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## **Collaboration: The Prodigal Process**

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*Collaborative processes are beginning to play an increasingly important part in global efforts to control pollution, population and more recently the threat of terrorism. Technological advances in communication have resulted in a greater sense of the global community in which we live and interact. Traditional concepts and roles are being overturned at a progressively faster rate, resulting in us living in a period of 'necessary interdependence' (1993, p. 21). As a result, society has become increasingly aware of and more willing to accommodate difference. Socialisation in Western society emphasises competitiveness and self-promotion, factors which do not prepare individuals wishing to undertake a collaborative process characterised by interdependence and mutual compromise. The increasing acceptance and extent of collaborative practice, in areas such as contemporary art, is one reflection of this global situation. An understanding of the creative and innovative approaches utilised in the arts will contribute to an area of increasing interest and relevance in contemporary society, particularly as the benefits of collaborating are linked to creativity in problem solving. This paper will investigate why collaborative processes are being encouraged in various sectors, such as education, and why such processes have appeared only in recent times.*

Collaboration is a term which has been increasingly used across a range of sectors including the arts, management, health, education and defence. The term collaboration has been generally considered to be a process engaged in by more than two people; but this is where general agreement of the meaning ends and misuse of the term begins. Many people purport to work collaboratively when in fact the process is more cooperative, meaning there is less personal and financial risk (p. 8; Winer & Ray, 2000). Engaging in a collaborative process is about embarking on a relationship which relies on the positive aspects of human nature to work effectively. Although there are many texts, particularly in management or business which describe group work strategies (Brown, 1991; Chalmers, 1992; DuBrin, 1997; McDermott, 2002; Reed & Garvin, 1983; Toseland & Rivas, 1998), it has been only recently that the human aspect of working together has been emphasised (Barrentine, 1993b; Buzzanell, 1994; Clift, Veal, Holland, Johnson, & McCarthy, 1995; Farrell, 2001; John-Steiner, 2000; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003; Rosener, 1990; Rost, 1991; Winer & Ray, 2000). One interesting aspect of these texts has been the majority of them have been written by women, who have identified feminine attributes which can encourage groups to interact with one another more effectively. These texts have subverted traditional hierarchical relationships to advocate a more devolved style of leadership.

Socialisation in Western society emphasises competitiveness and self-promotion (Barrentine, 1993b; Burns, 1978; Clark, 1996; Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1992; Rogoff, 2003; Sharpnack, 2005; Sowers, 1983). Rogoff (2003) described children's participation in the everyday formats and routines of cultural institutions and traditions as engagement with their underlying cultural assumptions (p. 234). She

noted that these are often taken for granted without question. Such an environment that prioritises competition does not prepare individuals wishing to undertake a collaborative process. One reflection of both this and the extent of collaborative practices can be found in contemporary art (Close, 2004; Green, 2001; Montuori & Purser, 1995; NGA, 1996; PHEC, 1988; Walwin, 1997). An understanding of the creative and innovative collaborative practices utilised in contemporary art, particularly in relation to creativity in problem solving, have wider relevance in contemporary society (Bennis & Biderman, 1997; McCabe, 1984; McDermott, 2002; Montuori & Purser, 1999a, 1999b; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 1994; Webb, 2005).

Historically, collaboration has been evident throughout the history of art (Campbell, 1995; Chadwick, 1985; Chadwick & De Courtivron, 1993; Cole, 1983, 1995; Cumming & Kaplan, 1991; Gadd & Wallis, 2002; Greenberg, 1979; Lightbrown, 1980; Maginnis, 1995; Mancinelli, 1994; McCabe, 1984; Oesterreicher-Mollwo, 1978; Raaberg, 1990; Renard, 1919; Riese Hubert, 1998; Rubin Suleiman, 1993; Shepard, 2005; Staley, 1906; Unwin, 1963; Weltge, 1998). However through a number of factors the artist, or to be more precise, the artisan became separated from their craft origins. This situation culminated in the nineteenth century's romantic view of the artist; a view which also later evolved into the heroic myth of the artist – white, male and angst ridden. Consequently the artist was almost obliged to separate themselves from society to preserve their perceived status of genius (Becker, 1982; Callen, 1979, 1984 - 85; Holmes, 2004; Matchett, 2005; Montuori & Purser, 1995, 1999a; Shroder, 1961)

### *Groups and Leadership*

The notion of identity, which has also been described in the art world as ego or authorship, has often been celebrated at the expense of other people who have worked in supposedly collaborative processes. The creative individual, or 'lone genius' myth, has been perpetuated since the identification of the role of the artist in the late nineteenth century. In addition to the attributes of creativity and originality, there are also antisocial characteristics associated with this persona. 2. These attributes however can be located across a number of other sectors, particularly in areas which rely on group dynamics for their success. An understanding of how groups work together is an important aspect to understanding the collaborative process.

