WHAT WORKS SCOTLAND

Research Report

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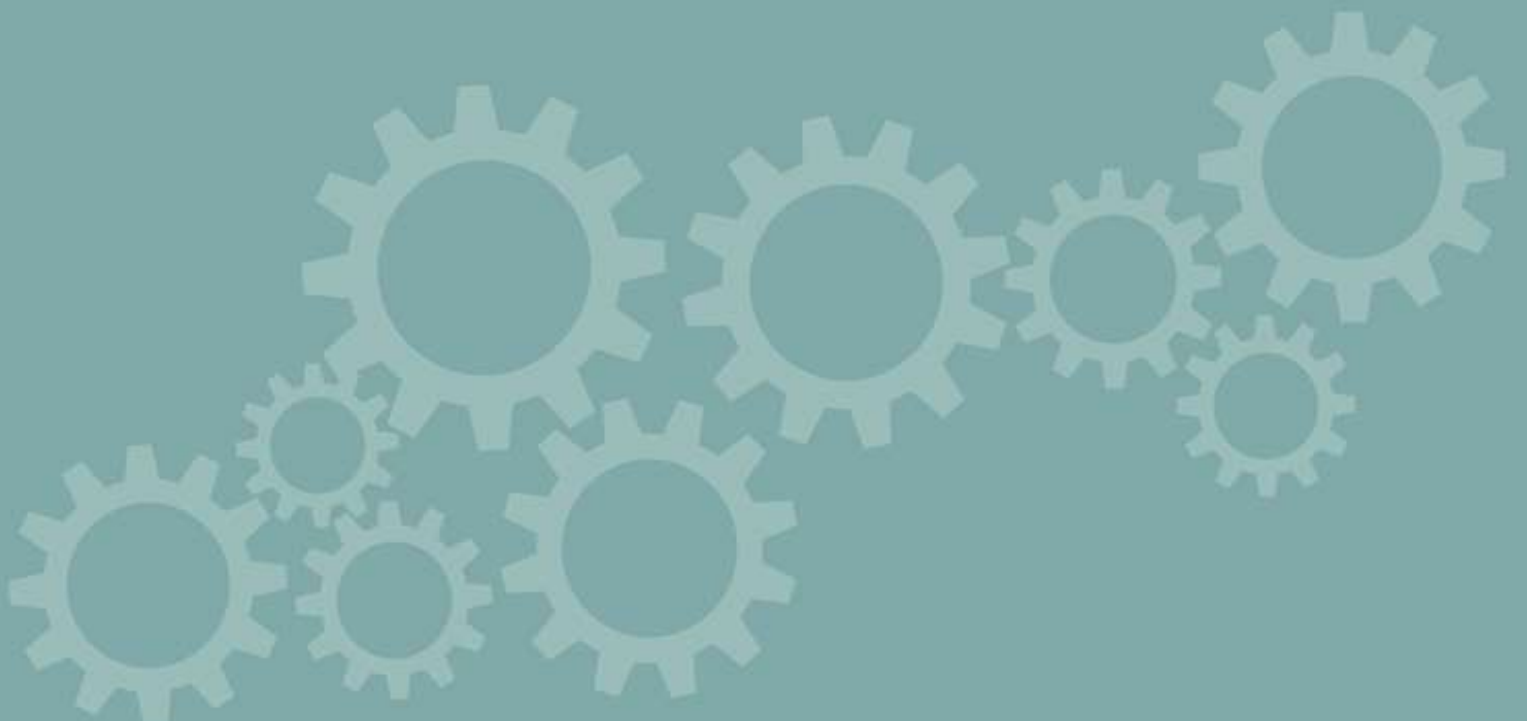
Pioneering Collaborative Leadership:

A Facilitated Approach to Learning in Action

Nick Bland

What Works Scotland (University of Edinburgh)

What Works Scotland (WWS) aims to improve the way local areas in Scotland use evidence to make decisions about public service development and reform.

We are working with Community Planning Partnerships involved in the design and delivery of public services (Aberdeenshire, Fife, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire) to:

- learn what is and what isn't working in their local area
- encourage collaborative learning with a range of local authority, business, public sector and community partners
- better understand what effective policy interventions and effective services look like
- promote the use of evidence in planning and service delivery
- help organisations get the skills and knowledge they need to use and interpret evidence
- create case studies for wider sharing and sustainability

A further nine areas are working with us to enhance learning, comparison and sharing. We will also link with international partners to effectively compare how public services are delivered here in Scotland and elsewhere. During the programme, we will scale up and share more widely with all local authority areas across Scotland.

WWS brings together the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, other academics across Scotland, with partners from a range of local authorities and:

- Glasgow Centre for Population Health
- Improvement Service
- Inspiring Scotland
- IRISS (Institution for Research and Innovation in Social Services)
- NHS Education for Scotland
- NHS Health Scotland
- NHS Health Improvement for Scotland
- Scottish Community Development Centre
- SCVO (Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations)

This is one of a series of papers published by What Works Scotland to share evidence, learning and ideas about public service reform. This paper relates to the What Works Scotland **Leadership** workstream.

Dr Nick Bland is a co-director of What Works Scotland, based at the University of Edinburgh.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Summary

This report is about Pioneering Collaborative Leadership (PCL), an experimental initiative testing an innovative development approach for public service leaders in Scotland in the practice of collaborative leadership and public service innovation. PCL provides skilled facilitators who work alongside partnerships on 'live' collaborative challenges. Their facilitation focuses on building the capacity for individuals and groups to reflect and learn about collaborative leadership, as they do it.

The report covers the early experience of delivering PCL over its first 18 months, from March 2015 until November 2016. It builds on a prior report published in 2016 which described the initial development phase of PCL, and drew out the learning from that collaborative experience, *Practicing Collaborative Leadership: reflection and learning from the Enabling Collaborative Leadership Pioneer Programme.*

Pioneering Collaborative Leadership's contribution to public service reform

The agenda set out by the Christie Commission in 2011 continues to be an important 'touchstone' for continuing efforts to reform public services in Scotland. However, despite evident ambition and commitment, it appears from a range of evidence that the transformation of public service structures, cultures and practices to put the Commission's recommendations into action remains a challenge to achieve comprehensively across Scotland. Perhaps as a response to this challenge and in recognition of the complexity faced by those working in public services, there is a diverse range of approaches and tools that have been promoted and applied to support the reform of public services in Scotland.

