Manifested Attitudes: Intricacies of Inter-Partner Learning in Collaboration

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ABSTRACT This article is concerned with attitudes to learning in inter-organizational collaboration. Basic attitudes to learning evident in extant research – selfish, sharing and sidelined – are compared with those observed through research-oriented action research. A conceptualization based on a characterization of the attitudes observed in the research situations is produced. It models attitudes to learning in collaboration as bundles of varied stances relating to taking and giving knowledge from or to a partner, or excluding learning from the agenda altogether. The observations suggest that actual attitudes – which are evident at individual, community or organizational level – are much more varied than the basic attitudes and that they often include elements of all three – sidelined, selfish and sharing – motivations. The model acknowledges differences in perceptions of attitudes, differences of attitudes within partner organizations as well as between them, and differences in partners’ attitudes to each other over time.

INTRODUCTION

Alliances, partnerships, joint ventures, networks and other inter-organizational collaborative relationships have, in recent years, become widespread (Hardy et al., 2005; Mitsuhashi, 2003). The purposes of collaborating are many and varied, but concerns about learning through collaboration have become increasingly prominent (Inkpen, 2000; Nooteboom, 2004). Positive and negative issues are raised, relating, for example, to possibilities for organizational capacity development (Breu and Hemingway, 2002) and joint innovation (Mothe and Quélin, 2000) on the one hand and the protection of intellectual property on the other (Mayer and Argyres, 2004). The potential for an organization to acquire sufficient learning from a partner to render the collaboration unnecessary is an area that has received particular attention (Inkpen and Beamish, 1997; Lotia, 2004; Shenkar and Yan, 2002).

Given the possible benefits that might be gained from positive learning relationships, and the potential for undesirable outcomes for a partner when learning is aggressively
unidirectional, it might be expected that partners’ attitudes to learning would have important consequences for the broader outcomes of collaboration. However, while extant research touches upon these, it does not address such attitudes as the central issue of concern. There is a tendency to focus on the process of learning or its outcome, rather than understanding the range of possible attitudes that might be encountered and their possible effects. For example, Inkpen and Beamish (1997) make a distinction between acquiring and accessing data from a partner but do not explicitly discuss whether or how partners’ attitudes to learning might affect their inclination towards either course of action. An opportunist attitude appears to be presumed. Similarly, Assimakopoulos and Macdonald (2003), focusing on networks of innovation, examine informal, social learning processes but do not explicitly consider the attitudes that influence these processes. In contrast to Inkpen and Beamish, their presumption appears to be that sharing attitudes will be the norm. In neither case are attitudes to learning themselves problematized.

To the extent that attitudes to learning are discussed, there is a tendency to take a one-sided view. For example, Inkpen and Beamish’s research views the situation principally from the point of view of the acquirer or accesser. Concepts such as Cohen and Levinthal’s (1990) ‘absorptive capacity’, which explicitly root their explanations of learning in a single-organization perspective, are also clearly one-sided. Similarly, the active donation of knowledge has received scant attention in comparison with research on the protection of such knowledge (e.g. Mayer and Argyres, 2004).

In this paper, therefore, we explore the attitudes of partners to learning in collaboration in some detail, to identify a broad range of possibilities. We address these possibilities in such a way that two key aspects of attitudes, hitherto not treated systematically, are fully characterized. The first of these is an appreciative aspect; we attend to the ways in which partners have a positive, neutral or negative attitude towards the possibility of knowledge and learning. The second is a directional aspect; we attend to the ways in which attitudes reflect concerns either for the acquisition or for the donation of knowledge (or both). The spectrum of attitudes thus characterized has implications for the outcomes of learning processes in collaboration, whether these are intended or unintended. Our aim is therefore to extend theoretical understandings of inter-organizational learning and, in so doing, to provide a framework that can support collaborative practice. Our findings both support and extend some existing research in this area but also suggest some possible challenges to existing conceptualizations of the development of learning processes.

We take a broad view of inter-organizational collaboration rather than concentrating on any particular type of it. One reason for this is that actual collaborations often have a complexity of membership cutting across different sectors and a multiplicity of interwoven purposes, and thus are not straightforwardly sub-categorized. A second reason is that since many of the common issues in extant collaboration research have been found to be applicable to a range of collaboration situations (for example, issues of trust and trust building: Carson et al., 2003; Chaserant, 2003; Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002), an inclusive perspective is appropriate. Indeed, we shall argue that our data clearly demonstrates that context, for example profit seeking versus public good purposes or private versus public sector, does not influence learning attitudes in stereotypical ways. The resulting theoretical framework is therefore relevant across all such contexts.

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LEARNING IN COLLABORATION: SOME FRAMING CONCEPTS

In order to contextualize the ways in which attitudes to learning in collaboration are framed and applied in theory and practice, we begin by setting out some structuring terms and concepts. A preliminary point is that while there are separate strands in the literature reporting cases of planned learning and of unplanned or uncontrollable learning (Assimakopoulos and Macdonald, 2003; Nooteboom, 1999; Norman, 2001), we, like Ingram (2002), are concerned here with both types of situation.

Concepts related to organizational learning are commonly thought to have considerable overlap with those related to organizational knowledge (Muthusamy and White, 2005; Vera and Crossan, 2003); the terms ‘knowledge acquisition’ (Inkpen and Beamish, 1997; Lyles and Salk, 1996), ‘knowledge transfer’ (Reagans and McEvily, 2003; Simonin, 1999; Tsai, 2001) and ‘knowledge creation’ (Breu and Hemingway, 2002; Boari and Lipparini, 1999; Nonaka et al., 1998) appear frequently across the collaboration literature. ‘Knowledge’ is, however, a rather problematic term (Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003); when considering ‘knowledge’ in this paper, we are particularly mindful of the issues it raises about the extent to which the world – and therefore, ‘knowing’ – is socially constructed in practice (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2002).

Notions of ‘acquisition’, ‘transfer’ and ‘creation’ are also questionable. Knowledge acquisition and knowledge transfer are imprecise metaphors for a learning outcome since knowledge might be more usefully regarded as mirrored by the acquirer through participation in practices (Brown and Duguid, 2001). From this perspective, the acquirer learns to enact knowledge (as situated action) alongside those already fluent in this enaction. Knowledge creation also raises issues with regard to its precise meaning. For example, from a structurationist perspective, the creation of knowledge is considered to be achieved in the enactment of practices and restructuring of communities (Berends et al., 2003). Alternative concepts such as recombination and reuse may be more appropriate descriptors (Majchrzak et al., 2004), reflecting the suggestion that innovation may result from the use of ‘old knowledge’ in new ways, rather than a truly creative act.

