

Collaborative cycles and strategic spheres of stability

Dr Denis Leonard CQP FCQI makes the case for organisations going beyond working in isolation to form structured, behaviour-driven collaborative working relationships

Through a study of three collaborative relationships, two models have been developed to articulate the journey and impact of collaboration. These help to conceptualise the benefits of collaboration, the impact of *ISO 44001:2017 Collaborative business relationship management systems – Requirements and framework*, and how collaboration creates a strategic stability in the chaotic business environment dominated by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA).

The collaborations studied include: an eight-year one between two organisations; a four-year collaboration between three organisations; and a two-year collaboration between 14 organisations.

Engaging in collaboration

By working in isolation, an organisation creates its own value and innovation, as shown by Organisation A (Org A) in Figure 1. This recognises that such an organisation, working in isolation, is still influenced by outside forces – such as political, economic, social, technological and legal – but is working in its own fixed sphere of influence. By working with another organisation (Org B), however, there can be a sharing or transactional relationship through

which, by combining their efforts, the organisations can create increased value and innovation. This is shown by the Transactional Sharing for Org A&B in Figure 1.

While this sharing is beneficial, it misses the true potential of going beyond a transactional relationship and engaging in collaboration. In the case of collaboration, each organisation would be looking beyond the transactional aspect of what would be needed in a partnership, to focus more on how strategically and operationally aligned potential partners are before a relationship is established.

This means that, when a collaboration is formed, the culture of the organisations would be more aligned. The teams working together will be more in tune with each other's objectives and methods of working, and would work together as a team more effectively, with duplication of work reduced or eliminated.

There would, however, still be a natural period of transition to working together, which would initially result in a dip in productivity. The advantages of this alignment would allow the 'value creation' stage to become productive more quickly and would reinforce the 'staying together' stage. This is shown by Collaboration Org A&B in Figure 1.

By adopting the structured approach of ISO 44001, the opportunity is created to take further the collaboration, value, innovation and continual improvement it provides, as cited in the standard itself. Rather than looking at the eight-stage lifecycle in its circular form, as in ISO 44001, if the stages are used to chart the development of a collaboration in a longitudinal, chronological format, we can visualise and chart the progression of a collaboration, as shown in Figure 1.

By using the ISO 44001 eight-stage lifecycle, each individual organisation is focusing separately and introspectively on its operational awareness, knowledge and internal assessment, before considering partner selection.

Behavioural assessment

This systematic, formalised approach facilitates a leading, rather than lagging, premeditation. If both organisations are using this approach it means that, at the partner selection stage, they already align in terms of their collaborative understanding and strategic intent. Ideally, both organisations would also have a similar level of experience and maturity in their application of ISO 44001. The partner selection process can then be more detailed, allowing the

‘working together’ stage to be more productive. This will provide stability, understanding and trust earlier in the process, ensuring that the ‘exit strategy activation’ stage (a potentially difficult and stressful period) happens smoothly (see Collaboration using ISO 44001 and Behavioural Assessment Org A&B in Figure 1).

While the ISO 44001 eight-stage lifecycle includes a focus on behaviours in the ‘staying together’ stage, organisations using the standard should be engaging behavioural assessment on an ongoing, organisational-wide basis. As a result, the benefits of using behaviours would be leveraged not just at the ‘staying together’ stage, but, most importantly, also as part of the internal assessment – and, of course, as part of the partner selection stage. Teams that would be working together could be strategically selected to ensure the best fit. Critically, this would mean that the transition to working effectively as a team (resulting in a dip in productivity) would be significantly shortened or minimised.

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Continuing to use behaviours not only to assess and align individuals’ profiles to form teams, but also to assess and continually improve the behaviours of the teams during the collaboration, would create a situation where value and innovation creation are continually improved to the maximum value. This will ensure the best possible ‘working’ and ‘staying together’ stages, and a productive and positive ‘exit’ stage.

Other advantages of collaboration are that it allows a greater sense-making perspective of the complex strategic environment and creates a collaborative ecosystem. This is a sphere of strategic stability within the larger VUCA environment, a sphere that can increase in size and influence, giving a significant advantage over organisations that work in isolation (see Figure 2).

