been thought that standardisation of collaborative business relationships would hinder creativity and confuse the whole partnership with bureaucracy and a lack of trust hindering 'joined-up' processes.



Based on our research in 2015, drawing on evidence from 107 companies through a survey, we found that it is only through formal and systematic processes that managers understand the benefits of collaboration in terms of cost and business growth. This formalisation, however, refers to systematic adoption of collaborative working and does not entail strict job descriptions or penalties that counter collaborative behaviour.

The prior evidence we reviewed had suggested standardising collaboration would not be feasible, because it is a long-term activity requiring flexibility in terms of the day-to-day activities and problem solving. But when we investigated it further we found that is not true. Formalised collaboration leads to a host of benefits including boosting business performance and this is statistically higher for organisations that have formalised their collaborations through the British Standard for Collaboration (BS 11000) and more recently ISO 44001.

We found companies need and want to know what to expect from collaboration and they want to know what a good collaboration looks like, especially as they are happening more and more. And putting in place a formalised process does bring benefits. Top of the list is improved business and operational performance and innovations in terms of products, services and processes. Collaboration has also brought more contracts for companies, enhanced risk management, increased client confidence and repeat business, new product development as well as multi-million pound efficiencies.

The study found the increasing amount of global trade, and complex and longer supply chains means companies are more interdependent than ever. Customers are pushing suppliers into collaboration rather than competing for contracts as it is more efficient. This is something the Government is very keen on now, and it is happening across different industries from transportation and construction to healthcare and retail, so finding a tried and trusted method of collaborating through an international standard is something companies are looking for. Our study found that nearly 80 per cent of companies believe they will be spending more time on collaborations in the future.

However we found the most significant challenge for adopting collaborative working is to change traditional organisational cultures and behaviours to accept more cooperative ways of working. This highlights the need to identify and further develop competencies and skills to harness collaborative working.

This report builds on our earlier research that identified the lack of understanding of collaborative skills and behaviour. Across different industries, there was no overarching evidence of a systematic way to document and identify the key attributes of an effective collaborator.

People development emerged as key antecedent of effective collaboration. This was mainly seen from a capability perspective, where the failure of a collaborative project was mainly underpinned by the lack of key resources and especially the skilled employees. At the same time, it was argued that collaboration creates unique opportunities for people development in terms of cross-industry and inter-organisational training. However there was an evident lack of training tools specified for developing collaborative skills in CoPS environments.

An ad hoc approach was evident across different industries, where the selection and allocation of employees for collaborative projects were based on experience or 'gut feeling'. This was identified as a major concern and as such, our ultimate aim for this research was to uncover the psychological and behavioural underpinnings of what makes an effective collaborator. The research reported in this document took place in 2016 over a 6 months period. It included observations at various collaborative projects, attendance at academic and practitioner collaborations and most importantly we have conducted specifically designed interviews with key informants from different sectors using a method derived from personal psychology called repertory grid technique. This special interview technique allowed us to map the way in which an individual perceives another as an 'effective collaborator'. By comparing and contrasting different collaborators, it allows the individual to articulate the cognitive perception of effectiveness when it comes to collaborative working.

As a result of the process we have identified a total of 126 personality attributes which were defined by positive and negative behaviour in relation to that specific attribute. Therefore the entire 126 attributes identified are defined by a positive to negative dimensions. Following the identification of these attributes, we then conducted further empirical analysis in order to categorise these into aggregate categories. As a result of this process we ended up with 18 different overall personal attributes. Next, we have conducted statistical content analysis to differentiate which of these 18 categories were most important and most influential in defining the effectiveness of the collaborator. This process resulted in identification of Top 10 attributes for effective collaboration. Before we describe in detail the Top 10 attributes, we would like to summarise the research methodology in order to provide further insight into the research process.

