



Collaboration with Intention

Building conscious partnerships to create the new workspace

A report by SustainEd
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Notes from a workshop held in November, 2011, in association with Southeast Micro Skillnet

Introduction

On November 15th 2011, SustainEd held a one-day workshop in Dublin asking those attending to discuss how to build better, more collaborative workspaces. This workshop was called Collaboration with Intention. We have collated the notes from this workshop and, taking some liberties, we have produced this document which we hope will be the basis for further discussion on the topic of collaboration.

The Collaboration with Intention workshop was an experiment in bringing people from diverse backgrounds together to explore the value of giving time to the practice of dialogue about questions that really matter. While there were many open conversations, the real value of the day was in tasting the potential of engaging with others in a more connected space.

The workshop focussed on the Intention – too many of us are co-working by

habit, or practice or even just necessity. We need to learn the ‘why’ and then the ‘how’ of intentionally collaborating.

There was a mix of attendees with a wide variety of experiences of collaborating in the workplace. The day was structured around three discussion topics that the organisers felt would capture the current understanding around how we collaborate in the workspace. The three headline topics were:

- Exploring the positives around collaboration
- What are the biggest challenges to collaboration
- Visioning exercise – creating the ideal collaborative environment

This document is more than a reflection of what was discussed and draws on the organisers’ own understanding of the processes involved. It develops these topics in light of the discussions that

took place in the workshop, in order to highlight and clarify how we all need to up-skill, if effective collaboration is to take place. The organisers have produced this document for all those who have an interest in developing the co-working environment that so many of us are now engaging with. SustainEd intends to hold further workshops on this topic in the future and we are open to suggestions, opinions and even collaboration on this work.

Further writings on the topic of collaboration can be found on our website
www.sustained.ie

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SustainEd is a collaborative business venture.

Visioning an Alternative Sustainable Future

Why discuss Collaboration?

“If you want to go fast –go alone, but if you want to go far – go together!”

We are beginning to actively explore the potential of diverse talent connecting in the process of generating new models for change, of working together around shared visions blending economic viability with improved work practice. Clearly, the goal is that we must become smarter and more effective when working together, in order to achieve sustainable common goals based on agreed values.

Addressing Complexity – Creating a Culture of Inter-Connectedness.

There is a growing recognition amongst many in our culture that it’s now up to us to make the necessary shift and not wait on the external environment to come right. We appear to be moving from the independent achiever stage of business/social enterprise - the do it alone entrepreneurial approach - to the recognition of our inter-dependence, the inter-connected nature of our productive and creative environment.

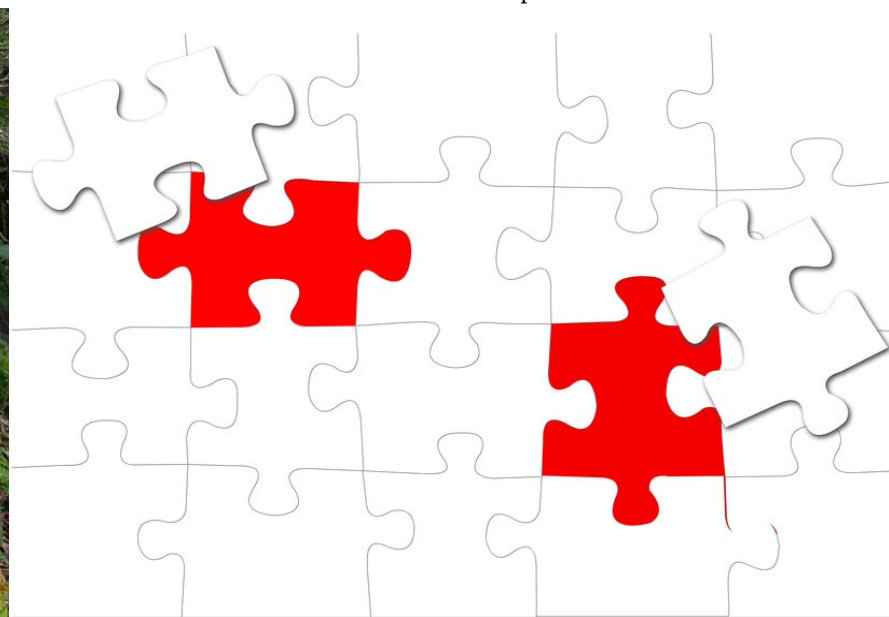
Life in many ways is becoming more complex and more inter connected,

