

WHY IS COLLABORATION LIKE A STREET PARTY?



By Cate Newnes-Smith

As our Joining Forces cell has been discussing, most social problems are too complex for any single organisation to solve on their own, and this means that collaboration is essential. Here, Cate Newnes-Smith, our thought leader for this cell, shares ideas on what good collaboration looks like.

I've come up with a theory around collaboration. I would be interested to hear your response: a) do you like this analogy? b) can it be built on in any way?

Collaboration is like holding a party.

At **Level Zero**, there are no parties. You don't bother to organise a party, you're just at home on your own or with your family. This is when no collaboration is going on. Sometimes this is what is needed, but not all the time.

You decide that you need to collaborate. You have decided to throw a party. You organise the party yourself. You decide everything – the date, the catering, the balloons, the decorations and then you invite your friends along. This is often the first step towards collaboration that people will take. You think that you are collaborating now, because people are invited to your event.

This is **Level One** of collaboration – other people are involved, but on your terms.

However, perhaps at the next party you throw, you ask friends for advice on the party. Do you think we should do a buffet or a chilli? Shall we start at 7.30pm or 8.30pm? Shall I invite Amelia and Seth from No 67? At full **Level Two**, you ask a group of friends to help you organise the whole thing. Let's agree a date we can all make. Who do you want to invite? Let's decide the menu together. You know that your parties are valuable when other people are keen to help you organise.

But then you start to realise that other people are having parties. And actually, maybe you could have more fun if you went along to other people's parties, you could meet more new people, you could have a wider variety of conversations. So, you start to reach out to like-minded people to make

friends, in the hope that you will get invited to their parties. Over time, you make good friends and offer to help them organise their parties. This is **Level Three** of party collaboration. This is an important step in the level of maturity in collaboration. It's not about your party, but other people's parties – you spend time learning about other people and other parties that are being organised out there. You start to figure out where you can go and where you can be. Being invited to lots of parties is a good sign, it shows that people value you and what you have to offer.

Level Four of party collaboration is the most sophisticated – true collaboration. This is a street party where the whole road is involved and come together to organise it (not the type where Jessica at No 6 does it all and no one turns up). You genuinely organise parties together in collaboration

with other people and organisations. You agree together that you want to organise a party. You explore together why you want to organise a party, who is it for and how you are going to go about it. This is true collaboration. It requires trust and knowledge of each other's priorities. However, I suspect that it doesn't require a vision (yet). True collaboration starts with exploration. The largest piece of collaboration/social movement that I have worked on started with just one meeting... but that's an essay for another day.

Does this resonate with you? Do you like this analogy? Or is it broken? If so, why? Would you like to organise a party with me?

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