# Summary of Research Methodology

The entire research process can be summarised as follows:

- The research began in February 2016
- Adopted a specific interview technique from personal psychology called repertory grid
  - Developed by George Kelly in 1955 based on personal construct theory
  - Used extensively in education and business context to uncover for instance tacit or hidden needs of customers. In this research it has been used to reveal what makes an effective collaborator from the perspective of experienced collaborators from various industries
- Conducted a series of in-depth interviews
- Identified 126 personality attributes
- These 126 personality attributes were identified in terms of positive and negative poles meaning that 252 items emerged from this research
- Grouped these attributes into 18 different categories
- 18 categories were sorted based on importance and relevance to effectiveness
- Finally the most important 10 attributes were grouped under three main areas that are in line with relational norms



# Key Individual Attributes for Effective Collaboration

Individual Attribute	% of Respondents	Relevance for Effectiveness	Combined Relevance
<b>1. Strategically Minded</b>	41%	Very high	Clearly highest
<b>2. Team Orientation</b>	59%	High	Very high
<b>3. Good Communicator</b>	41%	High	Very high
<b>4. Open to Sharing</b>	18%	Very high	Very high
<b>5. Creative/Innovative</b>	18%	High	High
<b>6. Empathetic</b>	53%	Intermediate	High
<b>7. Believe in Collaboration</b>	35%	High	High
<b>8. Good Listener</b>	29%	High	High
<b>9. Behaving Ethically</b>	47%	Intermediate	High
<b>10. Leadership</b>	53%	Intermediate	High
<b>11. Open-Minded</b>	35%	High	High
<b>12. Trustworthiness</b>	41%	Intermediate	Intermediate
<b>13. Self-Assured, Confident/ Optimistic</b>	18%	High	Intermediate
<b>14. Self Aware</b>	18%	Intermediate	Intermediate
<b>15. Managing Failure &amp; Mistakes</b>	24%	Low	Low
<b>16. Engaging Personality</b>	18%	Low	Low
<b>17. Understanding the Business</b>	18%	Very low	Very low
<b>18. Organisational Role</b>	12%	Very low	Very low

# Top 10 Attributes of Effective Collaborators

## 1. Strategically Minded

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategically oriented (managers)</li><li>• Strategically minded (seeing big picture)</li><li>• Having strategic long term vision</li><li>• Long term outlook</li><li>• Strategic - long term outlook</li><li>• Understand the wider picture/this is about multidirection and multi-organisational</li><li>• Longer term outcome/time dimension this is about time</li><li>• Strategic or helicopter view</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Task oriented (employees)</li><li>• Focused on short term (keeping to their own area)</li><li>• Short term driven, narrow sighted</li><li>• Short term vision/personal vision</li><li>• Tactical - short term outlook</li><li>• Not interested in wider picture/self-motivated/narrow view/their bottom-line</li><li>• Shorter term outcome</li><li>• Not so strategic/focussed on their own agenda</li></ul>

Being strategically minded allowed employees and managers to see the wider picture related to other partners as well as other teams outside the immediate working unit. Without a thorough understanding of the strategic visions of their partners, collaborators would find it really difficult to anticipate or reciprocate cooperative behaviour. This attribute referred to having a strategic, long term and comprehensive understanding of the collaboration. Research participants identified this attribute as a key differentiator of effective versus ineffective collaborators. These are demonstrated by the exemplar quotes as below:

*"The collaborators have the long-term vision and the blockers, if I call them that, have a short-term personal vision."*

*"Good collaborators think of the wider picture whereas others don't think of the wider picture. So these people understand the wider picture (ineffective collaborators) doesn't. They're focused very much on their own benefit rather than the wider benefit. So in one sense, they are focussed on the divergent benefit rather than convergent benefit."*

*"I think effective collaboration is a combination of thinking about the wider picture versus looking at the longer term outcome".*

*"I mean, (effective collaborators) look at a longer term outcome which meant more business for them and better relationships. (Ineffective collaborators) only look at the immediate bottom line".*

*"(Ineffective collaborators) are not prepared to be flexible at all. To an extent, that's a common characteristic, they only consider their own bottom line at the expense of everything else, and looking at the immediacy, the immediate benefit".*

## 2. Team Orientation

### Positive Attributes

- Working jointly towards common aim (doing best for project)
- Team-oriented
- Team worker
- Taking holistic view of organisations/ thirst for what's going on
- Trying to find common solution first
- Delivering overall goal (making everybody look good)
- Focused on organisational or team goals
- More focused on the holistic outcome/ on joint venture
- They would collaborate to find a solution/walk and talk collaboration
- Opportunity - understanding the value and capability/ability to understand that two parties can build something together
- Very aware of politics but was prepared to fight a cause and be genuine not only do what bosses want/ open to change