different stakeholders to be successful. The leadership skills needed to engage these other players are different to before.

To address these challenges we first have to be open to the fact that we need each other more now in our efforts to improve our collective situations. We need to find new ways of working together, sharing skills and capacities to resource our ideas while still retaining a level of autonomy and independence and the collaborative process seems to be fitting that bill.

A note of caution however, this process is slow moving in the beginning. This is counter to the current trend of ‘give me the short version’. The difficulty we now face is that the working culture is always rushed, reduced, faster, quicker..... This is part of the reason we find ourselves in the current mess we are in. Building trust; sharing agreed values; understanding each other’s intentions; these all take time, trust and skilled effort. The results in the end are very effective and are farther reaching than any individual achievement, but the initial effort requires time and commitment.

Our current work culture pushes us to believe that we don’t have the time, that unless we are at the keyboard punching in numbers, or making sales calls, we are not at work. If we are to develop shared goals, complex opportunities, creative ideas, then taking the time to share, is part of the work process. We need to have the confidence to pull back from the urgent, the frantic fire-fighting of the day to day work. We need to nurture the mindset of building relationships that lead to true collaboration in order that we can access new opportunities. Being aware of this reality, becomes our first step.



Context: The Need for Radical Change.

Jobs can no longer be automatically counted upon. Starting your business or even social enterprise can be a very lonely and challenging existence. Even operating an already up and running business in our current flat economy can make it hard to maintain the creative drive. Waiting on the system to fix itself is no longer an option.

and so is business and social enterprise creation. There are now many specialised skills and capacities needed for an individual to make their mark and that makes it very difficult for anyone who is either lacking in resources or who is not exceptionally talented to make the progress they seek.

Many of the opportunities we seek to pursue are now quite complex in nature. These opportunities are often not achievable by going it alone, but require the input, commitment and creativity of

Creating the New Workplace



IBM and 'Smarter Cities' in Galway

When IBM wanted to develop the long term research programme around 'Smarter Cities' and track information on Galway Bay they opted to collaborate with all the stakeholders involved. They did this as they see that is a more effective way of doing business. In a previous life they would probably have just tried to buy the information they needed. The new model involved more lengthy initial meetings with a diverse range of collaborators from the Marine Institute, the Department of Marine Studies in the university, local community groups, individual trawler fishermen, coastal watch groups etc. By engaging with the stakeholders in this manner, the project gains commitment, ownership, responsibility across all the players and the result is a more interactive, responsive and comprehensive picture of the activity in the bay area. Just what IBM wanted - and something they would almost definitely not have gotten if they tried to go it alone and just pay for the involvement of others. This is the model for a lot of IBM's work with other businesses across many of its business sectors these days.

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Cultivating diversity.

From the study of natural systems it is known that diversity is a key element in any successful system. Our own system of working tends towards standardisation, to collect together based on similarities. Those with divergent opinions or views are too often ostracised or shunned. Today, many of us are working in the 'ideas' economy and diversity can be a real bonus to such situations. If developed properly, diversity can help trigger innovation, critique constructively and broaden the perspectives brought to a problem.

Not only should we tolerate diversity but we should actively seek it out if we are to gain from it. By diversity we don't just mean different ethnicities or religious beliefs. A co-working space that collaborates effectively will aim to include many industry sectors, not just one; will have projects that include more than just small private businesses but also social entrepreneurs, bigger businesses, government agencies; it will

reach out geographically and socially to access new opportunities; and it will imagine a transformative business model to enable a more sustainable future for all.

