(Cross, Rebele and Grant, 2016). This also illustrates the relationship of reticulists to leadership (Ibarra and Hansen, 2011).

Convenors in the local government context may be powerful individuals such as the council leader or chief executive (Bryson, Crosby and Stone, 2006) but may also come from lower organisational levels performing important, formally defined liaison roles, such as integrating teams, organisations and cultures which need to be created “proactively and intentionally” (Mankin, Cohen and Fitzgerald, 2004, p12). The role of participating administrators and professionals are viewed as partners, not superior–subordinates and as such, they are co-conveners, co-strategists, co-action formulators, co-programmers, and so on. (Agranoff, 2006, p59).

My experience in Profession to Value and Collaborative Guidance was predominantly that of a convenor and reticulist and I have subsequently played this role in facilitating discussions amongst health and social care integration leadership groups. I am convinced that the role, along with others, is essential for collaborations to have any chance of success.

Webb (1991, p231) views the role of the reticulist as one of the two boundary spanning mechanisms along with networks, suggesting the term refers to individuals who are “especially sensitive to and skilled in bridging interests, professions and organisations”. However, whilst stressing their importance and praising their skills, he also argues that emphasising them results in a focus on
channels through which coordination may be routed or facilitated rather than an explanation of why coordinative behaviours arise, i.e. “to highlight the catalyst without explaining the underlying process” (Webb, 1991, p231).

Hudson et al. (1999) relate the notion of reticulist to that of “champions of change” whose skills are not only technical or competency based but also include social and inter-personal skills. They confirm legitimacy theory by arguing reticulists must “begin from a sound position of power and legitimacy” (Hudson et al., 1999, p251) and collaborative initiatives arising from reticulist activity need to be protected from the departure of key actors. This impression of permanence is supported by Schuman (1996) who, in discussing the role of facilitation in collaborative groups, argues that groups cannot become self-facilitating “so long as there are power differentials in the political process, distrust, novelty and so on” (Schuman, 1996, p136).

An authoritative account of boundary spanners is provided by Williams (2002, 2010) who sees the reticulist as one of the key aspects of the boundary spanner’s roles in the UK public sector along with that of the entrepreneur and the interpreter/communicator. An important consideration of Williams’s (2002) work is that it not only provides a framework for understanding the significance of boundary spanners but also leads to consideration of the skills and competencies needed to achieve collaborative advantage. This is especially important when considered in the context of one proposition that partnership “unlocks the
distinctive competencies of other sectors" and the case for cross sector collaboration “rests on claims that private and voluntary sector organisations have competencies, or resources, which are critical to service improvement” (Entwistle and Martin, 2005, p238). It is not clear how many of the partnerships cited in Achievements & Challenges were motivated by the inter-dependency of skills and competencies as a resource and my experience in Collaborative Guidance was that unlocking skills was more of a consequence than an aim. This supports Williams’s (2012) findings that although health and social care integration can be viewed as an exercise in learning and knowledge management, they were “not the subject of a planned, coherent or purposeful strategy” (Williams, 2012, p558).

**The skills and competencies needed**

I have already noted the changing climate in which local government managers have to work with an increased concentration needed on “remolding bureaucratic systems, reshaping bureaucracies into team-based units and creating networked systems that will cross political jurisdictions” (Abels, 2012, p355). McGuire (2006) notes that many writers have made the case that collaborative management skills are unique to the collaborative context, being differentiated in some cases by operational behaviour such as activating people and resources, framing agreements, mobilising behaviour and synthesising purposeful interaction (Agranoff and McGuire, 2001). He suggests, however, that many of these skills are equally relevant
in single organisations and are already inherent in public managers. Research by Williams (2002) led to at least four general competencies being identified for the art of boundary spanning – building sustainable relationships; managing through influencing and negotiation; managing complexity and interdependencies; and managing roles, accountabilities and motivations. The skills that make up these competencies include communicating to create shared meaning, understanding, empathy, conflict resolution, networking, creativity, innovation, empowerment, and building trust as the “lubricant” (Williams, 2002, p116).