### Negative Attributes

- Working for self/organisation (doing best for their organisation)
- Working on own
- Solo worker
- It's all about her/his job - never change the task
- Defending self interest first
- Focusing on own goal
- (penalising others to make self look good)
- Focused on personal aspirations only
- More focused on their personal career/own company success at expense of others
- Outcome focussed/doing outcome at expense of others/name only collaboration
- Lack of understanding and respect value that other
- party brings / non appreciation of the need to collaborate, not understanding the benefit
- Very aware of politics/ and what would work for their own future

Collaboration, in general terms, is about true team working. This is closely associated with strategic thinking but team orientation was seen as a way or a means to achieve the strategic outcome of collaboration. Having team orientation for an individual means that they are able to work in teams jointly towards a common aim, have a holistic view of the project/organisation, a focus on joint goals and awareness of politics and opportunities in order to promote the benefits of collaboration. On the other hand, there were many traits or behaviours discussed that harm effective team working. There was a common theme that self-focussed solo workers who focus on their own agenda, own goals and own bonuses or incentives are likely to significantly impact collaborative initiatives in a negative manner. Respondents explained team orientation as follows:

*"(Effective collaborators) want to adapt. They want to fit in a team. If they want something needs to be done they don't storm through it and tell people how to do it. They get alongside it and work with other people and find out what they think and I suppose it is part of a team in a way whether they are senior or not."*

*"The manager in my team knows exactly what is going on in all his squad because they are that close together. Yes so it is man management and you need to know. I've managed large teams. And the worst thing in the world is you know you have a problem if somebody starts trying to do someone else's job for them."*

*"(Ineffective collaborators) work totally solo. Solo workers. Not interested in the wider picture. (Effective collaborators) are interested in developing new solutions, a new proposition, a new offer. (Ineffective collaborators) have a model, that was his model and that's what it was".*

*"(Ineffective collaborators) would just dictate But they don't really understand the need for a team. They just want to be the boss. They want to be the boss and run it the way they want to run the team in a bossy way. The last thing they want to do is get together with other people and discuss if there is a better way of doing it than the way they want to do it".*

### 3. Good Communicator

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Good communicator</li><li>• Two way communication</li><li>• Communication skills/open interpersonal</li><li>• Frequent two way communication both formally or informally</li><li>• Fast responses</li><li>• Open/confident (transparent)</li><li>• Open (extrovert)</li><li>• Good communicator/listens and talks to people/have coffee every 3 months/values the relationship at a personal level</li><li>• Confident communication</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Not listening to what others say, lying</li><li>• Lack of two way communications</li><li>• Technical, narrow interest</li><li>• Only communicate when they want something</li><li>• Slow responses</li><li>• Closed (uncomfortable outside own comfort zone)</li><li>• Reserved</li><li>• Only one way communication only when they need it/does not value personal relationships</li><li>• Portrays confidence but does not show confidence</li></ul>

Lack of effective communication results in operational inefficiencies and can also lead to lack on understanding on the part of collaborating firms. This is also reflected at the individual level where managers, employees and executives should be able to communicate effectively by avoiding one way communication. A good communicator refers to someone who is open, confident and responsive and sees communication both formally and informally as a two way and multidirectional exchange. Effective communicators understands that it is not only about exchange of information but also contextualising information by understanding other perspectives and identifying underpinning circumstances. The respondents described this attribute as follows:

*“(Effective collaborators) are good communicators. They are good team workers too actually, they work together with other people. They would communicate well.”*

*“(Effective collaborators) are better communicators. They have better communications. They communicate. They are interested in other people, and they want to learn.”*

*“(Ineffective collaborators) would only communicate when something was going wrong rather than when something was going right. So they would only talk to you if they are facing any issues. They wouldn’t just talk to you for the sake of talking to you. Often, often they wouldn’t respond to requests. It would take a number of attempts. So one-way communication is what defines them.”*

*“The major failing of (ineffective collaborators) is their inability to communicate. So, they don’t have adequate communication skills.”*

*“Communication is not just about passing the information but actually understanding and getting opinions from the other person and two way. (Ineffective collaborators) generally have a lack of understanding of the two way nature of communication.”*

## 4. Open to Sharing

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Open (up for discussion) honest</li><li>• Open to sharing</li><li>• Open to suggestions and innovations</li><li>• Open to sharing - it'll come back at some point</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Closed (non-communicative)</li><li>• Getting nothing back</li><li>• Imposes own ideas (aggressive about own systems are best)</li><li>• Self focussed when sharing</li></ul>

