Retrofitting Collaboration Into the New Public Management: Lessons from New Zealand

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〈Abstract〉

New Zealand, like most countries around the world, is experimenting with collaborative techniques and processes in order to address cross-boundary public policy challenges. Still prevalent in New Zealand, however, are the policies and philosophies of that country’s sweeping public management reforms of the 1980’s and 1990’s – commonly called “The New Public Management (NPM)”. This article highlights the tensions between the NPM and collaboration in New Zealand, analyzes what is needed to change the bureaucratic culture of New Zealand to make it more receptive to the idea of collaboration, and offers concrete steps that can be taken to create opportunities for collaborative advantage in any country.

Key Words: Collaboration, New Public Management, collaborative leadership, collaborative mind set, changing organization culture, New Zealand

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I. Introduction

New Zealand, like most countries around the world, is experimenting with collaborative techniques and processes in order to address cross-boundary public policy challenges. I worked in New Zealand from 2013-2015 to study collaboration in that country, both as an independent scholar and as an Ian Axford public policy fellow. The Axford fellowship invites US public policy experts to work in New Zealand government offices. I was assigned to the “Performance Hub”: a joint policy team of the Ministry of the Treasury, the State Services Commission, the Prime Minister’s Office, and the Cabinet.

The New Zealand setting is a unique one. It is an island country with a total population of only 4 million people. It has a strong central government and relatively weak local governments. New Zealanders joke that local government officials are in charge of only three things: rats, rubbish, and roads. There are no state governments, but there are regional authorities.

New Zealand is the country, along with Australia, most famous for its public management reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, often called the New Public Management (NPM). The mantra of the NPM movement is that “government should be run more like a business”. Visitors still travel from foreign lands to New Zealand to learn about the NPM.

This article examines how “The New Public Management” is hindering modern efforts at collaborative governance. It highlights the tensions between the NPM and collaborative efforts in New Zealand, analyzes what is needed to change the bureaucratic culture of New Zealand to make it
more receptive to the idea of collaboration, and offers concrete steps that can be taken to create opportunities for collaborative advantage in any country. The sources of data supporting these findings include participant observation, structured interviews, unstructured interviews, self-completion surveys, and published sources.

II. Defining and Understanding Collaboration

Today the term “collaboration” is widely used in all sectors around the world - public, private, and non-profit. For the purpose of this article, I define collaboration as the process of facilitating and operating in multi-organizational arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved or easily solved by single organizations (Agranoff and McGuire, 2003) and add that collaboration can include the public. For the purposes of this article, I also use the following definition of governance:

Governance refers to the institutions and resources used to achieve direction and coordination between individuals (and organizations) ... to advance joint objectives (Imperial, Ospina, Johnston, O'Leary, Williams, Johnson, and Thomsen, 2016).1)

The public management literature generally differentiates among cooperation, coordination, collaboration, and service integration. (See Box

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1) Governance involves more than the configuration of governmental and non-governmental organizations. Governance includes enabling statutes, organizational and financial resources, programmatic structures, and administrative rules and routines. It is shaped by formal and informal rules and social norms that create the structures used to govern relationships between organizations.
1.) Collaboration from this perspective is best examined as a dynamic or emergent process rather than a static condition. In Selden, Sowa, and Sandfort’s (2006) dimensional illustration of a collaborative continuum, the right-hand side of the continuum describes the highest level of service integration and the least autonomous relationships, while the left side describes relationships where the joint action is less central to organizational mission.2)

![Box 1](Collaboration vs. Cooperation)

Further, the public management literature generally divides collaboration into three separate, yet overlapping categories: Interorganizational, public participation, and groups of individuals (which includes workplace teams). See Box 2.

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2) Not all management scholars agree with this continuum. Feiock (2009) and Feiock and Scholz (2010), examining these concepts through the lenses of decision making and game theory literatures, argue that these are not points on a single scale, and that problems of coordination and cooperation are fundamentally different forms of collaboration in terms of the risks faced by potential collaborators.
Box 2

Three Types of Collaboration Most Often Mentioned in Literature
(From a review of over 200 articles)

Interorganisational
Public Participation
Group of Individuals

New Zealand is not alone in its pursuit of collaborative solutions: this is a global phenomenon (See O’Flynn, Blackman, and Halligan, 2013; Torfing and Triantafillou, 2011; O’Leary and Bingham, 2009; Bingham and O’Leary, 2008). Several practical and theoretical reasons account for the increase in collaboration as a management and leadership strategy both in the literature and in practice. First, on the practical side, most major challenges are larger than one organization, requiring new approaches to addressing public issues. Think of any significant public policy challenge: housing, poverty, the economy, education, pollution, to name a few. In order to address any one of these challenges effectively, collaboration across boundaries is needed.

Second, the desire to improve the effectiveness and performance of
programs is encouraging public leaders to identify new ways of providing services. Collaboration can result in innovative approaches to service delivery, including multi-sector partnerships (Selden, Sowa and Sandfort, 2006; Goldsmith & Kettl, 2009; Andrews and Entwistle, 2010). Third, technology is helping public organizations and personnel share information in a way that is integrative and interoperable, with the outcome being a greater emphasis on collaboration (Pardo, Gil-Garcia, & Luna-Reyes, 2010). Finally, citizens are seeking additional avenues for engaging in governance, which can result in new and different forms of collaborative problem-solving and decision-making (Nabatchi, Gastil, Weiksner, and Leighninger, 2012).

As New Zealand is a country famous for making sweeping policy and management changes based on theory (largely economic), it makes sense to review the theoretical reasons why public organizations might collaborate. I do so here, despite the fact that most scholars of interorganizational collaboration agree that organizations prefer autonomy to dependence (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006).