Mankin, Cohen and Fitzgerald (2004) use their research to develop a “lateral skills” profile, stressing the importance of good inter-personal skills as a foundation for working effectively with people of different functional backgrounds, work experiences, knowledge bases and skills in today’s “multicultural, cross-functional and interorganisational workplace” (Mankin, Cohen and Fitzgerald 2004, p17). Their summary of the necessary skills – viz. open to working with others, and sensitive to their needs and concerns; doing a good job of listening; viewing work colleagues as customers; doing their best to serve them well; being very careful about how to handle role boundaries; demonstrating integrity and inspiring trust represent a set of qualities arguably rare among public sector managers. My research experience supports this as I detected the starting point for too many people was consideration of the consequences of collaborating for their domain and a reliance on me to play the boundary spanning role. There was too much assumption that once the rationale for collaborating was articulated, the necessary
skills would be triggered whereas the reality was that the depth of understanding of the concepts underpinning the collaboration was insufficient to be developed into skills.

The sum of the individual skills can be interpreted as a reflection of the organisation's skills and Getha-Taylor (2008), having discovered a disconnect between what human resource managers believe collaborative competencies to be and what exemplary practitioners demonstrate, argues that both sets of actors should define the necessary competencies. She further argues that the most basic and critical factor of collaboration is not results driven but interpersonal understanding. Brandsen and van Hout (2006) note, however, that it is not always clear that organisations are competent in the new ventures they undertake. This is unsurprising in the collaborative context as there must be a balance between the differentiation needed via a rational division of labour and the integration necessary to co-ordinate independent activities. Any move towards differentiation must be compensated by a movement towards integration (Brandsen and van Hout, 2006).

Effectively organising social care demonstrates this tension and illustrates that larger geographical footprints for social services functions motivated by gaining efficiencies (as per numerous partnerships in Achievements & Challenges) have significant implications for external partners.

Communication is also a skill and features as a critical component of successful collaborative activity, both among participants and between participants and others.
not directly involved in the collaboration (Mankin, Cohen and Fitzgerald, 2004). McGuire (2006) notes that communication among employees within an organisation is one of the foundations of purposeful organisational behaviour and although new competencies are needed for collaboration, some of these are already inherent in the public manager. In the inter-organisational matrix structure, the horizontal integration between the different organisations is accomplished through intensive contacts and communication between the members of the multidisciplinary teams (Axelsson, 2006) with informal bilateral linkages being amongst the foremost of inter-organisational contacts (Agranoff, 2006). This demonstrates the ongoing nature of cooperation and that one of the salient features of welfare agencies, typified by the portfolio, is that lower level staff have considerable contact with outside bodies and often enjoy discretionary powers. This reinforces the need for “persistent and consistent pressure” from higher tiers of management and raises questions about lower level commitment to pursue co-operative efforts and the need to engage them effectively (Hudson et al., 1999, p252), a factor I felt was sometimes overlooked by the Collaborative Guidance authorities.

Leadership

Leadership is a skill and a quality that has been described as one of the first basic principles underlying the collaborative process, being necessary for focused and sustained action and getting the collaborative process started (Mankin, Cohen and
Fitzgerald, 2004). The changing public policy environment, typified in Wales by the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, requires managers of local government to view their principal leadership responsibility as establishing regional collaborative networks that include multiple governments, integrated with private and non profit organisations (Abels 2012). Collaborations provide multiple roles for formal and informal leaders (Agranoff, 2006) requiring a range of skills which local government leaders will need to increase in future to “guide their communities” (Warm, 2011, p62). Bryson, Crosby and Stone (2006) propose that cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they have committed sponsors and champions at many levels who provide formal and informal leadership, the challenge being to align initial conditions, processes, structures contingencies and constraints, outcomes, and accountabilities such that good things happen in a sustained way over time.

