COLLABORATIVE CO-GOVERNANCE AS INQUIRING SYSTEMS

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"*an inquiring system has no safe and assured pathway ahead*"

C. West Churchman

Introduction

Over the last decades, the many different approaches to governance that have been put forward have typically suffered from the same general weakness. While they provide a more or less fair intellectual map of the governance terrain, they fail to fully develop the practical implications of their approach or derive from them sufficient guidance about how to put in place the requisite social learning and collaborative practices upon which effective governance is based. In particular, they underestimate the central importance of collective inquiry and heuristic learning. Consequently, scant attention has been paid to developing a repertoire of tools and affordances that might bolster the processes of monitoring, reflection and self-adjustment that are essential to the provision of trust, process guidance, direction-finding, shared learning and innovation that are vital in steering such polycentric systems.

The next frontier for all these approaches is to develop a toolbox to help practitioners experiment with various protocols capable of helping them forge the collaborative regimes and partnerships that can generate the necessary levels of shared learning, commitment and stewardship.

Progress on this front has been limited by three major and inter-related handicaps:

1. a tendency to wallow in oversimplified stylizations of complex systems and their environments in order to make them more amenable to treatment by familiar engineering-style methods of analysis that have been designed for well-structured and stylized problems. We use machine metaphors, such as the "well-oiled machine", "working like clockwork" and "logic models" that perpetuate the view that the behaviour of human organizations is deterministic, predictable and controllable;
2. a reluctance to abandon familiar methods of analysis (because of the intellectual capital already invested in them) despite their proven unhelpfulness in dealing with the ill-structured problems generated by complex systems and "no-one-is-in-charge" type organizations; and
3. a propensity among partners to slip into fanciful, altruistic fantasizing when it comes to defining the way in which collaboration will materialize – frequently being satisfied to presume that it will come forth organically without clearly explaining how it will emerge or how one can catalyze and nudge this process ahead – when as former US Surgeon General, Jocelyn Elders has observed (and not without a bit of irony) that, for many,

collaboration continues to be seen "as an un-natural act between non-consenting adults" (Backer, 2003: 10).

The challenge is clear:

- we must deal with the full complexity of our world by embracing it squarely, from the start, in all of its complex, ill-structured and self-evolving nature (Paquet, 2009; Wilson, 2011);
- we must adopt an inquiry mode that embraces paradoxes and multiple perspectives in a spirit of experimentation and "serious play" and dares to use whatever quasi-analytical protocols may be at hand (Schrage, 2000; Westley *et al.*, 2006; Martin, 2007); and
- we need to map out a workable approach to collaborative governance based on a full appreciation of heuristics and making use of all the physical and cognitive affordances one can discover that might help people to think more clearly about key issues, to make fewer mistakes and to learn from those (Rao and Sutton, 2008).

We proceed in developing a prototype of such a system of inquiry and governance in four stages. First, we explain why governing has taken a new twist: from a focus goal-and-control to governance as an inquiring system that is focused on intelligence gathering and innovation (Wilensky, 1967). Second, we make the case for inquiring systems as an assemblage of learning heuristics and for the use of affordances (such as checklists) as crucial facilitating components in any collaborative co-governance regime. Third, we put forward a provisional checklist of crucial questions that could guide in the elaboration of an effective regime of collaborative governance. Fourth, we suggest some caution in experimenting with this approach.

From goal-and-control marksmanship to inquiring systems

In our contemporary world, governance is effective coordination when power, resources and information are widely distributed. It entails continuing efforts to coordinate and collaborate in the face of twin pressures coming from without and within:

(1) in part as a reaction to the greater environmental complexity and turbulence that forces organizations and social systems to adjust faster and more effectively to survive; and

(2) in part as a reaction to the greater diversity of internal worldviews, systems of belief, and stakeholder capacities that inhabit modern organizations and social systems – a situation that makes the challenges of arriving at concerted learning and collaborative governance ever more daunting. These forces have triggered important modifications in the administrative cosmology in good currency.