Figure 1:
The collaborative cycles model

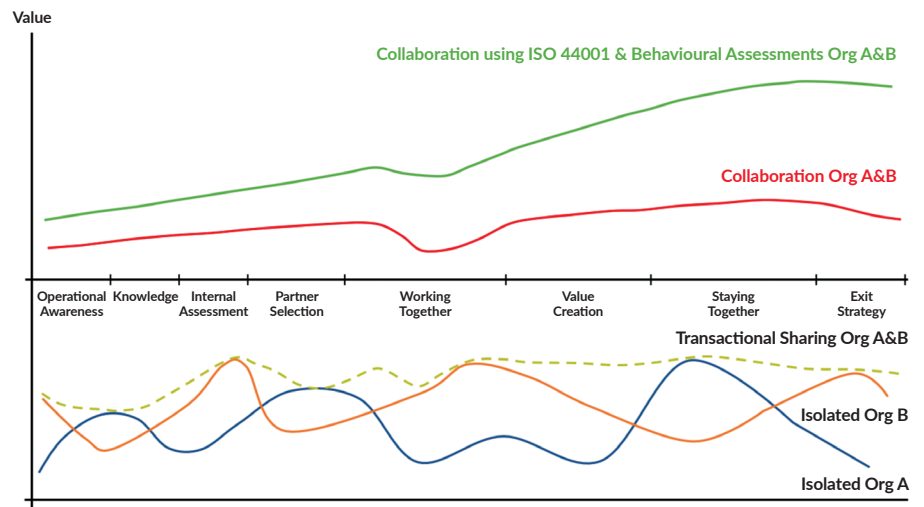
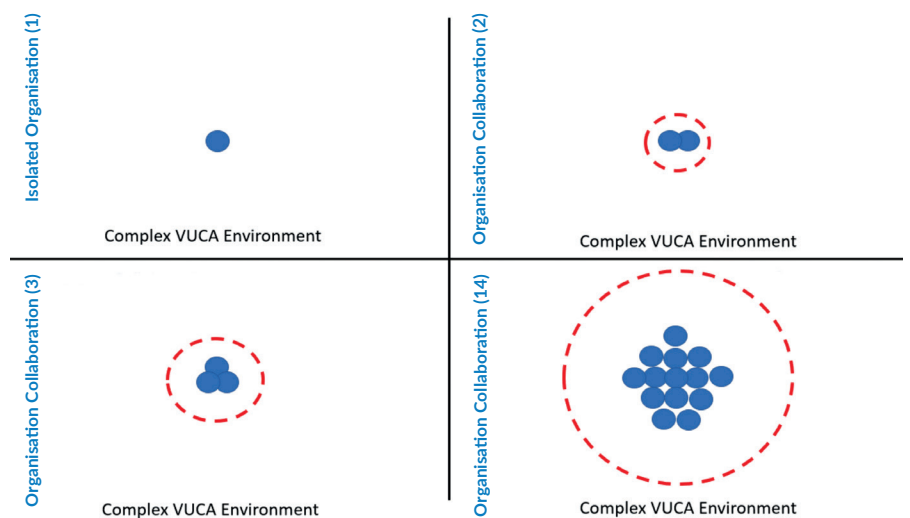


Figure 2:
Strategic sphere of stability created by collaborative ecosystems in a wider VUCA environment



A collaborative ecosystem

There are several advantages of behaviour-driven, structured collaborative relationships:

1. Creating a stable (increasing) strategic sphere or collaborative ecosystem within a larger complex, chaotic VUCA environment.
2. Focusing on behaviours and ongoing behavioural assessment to identify ideal collaborative partners.
3. Leveraging behaviours to ensure minimum performance dip during initial ‘working together’ stage.
4. Improving behaviours to maximise performance improvement/value creation during collaboration.

5. Using the collaborative cycles as a longitudinal perspective of the collaborative journey.

These collaborative models allow us to consider the value impact and benefits of progressing from ‘isolation’ through ‘transactional/sharing’, to more stable collaborative working relationships. With the uniting mechanism of ISO 44001, a structured collaboration can, finally, fully embrace the use of behavioural assessment in driving performance improvement. This will achieve an ideal level of collaboration and an increasing sphere of strategic stability through a collaborative ecosystem.