It is in this context that PCL seeks to make a distinct contribution. It is delivered by highly skilled facilitators who apply action inquiry (AI) principles to support experimentation, innovation and learning in collaborative leadership.

The governance and organisation of Pioneering Collaborative Leadership

PCL is part of a programme of work led by Workforce Scotland, which is a collaboration to develop the workforce across public services. Workforce Scotland is a workstream of the Scottish Leaders Forum, a network of senior leaders from central and local government, public services and the third sector.

As PCL started to work in local sites at the beginning of 2015, its governance and organisation evolved. First, dedicated Workforce Scotland programme manager and part-time administrator posts were created, hosted by NHS Education for Scotland (NES). These

posts then moved to the Scottish Government. Finally, the governance evolved into a PCL Stewardship Group to support and oversee its delivery, drawn from Scottish Government, the Improvement Service, Education Scotland, the Scottish College for Educational Leadership and NES.

PCL has been delivered by a core group of highly motivated facilitators, working on the basis of individual arrangements with their employing public service organisations which recognise the congruence of the work on PCL with their core role. This position reflects the overall collaborative ethos of Workforce Scotland, drawn directly from the strong emphasis on collaboration by the Christie Commission. PCL seeks to be self-sustaining by relying primarily on sharing existing resource across public services and without relying on the continuation of a specific funding stream. There is no budget to commission or contract out the core work, but some limited funds for promotional material and to pay some of the costs of running events. This marks it out as somewhat unusual in the crowded field of initiatives supporting public service reform.

The report draws on a range of research material – including interviews, reflective group exercises, project documents and PCL 'learning logs'– from a case study of PCL's extended collaboration with East Lothian Partnership in Musselburgh, and from three other sites where initial facilitation did not graduate to deeper collaboration.

What is Pioneering Collaborative Leadership learning about facilitating collaboration?

PCL worked with East Lothian Partnership as it considered how to achieve better outcomes for vulnerable families in Musselburgh, as part of a place-based approach. It is the most extended period for a site so far - from March 2015 until December 2016 - and provides a rich illustration of the PCL approach in practice.

To take the Musselburgh Total Place (MTP) work forward, a conventional project structure had been established with a project board, project team and a project manager. The PCL facilitators attended board meetings and also worked with the project manager and project team. They integrated their facilitation within the structure of the board - and subsequently project team - meetings, but distinguished their specific contribution from 'normal business'. For example, the facilitators would invite board discussions to 'pause', take notice of specific issues being raised, and take some time to reflect on their meaning and importance. The detail of their facilitation practice – involving interactional skill and careful judgement – is described in the main body of this report.

Using action inquiry, the facilitators helped the board to surface two compelling questions about local vulnerable families: "What is it like to be me in this family?" and "What is it like to work with these families?" The board decided it was important to hear directly the voice of families and those who worked with them. The reports it received of the personal

experiences of vulnerable families had a powerful impact on the MTP Board, and was heard without defensiveness or professional 'interpretation'.

The PCL facilitators supported members of the board and project team to act in ways that were less familiar and felt less comfortable: taking time and holding the space for personal and group reflection in meetings; developing a deeper shared understanding of the experience for families; and collective 'meaning-making'. This helped strengthen their collaborative leadership, individually and as a group, and drove a commitment to develop an innovative model of public service delivery.

There were a couple of partners who were not able to sustain a consistent commitment to collaboration throughout. This had implications for how quickly joint resourcing decisions could be reached latterly. This suggests a level of pragmatism in collaboration can be required; despite difficulties, it is still possible to make it work.

The PCL facilitators point to distinct conditions that appear to have created a supportive environment for their work in Musselburgh:

- The MTP Board recognised their work had reached a point where they were not certain about what steps to take next to make a difference for families. They accepted that sense of uncertainty and invited PCL to help them work through it.
- There was a senior champion for the involvement of PCL.
- Key senior individuals understood from the beginning the value PCL could provide.

Learning was also drawn from experience in three other sites in which initial facilitation did not graduate to longer-term collaboration with PCL. Facilitators reflected that engaging with potential PCL sites could be quite an extended process, involving a series of meetings to communicate the offer and negotiate the 'terms of engagement'. This can be a significant time commitment for facilitators. They need to build local understanding of the PCL approach, and their personal credibility. This is not easy and requires early relationship-building, and sometimes the delicate application of challenge to test whether there is the necessary local understanding and commitment to engage with the PCL approach.

The experience to date suggests facilitators could more explicitly assess the local conditions for collaboration and whether there is sufficient local capacity, capability, or motivation to work with PCL. Where there is not, the facilitators may be able to suggest other approaches or interventions that suit the local collaborative environment. They may also choose to encourage potential sites to decide sooner whether they will work with PCL. There is a risk that as PCL is a 'free' offer, there is less incentive for sites to think hard about whether they can commit.

There is emerging learning about the conditions that support PCL's entry into sites. This might be understood as a set of local 'minimal conditions' for collaboration. It appears necessary, but not sufficient, for there to be local advocates and senior champions who

understand and value the PCL approach. The facilitators can influence those conditions to some degree by communicating a clear offer, and modelling the facilitator role in practice.

The reflections of PCL facilitators on their experiences with sites points to the importance of certain personal qualities including:

- personal confidence, relational 'maturity', a sophisticated understanding of collaborative group process
- knowledge and experience of applying a range of techniques and approaches
- resilience and emotional intelligence to negotiate the challenges of entering sites, negotiating collaboration, and sustaining engagement.