However philosophically questionable ‘knowledge acquisition’, ‘knowledge transfer’ and ‘knowledge creation’ may be, the terms are widely used in the literature and in policy discourse (Cappellin, 2004; Chell and Oakey, 2004; Gerstlberger, 2004). They are also commonly recognized by practicing managers. We retain them, therefore, but as useful metaphors or ‘lingua franca’ rather than process descriptions.

In this spirit it is useful to consider how they have been applied in discourse about collaboration. Knowledge transfer in collaboration can be thought of as involving processes of ‘knowledge outflow’ from one organization and ‘knowledge acquisition’ by another. However, the pattern of knowledge flows between partners can be more variable than this, and has been characterized as unidirectional, bidirectional or multidirectional (Hardy et al., 2003). The unidirectional conceptualization has been linked to competitive learning behaviours in which one partner seeks to ‘acquire’ knowledge from another whilst limiting reciprocation (Ingram, 2002; Inkpen and Beamish, 1997). It may also occur as unintended ‘spillover’ during joint activities (Mothe and Quélin, 2000; Smith and Powell, 2004). In contrast, broader bidirectional and multidirectional learning achievements might include, for example, network participants learning new ways to
interact, structure, advance and collectively understand collaborations (Benson-Rea and Wilson, 2003; Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004; Zollo et al., 2002). Such transfer conceptualizations characterize organizations as learning from each other (Bergquist et al., 1995). In collaborations, however, the notion of organizations learning with each other to create knowledge has also been an important theme (Lazerson and Lorenzoni, 1999; Mothe and Quelin, 2000). Indeed, it has been suggested that knowledge creation and knowledge transfer are not necessarily mutually exclusive concepts and that aspects of each may be entailed in the other (Hardy et al., 2003).

ATTITUDES TO KNOWLEDGE CREATION AND TRANSFER

Attitudes to learning are often touched upon in discussions of knowledge transfer and knowledge creation as possible outcomes for collaborations. The manner and degree to which learning from and with partners is actually considered in practice is sometimes explicitly discussed, but more often implicit assumptions are apparent. Authors—and, our data suggests, practitioners—think about learning in collaboration in different ways. Much of the literature addresses attitudes to learning in either competitive (Ingram, 2002; Inkpen and Beamish, 1997) or collaborative (Inkpen and Tsang, 2005; Smith and Powell, 2004) frames. Individual authors (Beamish and Berdrow, 2003; Faulkner and de Rond, 2000; March, 1991; Oliver, 2001; Schuler, 2001; Spekman et al., 2000; Yan and Child, 2002) tend to deal with one or two particular attitudes, as a (partial) explanation of particular learning outcomes. For example, in their work on instability in joint ventures, Inkpen and Beamish (1997) presume a self-interested attitude in which knowledge acquired contributes to an organization’s bargaining power. Another example is the correlation between selfish micropolitical behaviour and learning outcomes discussed by Shenkar and Yan (2002). Consideration of extant research collectively, however, suggests a richer picture. Bringing these perspectives together, it is possible to identify a spectrum of attitudes, ranging across:

- the **Selfish** acquisition of knowledge from a partner, exclusively for an organization’s own use, thus *exploiting* the partner;
- the **Sharing** of knowledge with specific organizational partners, in a relatively controlled fashion, thus *exchanging* with them;
- the **Sharing** of knowledge in a broad, open manner amongst a range of partners, thus *exploring* innovative solutions to problems-at-hand collaboratively;
- the **Sidelining** of any consideration of learning, thus *excluding* it formally from the collaborative agenda, although it may be an emerging outcome.

The first two of these attitudes, **Selfish-exploiting** and **Sharing-exchanging**, are frequently implicit in the literature, and relate directly to alternative conceptions of knowledge transfer. The third, **Sharing-exploring**, is also well established and connected to accounts of knowledge creation. The fourth, **Sidelining-excluding**, relates to situations in which neither form of learning is a consideration for participants. This attitude is implied in literature relating to unintended outcomes (Assimakopoulos and Macdonald, 2003; Nooteboom, 1999) but, since it is not explicitly discussed, it is not well characterized. Sidelining might
be unacknowledged (i.e. learning is never considered) because the agenda is focused elsewhere, or deliberate, because learning is regarded as unimportant. Sidelining reflects Grant and Baden-Fuller’s (2004) suggestion that commercial firms seek to access knowledge from their alliances (for example, embedded in products) rather than actually acquire it. However, it differs importantly from Inkpen and Beamish’s (1997) view of accessing knowledge which is presented as a considered decision not to acquire knowledge in a particular circumstance.

The omission of learning as an aim does not preclude the emergence of learning (Beamish and Berdrow, 2003). For example, Levin and Cross (2004) suggest ways in which individuals gain useful knowledge in a social network and Zollo and Singh (2004) highlight possibilities for organizational learning through merger situations. Although both emphasize that learning can take place unconsciously, the latter also suggest that it is more impactful when processes of codification are in place (as do Mayer and Argyres, 2004).

In addition to their intrinsic value in understanding inter-organizational learning, attitudes seem likely to have significance for wider collaborative processes. For example, selfish and sharing attitudes are likely to be linked to perceptions about the trustworthiness of partners – often regarded as important to achieving (or not) successful outcomes (Carson et al., 2003; Chaserant, 2003). Consideration of the extant research in the area, however, suggests three problematic issues. Firstly, though some of the attitudes discussed above are well established, they tend to be factors touched upon in passing rather than treated as central phenomena themselves. Secondly, there is a particular gap in relation to the sidelining attitude, which is considered only as a featureless absence. Thirdly, there is little detail in characterizations of the attitudes or their consequences. The conceptualization of attitudes that emerged from our data addresses all of these points.

We approach these areas of contribution in the remainder of this paper by first discussing our methods and data, then considering basic attitudes and specific stances. We continue with three conceptual development sections and conclude with implications of the emerging theory for research and practice.