Maddock (2011) notes the need for collaborative leaders in local government who would promote their own organisations but not at the expense of the wider locality, with their transformative capacity forging the foundations of a “new public eco-system” at the local level. Rigg and O’Mahony (2013) reflect the importance of leadership emphasised in the literature by noting that improved systemic working is dependent on different thinking about leadership behaviours and qualities in that leadership could “honour contradictory demands for both unity and diversity” Ospina and Saz-Carranza (2010, p405).
Leaders facilitate collaborative advantage and Doberstein (2015, pp17-19) concludes that "metagovernors" can affect the design and management of collaborative governance by concentrating on achieving the correct timeframe, strategically managing the tasks of partners and targeting deliberations towards areas of agreement first. Doberstein (2015) argues that facilitative leadership is crucial for maintaining clear groundrules, building trust and facilitating productive deliberations.

Huxham and Vangen (2005) found that the frequent ambiguity about whom the partners were, and the inherent difficulty in specifying collaborative aims, made the translation of mainstream leadership theories to collaborative settings difficult. They concluded that leadership could be conceptualised through the media in which it is enacted – structures, processes and participants – and the kind of activities that those seeking to lead in collaborations find themselves in – managing power, controlling agendas, representing and mobilising organisations and enthusing and empowering those who could deliver collaborative aims. There is room for different styles to achieve collaborative advantage, both facilitative and manipulative – labeled "collaborative thuggery" (Huxham and Vangen, 2005, p222) - the latter recognising the need to manipulate the collaborative agenda and "play the politics" (Huxham and Vangen, 2005, p223).

Leadership featured in different ways in the portfolio, setting direction, facilitating co-operation and maintaining momentum but it was not always clear who was
leading and sometimes leadership became confused with management. Political
dimensions of leadership, at officer and elected Member level, were evident to the
extent that political considerations were highlighted as a specific heading in
Collaborative Guidance. At officer level, the different interests of chief finance
officers and service managers became evident when potentially fragile financial
issues were identified. These led to the declared political support for the
collaborative aims in the initiatives dissipating quickly in one case and, in another,
when there was a change of the political party ruling the council. Local authorities
are by definition political institutions with political governors and where political
behaviour is implicit and explicit. However, managing in a complex collaborative
environment requires a high degree of political stability as managers are effectively
acting as stewards for their political leaders who remain in ultimate control. As
Sundaramurthy and Lewis (2003) argue, according to stewardship theory, controls
may “squelch managers’ stewardship motives and aspirations—the very leadership
traits needed to propel organizations to new heights” (Sundaramurthy and Lewis,
2003, p403).
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The application of the literature review to the portfolio and my experience elsewhere have confirmed my belief that collaboration is a complex field of study that warrants deeper understanding by those responsible for creating and implementing public policy if it is to fulfil its central position in respect of the delivery of public services in Wales. This critical overview of the resource outputs, alongside the theory and practice which has emerged from a review of the literature, supports a conclusion expressed by Gray (1996, p77) two decades ago that despite growing experience with collaborative initiatives, they still remain vulnerable to political vagaries, economic shifts, institutionalised norms and ecological barriers. This leaves them unable to create and command the consequential and constitutive value needed to be sustainable (Cropper, 1996) unless corrective and compensatory action is taken. This overview has added to knowledge by examining collaboration in the context of Welsh social services and identifying a suite of characteristics by which the efficacy of collaboration as a credible public policy can be assessed, short of evaluating its outcomes.

The evidence confirms that collaborations are not consistently defined, can be formal and informal and take on a variety of different forms and designs. Collaborations can arise out of different motivations and reasons, some of which
involve theories about the dependency and exchange of resources and others rooted more in rational-altruistic grounds. The can also produce different outcomes ranging from mutual learning to real gains in efficiency and effectiveness and they contain contradictory elements that can include competition and conflict working against and within the collaborative endeavour.