The experiences of facilitators also highlight a number of benefits from them working in pairs:

- mutual support - both practical and emotional
- peer review and shared reflection about their experiences with sites
- division of labour in attending site meetings and preparing and doing facilitation
- pairs offer a broader mix of facilitation skill, technique and experience

Concluding reflections

The material presented in the report illustrates that PCL is generating a rich source of insight and learning about the conditions for collaborative leadership and the support it can offer.

PCL is clearly speaking to, and engaging with, the interest and enthusiasm of people across public services in Scotland looking for support to deliver local collaboration and innovation. But these potential local 'change agents' appear not always able to activate a wider change agenda in their localities.

Workforce Scotland's collaborative ethos is reflected in PCL's resourcing which relies on facilitators who are prepared to contribute alongside existing commitments, and be supported in their organisation to do so. PCL has succeeded so far with a highly-committed core group of facilitators. At the time this research was conducted, steps had been taken to form a wider facilitation network. Workforce Scotland and PCL may wish to consider what they consider the optimal level of scale to which PCL should aim, and the implications of that for the number of active facilitators that would need.

All PCL facilitators reflect positively on the growth and development of their own facilitation practice; it has gone to a higher level. They can exemplify and model a sophisticated range of collaborative behaviours. This is an important outcome from PCL. But there is a risk of a widening gap in expertise – and the confidence it generates – between this group and any new facilitators expressing interest in joining PCL. It is increasingly important for this facilitation skill and experience to be passed on to new facilitators to increase the capability of people in that pool.

PCL offers a specific contribution among the range of offers available to public services in Scotland attempting to put the Christie agenda into practice. That contribution is its focus on collaboration and leadership, and its 'delivery model' which situates it in local collaborative challenges. But it has been relatively modest so far in its claims and in promoting its offer. Now may be the right moment for Workforce Scotland to support PCL to become more visible in the wider Scottish public service system and to consider how a wider constituency might best be introduced to the insights and learning that this report helps document.

1. Introduction

This section:

- locates the Pioneering Collaborative Leadership approach in the context of contemporary public service reform in Scotland
- describes the range of other prominent approaches, methods and tools that support public service reform efforts and identifies what makes Pioneering Collaborative Leadership distinct
- explains the purpose of this report and identifies who might be interested to read it

This report is about Pioneering Collaborative Leadership[1] (PCL), an experimental initiative to support collaborative leadership practice across public services in Scotland. It covers the early experience of delivering PCL over its first 18 months, from March 2015 until November 2016, and draws out the growing learning it is stimulating.

The PCL approach can be located in a body of international research and experience over the past 30-40 years about participatory and collaborative approaches to professional learning and development. This developed from ideas about education and learning and the importance of collaborative approaches, and placing the learner in a more active role; empowered, and with the necessary capacity and capability, to take responsibility for their own learning. These ideas were applied and explored in professional working environments from which emerged the importance of inquiry and reflection for professional practice and for 're-imagining' the role and purpose of public services[2]. This tradition has had particular influence in some public service professions, specifically education and also social work.

Public service reform in Scotland

The Christie Commission report of 2011 articulated the challenges facing public services in Scotland and set out some principles it identified as central to any significant attempt to meet those challenges and to deliver on ambitions to tackle long-standing inequalities.

> *"irrespective of the current economic challenges, a radical change in the design and delivery of public services is necessary to tackle the deep-rooted social problems that persist in communities across the country… public services are built around people*

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[1] Known in its first phase as the 'Enabling Collaborative Leadership Pioneer Programme'.

[2] See for example, Argyris, M. and Schön, D. (1974) *Theory in Practice. Increasing professional effectiveness*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.; Schon, D. (1983) The Reflective Practitioner: how professionals think in action, London: Temple Smith; Argyris, C. and Schön, D. (1996) *Organizational learning II: Theory, method and practice,* Reading, Mass: Addison Wesley.

and communities, their needs, aspirations, capacities and skills, and work to build up their autonomy and resilience"[3]

The response from national and local government, public services, third, and community sectors to meet those challenges and apply those principles, which might be termed the 'Christie agenda', has been evident. The Scottish Government has placed an emphasis on approaches to public service delivery that seek to build on individuals' 'assets' or strengths, co-production of public services by providers and citizens, and the use of improvement approaches to help drive reform. It has termed this the 'Scottish Approach'.[4]

The agenda set out by the Christie Commission continues to be an important 'touchstone' for continuing efforts to reform public services. It is explicitly re-stated in the Scottish Government's guidance for the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. And the influence of Christie can be seen in a broad range of initiatives such as: the £2million Community Choices Fund to support participatory budgeting (PB) in 2016/17 as a tool for community engagement; self-directed support and 'our voice' initiatives in health; and the emergence of 'bottom-up' community action across Scotland championing recovery, co-production and community land initiatives.

However, despite evident ambition, commitment and action, it appears from a range of evidence that the transformation of public service structures, cultures and practices to put 'Christie into action' remains a challenge to achieve comprehensively across Scotland.[5]

Perhaps as a response to this challenge, and in recognition of the complexity faced by those working in public services, there is a diverse range of approaches, methods and tools that have been variously promoted and applied to support the reform of public services in Scotland.

Some examples of the approaches include:

- Improvement Science (applied initially within the NHS and then spread more widely by the Scottish Government)
- Theory U, being organised through U.Lab Scotland[6]

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[3] Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, 2011. p.26 http://www.gov.scot/resource/doc/352649/0118638.pdf

[4] Cairney, P., Russell, S., St Denny, E., 2016, *'Scottish approach' to policy and policymaking: what issues are territorial and what are universal?*' Policy & Politics, Volume 44, Number 3, pp. 333-350; http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/tpp/pap/2016/00000044/00000003/art00001

[5] For example, see Community Planning: an update, March 2016, Audit Scotland. http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/report/community-planning-an-update

[6] https://ulabscot.wordpress.com/about/ "U.Lab is a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) by the Massachusetts Institute for Technology (MIT) which offers to 'put you into the driver's seat of innovation and change' by helping you to make transformational change by changing yourself. Otto Scharmer (Author of Theory U) is working with Scotland to help us use U.Lab as a way of encouraging more people to make the changes we want to see in our country, both as individuals and as members of our organisations."