**METHODS AND DATA**

Methodologically, the theory is rooted in research-oriented action research (Eden and Huxham, 2006). This is similar to ethnography in the sense that it relies on ‘naturally occurring’ data rather than that generated through, for example, interviews or focus groups (Galibert, 2004; Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993). It resembles grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) in the sense that the theory is derived emergently from the data, although it does not adhere rigidly to either the precepts or methods. The feature that distinguishes it from these approaches is that the researcher, acting in such roles as consultant, facilitator or participant, actively intervenes in the researched situation and there is an expectation that the situation will thereby be changed. Data, in the form of, for example, notes, flipchart notes or recordings, is collected during the course of the intervention. The emergent output is explicitly intended to both develop theory and inform practice. The practical enactment is in the form of ‘handles’ to support practitioners in their own reflective practice rather than prescriptive advice (Huxham and Beech, 2003; Schipper, 1999).
The data which informed the conceptualization to be discussed here were predominantly in the form of detailed notes of what was done and said during our involvement in several collaborative development interventions. These typically involved a planning phase, focal workshop(s) and follow-up discussions with participants – the last element sometimes initiating a post-programme, ongoing informal relationship with central contacts. The eight programmes drawn upon in this paper are described in Table I. These collaborations functioned as useful situations in which to study attitudes to learning since, as a set, they included a wide variety of possible arrangements and therefore could inform the generality of collaborative possibilities. In the main, they had diverse memberships, often spanning sectors, and complex, interwoven sets of purposes. Collectively they represented more extreme, multi-dimensional and challenging contexts than the simpler dyadic situations in which some of the classic works on inter-partner learning have been rooted (see, for example, Inkpen and Beamish, 1997; Inkpen and Pein, 2006). Our involvements were concerned with facilitating collaborative processes and were normally not specifically related to learning. The data obtained therefore arose in the natural course of discourse and action. In the case of the Business Growth Network, however, we did explicitly raise issues of learning and knowledge transfer during one workshop.

We used an interpretive approach to building conceptualizations emergently from clustered data items (Eisenhardt, 1989; Huxham, 2003; Prasad, 2002), through a process of abstraction, clustering and conceptualizing that comprised several steps. First, we reviewed the data sets, identifying items that might be considered relevant to issues of learning in collaborations. The second step involved lengthy negotiations between us to clarify the meaning and relevance (or lack of it) for inclusion of each data item, and its relationship to others. This resulted in several hundred linked data items and the interpretations of their relevance, which were stored electronically using the software, Decision Explorer (Ackermann et al., 2005). Following several iterations of analysis, 12 clusters of related issues emerged.

In a third step, we reviewed the clusters and the links between them in order to derive theoretical conceptualizations. The cluster on ‘types of attitude’ was particularly rich and thus attitudes emerged as a prominent sub-theme in our analysis, seeming to indicate a more complex set of possibilities than that indicated in extant research in the area. This paper focuses particularly on that area. Other clusters related to separable conceptual areas were discussed and developed in another article (see Hibbert and Huxham, 2005). By way of example, a Decision Explorer view of an extract from the ‘types of attitude’ cluster is provided in Figure 1.

The final step involved the repeated drafting and discussion of the content of this paper, out of which emerged the characterization of attitudes and detailed stances towards learning, discussed in the following sections. In the next two sections we conceptualize the substance of attitudes and in the following section, discuss how this is operationalized.

**BASIC ATTITUDES AND SPECIFIC STANCES**

In our work with the collaboration programmes described above, we observed the full spectrum of attitudes in the research literature as highlighted earlier. However, it was
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group: interactions</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Sectors represented</th>
<th>Major purposes and aims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Science Network: small group work (3–5 persons, five one-day meetings) and personal communications with 23 core members</td>
<td>National science institutes; large science-led companies; SME consultants; officers of the European Commission.</td>
<td>Private sector (large companies and SMEs). Public sector (national and international).</td>
<td>Marketing channel for large science-led companies. Public good (through quality of science and economic impacts) motivation for science institutes and European Commission. Source of revenue for SME consultants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Science Network: planning group participation (regular meetings and personal communication with 3 lead members); 4 large one-day group workshops (12–15 people)</td>
<td>Large science-led companies; SME scientific companies; officers of the UK government; learned societies; SME consultants.</td>
<td>Not-for-profit organizations. Private sector (large companies and SMEs). Public sector (national).</td>
<td>Development and standing of science professions (for the learned society). Marketing channel for some companies. Public good (through quality of science and economic impacts) for UK government sponsors. Source of revenue: for lead institution coordinating the network on behalf of the UK government; for SME consultants assisting in the delivery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Business Network: regular planning and personal communications with network organizer and sponsor; 2 large half-day workshop events (20 people)</td>
<td>Design-led micro and small businesses; business service companies; independent but publicly funded institute for design.</td>
<td>Not-for-profit organizations. Private sector (large and small companies).</td>
<td>Promoting collaboration between members. Profit motivation for SMEs and business service companies. Public good (through quality of design) motivation for design institute.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Business Growth Network: regular personal communications with 2 lead team members and 2 other ‘ordinary’ members; attendance at 3 planning workshops (12–18 people); visits to 2 member organization sites; observation at a 2-day conference (272 people); one half-day training meeting (28 people)

Large and small consultancy companies; business service companies; venture capital firms and independent investors; entrepreneurial, technology-led start-up firms; regional universities; government funded enterprise development agencies.

Not-for-profit organizations (the administrators of the network).

Private sector (large companies and SMEs).

Public sector (regional – economic development and education).

Channel for sourcing investment capital and business expertise for the start up firms and universities.

Potential source of revenue for consultancies and business service companies.

Promoting collaboration – especially between funders and entrepreneurs.

Public good (through economic development) motive for the NFP administration group and the economic development agencies.

Economic Development Group: regular planning conversations with staff associated with different events. One preparatory meeting. Two workshops (8–10 people), two practitioner conferences including workshops (approximately 80 and 200 participants), report and follow up conversation

Economic development agency managers who were active in partnerships with other (governmental and quasi-governmental) agencies.

Quasi-governmental agencies.

Public good (through economic development).

Local Authority Partnership Managers: 2 planning meetings and regular conversations with sponsoring staff (3). 2-day workshop (8 people)

Local authority and quasi-governmental agency representatives with roles in local community planning partnerships.

Quasi-governmental agencies (with statutory roles).

Private sector (construction)

Public sector (local government).

Preservation of the natural environment.