Collaborations display the practical implementation of elements of organisational, institutional, network and agency theories and are frequently inextricably considered as an instrument of governance. A wide range of factors impact on their chances of success which change as they move through a life cycle of different phases. Collaborative working can occur vertically and horizontally in an intra, inter and cross-sector context reflecting both hierarchical and market forces as means of implementing public policy. Within collaborative activity there are strong socially interactive forces at play, such as power and trust, illustrating a dependence on certain behaviours to fulfil the collaborative objectives. Fundamentally, collaborations are dependent on the contribution of people as reticulists, leaders and stakeholders displaying a wide range of skills and competencies.

These characteristics are invaluable in adding to knowledge and furthering our understanding of collaborations and collaborative behaviour but do not readily lead to a straightforward typology of collaborations. For example, we know that mutually beneficial motives can disguise residual elements of conflict and competition, illustrated in the portfolio by *Profession to Value*. Similarly, the pursuit of a neat
organisational design for the collaborative form has to take account of numerous informal networking aspects, some of which are not immediately evident. This was highlighted in research for Collaborative Guidance where staff members in different parts of the council formed a degree of rearguard action against the main thrust of the strategy. In producing Collaborative Guidance, the issue of governance also became inextricably linked with the collaborative initiative and it was often difficult to precisely identify the shared objective of the strategy. Moreover, the mixed bag of collaborations and partnerships catalogued in Achievements & Challenges is itself indicative of the absence of a typical model.

So, if it is possible to offer characteristics of collaboration but not possible to fully typify it, how can this study not only add to knowledge but also add value to efforts to improve the chances of collaborative success? One argument is that it provides cause to celebrate rather than criticise the diversity of approach which has been identified, establishing such as a necessity given the culture of Welsh public policy. By enabling local individual initiative to determine what drives the reasons for collaborating and the form it should take, it could be argued that this will result in the collaborative experience being richer and more sustainable and relatively free from state control. To a large extent, this has been the approach taken to date in Wales, within a framework of government policy favouring collaboration as an alternative to the competitive approaches of the market. However, not only have we determined that such a choice is not as clear as first appears but also the inclusion of legislatively based imperatives for public agencies to cooperate in three significant
pieces of legislation, the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and the Local Government (Wales) Act 2015, have signalled that the voluntary approach does not produce the scale and pace felt necessary by government. The first two Acts are accompanied by statutory guidance on partnerships and make provision for national and regional approaches to functions such as adoption services, safeguarding and economic well-being. The pooling of funds across health and social care is made mandatory in specific functions but in one case the allowance for a lead-in period for this is generous and in other cases it is imprecise. This suggests a continuing anxiety in central government about over-prescribing.

A harsher assessment of government policy to date is that, despite including reserve powers to direct, it has been compromised by the need to appease local discretion, consistent with the central/local partnership culture both parties have sought to foster. The irony of this approach should not be lost in terms of evaluating the success or failure of the collaborative policy. I would argue that the voluntary collaboration inherent in the Compact for Change (2011) can be perceived as being motivated not so much by the need for an alternative to competition but as a means of avoiding local government reorganisation. Again somewhat ironically, incentives in this context involve the preservation of autonomy rather than a commitment to share sovereignty. A quick review of government initiatives since 2003 confirms some indecisiveness and a lack of assurance in the central government position. We have seen the creation and subsequent dismantling of local health boards co-
terminous with local authorities, the publication of Making the Connections as confirmation of the collaboration strategy, the Beecham (2006) and Williams (2014) reports on public services, the creation and (soon to be replaced by public service boards) abolition of local service boards, the regional footprints, the advent and demise of community strategies and single integrated plans, the Compact for Change, the threat of a collaboration legislative measure, legislation to support collaboration, and a Local Government Act (2015) paving the way for reorganisation.