- asset-based community development and co-production
- design approaches
- specific approaches to leadership development such as 'Leading for Outcomes' aimed primarily at those working in justice organisations and 'Leadership for Integration: Collaborative leadership in practice' aimed at primary health and social care professionals working together.

This might feel quite a crowded field to understand, let alone navigate, in Scotland's relatively small (compared internationally) public service system. Many of these approaches have been given a level of national prominence by the Scottish Government. But it should also be recognised that there is a lot of work locally as well.[7] The approaches each place differing emphasis on notions of, for example 'improvement', 'effectiveness', 'transformation', 'organisational development' and focus variably on public service leadership, partnership, collaboration, community engagement and participation.[8]

For the Christie Commission, the complex and interrelated nature of persistent inequalities in Scotland can only be addressed through stronger collaboration across government and public service organisations, to achieve better outcomes for less money. The Commission report identified that collaboration should increasingly involve citizens in co-designing and co-producing services.

> *Evidence drawn from written submissions to the Commission, public discussion events and stakeholder meetings, demonstrates that some new approaches – characterised by collaboration between organisations and partnerships with people and communities – are making a real difference and can provide positive models for the future. However, these are isolated examples. A priority for government should be to ensure such approaches become the norm, benefiting individuals and entire communities.[9]*

This is the specific territory in which Pioneering Collaborative Leadership seeks to make a distinct contribution. It is an experimental initiative to test a learning and development 'offer' with public service leaders in the practice of collaborative leadership and public service innovation. PCL provides advanced facilitation to work alongside groups and

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[7] For example, the What Works Scotland report describing work in Aberdeenshire which combined action learning and improvement approaches: http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/collaborative-learning-research-and-action-in-public-service-reform/

[8] This is a broad field. For a review focused on improvement, see Chapman and Rowe, 2015, http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/perspectives-on-improvement-and-effectiveness-key-definitions-and-concepts/.

[9] Christie Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services, 2011

partnerships on their 'live' collaborative challenges. The facilitation focuses on building the capacity for individuals and groups to reflect and learn about collaboration as they do it.

The Scottish Leaders Forum brings together the chief executive leaders from across Scotland's public services. It established a programme of workforce development activity after the publication of the Christie report. Workforce Scotland emerged as the Scottish Leaders Forum collaborative initiative to develop and support the workforce across public services in Scotland. Workforce Scotland expresses its aims as:

> We want to ensure that everyone working together to improve Scottish public services has access to high quality, multi-disciplinary development opportunities which:
> - engage and motivate staff around delivery of outcomes and policy priorities
> - build skills and confidence to take an assets-based approach
> - create confidence to work across organisational boundaries
> - build capacity to collaborate

A strong collaborative ethos, directly derived from the conclusions of Christie, has underpinned the design, development, resourcing and delivery of the wide range of Workforce Scotland offers. This collaborative ethos strongly informs the design, resourcing and delivery of PCL.

PCL draws from a broad 'family' of approaches to collaborative learning and action (e.g. it shares some of its underlying theory and principles with Theory U). It seeks to promote learning and synthesis between approaches – applying methods most appropriate to local contexts – applying what works best to enable and support people to learn from their own experience. This pluralist ethos was established early in the development of PCL.

What is this report about?

This report is about the early experience of starting to deliver PCL over the first 18 months from March 2015 until November 2016. It covers the second phase of PCL's development, and builds on a prior report which drew out the learning from the collaborative experience of its initial development phase, published last year.[10]

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[10] Bland, N and Sharp, C, 2015, *Practicing Collaborative Leadership: reflection and learning from the Enabling Collaborative Leadership Pioneer Programme*, What Works Scotland; http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Pioneering Collaborative Leadership-report-publication.pdf

This is a short summary of the insights from that first report:

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Insights from the development phase of Pioneering Collaborative Leadership

The group which originally developed PCL was diverse, drawn from a wide range of public services. Some members had worked together previously on public service collaboration, others were nominated by their organisation. Group members came with different 'frames' of meaning about the intention behind PCL's development.

Despite these differences, the group shared an ambition to contribute to the public service reform agenda In Scotland and recognised this could only be achieved through collaboration. Their differences of view and experience were largely embraced and appreciated. This 'creative tension' was accepted as a predominantly positive influence on the quality of their work. The group took a deliberative and reflective approach: exploring individual's assumptions and testing them with the group. They also worked through different assumptions about process as well as content, discussing how they would work together as well as designing what Pioneering Collaborative Leadership would be.

They expressed a commitment to this approach. It needed skill, sustained effort, self-awareness and honesty. The experience at times was difficult, required sustained personal commitment, and took longer than some might have wished. But there was a keen sense that working through the differences strengthened the collaboration, and contributed to a quality of work and thinking of a higher level than typically they had experienced in other settings.

The group developed a collaborative practice which exhibited an unusual level of individual and collective inquiry, and reflection practices, and sophisticated relational and facilitative skills. The individuals' readiness and desire to be actively learning and reflecting on the act of collaboration, in collaboration, seemed highly unusual and still largely 'counter-cultural' to prevailing public service organisational norms and expectations in Scotland.

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This report aims to provide reflection and learning relevant to:

- individuals, collaborating groups, and public service organisations considering the value of engaging with Pioneering Collaborative Leadership
- others engaging with the challenges of collaborative leadership across public services and seeking to create and support the conditions for innovation in public services
- the Scottish Leaders Forum, Workforce Scotland and the PCL Stewardship group, the core group of active facilitators, and the wider facilitation network.