*Resource dependency* is the most well developed theory of interorganizational partnership. The basic assumption of resource dependency theory is that individual organizations do not have all the resources they need to achieve their goals, and thus, must acquire resources, such as money, people, support services, technological knowledge, and other inputs, in order to survive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). That is, organizations must rely on a variety of inputs from a collection of interacting organizations, groups, and persons in the external environment to do their jobs and do them well. Although resource exchange theory is based on the notion of dependency (Ostrom, 1990),
even relatively independent organizations may collaborate to take advantage of available resources (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh, 2012). Organizations may actively seek out funds within existing network structures, or seek to initiate collaboration to tap into funding sources.

A second reason found in theory as to why organization leaders choose to collaborate is common purpose. Organizations form linkages in order to achieve similar, compatible, or congruous goals (Gray 1989). Issues that were previously thought of as single-agency issues are now increasingly understood to have broad linkages and to be interconnected with other issues (O’Leary, Gerard, and Bingham, 2006). Accordingly, many groups or organizations have - or should have - some partial responsibility to address public challenges (Crosby and Bryson, 2005) and are using collaborative techniques and processes to do so.

Related to common purpose is the notion of shared beliefs. A similarity in values and attitudes make the formation of interorganizational linkages more probable (Aldrich, 1979; Alter and Hage, 1993) and make these linkages more stable over time (Van de Ven et al, 1975). A common belief system, including norms, values, perceptions, and worldviews, provides the principal ‘glue’ to hold together networks of actors (Fleishman, 2009; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993). (Networks are structures of interdependence, involving multiple nodes - typically agencies and organizations - with multiple linkages.)

In addition to shared beliefs, organizations also sometimes pursue their political interests through collaborative arrangements. Through participation in a policy network, for example, organizations may promote the views or desires of their members or constituency; gain access to political officials or decision processes, and cultivate political alliances; gain political
legitimacy or authority; and promote organizational policies or programs (Hecló, 1978; Sowa, 2009).

Catalytic actors, or leadership both within the organization and by network leaders or coordinators, can provide other important incentives for the formation of collaborative linkages (Bardach, 1998). Thus, individuals acting as leaders or catalysts may provide incentives for organizations to collaborate. Sometimes this takes the form of an individual whose sense of what it means to be a highly professional actor includes the imperative to collaborate (McGuire, 2009). Other times, the catalytic actor may be an individual who naturally engages in collaboration throughout his or her career (Hicklin, O’Toole, Meier and Robinson, 2009). Catalytic actors may come from any level of an organization and include thought leaders.

In sum, there are many drivers of collaboration. But collaboration is not always wise. Evaluating when and where to collaborate, and strategically choosing collaboration to enhance outcomes and better serve the public, has become just as important as collaborative processes themselves.

Ⅲ. Challenges to Collaboration in New Zealand

The language of collaboration is not new to New Zealand. Documents on central government websites show a consciousness of the need to collaborate under appropriate conditions more than a decade ago. While there have been some successes in collaboration in New Zealand (O’Leary, 2014), progress has not been as rapid as one might predict. For example, Al Morrison, Deputy Commissioner for State Sector Reform in New Zealand, recently wrote:
A review of activity across the system reported in February, 2014, suggests that agencies are increasingly attuned to the problem solving and opportunities created from collaborative endeavour, but that we are some distance yet from the system as a whole operating that way as a matter of course (Morrison, 2014: 47).

Among the most significant findings of this study concerning the challenges to collaboration in New Zealand are the following.

1. History and Culture

There have been hundreds of works written about NPM including scholarly articles, books, chapters, government reports and case studies. The merits and weaknesses of NPM have been discussed and debated at academic conferences for decades. A prominent New Zealand scholar, Jonathan Boston, summarizes the goals of NPM reforms in New Zealand as follows, noting that not all the goals received equal weight:

- Improving allocative and productive efficiency, and enhancing the effectiveness of government services;
- Improving both managerial and political accountability;
- Reducing the level of government expenditure and the size of the core public sector;
- Reducing the range of state functions under direct ministerial control, and minimizing opportunities for the non-transparent use of public power;
- Minimizing the risk of bureaucratic, provider or regulatory capture;
- Improving the quality of the goods and services produced by public
agencies; and

- Making public services more accessible and responsive to consumers, as well as more culturally sensitive (Boston, 2012: 7).

By most accounts, New Zealand was successful in increasing efficiency and effectiveness, creating in large part the vertically streamlined government it wanted. Yet Boston cites several of the NPM “goals that received little or no weight” (Boston, 2012: 8) including:

- Developing new forms of governance for the handling of complex and controversial policy issues, such as joined-up governance, collaborative governance and co-management;
- Enhancing horizontal coordination across governmental organizations and more joined-up service delivery; and
- Increasing the role of citizens, as opposed to consumers, customers and clients, in the design, delivery, oversight and control of public services.

Boston goes on to lament the design principal behind some of the reforms that “all state organizations should, at least ideally, have only one main function.” This led to much decoupling and institutional fragmentation that hinders collaboration today. Tied in with this, there have been unanticipated consequences of the NPM reforms that serve as impediments to, and inhibitors of, collaboration.

As Alan Schick expressed in his 1996 evaluation of the country’s NPM reforms, New Zealand may have focused on accountability at the expense of personal responsibility, a phenomenon that inhibits collaboration.
The words [responsibility and accountability] lead down very different managerial paths. Responsibility is a personal quality that comes from one’s professional ethic, a commitment to do one’s best, a sense of public service. Accountability is an impersonal quality, dependent more on contractual duties and information flows. Ideally a manager should act responsibly, even when accountability does not come into play. As much as one might wish for an amalgam of the two worlds, the relentless pursuit of accountability can exact a price in the shrinkage of a sense of responsibility. Responsibility itself is not sufficient assurance of effective performance; if it were, there might have been no need to overhaul public management. Yet something may be lost when responsibility is reduced to a set of contract-like documents and auditable statements (Schick, 1996: 84-85).