The evidence in the portfolio suggests fulfilment of the Welsh Government policy agenda on collaboration appears to be at least uncertain. It could be argued that the collaborative commitment in producing *Profession to Value*, and immediately following its publication was impressive but direct action was patchy and the overall strategy only partly sustained. Similarly, *Achievements & Challenges* showed progress in partnership arrangements by Welsh local authorities in a wide range of service areas but not in a manner which represents a strategic approach, not consistently across the regions, and presented by directors of social services as much as a challenge as an achievement. *Collaborative Guidance* reflected failed recent attempts by four authorities to deliver their declared goals of achieving extensive integrated services across their geographical boundaries. Therefore, there appears to be some distance between strategic intent and successful implementation of this key central government policy.
However, the alternative to voluntary collaboration of a totally hierarchical, mandated approach, whereby government prescribes the routes to be followed, seems equally unattractive because it belies the complexity that has been identified. A “one size fits all” approach rarely meets all expectations, and clashes with the central/local partnership culture sought after in Wales. The two collaborative initiatives in *Collaborative Guidance* highlighted the need to recognise different geographies and local cultures which needed to be taken into account in arriving at the right solution but as the Williams Report (2014) made clear, something has to change for collaboration to become more consistent and effective. In this context, grant funding and programme bending towards regions whilst creating local authority based public service boards has, paradoxically, embedded the collaborative culture and partly discredited the policy. An uneven patchwork of local regional governance arrangements for different functions has exacerbated the problem.

It is tempting to recommend more practical guidance for local authorities based on research such as this study, but unless this became statutory guidance, the opt out option would remain, and in any case the guidance needed is not typical of that which government issues statutorily. *Collaborative Guidance* was undoubtedly well received as non-statutory guidance for inter-local authority collaboration in social services but there is little if any evidence that it has led to more collaboration. More guidance is needed but only within a context that it must be observed. One must recognise here that the collaborative effort may be temporarily in suspense in
anticipation of a reorganisation of local government but this should not be a
deterrent for improving service delivery models in the meantime. The portfolio for
this thesis is based on inter-local authority collaboration, implying that
collaboration amongst authorities can overcome problems of scale because of a
close relationship with a devolved government and a universal system of unitary
local government, thereby avoiding many of the governance problems experienced
in England (Fenwick, McMillan and Elcock, 2009). However, it is recognised that a
wider, more complex collaborative challenge rests with a cross-sector agenda,
notably health and social care integration. In this regard, guidance from the King’s
Fund (2013) has been made widely available but does not yet appear to have led to
the desired increase in scale and pace.

So, is that overriding message from Huxham and Vangen (2005) not to collaborate
unless you have to so understandable that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy? Is it
simply too difficult? If this is the case, retaining collaboration as the perceived
wisdom in respect of Welsh public services should be abandoned or at least
accepted as an objective which will only be achieved slowly and incrementally. This
overview started from the perspective that the perceived wisdom is justified and,
despite the potential for numerous negative obstructions along the collaborative
pathway which the study has identified, and a lack of empirical evidence about
outcome benefits, I believe the portfolio sufficiently indicates that collaboration is
an objective worth pursuing if citizens are to receive a more efficient and effective
public service. My belief arises from knowing that the collaboration that led to
*Profession to Value* was inspiring and many of the recommendations fulfilled; that the partnership working in *Achievements & Challenges*, whilst often presented as a challenge, also indicated a sense of pride and achievement; and that the failure of the collaborations in *Collaborative Guidance* could have been avoided. The aim now must be to find the right way of making collaboration work meaningfully and consistently and not “slow and sporadic” as claimed in evidence submitted to the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery in Wales (2014, p53) by the Auditor-General. Only then can its effectiveness be properly evaluated.

It is understandable that government could claim that a blend of prescription and enablement is the right approach but this is a complex objective and, I would argue, requires a new formula in the light of the complexities identified. For example, the prescription of different regional partnerships for different functions has provided flexibility but also allowed local authorities to question the logic of the government approach. Targeting grant funding to regional approaches brings strategic clarity but can also discourage other models of network governance.