From Big G to small g

They have challenged the old "Big G government approach" to decision-making (hierarchical, centralized, authoritarian, coercive) in all sectors (private, public and social) in this new turbulent and pluralist world. This is because, in this new world, (a) no one is able to take full control of events or of the responses to them because no one has the full complement of information, power and resources to undertake and carry out a successful response on one's own (Cleveland, 2002); and (b) there is no common belief system, no set of guideposts agreed to by pluralist stakeholders, that might serve as a common reference point to guide such top-down decision-making (Heath, 2003).

As a result, an alternative "small g governance approach" (more pluralist, participative, horizontal and experimentalist) has emerged that appears to be better equipped to cope with these polycentric coordination challenges, and to reconcile the variety of belief systems at play into a workable accommodation that takes full advantage of the dispersed information, resources and power under the control of the different stakeholders (Paquet, 1999b). With "small g governance," organizational and governance regimes are predominantly shaped by the dynamics of social learning which, through multiple, reflexive learning loops, generate coordination and collaborative arrangements capable of yielding pragmatic, shared value-adding and innovation while ensuring resilience and ongoing progress.

From leadership to stewardship

In a "small g governance" world, nobody is fully in charge so the use of the concept of leadership (with its necessary servitude of followers), does not correspond to the sort of dynamics observed. One must rather rely on the notion of stewardship built on the fact that participants are collaborating as co-producers of governance (Paquet, 2009: chapter 5).

From "nobody is in charge" flows the consequence that everyone is, in some sense, a co-governor. From basic networking practices to legal partnerships to moral contracts, to agreements between states, this entails a common thread – the burden of office of all participants is that they have to take intrinsic responsibility for working at ensuring effective coordination of partners with different but mutually compatible objectives. This new responsibility among all parties involved implies that those who are not continually making full use of their critical thinking, and are not tinkering with the governance regime in real time to improve it, are complicit in the fiascos that may ensue as a result of their sins of omission.

New principles and mechanisms

A variety of principles and mechanisms have been used successfully to help generate a collective stewardship capable of fostering high-performance and innovative organizations and socio-economic systems: inclusion (maximum participation), honest trade-offs (true prices and costs), subsidiarity, competition, relationship management (adequate negotiating forums), moral contracts, fail-safe mechanisms, etc. (Goss, 2001; Paquet, 2005, 2008, 2009; Wilson and Foster, 2006; Block, 2008).

Other ingredients are required for effective collaboration: commitment, trust, social learning through trial and error, etc. But they are not regarded as part of the usual repertoire of traditional top-down management practices. Consequently, they have not been the focus of sustained efforts to determine how to foster buy-in, to get partners to change their behaviours, to get all to be more accountable, to keep people in line, etc. These are all natural enough questions in uniform, homogeneous organizations but they pose daunting challenges in environments of shared ownership and distributed governance: new ways must be invented to nudge collaboration into existence given that collaboration cannot be compelled.

A new cosmology

Experiments have revealed a need to develop nothing less than a new vista that fundamentally challenges the conventional wisdom of "Big G government," leadership and the like, and to build a new cosmology in deriving protocols that can help in the design of the inquiring systems that are at the core of effective distributed governance.

It has become clear that in a world of wicked problems (where goals are unclear and means-ends relationships unstable), the governance regime can no longer work as a simple goals-and-controls apparatus: one needs to tackle the governance challenge as a learning-and-innovation process (Wilensky, 1967)

Further, in a distributed governance world, collaboration is crucial and a "must-have" component that must be explicitly developed as an integral element of the governance regime.

Experience has shown that collaboration cannot be constructed on the basis of partners who are perceived as simple Cartesian rational actors (i.e., simple wantons exclusively motivated by discounted values of future financial streams) (Sen, 1977). In complex situations, collective decision-making depends on the application of fast and frugal heuristics that have been developed through experience rather than on compliance with established rules. If we are to embrace the uncertainty that comes with complexity and take seriously its psycho-emotional-social context and the ecological notion of rationality (based on goodness of fit between action and context), then we must recognize the centrality of heuristics (i.e., fast and frugal ways of dealing pragmatically with complex, uncertain and evolving contexts) (Gigerenzer, 2001).

As we and others have observed, collaboration in such a context will not only be the result of rational discussions, negotiations or mediation, but the product of all sorts of affordances (like checklists and networking) to help partners focus on those things which are important in producing fewer mistakes and in learning from those mistakes.