Property Development Alliance: regular planning communication with the organizer. 1 day workshop (6 people)

Senior (including board level) staff of large property development companies collaborating on a major project.

Private sector (construction)

Public sector (local government).

Profit motivated.

Local Authority Division: planning conversations with organizers (2). 1 day practitioner conference including workshops (approximately 35 people)

Local authority officers involved in community service collaborations.

Public sector (local government).

Public good (through service delivery).
evident that they are more complex than previously suggested; in practice they revealed themselves in a variety of different manifestations. In some cases the attitudes were pursued actively, or even proactively. In other cases they were reactions to concerns or circumstances or even merely passive positions. In order to present the different manifestations of attitudes as recognizable ‘handles’ with the potential to support reflective practice, our conceptualization is expressed as generalized definitions and characterizations of them. In these terms, the four attitudes previously derived – which we shall now refer to as ‘basic attitudes’ – are defined and characterized as indicated in Table II.

The sidelining attitude, defined by the passive non-consideration of knowledge outflow or acquisition, may be characterized as: learning from or with partners is not something we think about (but unintentional learning may take place). The Selfish attitude to learning, defined by an active preference for unidirectional knowledge outflow from the partner and acquisition by the attitude holder, may be characterized as: we take from you without giving to you. Two forms of Sharing attitude were introduced earlier. The former is defined by an active appreciation of bi- or multilateral flows of existing knowledge as a process that may be a source of value in its own right. The latter sees this as a means of supporting the creation of valuable new knowledge. Both may be characterized as: we take from you and we give to you; you take from us and give to us. The exchanging version implies this is a straightforward trading of knowledge. In the exploring version, however, a corollary would be: and we learn together to create knowledge.

Figure 1. An example data cluster

Note: The main features are indicated in the Font Key. That is, the cluster shows: in a serif face, the data on learning that we gleaned in our research; in a sans-serif face, the interpretations which we (in a process of argument and agreement) assigned to them; and the hierarchical construction of more general interpretive concepts to encapsulate the breadth of the data.
Whereas the selfish attitude just highlights the way ‘we’ think, both sides of the equation are needed to describe the sharing attitude because both ‘we’ and ‘you’ need to be active in their relation to the other. In practice there is often a voiced emphasis on the giving rather than the taking aspect of sharing. For example, those promoting collaboration as a way of doing business often ask managers to consider what their organization could offer to a collaborative relationship.

In these and subsequent characterizations, the terms ‘we’ and ‘you’ may be interpreted at a variety of levels. They might signify an organization in some circumstances and a professional community in others – or even a particular individual member of either of these. Except where indicated, the characterizations could apply at any of these levels. We are using the terms ‘we’ and ‘you’ metaphorically and, in applying them to organizations or communities, only do so to reflect the discourse of the managers from whom we gathered data. We will return to this ‘multiple levels’ point in the conclusion.

We unpack the basic attitudes in two stages. Firstly we discuss the sidelining attitude, identifying the variations evident in our data. Secondly, we address the selfish and sharing attitudes together, as the data suggests a less polarized construction. In both cases we discuss a number of the stances we observed and use examples from the data to illustrate them. However, we are not intending to suggest that these exact stances are necessarily those to be found in all other collaborations. Our perspective is that actual stances are many and varied, but they can be usefully characterized in similar terms.

**SIDELINED LEARNING**

In most of the settings in which data were gathered, learning was not often considered by practitioners. The unprompted use of the term ‘learning’ arose infrequently and only twice, amongst all the data items, were uses that could be interpreted as being connected to the collaboration observed. There were rather more instances of ‘know’ and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic attitudes</th>
<th>Knowledge outflow and acquisition are passively not considered</th>
<th>Learning from or with partners is not something we think about</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sidelining:</td>
<td>Unidirectional knowledge outflow from a partner and acquisition only by the attitude-holder are actively preferred</td>
<td>We take from you without giving to you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfish:</td>
<td>Bi- or multidirectional knowledge outflow and acquisition are actively appreciated as sources of value in their own right</td>
<td>We take from you and we give to you; you take from us and give to us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing – exchanging:</td>
<td>Bi- or multidirectional knowledge outflow and acquisition are actively preferred as necessary vectors in supporting the possible creation of new valuable knowledge</td>
<td>We take from you and we give to you; you take from us and give to us – and we learn together to create knowledge</td>
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Table II. Basic attitudes – generic characterizations
‘knowledge’ that could be interpreted as relating to collaboration learning issues, but even these, in the main, were not central to conversations. In a workshop with the Business Growth Network where we explicitly raised issues of learning and knowledge transfer and creation, responses were generally negative. ‘Learning’ appeared to be regarded as irrelevant and a time-consuming diversion from the real purpose of collaborating. The reaction to ‘knowledge transfer’ and ‘knowledge creation’ from this group was generally one of horror. The network convenor argued that:

Knowledge transfer and knowledge creation is not language used in commercial companies.

Other researchers have also reported that learning is not a central issue for the collaborating organizations they studied (Spekman et al., 2000; Tsang, 2002). Much research, however, suggests that learning can be a valuable objective for some collaborations (Hagedoorn and Duysters, 2002; Hartley and Allison, 2002) and views such as that expressed by the convenor may not be typical in collaborations. Indeed we have data from collaborative situations that were not part of this research in which issues relating to learning have been spontaneously raised by participants, and ‘knowledge transfer’ and ‘knowledge creation’ are taken-for-granted language. Even in the very negative (to the notion of learning) Business Growth Network, there was eventually acknowledgement by at least one participant that there might be value to be derived from a focus on learning:

Maybe we should be more concerned about learning – SMEs in this area are too narrowly focused.

However, our data does indicate that for some – perhaps many – collaborations, inter-partner learning is Sidelined and rarely, if ever, explicitly considered.

Several variations on sidelining were evident in our data, as summarized in Figure 2. An obvious reason for sidelining learning is that for most collaborations, the primary purpose relates to more tangible ends such as service delivery, product development or production, market entry or joint planning (Dussauge et al., 2004; Gerwin, 2004; Milward and Provan, 2005; Zeng and Chen, 2003). In such cases, the normal expectation among partners is that they will contribute different expertise or other resource to the collaborative aim. In process terms, this can be conceived of as Using partners’ knowledge rather than learning from them. Comments that exemplify this attitude include:

Use the skills of people around the table. (Community Service Professional, Local Authority Division)

Sometimes the partners don’t need to learn but to make sure the partner does it well. (Director, Technology Start-Up, Business Growth Network)

This variant may be summed up as: learning from or with partners is not something we think about because our focus is on other objectives.
A further practical reason for sidelining learning repeatedly raised by members of the Business Growth Network was that while shared learning might be helpful, it is perceived to be time-consuming. One SME director commented:

If you are a small company there is no time to learn; you just want to get your product to market.