2. How to Succeed in the Business of Government

One chief executive (CE) I interviewed expressed his view that the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s have been successful in creating a solid business center, but with other unanticipated consequences. Some career public servants have become “company men and women” who are loyal to their own organizations described as “hunkered down silos”. The way to succeed for many has been to devote their lives to one organization, master its subject matter (only) and then go on to lead another organization. As Al Morrison explains:

The main criticism to emerge from the [NPM] reforms is around the way agencies have developed into silos and become overly protective of their policy, information, and operations. What gets lost in the fragmentation is the collective action required to deliver the common good (Morrison, 2014: 5).
Tied in with this, CE contracts until December, 13, 2013 did not formally emphasize leading across boundaries, but generally have concentrated on managing and leading within one’s own organization.\(^3\) This has yielded a very narrow “great man theory of leadership”, with one feature being a unitary focus on one’s organization. Again, this makes collaboration difficult.

Morrison traced the history of reforms in New Zealand concentrating especially on current efforts like the Better Public Services program which seeks to reform the public services “to think and operate across the whole government system and beyond to effectively address complex issues that have been holding New Zealand back, and create opportunities through collaborative endeavour” (Morrison, 2014: 3). Especially significant are two changes to the State Sector, Public Finance and Crown Entities Acts passed by Parliament in 2013 that seek to make it easier for collaboration to occur across state sector agencies. Also significant are innovations such as the “five results areas”,\(^4\) functional leads, heads of profession, shared services, and sector group cross-cutting initiatives.

Yet despite all these innovations, Morrison concludes that:

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3) One former CE pointed out that in the past joint performance indicators were often supplemental to contracts but were nonetheless the subject of discussion in performance reviews.

4) Ten Best Public Service Results were agreed by Cabinet in 2012. The Results were clustered into five result areas, with a Minister and chief executive assigned responsibility for each area. The Results specify government priorities in areas that matter to citizens - welfare dependence; better health, education and welfare services for vulnerable children; boosting skills and employment; reducing crime and re-offending; and making government interaction with business and citizens easier, particularly online. The full set of BPS Results, and progress towards achieving them, can be found at http://www.ssc.govt.nz/better-public-services.
While these are all good in themselves and achieving worthwhile results, there is little evidence that they are transforming the way agencies think about work and operate as a matter of course. For the most part, agencies have been able to comply without fundamentally changing the way they operate or give up significant benefit to the greater cause. The quick wins from simple forms of collaboration are important and relevant. But the real challenge lies at the ambitious end of the spectrum where complex social, environmental and economic issues demand levels of collaboration that confront and challenge the institutional culture and arrangements of the last two to three decades (Morrison, 2014: 3).

Indeed, the remnants of these institutional reforms endure today. One mid-level manager told me that he has shied away from collaboration because of his bosses’ “excessive focus on accountability and too much performance measurement. The transaction costs are too high. It [collaboration] is a lot of work, there are no templates or examples, there is no leadership, there is no time, and there is a great fear that collaboration will not yield better outcomes.”

“Collaboration will mess up my performance metrics” said another manager. When asked why he did not advocate a change in how to measure performance to his superior, the response was, “I am sure you understand the concept of knowing one’s place in one’s organization.”

A third manager said “As I read the 2004 State Services Commission document “Managing for Outcomes: Guidance for Departments”, I must show a return on investment for all collaborative activity. There are opportunity costs of doing things differently. I have a family. I have a mortgage. I cannot take the risk.”

A high-level SSC official who said he is “well aware” of the “siloh mentality” in the New Zealand bureaucracy put it this way:
We grew up in this culture. Government workers in their 50s know nothing else. Despite discussion to the contrary, the reforms of 1980s and 1990s are still alive. Adjusting those reforms now for today’s challenges and problems is a major concern. Despite dedicated individuals, agency culture can bring you down. The NPM may have created an organization culture where it is not okay to try new things like collaboration for fear of failure.

3. Delivering the Message

Many public servants lamented the difficulty of communicating the importance of collaboration throughout the bureaucracy even with defined terms. “It [the central government] is like the Catholic church. What the people at the top think they are doing and what is actually happening is quite different. There are translation problems and transfer problems,” said a high-level SSC official. The Catholic Church analogy arose again in speaking with an NGO advocate who said that “The CEs collaborate (and compete) and understand the importance of collaboration, but then as you go down the food chain less is done and less is understood.”

A consultant expressed a different view concerning where the message about the need to collaborate was getting stuck: “The CE level is okay with collaboration, and the street level bureaucrats - those implementing programs and working with the public - are okay with collaboration. It is the middle third [of the central government bureaucracy] where there is a collaboration performance gap” she said.

In the meantime, many middle managers weary of years of government reforms are asking, “Is collaboration just another management fad? Can I dig my heels in and sit this one out?” A scholar of New Zealand
government conveyed his view to me that despite studies that point to a positive link between collaboration and performance, many New Zealanders remain sceptical. A high-level SSC official commented that this is a “translation problem.”

4. Long Term versus Short Term

Many people I interviewed pointed out that New Zealand generally is quite good at dealing with emergencies, such as the Christchurch earthquake. Tied in with this, New Zealand bureaucrats take pride in responding quickly to Ministers. “New Zealanders are good at meeting the expectations of the government of the day,” said one high-ranking SSC official, but longer-term issues are more difficult. “We are not as good at dealing with complex issues that need a long view and the collaboration of many entities and people.”