Effective collaborators are open to sharing ideas, suggestions, and experiences. Importantly they are also open to changing their minds and decisions in light of constructive discussions. It is also worth to note that sharing should not be seen as only problem based or self driven. This means that ineffective collaborators tend to only share their problems and issues and also attempt to impose their perspective and ideas on others. Respondents described the importance of being open to sharing for effective collaborative working as follows:

*"(Effective collaborators) are both open and honest, they are up for discussion, their opinion is able to be swayed. So they don't have any preconceived ideas, so there is flexibility with those individuals. (Ineffective collaborators) are the opposite, closed minded, and fixed opinion. They shut down and you don't know what they are thinking and also they have a fixed mind, that made up mind, that there is no way that they will change that mind. They are not willing to hear suggestions."*

*"(Effective collaborators) are very open to new suggestions and being proved wrong. If you're working, if you come up with something when you're working together that it's new, they'll take into account. They don't need to have the last word. They will be open to innovation and open to suggestion and innovation."*

*"Because you're sharing opinions and that share is in force, opinions, feelings all sorts of sharing, it's not just about share and tasks, it's about sharing behaviours, feeling, emotions, and if one side is closed to that, then it's...you can't have one-way sharing, you need both parties to be willing to share thoughts."*

*"(Ineffective collaborators) try to impose their own company's culture onto the client and basically they don't care what the client wants. They want to impose their way. Also they're also very aggressive about their own systems being best."*

## 5. Creative and Innovative

### Positive Attributes

- Imaginative/creative
- Intelligent: thinking outside the box / innovative
- Innovative, imaginative, more than transaction

### Negative Attributes

- Narrow minded (not exploring alternatives)
- Less intelligent: not too innovative
- Too price and commodity focused/ seeing nothing beyond the utility of working together

Being creative and innovative has been seen as a fundamental part of high technology and design oriented tasks. It is also significantly important to the way in which collaboration occurs in practice. Collaborative working generally means moving away from traditional, competitive and cost driven working cultures. This essentially requires new ways of thinking, changing the status quo as well as being innovative and intelligent with problem solving. Being creative and innovative also means going beyond the job description and finding intelligent solutions to emergent partnering problems. The respondents described this personality attribute as follows:

*“(Effective collaborators) are imaginative and creative and they come up with solutions. And the other end is narrow-minded. We’ve always done it this way, so we’ll continue to do it that way. Or my company, so it’s this way. So we’re not gonna try and find a new solution together, being reluctant to creativity and being narrow-minded.”*

*“And, ah, what does it mean if someone is intelligent in this collaborative context? Well, perhaps it goes along with an ability to think on your feet, and to think outside the box and to sort of explore things. Think outside the box. Collaboration is about innovation, to a large extent”.*

*“(Ineffective collaborators) won’t be innovators. They won’t be innovative innovators. If it’s in the job description, they will aim to do it. But they won’t go out on a limb and try to do it on their own judgment. I mean it is a very difficult job description to write as well.”*

## 6. Empathetic

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aware of others (emotional intelligence) being a good leader</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Empathy with own team and customers</li> <li>• Emotionally aware (Goldman's EQ)</li> <li>• Treats others as individuals</li> <li>• Willing to help others/offering to assist</li> <li>• Interested in helping you value the others</li> <li>• Also understands others and other stakeholders</li> <li>• Recognises needs of others/and need to collaborate and help</li> <li>• Customer focussed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't care for others</li> <li>• Selfish</li> <li>• Zero empathy (sociopath/evil/Satan)</li> <li>• Focused on own tasks and business</li> <li>• Viewing people as obstacle/vehicles (Low EQ Goldman)</li> <li>• Everybody's the same</li> <li>• Not interested in helping others if not their responsibility</li> <li>• Does not care about others/not interested in relationships</li> <li>• Focussed on their own outcome</li> <li>• Single-minded about own needs/suspicious of others</li> <li>• Inward focussed on personal level/selfish</li> </ul>

Empathy as a personality attribute seems to also be linked to more effective collaboration. It is required for the person to fully understand the other parties' perspectives and relate to their position and perspective. It also enables delivering value in a customised manner instead of mechanically working according to the technical requirements set by the contract. Essentially, this dimension is about recognising the needs of others involved in the collaborative efforts.