Many traditional texts such as *Organisational Behaviour* (Hellriegel et al., 1992), and *Basic Groupwork* (Douglas, 2000) describe factual information about groups, such as how they are formed, the different types of dynamics that may be evident, and when groups are necessary; however, they do not mention the intensity of relationship evident in groups that engage in collaborative processes. Although recent texts such as *Managing and Organisations* (2005) and *Organisational Behaviour* (Robbins, 2003) do acknowledge the term collaboration, they do so in the context of purely strategic, monetary alliances. The traditional hierarchical approach inherent in many companies is being reconsidered through the use of terms such as transformational leadership. This form of leadership emphasises concern for people, however, it does not mean that leadership does not exist There is a greater emphasis on a more devolved style of leadership which encourages discussion and input from a greater range of people. A number of recent texts advocated that traditionally associated feminine attributes such as nurturing and caring have influenced this approach

(Barrentine, 1993a, 1993b; Buzzanell, 1994, 2000; Coughlin, Wingard, & Hollihan, 2005; Fisher, 2005; Gergen, 2005; Henry, 1996; Rost, 1991; Whiteley, 2005) .

### *Cooperation, Coordination and Collaboration*

There is a particular intensity of effort involved in collaboration, which becomes apparent when the terms cooperation, coordination and collaboration are defined. Winer and Ray (2000) have clearly described the differences between these terms. Cooperation has been defined as a shorter-term informal relationship that exists without a clearly defined mission, structure or planning effort. Cooperative partners share information only about the subject at hand. If organisations are involved, they usually retain independent authority and keep resources separate so virtually no risk exists. Coordination is described as a more formal relationship and understanding of the project being undertaken. People involved in a coordinated effort focus their longer-term interaction around a specific effort or program. Coordination requires some planning and division of roles and opens up communication channels between people and organisations. Although authority still rests with individual organisations, everyone's risk increases. At times power can be an issue in a coordinated project, although resources are made available to participants and rewards are shared. Collaboration is described as a more durable and pervasive relationship. A new structure has been created, particularly if organisations are involved, and there is full commitment to the common project. The relationships are maintained by well-defined communication channels and comprehensive planning operating on all levels. The collaborative structure determines authority, and the risk is much greater because each person contributes resources and reputation. The people involved jointly secure resources and share the results and rewards. The literature has revealed that writers use the terms cooperation and coordination interchangeably to describe a collaborative process, without acknowledging the intensity of the relationship described above.

### *Collaboration and Creativity*

Specific texts and articles which investigate the collaborative process link it strongly with creativity. This is evident in texts such as *Explaining Creativity* (Sawyer, 2006), *Collaborative Creativity* (Miell & Littleton, 2004), *The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration* (Wright, 2004), *Group Creativity* (Sawyer, 2003), *Creative Collaboration* (John-Steiner, 2000), and *Collaborative Circles* (Farrell, 2001). Sawyer claimed *Explaining Creativity* was the first text to consider performance, which contains the elements of improvisation, collaboration and communication. These elements are seen to be central to creativity. Sawyer also acknowledged that the creative process is unavoidably collaborative, and that research into group creativity must consider group dynamics. He observed that creative processes in the discipline of fine arts are more 'compositional, and allow time for unlimited revision and contemplation' (p. 7).

Miell & Littleton (2004) examined collaborative creativity across a number of areas including: music composition, business, school-based creative activities, fashion design and web-based academic collaborations. Miell and Littleton considered creativity as a fundamentally social process and emphasised the need to examine it within the cultural, institutional and interpersonal context which supports it. The authors noted that this approach to creativity had increased in academic literature in recent years. Miell and Littleton described the factors affecting the collaborative

process as: identity, affect and motivation. A chapter by Moran and John-Steiner (2004) described collaboration as involving ‘an intricate blending of skills, temperaments, effort and sometimes personalities to realise a shared vision of something new and useful.’ They defined the characteristics of collaboration as: complementarity, tension and emergence.