One former high ranking career public servant jokingly described New Zealand government officials as like the dog in the movie *Up* that was constantly distracted by passing squirrels. “Your attention is constantly diverted to the Minister’s crisis of the day. There is little reward for working on durable solutions to pressing public policy problems.” A regional government official phrased the tensions between long-term and short-term pressures differently: “Central government public servants are forced in a hole: they must serve the Minister, so they cannot think for themselves. There is no time for the analysis and effort it takes to do collaboration well.”
5. Risk, Fear and Trust

Fear is an inhibitor of collaboration in New Zealand. Public servants, especially at the central government level, expressed a fear of loss of power, loss of credibility, loss of control, suboptimal outcomes, loss of resources, personal loss, and loss of authority. “I have everything to lose and nothing to gain by collaborating” a program manager told me. “Collaboration is a risk.” Another said, “with performance indicators, I have no incentive to take risks.”

Tied with this is the idea that the principle-agent theory that undergirds many of the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s is perceived as communicating a lack of trust of public servants. “Trust is definitely an issue in collaboration” a policy analyst told me, “but it is also seen as an idea that cannot be quantified so no one wants to talk about it.” Trust is an asset in collaboration (Milward and Provan, 2006), and the remnants of the past based on a lack of trust slow some collaborative efforts.

6. The Media

It seems to be unanimous: NGOs, representatives from the private sector, and public servants at central, regional and local government levels agree: the “sensationalist” media in New Zealand is an inhibitor of collaboration. “If we try and fail, it will be on the first page of the newspaper,” lamented a CE. Another former CE agreed, but had a different perspective:

We did this to ourselves. We created an accountability system where we
set targets and we said, ‘We will meet those targets’. When we don’t meet the targets, we don’t want to have to explain ourselves. This is a form of arrogance. Private firms fail all the time, and explain why. Public servants have become risk averse because of the stringent accountability system created years ago [under the NPM].

### IV. Culture Was Changed Before. Can it be Changed Again?

Many of the impediments to collaboration in New Zealand can be traced to the ghosts of the management culture deliberately cultivated in the 1980s and 1990s. If the working cultures of New Zealand governments were changed before, can they be changed again?

The literature is replete with theories concerning organization change, including but not limited to evolutionary, teleological, life cycle, dialectical, social cognition, and cultural models, and theories that combine multiple models.\(^5\) From this vast literature, there are three theories that offer the most useful lenses through which to examine the possibility of creating a culture that supports collaboration in New Zealand.

#### 1. Lewin’s Theory of Change

“The fundamental assumptions underlying any human system are derived originally from Kurt Lewin,” writes Edgar H. Schein (Schein, 2004: 319). Likewise, Fernandez and Rainey (Fernandez and Rainey, 2006) note that many of the one million articles relating to organization

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\(^5\) For good explanations of these typologies, see Kezar, 2001
change are grounded in the work of Lewin. Hence, Lewin’s theory of change is the very best place to start when trying to understand organization culture.

Lewin put forth a three-stage model of change that he described as unfreezing the present level, moving to the new level, and freezing group life on the new level. His view was that “a change toward a higher level of group performance is frequently short lived: after a ‘shot in the arm,’ group life soon returns to the previous level” (Lewin, 1947: 344). Therefore, under his conceptualisation, for organizational change to occur, behaviour at the present level must be “unfrozen” (what Lewin described as creating a motivation to change), then the change needs to occur in the form of moving to the new level, and then the new behaviour needs to be “frozen,” or reinforced, on the new level.

Organization theorists such as Cyert and March (1963), Emery and Trist (1965), Katz and Kahn (1978), Thompson (1967), Lawrence and Lorsch (1969), and Aldrich (1972) all maintain that organizations both are shaped by and seek to shape their environments. Yet Lewin (1943) argued that a profound impediment to change in human systems is the presence of a “force field” that resists organizational change and tries to maintain equilibrium in the ever-changing environment described by classic organization theorists. This force field is comprised of driving forces and restraining forces that must be altered for change to occur. In order to move the equilibrium, the organization’s restraining forces must be removed or reduced. Those restraining forces are very difficult to get at because they often involve group norms or personal psychological defences embedded in an organization’s culture and are not easily understood.
2. Schein’s Theory of Change

The second theory of change that might guide management culture change in New Zealand was developed by Edgar Schein. Schein is considered one of the top organizational theorists in the world, known especially for his model and empirical studies of organizational culture. Among his many theoretical contributions, Schein extended Lewin’s model of change by unpacking the concept of unfreezing, honing and refining Lewin’s work within the context of organization change and culture. Culture is to an organization what personality is to the individual; hence every organization has a unique culture. Culture is the underlying set of values, beliefs, understandings, and norms shared by employees. It is manifest in a variety of ways, primarily through basic assumptions, values and beliefs, and artifacts (Schein, 2010). Khademian (2002: 18-19) explains:

...[B]asic assumptions...capture fundamental notions of how the organization and its members relate to the environment, time, space, reality, and each other. Basic assumptions are taken for granted and [are] below the level of consciousness for most members of the organization. This is the heart of culture and motivates behaviour. ...[V]alues and beliefs...[are] what members believe “ought to be” in the work of the organization. Ideologies, attitudes, and philosophies are found within this layer. ...[A]t the most visible level are cultural artifacts - the language used, stories told, ceremonies performed, rewards given, symbols displayed, heroes remembered, and history recalled.

Schein (2010) theorised that unfreezing, as essentially motivation to change, consists of three processes, each of which must be present to
some degree for change to be generated. The first part of unfreezing concerns disconfirmation within the human system. Schein maintained that all forms of change start with some form of dissatisfaction or frustration generated by data that refute reigning expectations or hopes. Just the presence of disconfirming information is not enough, however, because workers “can ignore the information, dismiss it as irrelevant, blame the undesired outcome on others or fate, or, as is most common, simply deny its validity” (Schein, 2010).