From this perspective, the opportunity cost of knowledge acquisition is simply seen as too high. Viewed from the outside, this attitude might appear short-sighted, but it may indicate as much about how the term ‘learning’ is often understood – i.e. as something that requires an explicit objective and allocated time, rather than something that happens emergently – as about the perceived desirability of it. In our research, some participants acknowledged that implicit learning happens, but did not contradict the dominant view that learning was not the reason, or even a reason, for collaborating. This Evaluating the Costs (especially in relation to time) variant might be characterized as: learning from or with partners is not something we do because the opportunity cost is too high.

We did encounter some acknowledgement in the Business Growth Network that learning could be a central objective for a collaboration, but that this should only be when a tangible and commercial focus could be expressed. This approach of Evaluating the Benefits of learning might be summed up as: learning from or with partners is something we think about only if it can be expressed in tangible outcomes. In more general terms it encompasses an active view that the value of knowledge acquisition is insufficient to justify its pursuit. A further variation
on sideling, which nevertheless acknowledges learning as an objective, occurred when a project manager from the lead institution in the National Science Network claimed to be in a collaboration,

to help (other participants) learn from each other.

This *Enabling* approach, in which knowledge acquisition is deemed unnecessary for one’s own organization but desirable for others’, can be seen as highly proactive. It can be characterized as: we don’t need to learn, but we help other partners to learn from each other.

These four variants of sidelined learning may be indicative of others. They suggest that there may be manifold reasons for sideling learning and many ways in which it is operationalized.

**SELFISH AND SHARING ATTITUDES**

As we have emphasized, learning may take place even though it is explicitly sideling. Our data suggests that participants do not have neutral attitudes to learning, even though they may not be routinely conscious of this. Implicit attitudes of both broadly selfish and broadly sharing types were identifiable.

At face value, the *Selfish* attitude does not appear to be consistent with a collaborative outlook. However, it is the stereotypical position associated with commercial alliances and is the presumption underlying models of collaboration rooted in resource dependence notions (e.g. Kim et al., 2004; Provan et al., 1980). As the convenor of the Business Growth Network put it:

It’s hard to get past the selfish box in a commercial setting – but this can act against us.

Neither the reasons for adopting a selfish stance, nor the ways in which this is enacted in practice, are necessarily as clear-cut as the basic attitude implies. The data also suggested that selfish attitudes are not restricted to commercial settings. For example, the comment made by a community service manager in the Local Authority Division:

Use information and knowledge to your advantage – controlling what’s shared,

indicates selfish motivations in the consideration of what should be shared with partners, despite an absence of any obvious competitive element to the collaborative context.

The observation above challenges the expectation that sharing attitudes would necessarily be consistent with a collaborative outlook and context. Similarly, our data – as we discuss later – undermines the expectation that a commercial outlook might always be associated with nominally selfish attitudes. Going further, it seems to be difficult to clearly
distinguish selfish and sharing attitudes in practice. We elaborate upon this below and develop some alternative, more robust distinctions by deconstructing the notion of ‘attitude’ into constituent espoused ‘stances’ on giving and taking knowledge to and from a partner, and addressing each of these in turn.

**Stances on Giving Knowledge to Partners**

The examples of stances to giving knowledge discussed in this section are summarized in Figure 3 and fall into three broad types: starving, instrumental and unilateral sharing.

*Starving stances.* Stances that restrict knowledge outflow often appear to be defensive or purely practical rather than aggressively selfish. For example, a common business concern is with the protection of intellectual property. In our cases this was a particular issue for small business owners. Not surprisingly, when considering market-access collaborations with very much larger companies they often expressed suspicion; in this context our data includes words like ‘unscrupulous’ and ‘shysters’. In order to safeguard themselves against partners’ perceived competitive behaviour, they sometimes displayed an *apparently* selfish reactive stance to their knowledge that might better be described as *Protective*. In the extreme, this becomes formalized into contracts (Mayer and Argyres, 2004):

> If it matters if a partner walks off and speaks to your competitor, include confidentiality in your legal agreement.

This piece of advice, offered to the participants at a meeting of the Small Businesses Network by a lawyer specializing in inter-company agreements, may reflect attitudes common in many business relationships. A more sophisticated version, which acknowledges the possible benefits of sharing knowledge, as advocated strongly by one participant during the same discussion, is to:

> hold some knowledge back

– such as a critical part of the technological know-how – while allowing most of it to be in the collaborative domain.

This *Protective* stance may be characterized as: we don’t trust you, therefore we don’t give to you. In addition to the emphasis on goodwill-based trust (Sako, 1998), this is significantly different from the original conception of the selfish attitude because it does not also imply (necessarily) a conjoint *we take from you* stance. The more extreme, *Legalistic* version of it may be characterized as: we don’t trust you, therefore we bind you not to take from us. An associated stance actively allows access to knowledge but not ownership of it. This was exemplified when representatives from a large private sector organization in the National Science Network offered

> access to specialist measurement technologies
to other partners with no intention of helping them to learn to set up their own facilities. This *Leasing* stance might be characterized as: we will let you have the use of our knowledge, but we will not let you replicate it. It is an interesting mirror of the knowledge accessing behaviours of firms referred to earlier (Inkpen and Beamish, 1997).

Another manifestation of protectionism in the data, but one which is rather more active, is based upon a concern for maintaining a competitive position. It may be characterized as: we want to maintain our independent position, so we don’t give to you. In the words of one participant in a Business Growth Network workshop:

*In a commercial context you would not seek to transfer your knowledge – the business perspective is on improving your competitive position.*

Expressed this way, it implies a stance rooted in concerns about survival and the need to mitigate dependence upon the collaboration.

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Reticence to giving knowledge does not, however, always arise from protectionist considerations. In the International Science Network the data indicated that many partners were unwilling to provide estimates for planning purposes if they were not sure of the integrity of their data. In general terms, doubts about the quality of knowledge may be a reason for the active restriction of knowledge outflow. This *Unconfident* stance to giving knowledge might be summed up as: we don’t trust our knowledge, so we will not give it to you.