2. What is the Pioneering Collaborative Leadership offer?

This section:

- explains the ethos and ambition of the Pioneering Collaborative Leadership programme
- describes how it draws on theoretical understandings of collaborative leadership and approaches to learning in action
- sets out the four core elements of Pioneering Collaborative Leadership
- explains the approach to learning and evaluation consonant with the ethos of Pioneering Collaborative Leadership
- describes the governance and organisation of Pioneering Collaborative Leadership and its unusual resourcing model

Pioneering Collaborative Leadership (PCL) is part of a programme of work led by Workforce Scotland, a collaborative initiative to develop the workforce across public services. Workforce Scotland is a workstream of the Scottish Leaders Forum, a network of senior leaders from central and local government, public services and the third sector[11].

PCL is described as aimed at those

> *"already working within and sometimes beyond their own organisation to:*
>
> - *improve public services and achieve better outcomes working cooperatively with individuals and communities*
> - *seek opportunities to build effective collaborative relationships then manage those relationships to build trust, confidence and credibility*
> - *think beyond the constraints of current ways of working, actively seeking the views of others and encouraging creativity and innovation*
> - *use evidence to inform development and recognise the potential to build evidence from current practice*
> - *share knowledge and information to obtain best value from it across public services."*[12]

It seeks to integrate intentional (explicit, planned) learning as much as possible with the practice of collaborative leadership. It is explicitly experimental in its approach, testing which approaches work best for different kinds of collaborations across different sites and locations. It intends to take this learning into future phases of work.

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[11] http://scottishleadersforum.org/

[12] Pioneering Collaborative Leadership 'offer' document- 'Enabling Collaborative Leadership Pioneering Collaborative Leadership Programme 2015, Briefing for teams – phase 1'.

PCL is delivered by highly skilled facilitators available to 'go to' and 'work in' existing partnership arrangements, or a specific collaborative challenge. The facilitators apply action inquiry (AI) principles and practice to support experimentation, innovation and learning in collaborative action. They also draw on a range of techniques and approaches that support group and individual learning and reflection. The facilitators seek to prompt inquiry into shared questions that relate to three levels of action in collaborative leadership:

- personal learning from inquiring into about personal acts of leadership ('my learning')
- collective learning from inquiring together about the quality of collaborative leadership in a team ('our learning')
- learning about the wider system within which a team is working

What is action inquiry (AI)?

'Action inquiry' (AI) has been adopted by Pioneering Collaborative Leadership to describe the stance taken in its facilitation. It is about creating space for learning by equipping teams with practices that support deeper curiosity about what they don't know, being open to perspectives they don't usually hear, and greater willingness to risk breaking out of 'business as usual' to get better outcomes for people and places.

AI includes a discipline of taking action (individually and collectively), and tracking and sharing of individual and collective reflections, and insights to help make sense of what is happening in a collaborative process, as it happens. There is a strong focus on people deciding for themselves which questions they want to pursue individually and together. These questions might explore the extent to which we 'walk the talk', the difference this makes for people in communities, and what kinds of evidence is most useful in enabling wider systems to get behind more effective ways of working.

The origins of Pioneering Collaborative Leadership's use of AI include the idea of 'living life as inquiry' as an action research methodology; insights from systems and complexity thinking; action science; first, second and third person inquiry strategies; appreciative inquiry; and systemic action research. PCL stresses it is flexible and pragmatic in applying action inquiry principles. They draw from a range of methods and tools, actively borrowing and adapting from Improvement Science, Theory U, design thinking, and social innovation lab methods (such as promoted by NESTA).

Pioneering Collaborative Leadership core elements

There are four elements to PCL:

1. Taster sessions
2. Active Pioneering Collaborative Leadership sites
3. Peer learning network
4. Facilitation pool

1. Taster sessions

PCL has run a series of what are called 'taster sessions' to promote and explain its offer. The taster sessions are advertised by Workforce Scotland through its existing networks and via email, online and social media. They are free and open to anyone to attend.

Five taster sessions were held between February 2015 and September 2016. Records held by PCL indicate that 111 people attended one of these five sessions. In addition, a workshop on action inquiry was held in October 2015 attended by 13 people. The sessions attracted people working in a wide variety of organisations including Scottish Government, NHS, local councils, national and local third sector organisations, Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

The sessions tend to last two to three hours and involve a couple of short presentations describing the Pioneering Collaborative Leadership approach and giving some explanation of the underlying theory which informs the approach. The tone and tenor of the sessions reflect the ethos of PCL, in seeking to support and encourage reflection, inquiry and open thinking. Importantly, the sessions also include a practical element so that people can experience some exercises that support the inquiring approach.

To help give a sense of the material covered in the tasters, the following are two diagrams used in presentation slides at the sessions to explain PCL's stance on collaborative leadership and action inquiry.

The first provides an explanation of different types of leadership, drawing on the work of Keith Grint[13]. This distinguishes a specific leadership style required to work on issues that are highly complex and for which solutions are uncertain or unknown (often described as 'wicked issues') and the importance of enabling and supporting collaborative and inquiring approaches.

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[13] Grint, K., 2005, 'Problems, problems, problems: the social construction of 'leadership'' in *Human Relations*, http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0018726705061314
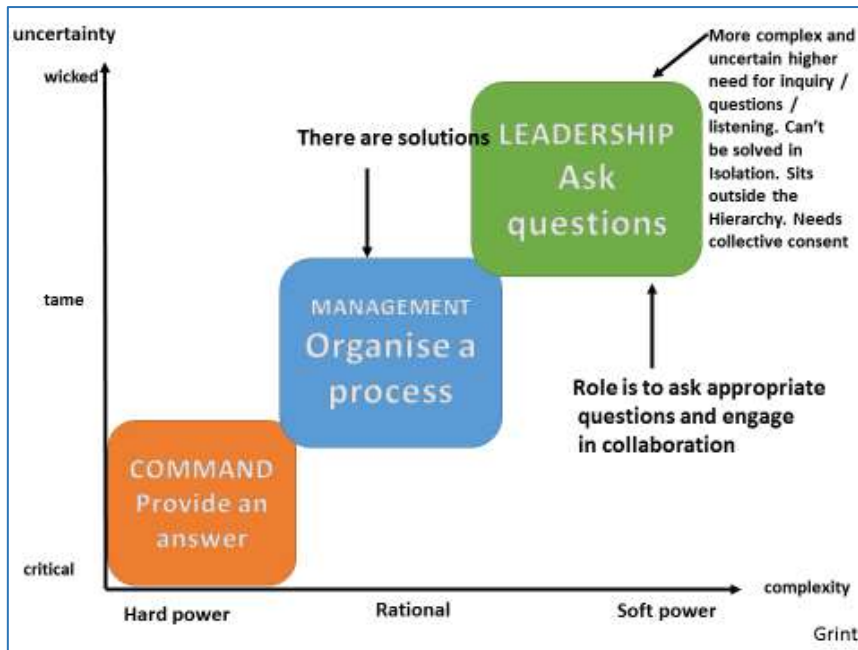
Illustration 1: Different types of leadership