This seems counter intuitive at first, surely the more alike we are the easier it will be to work together. The answer is both yes and no. In order to build resilience into the working environment we need diverse ways of thinking. We need to learn how to accommodate and motivate across a wide spectrum of stakeholders. We need to learn to work together without diluting the result or compromising our individuality. We need to learn how to mix all the colours together but come up with a rainbow, not just grey!

This will take a new understanding and a new skill set. Until we up-skill, diversity will be more hassle than it is worth, it will be too time consuming, too personally taxing and will be just dropped as a 'failure'. If we learn to accommodate diversity we will all gain immeasurably.

Creating the New Workplace (cont.)

Self-organising in the co-working workplace.

In the co-working space there is a need to learn different leadership skills, as no-one has the traditional authority position. We need to learn to lead outside our sphere of authority. On different projects, different people will lead. Different leadership roles will be assumed by individuals or granted to them by virtue of their personality, by the skill set(s) they possess, by their available resources etc. Leadership is now more often a temporary and/or a shared position. Individuals will need to learn to take on leadership roles without the requisite authority, a scary prospect for many of us.

Again, natural systems show us that the ability to self-organise is a vital pattern of successful systems. Any system has basic fundamental laws that individuals self-organise around. Darwin is often misquoted as stating the law of 'the survival of the fittest'; he actually said 'the survival of the fitting.' The natural process is not the linear, competitive, winner takes all model we have been following for years. It is more a process of inter-connectedness, of balance gained through understanding the common goals and the shared futures.

For a co-working space to be effective we must all assume different roles at different times, we must 'step up to the mark' and not let it all fall to one person. If this is to be achieved without traditional models of authority then we need to firstly, be aware of the need for change; then to develop the common intention and shared values; before moving on to identifying and addressing our collective and individual skills gaps in the new space. Only then can we change our attitudes which will lead to the development of the self-organising structures needed.



Developing and Supporting the Business and Enterprise Space

There are many co-working spaces in Ireland at present and some of them are successful. They act to motivate, encourage, up-skill and develop both social and private enterprises. Some of the spaces are really just a collection of desks or offices with business as usual, the 'co' being solely sharing physical space to reduce costs. This is wasted opportunity. Creating the physical space is the easy part. Bringing relative strangers together in the workplace and developing the vitality, the 'blood-flow' needed for collaboration is far more difficult.

We will need committed mentors and facilitators, as well as finding participant businesses who can commit to supporting the whole process and not just their own particular needs. 'Being responsible' is about creating a culture where participants are empowered to respond and free to make choices to the challenges that arise.

There is a need to find social entrepreneurs and business people who are willing to facilitate new co-working practices. There is a need to find ways to underwrite some of the cost factor in putting the facilities in place. Accommodating new start-ups and providing the soft support inputs will require an element of social entrepreneurship to get the process off the ground. There is a social-psychological change needed if we are to successfully collaborate.

Crazy Town - Team Entrepreneurs

In Jyväskylä, a town in central Finland, there is an enterprise centre called Crazy Town with about 30 businesses involved. The owners of these small businesses are all graduates of the local university's Team Academy. This is a degree programme in business based on actually running small businesses, in teams, over the three years of the programme and is recognised as one of the most successful enterprise courses in the EU over the past twenty years. The Crazy Town businesses know a lot about collaboration. In order to become part of Crazy Town the business owners must agree to be active in the on-going dialogue with regular, structured meetings, facilitated sessions, brain storming, retreat days etc.

This is not perceived as just 'nice to have' but rather as an essential part of how each business develops and consequently how the centre performs. These sessions happen even when individuals are busy as they understand they are an essential part of the work they do. They realise that building the necessary vitality for the centre to be enterprising is the responsibility of all involved and that collectively they can do more than individually. Those businesses that are unable or unwilling to engage with the collective are asked to find other accommodation as they drain the collective energy and motivation.