This amounts to a fairly significant reframing of the very notion of governing and of the way in which one should look at the whole world of public strategy: away from the instrumental rationality of goals-and-controls marksmanship toward the ecological rationality of a process rooted in intelligence, learning and innovation; away from collaborative practice being ignored or marginalized to collaboration being wisely engineered; away from constructing partnerships on the basis of the fiction of hyper-rational partners to building on the wisdom of reflective practitioners; and away from a world where the cost of thinking is assumed to be zero towards one where all sorts of devices become crucial to reducing the cost of that thinking and ensuring that few mistakes are made.

Finally, it has been argued that many of the failures and pathologies of governance are ascribable to the body of assumptions (common values, someone in charge) that underpins the ill-founded conventional wisdom about goals-and controls marksmanship as the basis of public strategy (Hubbard and Paquet, 2011). Yet, those foundational assumptions remain in good currency.

The rest of this paper is an invitation to enter the world of collaborative governance as inquiring systems.

Inquiring systems as heuristics and affordances

At the core of modern collaborative governance is its system of inquiry. Why? Because the circumstances that bring actors together are most often not readily amenable to an analysis that is likely to suggest answers available on the shelf. Potential collaborators typically begin by sharing their "ready-made answers", but what is most important is the interplay of their "questions" that inevitably leads to new answers.

We suggest that collaborative governance is a "collaborative inquiring or search system" that in the end is capable of providing the needed stewardship for ensuring on-going co-learning and experimentation, shared direction-finding, adaptability in the face of constant change, as well as contributing to innovation and productivity increases that will generate shareable and shared value adding (Porter and Kramer, 2011). Properly designing such inquiring systems will in practice, therefore, be quite a daunting challenge.

Some, in the tradition of operations research, have proposed creating nothing less than an omniscient and omnipotent algorithm (produced by some grand designer) that would steer the organization or the socio-technical system through more or less mechanical means by reconciling the various matters of facts and values (Churchman, 1971; Belton and Stewart, 2002). For those holding this view, an inquiring system would appear to promise a sort of magnificent, technocratic version of a missile guidance system capable of replacing the human messiness of political haggling and collaboration (Lee and Glad, 2011). Such a command-and-control engine would clearly be at odds with the realities of our complex and ever-changing world, where goals are unclear, the connections between means and ends unstable, and differences in belief systems and values significant.

Other groups (to which we belong) have more modest ambitions. They propose an approach, based less on goals and control and more on intelligence and innovation as the only workable one – originating with an intelligence gathering function, making use of various search processes, and being satisfied with keeping the organization of the system within a certain corridor defined by certain norms of behaviour and acceptableness (Vickers, 1965; Wilensky, 1967).

This sort of approach has been used, for example, by Carl Taylor (1997) to gauge public policy options based on the answers to four probing questions:

- Is what is being proposed technically feasible?
- Is it socially acceptable?
- Is it implementable, affordable?
- Is it too politically destabilizing?

This amounts to putting in place an assemblage of mechanisms and practices of collaboration (Chrislip, 2002), to create an inquiring system capable of bolstering the political process of collective decision-making by affording it a capacity to avoid avoidable mistakes (Martin, 2009).

There may be a variety of ways to proceed along this second path. But all such approaches may be stylized as proceeding in two stages: first, the use of fast and frugal heuristics in building an inquiring system (i.e., rules of thumbs or other practical shortcuts that are consciously and unconsciously in use by most practitioners); and, second, the use of affordances (like the checklists that have been used successfully by pilots as part of their take-off and landing procedures for decades) to underpin such heuristics.

Inquiring systems as assemblage of heuristics

An inquiring system is fundamentally about seeking and processing information as a sort of self-organized, direction-finding, super automatic pilot. It is designed to mop up information; to actively seek out anomalies and investigate identifiable pathologies; to explore problem definitions; to seek out potential collaborators; to generate testable prototypes of responses from conversations with those collaborators; to fail early and to fail often using these prototypes; but

also to learn quickly and thoroughly from each such experimentation; to disseminate the good and bad news about what has been learned; and to close thereby the knowing-doing gap within the organization or society (Boisot, 1995; Paquet, 1999a). In this regard, the challenge of collaborative governance is to assemble the most appropriate heuristics to deal with each of these capabilities (and more) in the least amount of time.