*"It is the understanding about having the empathy with the other person is going through. Yeah it is having the understanding that that person did the best they could at that particular moment in time. Just leave him alone. Nobody gets 100% decisions right."*

*"His (ineffective collaborator) biggest problem is empathy He doesn't care about anybody else but him."*

*"In collaboration you need to, sometimes you need to go beyond the expectations of the contract and adapt to the particular customer's situation and you try to help the people in the customer side, okay, because everybody has their own agendas and stuff. So understanding all of the collaboration, how it works, not only in a mechanical way, but, the word I like to use is empathy."*

*"So you really have to be empathetic to understand what's going on, on the other side. So to me if you, in the dimension of personal relationships the key attribute for me*

*is empathy, because if you sympathise and you know what's going with the other side then you can collaborate."*

*"And I think there would be a very interesting correlation between people who are emotionally intelligent and who are good at collaborating. So to be aware of other people and have emotional intelligence is fundamental."*

*"(Ineffective collaborators) has a very low EQ, in fact to the point where he doesn't... he just can't deal with emotional stuff. He can't deal with people. He has somebody else to actually do that. So, he has managers who work for him, who actually when they want to sack somebody get HR to do it, they can't do it. They cannot take on board these emotions."*

## 7. Believe in Collaboration

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focused on relationship (sharing ideas, information)</li><li>• Belief in benefits of collaboration – passion</li><li>• Understand the theory of collaboration</li><li>• Trying to encourage a culture of collaboration</li><li>• Capability - relationship building/ continues to maintain communication and relationship (trait about how people use others whether for value and or short term gains)</li><li>• Sees collaboration as a key way of problem solving believe that collaboration is designed to fix this</li><li>• Interested in relationships/involving people/willing to take risks/interested in qualitative outcome</li><li>• Walk the talk/commitment/actually do it/collaboration in their mind-set, belief</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focused on contract</li><li>• Putting collaboration down</li><li>• Doesn't understand theory as it takes them out of comfort zone</li><li>• Trying to damage relationship</li><li>• Fix everything through a contract/no scope for relationship</li><li>• Bought into collaboration until it meets a problem, easily revert to traditional behaviour</li><li>• Interested in outcomes/seeking immediate benefits/interested in how much money he got out/prepared to destroy the relationship</li><li>• Do not initiate collaboration/not proactive/not intuitive collaborator/ Do not believe in collaboration</li></ul>

Employees and managers that are committed to the collaboration seem to yield more effective results from the collaboration. They have often an inherent belief that collaboration will deliver superior output compared to other means, which then becomes practically a very positive self-proclaimed prophecy. They understand how collaboration works and are both focused on collaborative relationships as well as fostering a creation of collaborative in their organisations. Finally, the people committed to collaboration also 'walk the talk' as in the words of the respondents:

*"(Average collaborators), yes, they're collaborative, yes, they're helpful, yes, they're friendly but they don't seem as committed."*

*"And (most effective collaborators) they walk the walk, they are committed, they actually do the collaboration, collaboration is in their mindsets. (Average collaborators) do not initiate collaboration, not proactively and they're not intuitive about collaboration."*

*"And that is the culture change that I was talking about. I mentioned that the two people are the ambassador. Those people have to turn the CEOs vision from the golf course into a reality."*

*"I believe whatever the relationship ambition is, it needs to be seen in the context of the*

*organisational ambitions and how it contributes to them. Because if that doesn't support the organisation ambitions, people won't support it or will be less likely to."*

*"So I mean, that one out there is, just don't believe in collaboration..."*

*"It's based on, we believe that if you bring people together early, no one knows everything, and if you bring people together early, you will get a much better, um, leverage, leverage on that, on their ideas, than if you bring them together later. So first they need to meet and they need to meet early, in the building process, and you have got to have integrated teams all along, just like the Ina Report stated back in 98 or whenever it was. So that's still true in our model."*

*"We also believe that people who work with each other instead of against each other will produce superior results."*

*"There is just a passion within these guys that hasn't yet been lit within this person. These people believe that there is benefit there, they're convinced there is real belief, that collaborative working will benefit."*

*"And although they don't know how it's going to happen, how, how they are better at recognising than the competitive situation, the business situation and what it takes for their own organisations. How the collaboration will benefit their own organisations. So they believe in the collaboration."*