At a more generic level we label the collection of reasons for a *we don’t give to you*, restriction of knowledge outflow position as *Starving* stances. None of our examples of these suggest purely selfish motivations. However, from the point of view of members of the ‘starved’ organization, it may only be the lack of giving, rather than the reasons for it, which is perceived:

In a company marketing situation . . . [our partners] were engaged on a selfish level and played their cards much closer to their chest. (Participant in a Business Growth Network workshop)

*Instrumental stances.* In contrast to the above, the data also revealed many instances of the apparently positive *we give to you* position in which knowledge outflow is enabled. Interestingly, however, it often indicated a degree of selfishness even when there was a preparedness to give. The earlier quotation, ‘use information and knowledge to your advantage – controlling what’s shared’, indicates an *Instrumental* stance on sharing, in which knowledge outflow is actively enabled, but only under advantageous circumstances: when it suits us to do so, we give to you. A number of instrumental stances were observed. An extreme version, which might be thought of as *Force-feeding* involves proactively seeking to ensure the receiver acquires the knowledge: when we need you to have understanding, we give to you. Stances of this sort were exemplified by discussions about the need to demonstrate to potential partners that there was a reason for them to collaborate with the knowledge-giver. Essentially it was a way of selling the virtues of the potential collaboration. The term *force-feeding* implies that there may be a degree of resistance from of the receiver – *we force you to take* – and to that extent the attitude is selfish.

The data also suggested some rather political instrumental stances. For example, in the National Science Network one of the partners managed knowledge outflow in order to maintain their own role as a network hub. This *Positioning* stance, which implies actively enabling knowledge outflow in order to maintain relationship differentials, might be summed up as: when it helps us to maintain our central position, we give to you. A further type was exemplified by a partner in the International Science Network which provided knowledge to another (regulatory) partner in order to undermine a third member. This *Manipulative* stance might be summed up as: when it helps us to manipulate a third party, we give to you.

Rather more collaborative, but nevertheless still instrumental and controlling is a *Parenting* stance in which knowledge outflow is actively enabled in order to support or develop a partner. It is exemplified by the comment of one of the Local Authority Partnership Managers:

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In distributing information, you have power in interpreting what is relevant to whom. This can be summed up as: when we deem it to be good for you, we give to you. Looked at benevolently, this can be seen as a positive and practical choice about what to pass on. Another version of this relates to the empowerment of others through giving knowledge (as well as other resources). For some, empowerment is at the very heart of collaboration (Himmelman, 1994), but as one Economic Development Group manager pointed out, it is done by the agency with power to the disempowered and thus is a one way transaction.

A unilateral sharing stance. Both Instrumental and Protective stances imply careful thought. However, less ‘careful’ stances are sometimes enacted. For example, in the following extracts from conversations in a Business Growth Network workshop, those with technical expertise are stereotyped as being naturally inclined to share it:

There is a tendency to ‘gush’ (technical know how) in the academic world.

Engineers operate at a sharing level.

The first of these statements was made in the context of remarks by the speaker about the desirability of withholding knowledge from potential ‘shysters’. The person who delivered the second statement implied that senior managers in the same company would not regard sharing as appropriate. Whether or not such stereotypes and related concerns are valid, these examples raise an important question about the relationship between espoused Protective attitudes and the likelihood that they will be enacted in practice throughout an organization. This gives another stance in which knowledge outflow is actively or passively enabled by inherent professional or personal behavioural characteristics: we enjoy sharing, therefore we give to you (even though we may be unwise to do so). Note that in this case the ‘we’ is likely to relate to specific individuals or communities rather than to an organization. It could be argued that while this Unilateral stance is ‘sharing’ in respect of partners, it can be considered ‘selfish’ in respect of colleagues in the same organization if it undermines their strategy.

Stances on Taking Knowledge from Partners

The examples of stances to taking knowledge discussed in this section are summarized in Figure 4 and also fall into three groups: emergent, discretionary and limited ability. We emphasize that we are using the term ‘taking’ in a neutral sense – since it may mean, for example, gladly receiving (as of a gift), obtaining without permission, or passively accepting something that may, perhaps, be unwanted.

Emergent stances. A first point relates to the degree to which knowledge acquisition is pre-planned. For example, a discussion in the Small Business Network revolved around the need to share know-how with potential partners in order to see whether a collaboration was worth pursuing. Worries were expressed about the use the potential partner might make of the knowledge acquired if no collaboration results. The implication was that the original intent in sharing knowledge may have been entirely collaborative, but it is not possible to turn back the clock and wipe out the knowledge gained if intentions
change. This suggests a reactive stance that we might label, *Emergent Selfishness*: we didn’t intend to take from you, but since we now have the knowledge we will use it. However, it is also possible that the attitude may derive more from *Emergent Carelessness* about the consequences for the other party than from consciously selfish behaviour: we didn’t intend to take knowledge from you, but since we now have it we will use it irresponsibly. This passive stance is characterized by a lack of consideration when using the knowledge gained.

Another emergent possibility of a more sharing nature is that a partner, originally acting purely as a knowledge donor, may come to realize that there is a potential learning outcome for them also. This is a reactive stance towards the acquisition of knowledge following an enablement of knowledge outflow. It was exemplified by an individual in the Economic Development Group:

> Also we can learn from partners – for our own capacity building.

This kind of *Emergent Sharing* stance might be summed up as: we were happy just to give, but now we realize that there is something in it for both of us.

**Discretionary stances.** The second set of example stances connected to taking knowledge from partners relates to a non-acquisitive stance that is not altruistic in motivation since knowledge is actively rejected. These stances could be seen as the inverse of the Carelessness attitude. They relate not to the misappropriation of knowledge, but to the ignoring or refusal of it. For example, the following pondering from one of the Local Authority Partnership Managers:

![Observed stances](image-url)
when asking communities questions, what weight should you give to their answers?,

suggests a stance of choosing to use the knowledge offered in a *Discretionary* mode, based upon an assessment of the giver. This active stance towards selective knowledge acquisition may be characterized as: we take what you give only if we choose to. It also suggests a *Trust Limited* stance in which the selectivity is based upon doubts about the capability of a partner to provide knowledge of value: we don’t trust you, therefore we don’t take what you give. In this case, it is competence-based trust that is at the core of the attitude rather than the goodwill-based trust associated with the *Protectionist* stance (Sako, 1998). Both stances are partially selfish because they do not take account of what the giver wants.