This second diagram is used to explain the difference between an 'advocacy' stance and an 'inquiring' one[14] and to highlight the importance in group interaction of being able to work in both ways to support collaboration and learning.
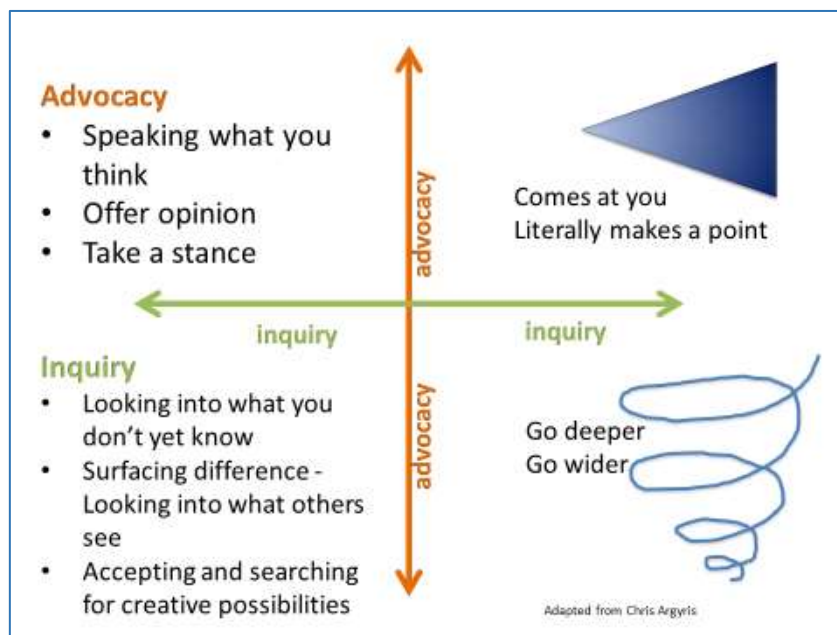
Illustration 2: difference between an 'advocacy' stance and an 'inquiring' one

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[14] Drawing on the work of David Kantor and Chris Argyris. Argyris, C., 2004, *Reasons and rationalizations: The limits to organizational knowledge.* Oxford: Oxford University Press; Kantor, D., 2012, *Reading the Room: Group Dynamics for Coaches and Leaders*; The Jossey-Bass Business & Management Series.

2. Active PCL sites

The core of PCL work takes place in active 'sites': live examples of collaboration between public services in local areas working with facilitators. Much of the rest of this report draws out reflection and learning from the experience to date of taking PCL into sites.

3. Peer learning network

PCL also supports a peer learning network. The network serves as a forum for sharing insights and experience from PCL sites, as well as wider work on collaborative leadership. Three network events were held over the same period March 2015 to September 2016. PCL recorded 84 people attending one or more of them.

PCL has taken an 'open-armed' approach to other initiatives which share a similar ethos and ambition. For example, the third peer learning event in June 2016 included presentations from Allison Trimble, leadership development consultant with The King's Fund and member of the System Leadership Centre in London which has been doing very similar work in England, and Lisa Pattoni from IRISS, who discussed collaborative leadership through its Big Idea Project.[15]

4. Facilitation pool

A central part of the PCL model was the need to have a pool of skilled facilitators available to take up active facilitation as and when potential sites approached PCL and invited them to engage. The model relies on people employed in public service, and with the sophisticated skill set in facilitation, being able to give time to support sites, as well as attend regular meetings of a facilitation pool.

Recruitment and retention to the facilitation pool has proven challenging. For example, in July 2015, PCL had a record of 20 people engaging with PCL about facilitation: 12 were identified as facilitation pool members; a further five as new facilitators; and three others as having indicated a continuing 'interest'. However, throughout this second phase of PCL, it has remained a struggle to get people to graduate from a position of genuine interest and engagement and become active members of the core group of facilitators. The most common barrier to taking on a facilitator role appeared to be the challenge of finding – or being given – the space and time to do it alongside their existing work commitments, or in a way congruent with their role. The number of sites it can work with at any one time has been influenced by the time that can be given by the small core group of facilitators. This has constrained the degree to which PCL has been able to grow the number of active sites. They have recognised this and are considering new ways to increase their available facilitation resource.

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[15] http://blogs.iriss.org.uk/thebigidea Project manager note July 2016

The governance and organisation of Pioneering Collaborative Leadership

In its first phase, the design and development of PCL was taken forward by an inter-agency group, reflecting the organisations contributing to Workforce Scotland. At the beginning, members were drawn from the Scottish Government, Police Scotland, Education Scotland, NHS Education for Scotland (NES), the Improvement Service (IS), the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the Scottish College for Educational Leadership (SCEL) and the Scottish Social Service Council. Most of the members of the group had responsibilities in their respective organisations for leadership and/or organisational development.

When PCL moved into its second phase and started to develop work in case sites the governance and organisation of PCL evolved. First, posts for a dedicated PCL programme manager and a part-time administrator were created, initially hosted by NES. These posts then moved to a new team in Scottish Government (called Ingage) charged with supporting public service reform across the Scottish Government. Finally, the original design team (DT) evolved into a PCL Stewardship Group to support and oversee the programme. In practice, the membership of this group involved a smaller number of organisations than the original design team, drawn from the Scottish Government, IS, ES, SCEL and NES.