## 8. Good Listener

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Good listener</li><li>• Listener</li><li>• Listening</li><li>• Very good listeners</li><li>• Listening to others before making judgements/curious to make sure own judgement is correct</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talks over everyone</li><li>• Comes with an agenda</li><li>• Doesn't listen (only hears)</li><li>• Their way is the right way</li><li>• Judging something based on e.g. a document instead of talking to people before judgement</li></ul>

Being a good listener was also identified among those personality attributes that link to effective collaboration. People were identified to be actually listening and hearing what others have to say, and at the same time maintaining an open mind. At the opposite would be someone coming with a ready agenda irrespective of other perspectives and talking over everyone. Good listeners make their mind only after first hearing what their collaborators have to say. These were described by research participants as follows:

*"(Ineffective collaborator) doesn't listen to anybody and speaks over everybody with absolutely no self-awareness. (Effective collaborators) on the other hand are very good listeners. So if you have meetings with them, they will be patient and they will be respectful as to what you're saying."*

*"I would say you could almost speak to them in confidence and they would almost treat you as a friend. They would listen to what you have to say..."*

*"(Ineffective collaborator) never listens. He is incredibly domineering and doesn't see people as an equal."*

*"(Ineffective collaborators) aren't good at communicating. This one lies and doesn't listen to what you say."*

*"And this (ineffective collaborator) doesn't want to listen to what anybody said. So they both had qualities that stopped them communicating."*

*"So you have to be open to hearing the other person's point of view. You have to be able to understand enough about your business, the goals and the other parties, that when you are negotiating you can compromise."*

## 9. Behaving Ethically

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Modest, respectful</li><li>• Acting morally</li><li>• Ethical behaviour (values)</li><li>• Confidence "I know this is the right thing"</li><li>• Motivated by integrity (supportive of others - mentoring)</li><li>• Commitment/integrity/stick to their word</li><li>• (Ethical) integrity/sharing for the common good</li><li>• Openness and integrity about credibility/ considerate consistently</li><li>• Having a character</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Arrogant/ not showing respect</li><li>• Immoral - shallow, following the crowd</li><li>• Unethical (lack of ethical values)</li><li>• Questioning because of negative consequences</li><li>• Motivated by selfishness</li><li>• Not seen as committed/not seen as important to them/may not always turn up for meetings</li><li>• Trying to get all the benefit for themselves</li><li>• Intermittent openness depending on their agenda/ comes across as false/ actions and behaviours do not marry up</li><li>• No known character</li></ul>

Behaving ethically, as the attribute name suggests, is about behaviour consistent with high moral and ethical standards. Here, the choice is made "to do the right thing" instead of being motivated by selfishness or acting in a shallow manner. People showing ethical behaviour have high integrity, are open about their intentions and respect others, which is linked to high effectiveness of collaboration. Some illustrative quotes:

*"The role of those individuals is an enabler. They are the touch point of the two organisations coming together. So for each party, the other individual is an ambassador of that organisation, of their values, their ethics, and their process"*

*"In general, I think that other companies, they are just supposed to maximise their shareholder value and deliver as much profit as possible, but still you have pretty much prioritised collaborative values and you know, behaving ethically and what is correct for the client and for the project, even at the, at least, short term expense for the profit and shareholder value."*

*"So because when you work with (effective collaborators) you feel there is a trustworthy, you value their integrity, their ethics, their values. You know their intent."*

## 10. Leadership

Positive Attributes	Negative Attributes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Engaging people and having them work together</li><li>• Respecting others' views/ adaptable/ guiding/team players</li><li>• Inspirational leadership</li><li>• Good at bringing people together/ voice of reason/lead people</li><li>• Team player (leadership)</li><li>• Less bossy</li><li>• Well organised, doesn't micromanage</li><li>• Uses language of engagement</li><li>• Pragmatic (understands trade-offs)</li><li>• Leadership (managing people in positive manner)/naturally good at managing people</li><li>• People oriented (working together with/ leading people)</li><li>• Meets all stakeholders/have to collaborate to get the job done</li><li>• Get up and go/proactive/capability and drive to get the outcome</li><li>• Better team leader</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Highly focused on outcomes at the expense of losing people</li><li>• Bossy, self-interested</li><li>• Do not inspire as a leader, backseat leadership</li><li>• Managing people through direction/ make people do, rather than leading them</li><li>• Not a team player</li><li>• More bossy/ too much of a superior attitude</li><li>• Disorganised</li><li>• Uses language of fear</li><li>• Sits on the fence (unable to take decisions)</li><li>• Being passive</li><li>• Task oriented (leading tasks)</li><li>• Think they have power to do what they want/arrogant/selfish</li><li>• Reliant on others to do things/you wouldn't put your mortgage to deliver an outcome</li><li>• Was not a leader/lack of drive to lead/lacks the techniques to lead</li></ul>