Integral Collaboration



Are you ready to make this radical shift in our thinking?

As part of the Collaboration for Intention process we are involved in a **Teachings for Transformative Change** program. This is a two year pan European Learning Partnership Initiative involving several programmes in five different countries.

Participants have gathered on two separate multi-day sessions to first understand each other and their projects, before beginning work on the solutions or outcomes.

In the face of increasingly interconnected global challenges the participants are consciously engaging with shifts in value systems on an individual and societal level. This reflects humanity's urgent need to undergo a radical change and echoes the growing realisation of our interdependent relationship.

The programme is focussed on using the new ways of thinking and practices of the **Integral Approach**† to promote radical change across society. The first step is to build awareness of the issues involved and to then understand how to make the necessary changes. The integral perspective hones in on the overall cultural setting and how this affects our consideration of the options for radical change.

†**Integral Approach** - an approach to understanding that includes both dimensions of the inside and outside, the external and internal, the objective and subjective in our understanding of the dynamics of the world we live in.

Integral Collaboration –Paying Attention to the Inside as well as the Outside.

For collaboration to work and be sustainable it needs the integration of both the inner space and the outer place. The inner space work is about learning the practice of how we can come together to think beyond ego and operate from a more connected or unified field. Learning this practice is where the rubber meets the road. We are accustomed to thinking alone, to having our own opinions and judgements, of operating from our highly individuated separate self space.

When we come together we don't tend to pay enough attention to the inner space which we operate from, our focus is usually on the outer manifest expressions relying on words, concepts and opinions to secure agreement. We need to develop a new understanding of our own identity in respect to how we interact with others.

Paying attention to how we come together and learning to operate from a more connected space, will be key if we are to evolve collaborative practice to a new level. Instead of thinking of ourselves as separate competing parts, the new paradigm will be about seeing ourselves as whole/parts or holons - autonomous individuals but also part of a greater whole.

The real potential of creating a new collaborative future lies in our capacity to come together and connect in a common ground as a seamless whole field – a field that will ultimately be far greater than the sum of the individual parts.

Integral means also Attending to the Outer Space

The outer goal is in finding the places where we can do this work together, creating the spaces that foster the spirit of collaboration. So collaborating to find and create these spaces in our working environment will be a big first step.

There needs to be a degree of proximity within such spaces. Getting the right balance of proximity is important. Too little will restrict and reduce access and

too much will interfere with the next really important element of co-working; privacy.

Privacy is about establishing an ethic of how to engage - but also how to dis-engage - in an acceptable manner so as to allow work to progress. We also need the permission to collaborate, to create the atmosphere where these engagements are encouraged and rewarded, this means being open, receptive and positive to changing interactions. Getting the balance between these elements is the responsibility of each of us in the collaborative space.

Giving Time to Deepening the Practice

It might seem obvious to say that we will ultimately solve our individual problems only by addressing the needs of the greater whole – focusing our intention on making collaboration work for all of us. Doing that however is going to require a deeper commitment from anyone who wants be a part of leading this change.

So what are the next steps?

- The ongoing action research of those who are already working collaboratively, into what's working, not working and what could work better, will provide essential insight into the practical issues that need to be adopted.
- Giving time to engage in dialogue between interested stakeholders will be an important first step to explore more deeply the issues raised in this workshop.
- Facilitating workshops in the practice of collaborative dialogue – developing the group dynamic to become more connected and capable of evolving a unified thinking process, will ultimately lead to powerful creative action that will increase opportunity for all involved.

Sustained are keen to work with co-workers and other potential collaborators as we move towards a more sustainable future. Further readings on collaboration and sustainability can be found on our website at www.sustained.ie Please feel free to contact us to discuss your ideas for change.