Over the period covered by this report, PCL has been delivered by a small core group of facilitators: two members of the original design team, the new programme manager and two early members of the wider facilitation pool. This highly motivated and committed group has largely taken responsibility for running taster sessions, engaging with potential sites and providing ongoing facilitation with active sites. These facilitators come from the Ingage team in the Scottish Government, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, NHS Education Scotland and the Improvement Service. All the facilitators work on PCL on the basis of individual arrangements with their employing public service organisations and congruence with current work. They have other responsibilities but these tend to fit well with their work on PCL. They operate with a reasonable degree of personal autonomy but rely on the formal agreement of their employer (primarily through their immediate line manager) to allocate some of their time to PCL.

This position reflects the overall resourcing approach that has been applied from the beginning in PCL. PCL seeks to be self-sustaining by relying primarily on the sharing of existing resource from across public services. It does not have a budget to commission or contract out the core work to private sector consultants, or to 'buy out' individuals' time to commit to PCL. There are limited funds available to produce promotional material and to pay for some of the costs of holding taster and peer network sessions. But PCL generally relies on its key partner organisations for freely-available space to hold these events. This

approach marks it out as somewhat unusual compared to other development and improvement approaches[16].

PCL seeks to create a sustainable position from within existing resources without relying on the continuation of a specific funding stream. And it aspires to build capacity in the public service system in Scotland to undertake this kind of action inquiry without external facilitation support. As we shall see in later sections, this poses some questions for the nature, pace and scale of PCL's development.

Pioneering Collaborative Leadership's integrated approach to learning and evaluation

PCL's approach places an emphasis on individual and collective reflection and learning 'in action' as part of regular working practices in public service. The approach to learning and evaluation in PCL seeks to be sensitive to, and congruent with, these principles and practices.

PCL's development can be understood as comprising two phases: in phase 1 PCL was developed and designed; phase 2 marked the beginning of its delivery with local sites.

Learning and evaluation in phase 1

In the first phase of PCL – its design and development – Nick Bland (What Works Scotland) and Cathy Sharp (Research for Real) provided learning and evaluation support. This first phase produced:

1. A framework for learning and evaluation – a description of the way we approach learning and evaluation within PCL, including its integration with the work of facilitators in sites (described below).
2. A guide for facilitators – including tools to support the integration of learning and evaluation as part of their facilitation through action inquiry.
3. A Learning History of the design team's collaborative experience which was then used as a stimulus in a facilitated group discussion with the team following a full cycle questions approach (Observation, Reflection, Planning, Action).
4. And from this work, a final report: '*Practicing collaborative leadership: Reflection and learning from the Enabling Collaborative Leadership Pioneer Programme*' which reflects on the design and development phase of PCL up to April 2015.

An important part of this approach was to develop a framework that described the outcomes to which PCL was aiming to contribute. The framework aimed to support

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[16] For example, the scale of investment in creating significant capacity in Improvement Science by the Scottish Government, specifically through the Leading Improvement Team and its work both within government and across a range of public services. And the investment in 'Leadership for Integration: Collaborative leadership in practice'.

facilitators in conversations with the people in sites about the different learning outcomes they choose to work towards. It brings together:

- four learning outcome 'domains' towards which PCL sites are supported to work
- six PCL outcomes for public service leadership and collaboration

The four learning outcome domains are deliberately not specified or prescribed as they need to be developed locally as part of the developing action inquiry. They are:

1. Personal outcomes for individual public service workers ('me')
2. Shared outcomes for teams ('we')
3. Outcomes for the organisation and wider 'system' ('us')
4. Outcomes for people and communities ('us all')

The six PCL outcomes are:

1. Public service leaders are better equipped to lead collaboratively and effectively in times of change.
2. Public service organisations are better equipped to recognise, nurture and share behaviours which enable collaborative leadership.
3. Public service leaders have better networks which span organisational boundaries and specialisms.
4. There is wider recognition that some issues are ambiguous, complex and uncertain and can only be addressed by collaborative leadership.
5. Public service organisations have better evidence of the benefits of collaborative leadership.
6. Public service leaders have an increased ability to understand and practice inquiry at all levels: individual, group and wider system.

See Annex A for a visual representation (the 'egg model') of this framework.

As part of the learning and evaluation, a simple reflection tool was developed called 'EERS' (Elicit, Evidence, Resourcing, Start again) to support cycles of inquiry and reflection in sites (see Annex B). It aims to help people working with PCL to become more confident about consciously and actively seeking and interpreting evidence that their learning is making a difference. An EERS recording template could be used to capture reflections and evidence of changes people were noticing.

EERS has been used in phase 2 by facilitators with sites as a way of embedding evaluation and learning into the work from the beginning and giving sites some clear theory and language to help with the work they were doing together.

Learning and evaluation in phase 2

The learning and evaluation work in phase 2 of PCL has been led by Nick Bland working with the Stewardship Group. This report draws from the following:

1. A specific focus on the PCL work with Musselburgh Total Place (MTP), based on a range of research material:

- project documentation
- 'learning logs' produced by one of the facilitators
- reflective group sessions facilitated by Nick Bland with MTP project board and project team
- reflective interviews with facilitators (in October 2015 and then in December 2016)
- a written-up review conversation between the facilitators and two of the local leads
- interviews with selection of participants in December 2016

2. The learning from three PCL case sites where early contact and facilitation work was undertaken but which did not then graduate into a longer-term partnership. It draws on:

- project documentation:
- PCL learning logs produced by a facilitator
- reflective interviews with the facilitators involved in December 2016
- site interviews in December 2016

Extracts from interviews are used throughout to illustrate points and to give voice to the reflections and experience of interviewees. Any names referred to in extracts are pseudonyms to maintain the anonymity of interviewees.

The stance taken to the learning and evaluation work presented in this report is engaged and appreciative of PCL, but still concerned to ensure a structured and systematic approach to the research and learning. It reflects What Works Scotland's practice of collaborative approaches to research in action.