*A limited ability stance.* The final stance is also a form of the position in which knowledge is not acquired. It relates to the degree to which a partner believes that they lack the necessary competencies to acquire knowledge:

They [large companies] may be more sly at learning than we are.

This comment from an SME owner in the Business Growth Network raises a question about whether it is possible to take a selfish attitude in a relatively open way, or whether ‘slyness’ is an essential component of the attitude. It also suggests that having the ‘skill’ to take knowledge furtively from a partner may be an important prerequisite for a selfish *taking* stance. For this or other reasons, such as lack of top management commitment or low tolerance for information redundancy (Inkpen and Beamish, 1997), there is an implication that for some, their stance may be rooted in their *Limited Ability*. This renders them ineffective in acquiring knowledge and so passively unable to do so or unwilling to try: we don’t have the requisite skill, therefore we don’t take from you.

It is clear from the examples given above that not all stances that inhibit knowledge outflow or promote knowledge acquisition are motivated by purely selfish, competitive aims and that not all stances that enable knowledge outflow or decline knowledge acquisition are motivated by purely selfless, co-operative considerations. Rather, most of the stances in our data appear to have an element of both within them.

**CONTEXT AND COMPLEXITY: FROM LEARNING STANCES TO LEARNING ATTITUDES**

In the last two sections we introduced the notion of characterizing stances and developed definitions for those stances evidenced in our data set. Continuing our data analysis, we turn our attention to how attitudes to learning in collaboration operate. We do this in three stages, focusing first on combinations of stances, then on attitudes within organizations and finally on micro and macro levels.
Attitudes as Combinations of Stances

The data-derived stances in Figures 3–4 are framed from the perspective of ‘we’ doing the giving or taking (or not). However, to get a full picture of the attitudes of partners towards each other it is also necessary to characterize the perspective of ‘you’. We argued earlier that both perspectives were needed to characterize the basic sharing attitudes. In these, the relationship is presumed to be symmetrical: we take from you and we give to you; you take from us and give to us. In practical situations, however, asymmetry seems much more likely. Thus in the statement (partially revealed earlier):

in a company marketing situation sharing was on our side – others were engaged on a selfish level and played their cards much closer to their chest,

the speaker is indicating a stance that, framed from his perception, could be encapsulated as: we give to you but do not take from you; you do not give to us but you take from us. Of course, it might have appeared quite different to other participants.

Generalizing from this, our conceptualization models attitudes as being composed of (usually asymmetric) combinations of stances. For example, ‘we’ may take a Parenting stance on giving knowledge and a Discretionary stance on taking knowledge, while ‘you’ may take an Independent stance on giving knowledge and a Limited Ability stance on taking it. In multi-party situations, pair-wise combinations of attitudes (i.e. the attitudes of each partner to each other partner) have to be considered. We include in the model the possibility that each party’s perception of the combined stances may differ significantly.

Attitudinal Boundaries

Beyond this notion of combining stances, our data suggests that the conceptualization must pay attention to intra-organizational issues as well as inter-organizational ones. There are two aspects to this. Firstly, there may be different attitudes to learning at different levels within a single organization. For example, the person who argued that ‘engineers operate at a sharing level’ also argued that:

Chief executives play their hand close to the chest, and the marketing and communications managers share just enough for the collaboration to function.

This is, of course, another stereotyping perception which may or may not reflect actual collaborations. Extrapolating from this, however, it seems likely that many organizations would be host to a multiplicity of attitudes and related perceptions since there is unlikely to be uniformity of culture within an organization (Alvesson, 2002). This variety might nevertheless be influenced by a dominant attitude, ‘dominant logic’ (Lampel and Shamsie, 2000) or ‘dominant conceptual frame’ (Chaserant, 2003). This possibility reflects strands in the literature on organizational culture that suggest that common values within an organization might exist (e.g. Fey and Dennison, 2003; Schein, 1993, 1997). Anthropomorphization of organizations in practitioner discourse also implies a
sense of dominant attitude. For example, the community officer in the Local Authority Division who argued that:

as the agency with the power we should be concerned with ways of sharing information,

could be viewed as making the case for a shift of dominant attitude.

Secondly, even when knowledge is given to an organization by a partner, attitudes to sharing knowledge within the organization may result in some individuals not having access to it. Thus, referring to engineers from a product development collaboration, a corporate technology manager in the Business Growth Network commented:

The engineers who had to make this work... weren’t learning about the bigger picture.

This connects with research on communities of practice and professional networks, which argues that access to particular enactments of knowledge is dependent upon recognition of the individual as a legitimate member of the relevant community (Brown and Duguid, 2001; Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Macro and Micro Level Attitudes

The notion of a dominant attitude also points to another aspect of attitudinal inconsistency that needs to be included in the conceptualization. Attitudes have so far been described as though they operate at a macro-level, throughout the life of a collaboration. Even if this is so, there may be many micro-level changes of attitude according to the context of the moment. For example, one SME director in the Business Growth Network saw a need to:

engage with partners to explain the gap in knowledge and see the use of technology,

at a point when he was aiming to draw the partners into a collaboration, but implied that this offering of knowledge was a short term stance for getting started. Given the inherently dynamic nature of all aspects of collaboration (Ebers and Grandori, 1997; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Koka and Prescott, 2002), attitudes may also change over time at the macro level, as, for example, individuals get to know each other, early successes lead to trust development, or changes of personnel undermine it.

UNDERSTANDING ATTITUDES TO LEARNING: SOME IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

Taking the above points together, our conceptualization is summarized as in Table III. We emphasize that while the specific stances identified from our data may be encountered in other situations, it is the higher level concept – i.e. the concept of attitudes as made up of complex combinations of varied stances – that we wish to stress.
The conceptualization portrays a complex picture in which the actors may be conceived at a variety of different levels. Considering both debates in the literature and the data we observed, it is difficult to ascribe a particular enactment of attitude as being clearly at an individual, community or organizational level, but for each observation in the discourse, one of these levels might be considered more likely. In practice, therefore, the level of each enactment of attitude must be reviewed as an individual case. Given the possibility of the interaction of both organizational and professional community cultural assumptions (Faull et al., 2004) and the possibility of multiple, individual interpretations of any seemingly agreed matter (Corley, 2004; Martin, 2003), it is perhaps unsurprising that a wide variety of possible enactments of attitudes within particular communities or organizations is possible.