Schein maintained that such disconfirmation must arouse the second step of unfreezing - “the connection of the disconfirming data to important goals or ideals, causing anxiety and/or guilt” (Schein, 2004: 320). What he calls “survival anxiety” is the sense that if the organization does not change, it will fail to achieve its goals and ideals. In order to experience survival anxiety and move to this stage of unfreezing, the disconfirming data must be accepted as valid and relevant. What typically prevents this stage from occurring is denial and a different kind of anxiety, “learning anxiety”: the feeling among members of the organization that if they admit to themselves and others that something is wrong, they will lose their effectiveness, their self-esteem, and perhaps even their identity. Learning anxiety and denial are the fundamental restraining forces on an organization which can controvert the effects of disconfirming information, leading to the maintenance of the status quo equilibrium. Furthermore, Schein (2010) argues that survival anxiety must exceed learning anxiety, and that change depends on reducing learning anxiety (not increasing survival anxiety).

Schein’s third step to unfreezing behaviour is creating some degree of “psychological safety for workers that helps them see a possibility of
solving the problem and learning something new without loss or identity or integrity” (Schein, 2004: 320; Schein, 1999; Schein, 1980). Schein theorised that unless sufficient psychological safely is created, the disconfirming information will be denied, ignored, or otherwise countered, and no change will take place. The key for change in an organization becomes balancing the threat posed by disconfirming data with enough psychological safety to allow those averse to change in the organization to accept the information, sense survival anxiety, and become motivated to change.

Once an organization is motivated to change, Schein notes that reframing or “cognitive redefinition” is needed. This occurs by adopting the new information and yields, among other things, new standards of judgment or evaluation, which must be congruent with the rest of the organization culture. If organization members do not find the new standards plausible and sensible, this will set off new rounds of disconfirmation that often lead to unlearning. At the same time, for refreezing to occur, changes to old norms and behaviour must be embedded throughout the entire organization, and rewards must buttress the new desired behaviour.

3. Kanter’s Theory of Change

The third theory of change that has application to the managerial culture of New Zealand comes from Rosabeth Moss Kanter. Kanter studied corporations and compared those organizations that were able to change successfully with those that were not able to change successfully.

Kanter outlines five forces that must converge in order for major change
to occur. Force 1 is “grassroots innovations,” which Kanter defines as positive departures from tradition, or new ways of thinking in the organization. These “aberrations” pop up in an organization often by accident or, if deliberate, are seen initially as insignificant or non-threatening. These are “‘unplanned opportunities’ that permit entrepreneurs to step forward ... they may work best at the periphery, in ‘zones of indifference’ where no one else cares enough to prevent a little occasional deviance” (Kanter, 1983: 291). Force 2 is a “crisis or galvanizing event.” The event might be a lawsuit, a change in the economy, or an announcement that “business as usual” will not be tolerated. Kanter, Stein and Jick (1992: 499) explain:

The event or crisis seems to require - even demand - a response. If the crisis is defined as insoluble by traditional means, if traditional solutions quickly exhaust their value, or if stakeholders indicate that they will not be satisfied by the same old response, then a nontraditional solution may be pushed forward. ...In effect, variations from tradition create potential, but until the system has enough of a “crack” in its shell, they are not able to penetrate.

Notably, a crisis need not be exogenous to constitute a force for change. That is, a crisis may be precipitated by the organization’s own actions, and yet still demand response.

Forces 1 and 2 in combination set the stage for change, but neither new ideas nor crisis alone guarantees change without two other conditions: explicit strategic decisions in favour of change, and individuals with enough power to act as “prime movers” for its implementation. Force 3, then, is “change strategists and strategic decisions.” This is where most
change management or strategic planning literature begins: Leaders enter and develop strategies that use Force 1 to solve the problems inherent in Force 2. “A new definition of the situation is formulated, a new set of plans, that lifts the experiments of innovators from the periphery to centre stage, that reconceptualises them as the emergent tradition rather than as departures from it” (Kanter, 1983: 294).

Force 4 is “individual prime movers,” which Kanter defines as people able to push the new organizational reality, often by empowering the champions or advocates of change. Prime movers may sell the new strategy in many ways: by repetition (mentioning the new idea or new practice on every possible occasion), by making clear that they believe the new vision, by visiting subordinates to answer their questions about the new vision, by developing slogans that communicate a new way of operating, by changing the agenda at staff meetings, by demanding that new items be contained in reports, and by concentrating on symbolic management. The point is to change the organization’s culture and direction through “signposts in the morass of organizational messages” (Kanter, 1983: 298).

According to Kanter, one last Force (#5) is needed for true organizational change to occur: “action vehicles.” Action vehicles transform abstract notions of change into reality - ideas become actual procedures, structures, or processes. They are important because, in order for change to take hold, change recipients need to know what the change means for their own unique activities. Changes need to be written into the fabric of the organization - into job descriptions, work processes, contracts, and so forth. On top of this, individuals need to be convinced that using the new practices clearly creates benefits for them so that they will use
them, and incentives must support desired actions. Employees are also encouraged to look for broader applications of the new ideas. Ultimately, the goal is to create momentum and critical mass. “…[M]ore and more people use the new practices, their importance is repeated frequently, and on multiple occasions. It becomes embarrassing, ‘out-of-sync,’ not to use them” (Kanter, 1983: 301). Kanter further argues that when organization change efforts fail, it is often because of a weak Force 5, rather than an inherent problem with the innovative ideas themselves.

