

# Collaborative disposition



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**ICW Scotland discussions over the last year between public and private sector organisations, have focused on collaboration, where little or no structured collaborative working process exists.**

Participants understood that there are many situations where collaboration is highly desired but not mandated, and even where it *is* mandated, organisations rely heavily on the personal choices of participants to engage in collaborative working, in order to make it work. This is true whether we are working in for-profit or not-for-profit organisations. Therefore, even where companies are clear on process, they need to be able to help staff develop the personal disposition to work collaboratively with others.

For some time I have been exploring what causes us as individuals to collaborate and what stops us, regardless of whether things are structured, coordinated or chaotic. I refer to this as our “collaborative disposition”.

## **The inclination of the individual to collaborate**

Understanding and developing this inclination to collaborate is critical in those exercises whether the participants are not aware of, or don’t understand, or don’t buy into the strategic intent of the different organisations or partners involved.

They don’t get the value to be had by the organisation for their discretionary effort, their focus will be on more tactical arrangements and the additional value will often derive from getting operational work completed safely, free from stress and conflict, and to feel a sense of accomplishment. This is the case for most public sector employees and for significant numbers of employees in large private sector organisations.

Most of us intuitively understand our own collaborative disposition when we take part in games, team sports or community events like litter picking or organising a street party. We want to be involved in something useful or interesting or worthwhile and we are willing to work with others.

In business settings some of us can struggle with maintaining a good collaborative disposition if we are in situations where things are tense, or we feel we are under threat. Some of us may actually enjoy the tension of meeting deadlines and budgets. Some of us may even have succeeded in our careers because of our capabilities to get things done under such circumstances. Quite often these capabilities reflect our habit of dominating and pushing people into action, and our tenacity to

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keep chasing anyone who falls behind. However, many of us find the stress and strain of that kind of command and control less and less acceptable. This demanding and controlling behaviour worked in older, more traditional project environments and even in stable, long run production environments. However, it is far removed from the collaborative disposition needed where we may have no authority over others to get things done, but rather we depend on them to step forward to assist.



**Influenced**

Our collaborative disposition is influenced by many things, some of which we are not consciously aware of. At the most basic level it is influenced by the way we feel physically and mentally. Many of us will already know that if we haven't had enough sleep we can be irritable and more ill-tempered and less tolerant than we might be normally. Most of us know that if we are suffering an illness, or pain such as headache or toothache, we feel as if our energy is being drained and we are less able to cope with the challenges around us. Even something as simple as feeling hungry can influence our collaborative disposition. Recent research showed that judges were more likely to give harsher sentences late in the morning for the same crimes, than they did after lunch. The only factor that was different was they were hungrier as they approached lunchtime.

How we learned to deal with conflict or threat as children or how we learned to deal with

challenge or different kinds of humour, will be seen later in life. If shouting and arguing was common in the environment we grew up in, then it will feel perfectly normal to us when we hear it in other situations, and indeed it may be our preferred way of dealing with others. If our early experiences of conflict cause us to feel fear, then remnants of that fear may be triggered in work situations causing us to retreat from collaboration. Even distractions like a sick child or struggling to meet the cost of living in our own lives can cause us to feel more heavily burdened, when assessing the cost or risk attached to a particular course of action, and choosing not to get involved. Yet a few days later when we feel better, or our circumstances have changed, the challenge, cost or risk seems more acceptable.

Therefore, it is important to be aware of our own personal collaborative disposition whenever we participate in collaborative working exercises. If our collaborative disposition is weakened, so is our ability to interact, make judgement calls, tolerate difference and risk, be patient and appreciate the pressures we and our partners are

under. However, if we become aware of our collaborative disposition, we can immediately act to reset it for our own benefit, and for the benefit of the project and project partners.

**Collaborative Disposition Index® (CDI)**

We are developing our Collaborative Disposition Index® (CDI). The CDI is a self-scoring instrument which will help people around the world quickly check their own collaborative disposition with a view to improving it and

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shaping the success of any collaborative working project.

The CDI instrument is ideal for:

- Self-check and correction of personal disposition prior to each collaborative working meeting
- Personal development
- One-to-one coaching
- Team coaching
- Collaborative leadership development activities. ■

The CDI is administered online and offers a graphic presentation of ratings and a personalised analysis of results. If you would like to know more, or to simply have a chat, contact [mike.healy@faceoffgroup.com](mailto:mike.healy@faceoffgroup.com)