

Enhancing collaboration and civil benefit through institutional resilience: Five principles to help achieve a longer and more prosperous exchange

LSE blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/02/22/enhancing-collaboration-and-civil-benefit-through-institutional-resilience/

2/22/2013

Ahead of an event next week on [developing collaborative research opportunities](#), we asked speaker [Professor aladin aladin](#) to provide his thoughts on strengthening collaborations and engaging with new partners in the university. He argues that if institutions and individuals deepen their awareness of the civil benefit to society, this will strengthen the resilience of collaborative interactions. With significant experience working across societal sectors, aladin offers five strategic planning principles relevant for institutions and individual researchers looking to achieve long-lasting and mutual beneficial partnerships.



I provide strategic counsel to institutions, groups, individuals and indeed across sectors. In the course of my work I've begun to note certain patterns: the more a party puts into collaboration and into widening and deepening 'civil benefit' the greater seems to be the resilience and longevity that accrues to them. Moreover, the prospects for collaboration and for civil benefit may be augmented by practising a variant of strategic planning which treats civil society as a critical stakeholder alongside formal shareholders, such as the university, both of whom are encouraged to work in partnership with each other.

A corollary to this is that the institution (commercial, public or non-profit) which is looking to gain 'competitive advantage' can do so through ramping up its commitment to or investment in an ecology of equitable transactions between itself and civil society. It will need to enhance its capacity to be able to interact with the latter to do this, which means developing its organisational and interpersonal capacities to uncover, depict, engage with and 'narrate' (share knowledge of) society's complex social and organisational processes. Institutions just need better maps and radar to get better at maximising partnerships and at becoming more active as co-participants in society – it's quite a cosmos out there; you need every help you can get. For an enterprise it might make the difference between thriving or failing.

In my consultancy work, perhaps unsurprisingly, I lean towards inculcating a strategic mind-set which gives prime position to optimising 'civil benefit'. This is based on a pragmatic rather than idealistic conviction that wider society and formal shareholder are equally primary stakeholders. However it's also an approach which is not straightforward to convey or grasp, and can feel unwieldy to research, codify or place under the rubric of a particular discipline. In my view though it has the almost tactile characteristic of being able to marry the analytical with the imaginative and of being able to give space to exploration, experimentation, learning, collaboration, co-creation and knowledge-sharing as ends in themselves.

At a very practical level, to build resilience as outlined above requires a dedication to increasing the volume of transactions right across the spectrum, packing as much added value and 'bangs-to-the buck' as is constructive to do, whilst not displacing more conventional or classical corporate strategic planning obsessions which need to be addressed alongside. It is however about doing rather than ruminating.

I'd like to share a few principles relating to optimising resilience which are culled from my more recent experience of providing strategic counsel to organisations and institutions across social sectors. In particular I will itemise below a few strategic approaches which in my view can enhance collaboration and civil benefit – which in turn helps consolidate an organisation's ability to live with change and transformation to the degree and depth necessary to survive.

The five principles which follow are an amalgam of more material than I could possibly fit into this piece; they are indicative, playful, an invitation to experiment. However, it wouldn't hurt an organisation's prospects if they were to integrate these pointers wholesale into their strategic planning process; to the contrary, they are more likely to give rise to sustained, constructive outcomes were they adopted as a primer whether at the level of individual or institutional intervention.

1. INCREASE COMPLEX INTERDEPENDENCE

Maximise the extent and potential for complex interdependence across all constituent parts of your process. Utilise multiple, integrated, interdisciplinary interventions across the plane to optimise the range and number of elements implicated in your process.

2. EVERYBODY IS A PRODUCER AND CREATOR

Regard your entire ecology to comprise parties and persons who are either potential or actual producers and creators directly implicated in your process. Act, activate, initiate, plan accordingly.

3. EVERYBODY IS A PARTNER AND COLLABORATOR

Consider your whole ecology to be made up of either potential or actual partners and collaborators in your process. Embed this concept at the heart of your planning and decision-making capacity. Embark on catalysing, igniting and actualising partnerships and collaborations across the spectrum.

4. CONJOINT OWNERSHIP.

Conduct yourself as if you and every other stakeholder possible are already conjoint owners and operators of each other's resources and assets. Invest in realising at the operational level the potential benefits of carrying out your everyday business in such conditions – where you see and invite in others as fellow custodians of a process.

5. SYMMETRICAL BENEFIT.

Be governed in your practice by the conception that you exist in a paradigm where benefits increasingly need to be seen to be accruing symmetrically, at a meaningful and transparent level, such that it is clear there is a clear trend towards a balanced equilibrium of mutual gain. All stakeholders need to be feeling and seeing the benefits of being in position as fundamental collaborators in each other's processes and enterprises.

In conclusion

To summarise then: it is crucial to the institution's resilience and its strategy for survival that it researches and brings into being operating systems which focus on optimising civil benefit through a focus on developing and maintaining a balanced, sustainable ecology which treats each other as partners and collaborators. It is an approach which should be embedded into the heart of decision-making, equally at the level of individual intervention as well as at the level of institutional strategic planning.

Naturally, the other side of the coin to being civil agent treating wider society as your partner is that you yourself or the institution in question must equally be able and willing to participate in the enterprises and activities of others, to the maximum extent practical. One-way traffic not allowed.

It is also likely that there is continued scope for comparative academic research on the relative effectiveness for corporate survival of a focus on civil benefit as opposed to a reliance on a more classical strategy. There is also a space needing to be filled, gathering and compiling narratives about the experience of planning, managing and operating to maximise resilience through a strategy which focuses on optimising civil benefit.

Meet you soon at the fault-line/front-line...

You can register now to attend Wednesday's (27th Feb) event ["How can we use partnerships to support positive intercultural relations? Developing collaborative research opportunities between practitioners and academics"](#)

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the Impact of Social Science blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

About the author

Professor aladin aladin, universally known as simply 'aladin', practises across categories as an independent strategic counsel. He has acted for Mayor Ken Livingstone's Cultural Strategy Group for London/City Hall, Prime Minister David Cameron's 'TheBigSociety.Co.Uk', the World Petroleum Council, the city of Aarhus, the London Borough of Lewisham, DEFRA, the Arts Council and Wikipedia Co-Founder Larry Sanger. www.aladinaladin.com

- Copyright © The Author (or The Authors) - Unless otherwise stated, this work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution Unported 3.0 License.