An inquiring system is, therefore, not only an evolving body of knowledge or data but it is also an evolving set of arrangements among partners and contributors that are based on existing practices and are being continually modified by new information and the accumulation of new experience. These relationships may be etched in MOUs or partnership agreements but their real texture is embodied in the co-learning and value adding that the relationship engenders. Consequently, the various relationships (internal and external, quantitative and qualitative, functional and metabolic, etc.) are continually transforming the intelligence gathering and processing capabilities that they mediate. The attention of an inquiring system, however, must always remain focused on the corridor of the feasible – to ensure that outcomes are acceptable and sustainable given the relevant constraints of which threat-avoidance is one.

Any inquiring system is the natural result of a cumulative process of learning and unlearning. Its outputs are appropriately compiled and acted upon through system modification, development and redefinition through time. The learning and unlearning cycle is best facilitated by discovery engines that are frugal and flexible; that are based on the learning acquired by trial and error; but that have no guarantee of immediate success in a world that is constantly changing.[1]

Effective collaborators will inevitably create and make use of a large repertoire of quick and easy to use heuristics as part of their own adaptive toolbox. These heuristics can be matched to particular issue domains and partnership features, allowing them to formulate an inquiring system that is ecologically rational, i.e. well matched with their environment. Heuristics are made of combinations of skills, abilities, practices and techniques which have become adopted because they are effective. For instance, the "tit-for-tat" heuristic, that is widely regarded as a core tool of cooperation, is comprised of the abilities to cooperate, to forget and to imitate (Gigerenzer, 2001, 2007).[2]

In most governance regimes, such abilities, skills and practices are the critical factors in collaborative success. Consequently, ensuring that these abilities are in place and well developed must also be an important feature of a successful inquiring system. Unfortunately, these cooperative abilities and skills are not consistently encouraged. This is one challenge where affordances are proving to be of great worth as they can help to stimulate the right and timely use of those skills to facilitate more cooperative behaviour.

Checklists as affordances

Affordances (as we mentioned earlier) are physical or cognitive devices designed to lower the cost of thinking, to help people think about things and take action on that basis more easily, devices that afford certain action possibilities and not others. They are the practical tools that facilitate the use of heuristics in collective problem solving and foster the use of quick and easy rules of engagement in partner management (Hubbard and Paquet, 2010: 213-216).

Checklists are one very good example of what we mean by affordances: they are a fast and frugal way to focus the mind and attention on key issues. They do not provide answers or ways to generate answers, but they do ensure that key questions are asked. In this way, checklists afford

some effectiveness in coordination or collaboration in complex situations by ordaining that certain fundamental questions be addressed. Then, coupled with heuristic strategies to deal with such questions, they afford collaborative governance support by strengthening the work of its inquiring system.

The effectiveness of checklists as a facilitator of collaboration has been demonstrated in many areas. Gawande (2009), for instance, was involved in the development of checklists for helping surgical teams to effectively and efficiently steward the collaborative activities of operating room teams. The use of operating room checklists was inspired by the use of the same affordance as the aircraft pilots in the cockpit. The results, when applied to the operating rooms, were phenomenal as revealed by the results of an eight-city pilot study that was carried out:

- complications dropped by 36 percent,
- operating room deaths fell by 47 percent,
- infections originating in the operating room dropped by almost half (Gawande, 2009: 154).

Further, analyses of exit surveys of staff members coming out of surgery have also helped uncover the key causal mechanism that explained why the checklist approach had been so successful. As it turned out, the key success factor enabled by the use of checklists was a significant increase in the level of communication among operating room collaborators.[3]

It is important to note that far from being static bureaucratic lists, checklists in practice tend to evolve as social learning progresses, and as new experiences and new contexts materialize. In the aircraft industry, for instance, manufacturers regularly update their cockpit checklists reflecting recent pilot experiences with the aircraft, and new regulations: they have a publication date on all their checklists to ensure that only the most up-to-date version is used.