Box 3 weaves together Lewin’s, Schein’s, and Kanter’s theories of change, and distills from all three the necessary ingredients for successful organizational change. Box 4 includes specific challenges to the needed causal factors in New Zealand.

The applications to New Zealand are many. Conditions that hinder culture change toward an environment in which collaboration is seriously considered as a management and leadership strategy include the stifling of grassroots innovation; programs that are stripped down to their basics with managers “playing tennis at the net” all day without time to get off the court and think about new ways of serving the public; lack of shared understanding concerning the meaning of the words collaboration, collaborate, collaborative and co-production; a culture where risk is discouraged and public servants fear deviating from standard operating procedure; and the fact that prime movers of collaborative ideas leave when room to maneuver closes down.
| Phase of Change | Required Causal Factors |
|----------------|------------------------|
| **Unfreezing** |                        |
|                | Grassroots innovations are present |
|                | Crisis or galvanising event occurs |
|                | Disconfirming information is present |
|                | Restraints of group norms and psychological defences are reduced |
|                | Survival anxiety drives acceptance of disconfirming information |
|                | Psychological safety permits motivation to change |
| **Change**     |                        |
|                | Cognitive redefinition |
|                | New standards of judgment and evaluation are developed |
|                | Change strategists exist and make explicit strategic decisions in favour of change |
|                | Prime movers sell change strategy and empower change advocates |
| **Refreezing** |                        |
|                | Action vehicles transform abstract ideas into reality |
|                | Rewards buttress new desired behaviour |
|                | Changes to old norms and behaviour are embedded throughout the organization |
## Box 4

### Organizational Change in New Zealand

| Phase of Change | Conditions in New Zealand That Hinder Organization Change |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Unfreezing      | **Grassroots innovation stifled:** Workers report having to collaborate under the radar. When collaboration rises up from underground, it is often cut off as not complying with standard operating procedures. |
|                 | **Crisis or galvanising event occurs:** No crisis or galvanising event. Business as usual reinforces behaviour as usual. The exception is the Christchurch earthquake which catalyzed collaboration. |
|                 | **Disconfirming information present but rejected:** BPS increased the awareness of areas where performance is low. Leaders sent message: you can evolve or leave. Government sees opportunity, not just risk, but bias by some in the trenches is to dismiss collaboration. |
|                 | **Restraints of group norms and psychological defences are reduced:** Workers weary of reforms and fearful of new reforms seek to maintain current equilibrium. |
|                 | **Schedule pressure thwarts survival anxiety:** Public servants often have enormous responsibilities. Dealing with the concerns of the government of the day keep public servants putting out fires. Yet the complexity of new challenges and changes has begun to raise survival anxiety. |
|                 | **Learning anxiety is profound:** Characterisation of accountability targets that “we will meet” makes it hard to admit weakness or failure. |
|                 | **Psychological safety absent:** Some have it, some don’t. Many “hunker down” as “failure is not an option” is deeply engrained in culture. |
| Change          | **Cognitive redefinition undermined:** Change agenda superseded by responding to government of the day; Message not getting through bureaucracy. |
|                 | **New standards of judgment are not stabilized:** 101 definitions of collaboration create uncertainty. Leadership instability through high turnover undermines initial efforts to evaluate and change culture. |
|                 | **Change is more tactical than strategic:** Change targets are typically technical in nature and narrowly construed. Some official pronouncements do elevate and enhance the message of collaboration. |
|                 | **Prime movers do not persist:** Prime movers leave when room to manoeuvre closes down. Leadership changes, as well as unclear understandings of when and how to collaborate undermine stability of message. |
Refreezing

**Action vehicles create new structures and processes:**
Lack of attention to collaborative structures and processes. Leaders struggle with finding the “glue” to make the message about collaboration stick. Collaboration just beginning to be written into job descriptions, work processes, individual performance agreements and contracts.

**Rewards buttress actions:**
Few rewards for durable solutions to long-term problems. View that there are few rewards for collaboration, only negatives such as loss of budget, loss of time, or loss of authority.

**Changes to old norms and behaviour are embedded throughout the organization:**
Continual restructuring makes new behaviours difficult to freeze. Employees not encouraged to look for broader applications of collaboration. Collaboration seen as deviant behaviour or admitting weakness rather than a savvy management or leadership strategy. Strategic collaboration is the exception, not the rule.

Widespread change within a bureaucracy is difficult to enact and typically can take up to ten years to accomplish. Here are some concrete steps that can be taken to jump-start changes in the culture of the New Zealand bureaucracy (as well as other countries’ bureaucracies) with the goal of creating opportunities for collaborative advantage:

- Make clear what will be monitored and controlled. If you monitor only unilateral activities within silos, you will get unilateral activities within silos.
- Pay attention to the language that you use. An over-emphasis on accountability might decrease personal responsibility.
- React appropriately to critical incidents and organizational crises. There will be failed collaborations. Private businesses fail all the time, evaluate the failure, and move on. Think about the message you want to send when collaborations fail. Your employees will be watching.
• Practice deliberate role modelling and coaching. Collaborate with other managers and leaders. The Brackenridge Declaration (Morrison, 2014), co-authored by the SSC senior leadership team at a retreat is one example. (See Box 5)

• Initiate collaborative programs. Develop logos and symbols to represent the collaborations. Be the sources of collaborative ideas. Establish clear criteria for rewards and punishments. Those criteria should include collaboration.

• Coordinate organizational designs and cultural messages to emphasize that collaboration is here to stay.

• Coordinate organizational systems and procedures with cultural messages to emphasize that you are serious about collaboration as a management and leadership strategy.

• Design physical space to communicate an organization culture that embraces collaboration.