Wright (2004) described collaboration as having a ‘delicate essence.’ In his article *The Delicate Essence of Artistic Collaboration* he noted that collaboration emerges and flourishes under particular circumstances and that its very nature is paradoxical. Wright examined the basis of the art economy which is reliant on the exchange of object-based artworks. Given this context he stated that: ‘co-authorship can only be perceived as a hindrance to the sort of possessive individualism underpinning authorship’ (p. 534). Wright further contended that collaboration between artists is often strategic, and teamwork is the exception. He claimed that art, and more specifically the art object as a commodity, was the chief obstacle to artistic collaboration. In this way Wright identified capitalism as an anti-collaborative force.

### *Social and Cultural influences on Artistic Collaborative Practice*

For many people the gallery system is their most common experience of encountering art. In the article ‘Artistic Autonomy and the Communication Society,’ (2004) Holmes argued that aesthetic institutions and consequently artists have been affected by the transformation of society on a model which measures input and output in the context of economic viability. As Holmes stated:

... the values of transnational state capitalism have permeated the art world, not only through the commodity form, but also and even primarily through the artists’ adoption of managerial techniques and branded subjectivities (p. 551).

This has resulted in privatisation of companies, the reduction of staff and consequently a reliance on automated programs to complete banking, pay bills, and book tickets for flight and entertainment. Issues arise however when the same automated programs are used when assistance is sought and long waiting queues ensure. Many artists who have traditionally eschewed society, have nevertheless exhibited within a gallery context, and are aware that for the dealer it is a business. Galleries, curators, dealers and artists have become more aware of the importance of publicity, professionally presented work and the cultivation of some degree of controversy to enhance their marketability: 3.

### *Collaboration & Business*

Ironically, given the insidious force of capitalism, an investigation of various business models reveals that management structures are also undergoing a process of transformation. They are moving from a less hierarchical model, associated with masculine attributes, to a more devolved and horizontal system of management, associated with feminine attributes (Barrentine, 1993b; Buzzanell, 2000; Clift et al., 1995; Montuori & Purser, 1999a; Purser & Montuori, 1999; Rickards & De Cock, 1999; Rost, 1991; Thousand et al., 1994; Webb, 2005; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

Barrentine the editor of *When The Canary Stops Singing* (1993b) described this new way of doing business as a feminine approach. She defined the word feminine through Carl Jung's interpretation as characterising love, nurturance and compassion which are not solely the provenance of women (p. 10). Jung also argued that person was born with a feminine and masculine side, with one typically dominating the other. Jung proposed that when individuals were able to recognise both sides and integrate them into a balanced whole they have achieved a healthy personality. Gergen (2005) also agreed noting that effective leaders must mix together masculine as well as feminine qualities. Eisler (2005) stated that leadership and management styles which emphasised caring rather than coercion have become more prevalent today. She believed this was 'because of the rising status of women, and thus of qualities and behaviours associated with femininity, such as nurturance and empathy' (p. 25). There are a number of reasons for this, but generally it, can be argued, that as the Western world has moved from an industrial to an information economy, people are expected to think for themselves, and will often resist and resent attempts by leaders who employ a policy which alienates and coerces employees.

Rogoff (2003) noted that differences between boys and girls, such as aggression and nurturance, 'reflect a clear relationship to the roles expected of men and women in many cultural communities' (p. 192). In terms of gender, many men have been socialised to be decisive, and therefore processes such as consultation and negotiation with other people can be difficult (Acker, 1990; Brown, 1991; Burns, 1978; Rost, 1991; Toseland & Rivas, 1998). Women are perceived to be nurturers and carers, responsible for maintaining the social networks of the immediate and extended family through constant interpersonal communication (Chadwick, 1996; Chadwick & De Courtivron, 1993; Fontana & Frey, 2005; Garvin, 1997; Harlan, 1998; John-Steiner, 2000; Mumby, 1996; Olesen, 2005; Parker & Pollock, 1981; Shepard, 2005; Tong, 1995; Wolff, 1981, 1992). There is evidence to suggest that social conditioning (Hunt, 2005; Whiteley, 2005) and to some extent biological predispositions (Eisler, 1995, 2005; Fisher, 2005) enable women to engage in a collaborative process more easily than men. In his discussion of leadership, Gergen (2005) argued that effective leaders must have both masculine and feminine qualities, and it does not really matter whether a 'feminine' style of leadership is in the genes or created by socialisation (p. xxi), effectively denying the prominence of either side of the nature/nurture debate. 4. Rogoff (2003) revealed that although men and women have been socialised in particular ways, these socially-constructed roles are not rigid, and will change as perceptions of the way people should interact with one another change:

Developmental transitions in roles across the life span will undoubtedly continue to be closely aligned with cultural communities' traditions and practices. But the nature of those traditions and practices, including those involving gender roles, are likely to change in subtle and not-so-subtle ways with coming generations. At the same time, they are likely to maintain some continuities with roles that humans have developed over millennia, based on biological ecological, and cultural constraints and supports (Rogoff, 2003, p. 193).