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The conceptualization of inter-partner attitudes to learning at this detailed level contributes to an understanding of the practical motivations and emergent processes of learning in collaboration. As with other authors (e.g. Inkpen and Beamish, 1997; Shenkar and Yan, 2002) we see inter-partner learning as contributing to the stability or otherwise of collaborations. However, while we would not question the presumption that partners’ relative levels of knowledge affects their mutual bargaining power, the current conceptualization also presumes that partners’ perceptions of each other’s attitudes to mutual learning affect the processes of interaction between them. It is for this reason that the investigation of the more subtle stances on learning is important.

Other specific stances can be envisaged and some can be found embedded, but not highlighted, in the work of other authors. For instance, stances that might be described as defensive (we don’t trust you, therefore we take), discretionary-value oriented (we take only...
if we value what you give) and _discretionary-complexity limited_ (we take only if the knowledge is relatively straightforward to garner) are implicit within Inkpen and Beamish’s (1997) classic account of knowledge acquisition in relation to bargaining power. In their context these are posed as _rationales for a choice_ between knowledge acquisition (we take) and knowledge accessing (we use, but don’t take) from a partner, rather than stances.

We go beyond the access-acquisition dichotomy by developing a broader range of fundamental framing concepts, in two ways. Firstly, our characterizations provide greater breadth and depth on stances concerned with the acquisition and protection of knowledge than are suggested in other authors’ work. Importantly, this includes stances on knowledge outflow that may operate in conjunction with ‘acquiring’ stances. Stances on deliberately _giving_ knowledge have not previously been adequately considered, but are an essential ingredient in the transfer or creation of knowledge. Taking these stances into account thus gives a richer picture of the possibilities for effective inter-partner learning processes.

Secondly, we develop concepts related to the rejection, filtering or sidelining of knowledge. These suggest that ‘accessing’ is only one of many stances that can result in the _non-_transfer of knowledge. These new conceptualizations help to shed some light on the reasons for the low levels of inter-partner learning in some collaborative contexts. These may be ‘missed opportunities’, although sidelining can also be quite deliberate.

Significantly, the richer picture that recognizes the variety of possible stances on all ‘sides’ of a collaboration adds some qualifications to single-organization explanations for successful knowledge transfer, such as ‘absorptive capacity’ (Cohen and Levinthal, 1990). Our conceptualization emphasizes that the way partners interact is influenced (explicitly or implicitly) by the attitudes to learning at play _between_ them. The conceptualization does not question the utility of the basic attitudes to knowledge acquisition, outflow, transfer and creation that underlie most research in the area, but the richer detail challenges the assumptions about behaviour that are implicit in such works. There are clear implications for both theoretical and empirical research in the area of inter-organizational learning and knowledge. We suggest that a presumption of multiple interacting stances on learning is a helpful starting point and that simplified models might be reverted to once the context is understood.

However, although simplified approaches might be feasible, the interplay of different environmental influences (Faull et al., 2004) with the range of stances in play is likely to result in a degree of unpredictability. We therefore see scope for further research that explores such interactions and their effects on learning processes, continuing a vigorous and long-running strand in the research on organizational learning (Antonacopoulou, 1998; Argyris and Schön, 1978) and extending it more fully into the inter-organizational domain. However, our conceptualization already provides some initial contributions to this developing debate on the complex, situated nature of learning (Lawrence et al., 2005), in three ways. Firstly, it provides support for conceptualizations of alliance learning strategies (Larsson et al., 1998) by helping to elucidate how these might be generated from a mix of more complex motivations. Secondly, it acknowledges the organizational and individual level interpretations of learning.
described by Antonacopoulou (1998) (as well as adding the professional community level to this mix) and highlights the likelihood that the complex and non-mechanistic learning processes she has described are also likely to be observed in the interorganizational context. Thirdly, it supports and extends (in sectoral breadth and conceptual detail) research on the impact of learning on the possible survival of collaborations and their constituent organizations (Oliver, 2001).

We argued earlier that in practical terms the conceptualization should provide ‘handles for reflective practice’. This implies a role in supporting managerial consideration of action. It does this in several ways. At one level the conceptualization has a highlighting role. For example, since learning is often sidelined, the framework is helpful at the basic level in highlighting that it is actually taking place. This forces acknowledgement that even in circumstances in which learning is apparently less than central, implicit stances are in play and may influence collaboration processes and outcomes – with both positive and negative consequences for ‘we’ and ‘you’, however those terms are conceptualized in a particular context. It also highlights the complexity of motivations that underlie attitudes; in particular, the possible discrepancy between superficial assumptions about selfish or sharing attitudes and the ‘reality’ when attitudes are considered in terms of more subtle constituent stances.

At a second level it can support action by directing thought processes, through providing a framework for exploring motivations about knowledge-related behaviour. It provides a basis for exploring the particular attitudes to learning in play – of oneself, one’s own organization, and partners – and their implications. It is thus useful in helping collaborators to understand the feasibility of establishing or continuing to engage in complex learning processes (Berends et al., 2003; Bouwen and Taillieu, 2004; Brown and Duguid, 2001; Polanyi, 1966) and in exploring how to work effectively with partners. Practitioners who have used the framework in this way have developed additional stances to describe their own situations. For example, one characterized a partner as having an Arrogant stance: we’ve done it before so we can do it again.

In closing, we highlight three areas of limitation of our study, and the related opportunities for further research that merit consideration. Firstly, our analysis has focused on espoused views about learning offered at particular moments in time. However learning necessarily takes place over time, so there is scope for research which explores, in an intensive longitudinal context, how interacting attitudes to learning impact on the evolving processes and outcomes of collaboration. Secondly, we deliberately included a range of networks and partnerships in our research but many types of collaborative relationship were not studied. While we have no reason to doubt the wider applicability of the conceptualization, studies to confirm its applicability in other contexts would be helpful. Thirdly, research which considers the links between attitudes and learning outcomes at the different possible conceptual levels (individual, organizational and inter-organizational) might provide additional clarity, particularly in facilitating the use of the conceptualization in supporting reflective practice. These lines of further research may confirm, extend or challenge the inferences we have drawn, since our approach has intentionally focused on breadth and possibility and the resultant conceptualization is therefore open to new insights.
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