• Employ stories about events and people who initiated collaborations in order to better serve the public. Celebrate successes through rituals and ceremonies. Give awards for exemplary collaboration. Your employees will be watching to see what happens when someone succeeds.

• Develop formal statements of organization philosophy that includes collaboration as a management and leadership strategy.

• Approach transformation as comprehensive organization change. Analyze the forest, but don’t forget the individual trees.

• Coordinate cultural leadership and change with strategic planning. Empower those employees who “get it” by letting them design and lead strategic planning efforts.
• Coordinate cultural change with technology, structure, and design. Take a systems approach to better understand how the pieces of the puzzle fit together. Pay attention to physical symbols.

• Pay attention to the informal organization. While the formal organization might state a commitment to collaboration, the informal organization might be passively aggressive toward the idea. Formal leaders can attempt to change or manage culture, but organizations also will be influenced by informal opinion leaders.

Box 5

The Brackenridge Declaration

WE are the leadership team of the State Services:

Our purpose is:

Collective leadership for a better New Zealand

Towards this we will:

• Be collectively ambitious for New Zealand, by focusing on the needs of our customers
• Mobilize our people and resources to ensure those leading complex system-wide issues are successful
• See past any barriers and make what needs to happen happen
• Champion state sector reform in our organizations
• Support each other as a team “out together, back together”, pick up the phone
• Collectively and individually support and implement the work of functional leaders
• Own and champion decisions of the State Sector Reform Leadership Group
• Prioritize our biannual State Services Leadership team meetings.

27 March 2014
V. New Ways of Leading in a World of Shared Problems

Leadership is critical to developing and sustaining a collaborative culture that will encourage and support working across political and organizational boundaries. The contemporary leadership literature points out the limits of the “great man”, heroic, and “leader as sage” perspectives. The biggest problem with these traditional views of leadership is that they are concepts that reside exclusively in the individual. Tied in with this, the perspective is often narrowly locked into a leader-follower-shared goals triad (Drath, McCauley, Palus, Van Velsor, P. O’Connor, McGuire, 2008).

Leadership in collaborative networks is contrasted to these traditional views of leadership in Box 6. Lester Salamon (2002) observed that collaboration and collaborative governance shift the emphasis from the control of large bureaucratic organizations and the bureaucratic way of managing public programs to enablement skills. These enablement skills are used to bring people together, to engage partners horizontally, and to bring multiple collaborators together for a common end in a situation of interdependence. Examples include negotiation, facilitation, collaborative problem solving, and conflict management.

Collaborations and networks dedicated to the type of large-scale public policy problems facing developed countries like New Zealand usually do not emerge spontaneously:
Someone has to call the initial meeting and decide who should attend. The group needs to figure out how to organize its work, perhaps seek out new members, decide what it will do collectively, and most importantly find resources to get initial efforts going, even if the resources are something as simple as finding meeting space and getting permission to perform these new activities as part of regular job duties. Network members do not automatically embrace the idea of giving up autonomy or willingly embrace the need to work together, and often are reluctant to subsume their goals to those of the larger network. Participating in a network may carry risks and certainly imposes costs on participation. Accordingly, network governance has a distinctly emergent character, and requires a requisite amount of collaborative leadership on behalf of the whole network to initiate processes that inspire, nurture, support, and facilitate communication and involvement by members (e.g., individuals and organizations) in governance processes (Imperial, Ospina, Johnston, O’Leary, Williams, Johnson, and Thomsen, 2016).

As a collaborative network evolves, leadership roles will evolve. Rather than one individual leading the network at all times, it is typical to see different organizations and different individuals stepping forward to fulfill different leadership roles at different times. See Box 7. “Thus, collaborative leadership is ‘decentered’ with the roles for leaders distributed widely across the network” (Imperial, Ospina, Johnston, O’Leary, Williams, Johnson, and Thomsen, 2016).
### Box 6

**Traditional (Bureaucratic) versus Collaborative Leadership**

(Imperial, Ospina, Johnston, O’Leary, Williams, Johnson, and Thomsen, 2016)

| Traditional | Collaborative |
|-------------|---------------|
| Vision is possessed and articulated by the leader | Helps craft collective vision |
| Leader frames the problem and solution for followers | Helps others frame a collective definition of the problem and appropriate solutions |
| Leader has to have followers to lead | Leader is simultaneously a follower |
| Unilateral decision-making based on hierarchy, formal position, or legal authority | Shared decisions and values |
| Communication within a single organization or homogeneous group with shared interests or values | Communication across diverse groups with competing interests and values |
| Working within boundaries (e.g., program, organization, jurisdiction) | Working across boundaries |
| Focus on certainty | Tolerates and embraces ambiguity and complexity |
| Leader directs action | Leader facilitates and coordinates shared action |
| More closely aligned with transactional theories of leadership | More closely aligned with charismatic or transformational theories of leadership |
A move from a traditional leadership culture where individual accountability reigns supreme to a collaborative culture where leadership is emergent and shared, will not be easy for some in New Zealand. But there are enough people who see the need for increased collaboration under the right circumstances, and who want to move forward to better serve the people of New Zealand, that the odds of success are promising.
1. Cultivating the Collaborative Mind Set

Collaboration is deeply dependent on the skills of officials and managers. Important is who is representing an organization, agency, or jurisdiction at the table, whether they can see collaborative advantage, and whether they have the necessary skills to be an effective collaborator. In 2012, O’Leary, Choi and Gerard (2012) surveyed 304 members of the US Senior Executive Service (SES) and asked them the question, “What is the skill set for the successful collaborator?” In addition to strategy and technical knowledge (considered baseline or entry-level skills by respondents), the most frequently mentioned answers to the question dealt with personal attributes and interpersonal skills, followed by group process skills.