Given these socially entrenched and gendered assumptions about men and women, it has to be expected that these attitudes would prevail in any theories relating to leadership in small or large groups.

Literature pertaining to leadership particularly in organisations during the 1960s and 1970s emphasised the hierarchical nature of leadership, with decisions being made by a small group or individual at the apex of a pyramid structure. However, a more devolved style of leadership has become increasingly more acceptable and encouraged across a range of areas. People undertaking leadership roles in society have been affected by cultural processes throughout their life. The way they practice their leadership is affected by cultural awareness and also by the social system in which they currently operate.

### *Collaboration & Education*

Collaborative processes are being increasingly utilised in the education sector (Chalmers, 1992; Engestrom, 1994; Erickson, 1989; Henry, 1996; Littleton, Miell, & Faulkner, 2004). Educators are encouraging students to work together and to use a range of learning styles in order to increase their relational skills. Sawyer (1997) noted that contemporary research in education ‘focuses on the benefits of collaborative, participatory learning, in which the students take an active role, in rich unstructured interactions with both the teachers and with other students’ (p. 197). Sawyer saw improvisation as a vital factor in this process. Baker-Sennett and Matusov (1997) noted that when educational opportunities for improvisation are blocked, children’s opportunities to learn and develop become limited. They also noted that improvisation benefited from experience, particularly when examining teaching effectiveness. Teachers who created improvisational environments underwent a ‘paradigm shift in their teaching philosophy that involve[d] relinquishing control of the educational process and re-viewing teaching and learning as a collaborative endeavour’ (Baker-Sennett & Matusov, 1997, p. 207). Traditional education has emphasised text-based learning and discouraged improvisation. It is now apparent that improvisational performance provides students ‘with opportunities to engage in sophisticated collaborative-solving processes’ In addition ‘it also serves as a tool that revitalises the way we think about the relationships between teaching, learning and development’ (Baker-Sennett & Matusov, 1997, p. 210).

In the education sector, Malone (2005) described collaboration as shared planning, with administrators talking to each other daily, sharing information and making decisions through a collaborative process. Although Malone did not fully explain how the collaborative process worked, she did indicate that it was a shared process which reflected the change in education and business from a less hierarchical ‘top down’ approach to a more devolved horizontal structure with opportunities for decision making from those not in leadership positions. Friend and Cook (2003) in the text *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals* stated: ‘Interpersonal collaboration is a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work towards a common goal’ (p. 5). Friend and Cook contended that the use of the word style distinguished between the interpersonal experience of collaboration and the collaborative activity. They described the defining characteristics of collaboration in this context as follows: collaboration is voluntary; collaboration requires parity among participants; collaboration is based on mutual goals; collaboration depends on shared responsibility for participation and decision making; individuals who collaborate share resources; and individuals who collaborate share accountability for outcomes (pp. 6 - 11). Friend and Cook described the outcomes of a successful experience with the collaborative

process as: individuals who collaborate value this interpersonal style; professionals who collaborate trust one another; and a sense of community evolves from collaboration (pp. 11 - 13).

*Collaborative School Management: One Principal's Experience* (1992) revealed how the collaborative process can operate with a leader in charge. Chalmers emphasised the importance of collaboration, but the process itself was not fully investigated. Henry (1996) in *Parent-School Collaboration: Feminist Organisational Structures and School Leadership* revealed more of the human element involved between the wider school community and staff which was facilitated by her awareness of feminine attributes in the collaborative process. Henry (1996) took a feminist approach to school leadership and structures which emphasised collaboration amongst parents, teachers and administrators as being essential to achieving effective outcomes for all concerned. She proposed that the organisational structures which schools are traditionally based upon require new leadership strategies, to enable them to work with the community instead of apart from it. Henry stated that feminism, in addition to being a political movement that advocated for and gained legal and social rights for women, was also an intellectual school of thought grounded in principles of equality, respect, and humanity. She therefore believed this philosophical approach was vital in framing school-parent relationships.

As the majority of teachers will attest, in any sector of schooling there is an ever-increasing variety of cultural, ethnic, language, social-class backgrounds and orientations amongst the school community. However, the language of parents and educators can be very different, resulting in communication problems. As Henry noted, the irony was that although educational jargon was not difficult, it can be used in such a way as to alienate and exclude people, automatically sabotaging any attempts to communicate effectively. Because of this perceived superiority, many parents may defer to a teacher, even when they have an important contribution to make (p. 147). Educators, teachers and administrators should be able to communicate easily with a wide range of people, particularly if they are sincere in sharing decision making.