Collaborative governance as inquiring systems: a skeletal view

Collaborative governance, in essence, is a complex inquiring system: it is much more than board rules and committee structures; it is an assemblage of processes to ensure effective coordination (at all key junctures) when power, resources and information are widely distributed. Such an inquiring system need not be the same in each of the private, public and social spheres, nor in every issue domain. But in whatever sphere or issue domain, there are common challenges that will confront the designers of the inquiring systems required to govern collaborative regimes.

One may stylize the key phases in the collaborative governance process as a continuous loop of reflective questioning that includes:

- **observational:** Is there anything wrong or unsatisfactory?
- **investigative:** What is the problem?
- **relationship design**: How can we work together in tackling the problem?
- **learning-while-doing***: How can we learn together and evaluate our progress?

These four phases operate on a background of six ongoing cooperative activities that include information gathering, relationship management, trust building and affirmation, co-creative learning, collaborative doing and mutual feedback.

At each of these junctures and within each of the activities, the inquiring system must build as much as possible on the practical rules and accepted practices in good currency to ensure that they become incorporated in the inquiring system. For instance, the inquiring system

Figure 1: A Cycle of Social Learning

must ensure that professional practices in good currency in an issue domain are the foundation of the inquiring system, since otherwise the attention and interest of the partners imbued with these practices could not be effectively engaged.

Observational and cognitive

The first phase, is primarily observational and cognitive: the issue and its context are examined to determine their "fit" with the mega-community involved (Gerencser *et al*., 2008) and to explore whether the *status quo* is actually in need of change. In the process, one would explore whether there are any detectable anomalies present; what features of the issue landscape are salient; what are the causal mechanisms at work; and who are the primary stakeholders that hold such a significant amount of power, resources and information that they need to be profoundly involved from the beginning in any process intent on designing or redesigning the collaborative governance regime.[4]

Investigative

The second phase is investigative, focusing on defining more precisely the issue and the task at hand. Is there a problem to be solved or a possibility to be lived into? What are the non-negotiable constraints imposed by the mega-community or by the ethos of the milieu?[5] What is the nature of both the anticipated benefits and the harms to be avoided, if at all possible, in the process of generating and implementing responses? In this way, partners can construct the upper and lower bounds of what is to be accomplished (at best or minimally) by their work together, while roughly articulating the nature and distribution of risks and costs (financial, environmental, political, social, psychic and emotional) together with the distribution of potential rewards and benefits, both tangible and intangible. This phase also examines what is working well and what can be built upon, as in the process of appreciative inquiry.

Relationship design

The third phase is a relationship design phase that explores how the partners could work together and includes both structural design and moral contracting elements that unfold in two parallel but

intricately integrated sub-processes. Together they identify how partners will collaborate while infusing their process with the necessary social capital to support that work.

The first sub-process concerns the development of the institutional/organizational structures (legal, informational, etc.) that will ensure the necessary rules of the game required for the collaboration to be viable. This also concerns the choice of instruments, arrangements and affordances that will be necessary to foster sufficient social learning to allow a modicum of chance that early successes will arise and provide a foundation for future, more ambitious achievements.

The other sub-process concerns social conventions and moral contracts, and also incentive-reward systems. These are put in place to mobilize the "willing" collaboration of all the significant stakeholders and to ensure that the requisite *affectio societatis*[6] is developed so that the collaboration can last as long as needed.

The first sub-process defines the structures through which the activities of collaboration can flow, while the second process encourages a culture of cooperation and trust to support it.

Learning while doing

The fourth phase is a learning-while-doing phase: it focuses on evaluation and social learning but not strictly on outputs and outcomes (as in the summative evaluations and other arrow-hitting-target approaches) but on the extent to which the collective intelligence and innovation functions have performed well (Paquet, 2001).

Collaborative implementation is seen here not as a separate function but as an aspect of experiential learning derived from experimentation and prototyping. This phase focuses cooperation on co-learning and progressivity (i.e., the capacity to transform), and on the changes in attitudes and behaviour of key stakeholders that might improve the coefficient of effective and fruitful collaboration (Gamble, 2008; Quinn-Patton, 2010).