The most frequently mentioned *personal attributes* were (in order): open minded, patient, change oriented, flexible, unselfish, persistent, diplomatic, honest, trustworthy, respectful, empathetic, goal oriented, decisive, friendly, and a sense of humour. The most frequently mentioned *interpersonal skills* were good communication, listening, and the ability to work with people. Tied with this were *group process skills*, mentioned third in importance as part of the skill set for the successful collaborator. These included facilitation; interest-based negotiation; collaborative problem solving; skill in understanding group dynamics, culture and personalities; compromise; conflict resolution; and mediation. Taken as a whole, O’Leary, Choi and Gerard call this “the collaborative mindset.”

The collaborative mindset can be acquired by most and collaborative problem solving can be learned. (See Box 8.)
Box 8

**How to Do Interest-Based Collaborative Problem Solving**

- Define the issue and frame it as a joint task to meet both parties’ needs
- Educate each other about your interests (disclose and listen)
- Look for ways to expand the pie (create value before you claim value)
- Generate multiple options for settlement; if you get stuck, go back and review what people’s interests are
- Evaluate the options (how well do they meet needs?)
- Select/modify options based on which ones meet needs most
- Use objective criteria to resolve impasses.
- Develop a plan to implement the agreement including monitoring.

O’Leary and Bingham (2007)

Public managers in New Zealand (and around the world) would benefit from training in collaboration as a management and leadership strategy, including the skills mentioned above. I close this section with recommendations based on the expert insights of New Zealanders who participated in my research, as well as my own consulting experience. See Box 9.
Box 9

**Recommendations to Agency Heads to Create a Collaborative Environment**

- Accept ideas from people and places you would never think of. Learn from others.
- Bring in thought leaders who might create a spark of an idea in your employees.
- Seek people with strong public service motivation, dedicated to the overall well-being of New Zealanders.
- Seek people who will think widely about options.
- Seek people willing “to play outside their comfort zone.”
- Seek people comfortable with acting “transformationally” rather than staying in an old “transactional” mode.
- Seek people who can see collaborative advantage.
- Seek people with exemplary collaborative skills such as negotiation, conflict resolution, collaborative problem solving, facilitation, and strategy.

If your employees do not have these skills, obtain training for them.

- Provide an enabling environment to buffer short-term factors that undermine success.
- Empower network members to enable participation.
- Frame problems and solutions to create the space needed for collaborators to find productive ways to work together.
- Educate employees about the importance of the strategic use of individual attributes, interpersonal skills, and group process skills while collaborating.
- Incentivize and reward collaboration among individuals and organizations.
- Embed collaboration in performance evaluation and core competencies.
- Document and share how collaborations are working so that managers can learn from successful and failed experiences.
- Reshape management and leadership education to include intensive self-assessment and emotional intelligence development.
- Address challenges to data sharing and incompatible technologies that block inter- and intra-agency collaborative work.
- Address structural barriers to interagency work.
VI. Conclusion: Important Choices Ahead for New Zealand

New Zealand’s challenges, as with all countries, are not getting any easier. Global climate change, immigration, pollution problems, housing, child poverty, public health, disaster response, and reducing crime are only a few of the examples of cross-boundary challenges that could benefit from collaborative approaches.

New Zealand has taken positive steps in recent years to encourage collaboration across boundaries. The Better Public Services program currently being implemented is the latest in a long line of efforts to catalyze public servants to think and operate collaboratively. Especially significant are changes to the State Sector, Public Finance and Crown Entities Acts passed by the New Zealand Parliament in 2013 which knocked down legal impediments to collaboration. The idea of joint stewardship is now mentioned in legislation and in discussions. Attempts at cross-cutting initiatives are growing in frequency.

Many local and regional governments in New Zealand are doing significant work in the area of collaboration. I saw creative collaboration both with and among the public and among government entities in the meetings I observed in Otago, Canterbury, Wellington, and Auckland. I witnessed collaboration in human services jump-started by co-location in most communities I visited. As Bill Ryan put it:

There are pockets of [collaborative] innovation to be found in many places in ... New Zealand ... Some of these initiatives are big, on-the-surface and
proclaim their features (especially about partnership, collaboration and networks). Some are small, under the radar and doing ‘what needs to be done’ with little fanfare ... I suggest that they are signs of the future (Ryan, 2011).

Collaborative governance in New Zealand is not just about getting the job of government done. It is about larger issues such as control and liberation, opportunity and constraint, and creativity and conflict (Dickinson & Sullivan, 2014). New Zealand is like a group of swimmers perched at the edge of a lake, deciding whether to dive in. Some have dipped their toes into the water of collaboration but only a few have taken the plunge to fully explore collaborative potential. There is a healthy scepticism about collaboration and New Zealanders rightly are weighing on a case-by-case basis whether to collaborate or not.

Collaboration is hard, and it is not always wise. There is no magic formula or magic elixir that can be used to solve all public problems collaboratively, and there will always be tensions between the vertical and the horizontal. Collaboration in New Zealand does not mean tossing out all the good that came from the New Public Management reforms; rather it means building on these reforms to better serve the public in those areas that can best be addressed by crossing boundaries.

New Zealand is a country with a great history of innovation and is more “nimble” in enacting reforms than most countries. Sufficient political will is needed, however, to change the leadership and management culture to retrofit collaboration into the philosophies and policies of the New Public Management. If any country is up for the challenge, New Zealand is.
Some Questions to Ask Before You Collaborate:

- Is this the right issue, time, and place for a collaborative approach?
- Will this approach help you reach pivotal performance objectives and better serve the public?
- Is the process being proposed or developed likely to be fair and effective?
- Are you and your organization suited for participation (mission, expertise, time)?
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