In Chapter 9 of *Parent-School Collaboration*, Henry outlined and compared traditional bureaucratic hierarchical structures of organisational and school leadership to feminist structures. She described this as a feminist mindset that was not competitive, bureaucratic, hierarchical nor exploitative, and further added that schools reflected the values of the society they exist in. She noted that the values that can be used from feminism would involve moving beyond gender differences and towards a theory of care that is inclusive:

In other words, education is no longer seen narrowly as a set of managerial and pedagogical skills, but rather as a caring, collaborative profession which works with families and others to make decisions about pedagogy and curricula in order to best meet the needs of all children. Following this view, schools would be child-centred, collegial cultures, operating as small units, where risk-taking and creative ideas and actions are valued. Parents and educators would be working together for such goals as: building trust; creating a safe school environment for children; enabling academic, athletic, and personal successes; supporting teamwork

and collaboration between school and community; and taking care of building and finances. Hierarchy would be something to overcome. In a feminist view of organisation, face to face discussions and collaborative decision making take precedence over bureaucracy and formal rules (p. 179).

The notion of co-operative learning, which many also describe as collaborative learning, has evolved predominately from the theories of Vygotsky. He defined 'the zone of proximal development' a concept which described the distance between what a person can achieve as an individual, compared to what they can achieve if under the guidance of more capable peers. In educational environments for example, teachers who wish to maximise what a child can accomplish will minimise the time the child works alone on school tasks, and maximise the time they can work with others who possess different knowledge or expertise. Vygotsky and Piaget both claimed that cooperative learning is the essential means by which the mind constructs knowledge and invents meaning (Thousand et al., 1994). Educationalists have recognised a number of strategies which they say feature collaborative processes such as peer tutoring and cooperative learning groups, which helped students learn more effectively. These types of self-described collaborative strategies have been extended into such areas as business, nursing, counselling, and leadership because of their intrinsic value to the learning process.

The text *Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn* (Littleton et al., 2004), was situated in an educational context, and examined how certain modes of peer collaboration promote learning, and how the skills, disposition and strategies to engage in a collaborative process can be learned in order to make peer interaction an opportunity for learning. This work was undertaken with students and teachers through observational tasks which were recorded and analysed. Some of the interesting observations proposed by this text were that the collaborative process can be affected by gender, with some of the studies revealing that girls were more successful at engaging in collaborative activities than boys. Another important observation was that collaborative activity was inherently creative. As such this broadens the repertoire of experiences from which children can interpret the set task. Therefore the process and/or end result may not always be directed towards the educational goal that had been devised. The text also argued that each individual has a different capacity to collaborate; it was not an innate quality, which appears to refute the proposition that women may be more predisposed to collaboration. The last chapters of *Learning to Collaborate, Collaborating to Learn* argue that computer technology can re-structure social interaction and joint knowledge building, enabling us to approach the collaborative process without the traditional biases which already exist in verbal communication.

### *Conclusion*

This paper has briefly outlined why collaborative practices appear to be increasing in society, and how this is evidenced through various sectors such as business, education and the arts. The arts can provide important strategies in understanding the creative potential of collaborative processes, particularly in the area of student learning. Collaboration has been traditionally devalued in an individualist and capitalist society. However, it appears to have been welcomed back as a legitimate and important method for establishing relationships and working together to achieve a common goal.



## **Endnotes**

1. A number of contemporary artists are using working cross disciplinary and often with new technology. The Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) is one organisation which seeks to provide a connection between art and culture, science and technology. ANAT seeks media artists working in screen, sound, installation and performance to create opportunities for connection, collaboration, innovation, research and development both nationally and internationally.
2. Rickards and DeCock (1999) suggest that these antisocial characteristics such as being a revolutionary, a loner and a destroyer of traditional institutions are incompatible with the skills required to engage in collaboration.
3. The recent 'curator gate' scandal at the National Gallery of Victoria involving Geoffrey Smith who recently resigned following allegations that he was involved in conflict-of-interest purchases is one case. His partner was quoted as saying: 'The phone's been running hot, he's a world expert on a large number of artists – he's hot property (Perkin, 2006).'
4. Gergen uses the words: aggressive, assertive, autocratic, muscular and closed to describe traditional forms of leadership, and consensual, relational, web-based, caring, inclusive, open and transparent to describe a 'feminine' style of leadership (p. xxi).

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