This thesis makes a further original contribution to the knowledge on collaboration policy and its effectiveness through my conclusion which is that a new five-prong approach is needed. First, government should be unequivocal in demanding that collaboration should be the expected norm, simplifying its rationale to well-established principles of gaining efficiency and effectiveness. Second, it should legislate for collaboration where necessary, and ensure that this legislation is firmly
based on supporting collaborative working. Any structural reorganisation should be consistent with the principles of fulfilling effective collaboration. Third, the legislation should be supported through guidance and incentives that should be followed mandatorily and not only outline government expectations but include practical tools and aids on implementation. Fourth, agents for change should be identified in the shape of collaboration experts equipped to untangle the web of complexity and acting as reticulists. The collaborative skills and competencies needed should be clearly defined and good practice incentivised and publicly recognised, possibly through an awards system. Fifth, importantly, government should identify any lack of progress and follow through on collaborative inertia with consequential action. I would also argue that a re-appraisal of the regional approach is needed to ensure it is supporting collaborative policy and that deeper research is commissioned into establishing and sharing best collaborative practice.

It is important to emphasise here that in promoting a concentration on rationales connected with efficiency and effectiveness, I am inviting reconsideration of the argument by Dickinson and Sullivan (2014, p174) that the appeal of collaboration amongst policy makers and practitioners is “as an expression of cultural performance associated with efficacy rather than efficiency and performance.” I suggest a sharper focus is needed and I am not proposing we lose the transformational collaboration sought by Himmelman (1996) when he argues that collaborative change practice must move beyond its focus on integrating social services, and improving their cost-effectiveness, to one of empowerment of
communities. The citizen-centred approach enshrined in the new Social Services Act and promoted so strongly by so many is as much a central feature of government policy as collaboration. Where I differ from Himmelman (1996) is in suggesting the approach does not need to be “either/or” but “both/and”. Most importantly, I am not advocating a return to a hierarchical form of governance but a demonstration of leadership and determination by government that public policy, once agreed, should be implemented and not, as Henry Ford implies, hallucinatory. As McGuire and Agranoff (2011, p279) argue, “it is more appropriate to speak of shifting than of shrinking roles of the state”.

My strategy is consistent with much of that proposed by Williams (2014) and that is gratifying as is the fact that he should have devoted so much attention to collaboration in his report which was published after my proposal for this thesis was agreed. However, I would argue there are fault lines in Williams’s strategy for at least three reasons. First, he simultaneously recommends a formula for reorganising local government which would create new difficulties for achieving effective cross sector collaboration. Second, he agrees with a selective approach to collaboration which I believe militates against the unequivocal commitment needed to make collaboration the norm. Third, whilst he speaks of the consequences of not collaborating for achieving improvements in service delivery, he is less clear about using sanctions and levers to make it happen.
Collaborative Guidance highlighted the relevance of the position of the Auditor-General in Wales in respect of implementing the Compact for Change (2011), noting that it is quite possible that he “would have to conclude in some cases that in choosing to pursue collaboration for the greater good, and foregoing other options that might have led to greater individual benefits, or in taking an additional risk, the council is potentially failing to make effective arrangements for making continuous improvement” (p15). Hence, Collaborative Guidance recommended that before formally agreeing to collaborate, councils needed to appraise other options, provide evidence of their rationale for collaborating and present a clear business case for doing so. It could be argued that whilst the literature confirms unconditional collaboration is not desirable, the Compact for Change (2011), and the inevitable position of the Auditor-General which followed it, are symptomatic of the absence of the unequivocal favouring of the collaboration approach needed, not least because the compact is founded on a voluntary basis.

The alternative to voluntary is, by definition, compulsory, which would possibly trigger a negative political reaction throughout local government. The change does not, however, necessitate blind, unconditional commitment but a predisposition to collaboration as the expected norm unless justified otherwise through evidence based arguments. In other words, not collaborating needs to be embedded as the exception not the rule and this will only be achieved through a change in strategy, such as that proposed by this thesis.