Finally, there must be an explicit (though not necessarily a formal) mechanism of conflict resolution to deal with the differences of opinion and interpretation, not if but when they emerge, together with fail-safe mechanisms in case those differences prove irreconcilable, or the potential for sabotage and conflict are such that there is a danger of not only derailing the social learning process but even destroying the organization or the social system. These fail-safe mechanisms are crucial components *ab ovo* since the differences that generate value-adding from collaboration also mean that the inquiring system is more likely to fail than to succeed, and that unless such fail-safe mechanisms are in place, the probability of disintegration is quite high.

In the table below, each of the columns is not only the locus of a number of such questions, but each of these questions can in turn be subsequently unpacked into more detailed and issue specific questions that can lead to an array of heuristics and affordances designed to provide answers to these questions (and likely many others). As new information becomes available or new circumstances materialize, a regular partner interaction and process of inquiry fuels the cycle of social learning, innovation, shared commitment and mutual accountability.

The checklist of questions presented below can help in defining the burden of office of each partner in the collaborative governance process, and in affording an opportunity to rethink assumptions, structure, technology or even the theory of what the "enterprise" is all about. As

Donald Schön (1971) has shown, theory, structure and technology are in constant interaction, and social learning is effective or not depending on the degree of misalignment among the three. The checklist of questions below is presented as a budding inquiring system.

Provisional checklist of questions

I Does the situation need changing?	II What is the problem?	III How will you work together?	IV How will you learn together & evaluate your progress
1. Are there any detectable anomalies?	6. What is the task at hand?	*a. DESIGN*	12. What feedback and informational loops do you have to enable social learning?
2. What are the salient features of the issue domain?	7. What are the non-negotiable constraints within the mega-community?	10. What instruments of collaboration and social learning can you use to produce short-term success and long-term commitment?	13. What collective learning processes do you have in place?
3. What are the causal mechanisms at play?	8. Who are the stakeholders that must be included and how will you involve them?	*b. CONVENTIONS*	14. How will you gauge ongoing performance objectively?
4. Can this be resolved by a single actor?	9. What are the risks and potential rewards, and how will these be aligned among the various partners?	11. What are the conventions and moral contracts that need to be negotiated to maintain a culture of collaboration?	15. How will you gauge changes in attitudes and behaviours among partners?
5. Who are the key stakeholders?			16. How will you resolve conflicts?
			17. What safe-fail mechanisms are in place?
			18. At what point would you dissolve the collaboration?

A word of warning

In this inquiring process, many affordances will be found useful to ensure good results. Their role is to ease and support the inquiring process without being overly heavy and cumbersome to the

point of slowing down and ossifying either collective decision-making or the collaboration and negotiation processes at a time when nimbleness is called for.

The checklist affordance we have offered is only one example, and it should be developed further in each of the four areas in a manner that takes into account the idiosyncrasies of each particular issue domain. It should also become sufficiently detailed at an operational level to echo key partner concerns in each particular phase of collaboration. However, even at this stage, it can serve as a way to initiate and provoke discussion and focus partner attention if and when anomalies are noticed. Yet one should be careful to apply it in a manner that does not interfere meaningfully with the flow of shared commitments or partner activities.

One should keep in mind that the key rationale behind the use of a checklist as an affordance of collaborative governance is not that collaborative governance is somehow formulaic or that it follows some form of recipe. Indeed, this is just the opposite! Governance failures not only do occur but such failures are "bound to occur" as they do in most human activities (Ormerod, 2005; Petroski, 2006).

This is why putting in place fail safe mechanisms to use as a bulwark against collaboration failure, as we ourselves have suggested earlier, will not always suffice. While useful, such fail safe precautions presume that cooperative arrangements or complex policies generally work, and they are included to deal with what is regarded as the most unlikely event that collaboration might fail. Accordingly, the work to develop mature collaborative structures and cultures is not taken seriously and there is an over reliance on coercion from the top to sustain collaboration. Needless to say, coerced collaboration is an oxymoron.

Yet if one presumes that in all likelihood "things will fail" at some point, (a presumption that is consistently supported by experience), one has only to shift beyond a fail safe to a "safe-fail" approach where attention is directed towards catching the quasi-certain or highly probable failure as soon as possible to minimize the damages that are bound to occur (Holling, 1976).