Leadership focussed at managing people in an inspirational way and being able to get the best out of them for the benefit of the project. The leader engages people and is able to focus on appropriate level of control and activeness in the interaction with the personnel. People showing characteristics of leadership are able oriented towards understanding and influencing others in a positive manner. They show a spirit of doing rather than remaining passive. Here are some illustrative quotes regarding leadership:

"And all of those different types. And some people just have leadership skills and some are more technical and we take that into account ..."

"Both parties leadership should enable people to collaborate, creating the environment, leading by example, requiring it to be done."

"Some of the clients actually say, well, we are going to take all the risk, we just want your people on the job, doing their best. The question that arises, how do you motivate the people to go to work every day and do their best? Well that's leadership. And having an incentive will focus people, but it won't motivate people. We want to motivate people to work for the right thing."

# Research Conclusions

During the course of this research, we have started to encounter the utilisation of different types of psychometric tools that were used especially for recruitment and selection of employees on collaborative projects. Some firms were increasingly adopting these tests through various personal or team development workshops as well as leadership courses. Overall this suggests an overarching interest to align individual behaviour along the lines of collaborative standards and objectives. The implications of the Standard are now diffusing into the individual level where partnering firms see collaboration as an essential employee trait that needs to be encouraged, measured and rewarded. Firms need to be aware that many of these psychometric tests are designed to be general tools that are largely used to test either for personality, behaviour or aptitude usually through different tests. However we are well aware that collaborative working includes these aspects, as a whole hence requires a tool that is specific for collaborative working and not generic. Importantly the identified attributes with this research intriguingly lie on a separate dimension from e.g. logical vs. intuitive or creative vs. technical competences. They are also orthogonal to Myers-Briggs personality types, which is the most frequently used form of personality test currently in practice within many different industries. This means that different kinds of people may be equally effective collaborators, the main distinguishing factor is behaving in accordance to relational norms. These are discussed next.

In the final step of our analysis of the findings we have grouped the 18 categories into three key areas based on relative similarity. This analysis, just like the preceding phases, was carried out avoiding any preconceived ideas regarding how these categories or areas might look like. We used the top 10 most relevant personality attributes for the further categorisation, in order to see the areas most effective for reaching desired results of collaboration. Accordingly, we identified that three following areas of personality attributes characterise the most effective individuals in terms of collaborative working:

- a) Strategic and adaptive orientation  
("strategically minded", "creative/innovative", "leadership")
- b) Effective information exchange  
("good communicator", "open to sharing", "good listener")
- c) Prioritising common values  
("team orientation", "empathetic", "believe in collaboration", "behaving ethically")

It is interesting to see how closely these three identified areas link to the relational norms outlined in prior scientific research: (1) information exchange, (2) flexibility, and (3) solidarity. We interpret this relationship meaning that people who possess personal attributes showing adherence to relational norms are the most effective in collaborative working. It can be discussed whether such attributes are the result of nature or nurture, but from our research it is clear that they are linked to effective interpersonal collaboration.

We find it tempting to draw some parallels from our findings on an interpersonal level to the role of standards in driving collaboration at the inter-organisational level. Whilst ISO 44001 sets higher-level guidelines and expectations for companies regarding collaborating with partners, relational norms guide individuals through the complex environment of interpersonal collaboration. Accordingly, relational norms can be viewed as a natural set of

guidelines people tend to follow and expect others to follow as well. Our research provides evidence that deviation from these norms may lead to reduced performance. These insights can be used by companies in training employees, through aiming to increase awareness of the importance of relational norms as soft but crucial guidelines for interpersonal collaborative work. The findings showcase the systemic nature of collaboration in terms of highlighting perceptions of other's behaviour in relation to the expectations set by the general relational norms. Further, investments into building appropriate organisational culture and desired behaviour should be evaluated against their potential to improve the personnel's abilities to show adherence to relational norms in interpersonal collaboration within and across companies.