From this perspective, the main contribution of a checklist approach (and therefore its thrust) is therefore in the prevention of harms (Sparrow, 2008) that could result from failed partnerships, un-integrated or narrowly defined policies, under- or un-utilized resources, and a wasteful adversarial environment, i.e., poor collaborative governance.

As a further caution, accepting the challenge of being guided by an inquiring system does not mean that one abandons oneself to the caprices of this system. Any experiment (including that of an inquiring system) entails vigilance, and some capacity to resort to nudging actions if and when the inquiring system gives signs of acting in an untoward manner. Yet experimentation is not a regular feature of top-down management systems. This reluctance to experiment will only be overcome if there is a culture of experimentation that is commonly accepted, and if the notion of "checklist as guide" is accompanied by assurances that any missteps resulting from experimentation will not lead to the usual blame game but to quick, corrective action.

Yet even if such a culture existed, it would not be sufficient for the incremental successes with inquiring systems to offset the prevalence of risk aversion that is so widespread, particularly in the public sector. For that to occur, there will have to be some additional re-assurance that disaster will not be an outcome of these sorts of experiments in social learning. Happily, one of the major advantages of inquiring systems is that the processes which comprise robust, continuous vigilance are much more likely to catch very small variations before they evolve into

major catastrophes. And so even for those who may be quite risk averse, small experiments with the design of collaborative governance can help minimize collaborative risk in the pursuit of potentially significant benefits.

Yet, one also has to be vigilant and on the lookout for any obstacles or barriers that may present themselves in the way of establishing an inquiring system – obstacles that may emerge either from without or within the organization or the socio-economic system. The more alert these monitoring mechanisms are, the sooner any anomaly can be detected, and the faster corrective adjustments can be applied. This will result in an even more effective inquiring system that can act as the engine of good collaborative co-governance.

It would seem that this etiquette of active and defensive alertness therefore serves as the underlying characteristic of inquiring systems and the most important capacity of a safe-fail apparatus.

Conclusion

So far, in all the fields where they have been used, inquiring systems and affordances have been mainly developed by practitioners and from experience over time. They need not to be theorized first. Indeed, our effort to produce a collaboration checklist prototype as a way to launch an inquiring system is the product of trying to find the common threads emerging from the experience of various practitioners, and from an impressive literature that has often unwittingly proposed checklists for the design of collaborative governance framework without calling it so (Romero, 2008; Rubin, 2002; Straus, 2002).

Nevertheless, the real test of any inquiring system will come in the field. Consequently, while we have tried to structure our prototype as much as possible to cover all the bases in the sketch above, it cannot at this time be regarded as anything more than a skeletal and provisional prototype. But that prototype does suggest that people and organizations can learn and work together without the need to resort to some "higher" authority to compel behaviour. It is suggestive of the possibility of well functioning mega-communities and communities of practice. However, before such a prototype can be successfully applied in a particular issue domain, there is much in terms of flesh, blood, nerves, muscles, etc. that may have to be added to this skeleton through extensive conversations with practitioners.

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Notes

[1] David Straus (2002) identifies, for instance, 64 such heuristics that are regularly used in the practice of collaboration.

[2] This is the well tested game theory heuristic of cooperating first, then imitating your partner's last behaviour (cooperation or non-cooperation), while keeping in mind only their last move and forgiving all previous moves.

[3] Checklists are widely used in many different fields with great advantage: from the cockpit of airplanes about to take-off, to construction sites, to operating rooms, but also as a key instrument in project management.

[4] Operating under the principle of inclusivity, less significant stakeholders could also be involved but in a less profound and significant way and at times of their choosing.

[5] The milieu can elicit some norms (as in the case of Carl Taylor`s four norms for gauging changes to public policies): Is what is being proposed technically feasible? Is it socially acceptable? Is it implementable and affordable? And, is it too politically destabilizing? But the organization may also be imbibed by neuroses (Kets de Vries & Miller, 1984).

[6] This is a French legal concept that means that two or more people personally and jointly commit themselves to achieving the purpose(s) of their association. French courts have added to objective partnership criteria an indispensable subjective one: the presence of a "spirit of cooperation" among the partners or *affectio societatis*, which defines their willingness to pursue their goals together. Lack of *affectio societatis* is a sufficient condition for the partnership to be dissolved (Cuisinier, 2008).

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