It is important to note that this research does not intend or claim that the findings are the ultimate and final results or 'the silver bullet' to answer the question of 'what makes an effective collaborator'. However we believe that this research lays the foundations as the first known study to identify managerial level attributes for effective collaborative working within complex business contexts. Overall the research is ongoing where we are currently partnering with a number of organisations to understand the extent to which the identified attributes apply to different industries. We will focus on a number of select industries to see which attributes are specific to an industry and which are generic across different sections. In the light of this ongoing research, we would like to pose further questions in order to stimulate food for thought for further discussion on the current practice of collaborative working. For instance:

- To what extent does the training provided to employees *match the specific skills required* for effective collaboration?

This is an area where firms need to internally assess their training practices with their partners. Given the prominence of collaborative projects, has the supporting organisational structures such as training, recruitment and assessment processes been adopted to match the goals and objectives of collaborative projects? If partnering firms identify that collaborative working requires specific skills then there is a need to match these skills with supportive structures. This essentially requires the review and adaptation of recruitment, training, development, and assessment strategies.

- Too much emphasis on 'positive skills' training but how about identifying and addressing *counter behaviours*?

Finally, we have seen many examples of effective training programs for collaborative initiatives. However many of these emphasised positive skills training. Our research identified that negative behaviour at the individual level can be as impactful -nevertheless in the counter-productive manner. It is imperative to define both positive and negative attitudes and behaviour within the context of the collaboration so as to proactively avoid failure to work together for the common objectives and goals.

- How could we assess the performance implications for the identified attributes and behaviours?

It is important to clearly define the relationship between adopting effective collaborative behaviour at the individual level and performance at the firm level. In other words, there are significant benefits of capturing and communicating the benefits and values of effective collaborative behaviour, as this will motivate and incentivise these practices. However visibility of performance implications are essential to convince the key stakeholders both internally and externally with the partners.

## About the Authors

**Dr Mehmet Chakkol** is an Assistant Professor of Operations Management in Warwick Business School. Mehmet currently teaches supply chain and operations management at undergraduate, postgraduate and executive levels. His main research interests are within the areas of inter-organisational relationships and strategic supply chain management. In particular, his research focuses on the implications of collaborative business models on network structures, configurations, and relationships. His research has appeared in world leading academic journals.



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**Dr Mark Johnson** joined WBS as an Associate Professor in Operations Management and is Head of the Operations Management Group. His current research is in the area of Service Networks. This examines the appropriate supply chain strategies, configurations and their overarching relationships for companies that provide business solutions. Mark has worked with a number of companies in his research and education. These include: Rolls-Royce, BAE Systems, Atos Origin, PA Consulting, UK Trade and Investment, DB Schenker, British American Tobacco, HP Enterprise Services, Jaguar Land Rover, GKN Aerospace and GVA Grimley. He teaches a range of subjects at MBA and executive level, including Operations Management, Operations Strategy, Service Operations Management, Supply Chain Management and managing inter-organisational relationships.



**Warwick Business School** (WBS) is part of the University of Warwick, one of the UK's top universities. In less than 50 years WBS has become one of the world's elite business schools providing top-class programmes for ambitious people. We are led by innovation, creativity, and change, and engage with the big debates in business and public policy. In June 2014 WBS completed an agreement to open a London base at The Shard. It is currently ranked 1st in the UK for full-time MBA, and is within the global top 25 for the Executive MBA. The vision of WBS is to be a world leader in business education, research and engagement, helping to create a better global society.



**The Institute for Collaborative Working** was formed by the then DTI 27 years ago to encourage the widespread understanding/adoption of effective collaborative working (partnering sic) as a source of competitive advantage. ICW is a self-financing, knowledge based organisation with an extensive/growing collaborative working membership network



drawn from business, the public sector and academia. Over the 25 years ICW has become widely recognised as the thought leader in collaborative working leading a growing collaborative working professional community. ICW works closely with BSI on the evolution of BS 11000 the National standard for collaborative working published in 2010 now an International standard – ISO 44001 published in March 2017.

# Collaborative Working Academic Forum

The forum was jointly established by the institute and WBS to create a platform on which we could invite other academic institutions from both the UK and overseas to share knowledge and research to further the development of collaborative approaches.

The forum meets at the Warwick campus on a regular basis to exchange ideas and develop the future focus for research collaborative working knowledge. The current members include:

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Warwick Manufacturing Group

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Birmingham City University

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West of England University

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