3. Pioneering Collaborative Leadership in action: a case study in Musselburgh

This section:

- describes the context of the work done by East Lothian Partnership with PCL
- draws out learning from this example about:
    - o beginning collaborative work
    - o the practices of facilitation
    - o supporting new ways of working
    - o the outcome of collaborative work

The work undertaken by PCL with East Lothian Partnership in Musselburgh is the most extended period for a site so far; over 20 months from March 2015 until December 2016. It provides a rich illustration of the PCL approach in practice supporting local collaborative work. In the following, we shall see how PCL supported changes in working styles, strengthened collaborative leadership, which led to imaginative decisions about public service delivery.

Introduction

Over 2014 and early 2015, East Lothian Partnership had been applying a place-based approach in Musselburgh[17]. In phase one of this work, they had undertaken detailed data collection and analysis using data from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation. This led to a focus on families considered to be 'vulnerable', and they carried out detailed work to map every intervention that public sector agencies had with six specific families. There emerged a sense of uncertainty about how best to respond to the picture painted by this data, and an offer was made by PCL to help them work through it.

To take the Musselburgh Total Place (MTP) work forward, a conventional project structure had been established: a project board, a project team, and a project manager tasked with managing the work. The project board was chaired by the council chief executive and comprised senior managers from several council departments, including a representative from the local high school, the police, NHS, and a local third sector organisation. The project team comprised middle managers from the same organisations. The board met on about a

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[17] For reviews of the application of such approaches in Scotland see Bynner, C., 2016, *Rationales for Place-based Approaches in Scotland*, What Works Scotland, at http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/rationales-for-place-based-approaches-in-scotland and Baczyk, M., Schenk, K., McLaughlin, D., McGuire, A. and Gadsden, S., 2016, *Place-based Approaches to Joint Planning, Resourcing and Delivery: an overview of current practice in Scotland*, Improvement Service; http://www.improvementservice.org.uk/documents/research/place-based-approaches-report.pdf

monthly basis. The PCL facilitators attended project board meetings and also worked with the project manager and the project team.

Beginning collaborative work, establishing the facilitation

The following describes the experience of the two facilitators as they began their work, illustrated by extracts of their reflections in interview.

From the beginning, there was a senior champion for the involvement of PCL and key senior individuals also had a good level of understanding about why PCL was there, and that understanding grew over time. The facilitators needed to build an understanding of the PCL approach, and what their role would be as facilitators with the board as a whole. It was important to develop that understanding as part of building their credibility and authority, and a relationship of trust, with the group. This was crucial to allowing them to make a range of delicate and sensitive interventions in board meetings.

To begin, this involved integrating their facilitation within the structure and agenda of the board meetings, and subsequently the project team meetings. Still, they sought to distinguish their specific contribution from 'normal business', which they described as '*marking it out as different territory*'. This challenge is at the heart of the PCL approach- of seeking to introduce new ways of working into conventional work settings.

> *"We established a kind of facilitation so there was always a bit on the agenda… so there was a recognition that there was the work [of the board], but also this other thing that was happening at the same time [the PCL facilitation]."*

This involved making contributions at times in meetings to cause the discussion to 'pause'; inviting the board to take notice of specific points or questions that were raised and to take some time to reflect on their meaning and importance. Such moments can often be quickly passed over in more transactional meetings, where there is an emphasis on pace and 'getting through' a full agenda of business. The facilitators felt they achieved this quite successfully, described in the following extract:

> *"I had a sense of trying to establish something that felt a bit structured at the beginning, so that it would allow the facilitation to be very much part of the process of the actual work of the board… I think that was quite good at the beginning, and I think there was a kind of sense of holding people a bit. Things like when people surfaced questions - trying to make that explicit."*

But the facilitators were reflective about how and when they chose to contribute to early board meetings. It is evident that this requires sensitivity and careful judgement about whether an input brings a constructive element to the group process and to the way people reflect about how they are working. In practice, it involves delicate interactional skill, tact and diplomacy.

In the following example, a facilitator invited the board to reflect on why they decided to delegate aspects of the work to the project team and project manager and to consider the impact of that decision. The invitation was not taken up and the facilitator chose not to pursue the issue. They reflect on the stage they were at, and the sense they were still building a clear understanding of their role and the credibility of their contribution with the board.

> *"We kind of ran into a bit of resistance on that, and I certainly kind of backed off from it, because I thought, yeah, I'm not entirely sure this is really taking us anywhere productive - and it still feels like it's quite early days, and we've not necessarily established completely things like credibility. You're just mindful at those first few meetings that there's a little bit of jockeying and kind of trying to understand - and us trying to be quite clear- about what our role was."*

The practice of facilitation

This section draws out some of the detail of the facilitation practice used with the MTP board and project team. It illustrates sophisticated interactional skill and careful judgement about when and how the facilitators chose to contribute.

The following extract illustrates how the facilitators sought to establish action inquiry as a routine practice in meetings by explicitly 'holding the space' for inquiry and continually calling attention to the questions that were coming up in discussions. They called attention to the EERs reflection tool (Annex B) regularly as a reminder of the cycle of inquiry, and produced a written 'learning log' of each meeting which recorded the board's reflections and conscious learning (discussed more later).

> *"We were taking an action inquiry approach and we had set it up as… 'in order to deal with really complex issues, you have to collaborate, and part of that is you have to listen, we're about trying to surface questions and then pay attention to the questions that surface'. So we had a very coherent sense of what that work was around inquiry… we did do a lot of work to hold people in that space, so reinforcing the questions, writing on the learning log, paying attention to them the next time."*

The facilitators were reflective about important moments when having called attention to specific questions that were worth reflecting on more deeply, the need to then create the space for that reflection. At that point it is better to hold back from contributing further and simply let the group manage itself. This requires some sensitive judgement about the tone and dynamic of a discussion and deciding 'in the moment' whether to step back, or contribute further.

> *"As facilitators, I guess there's that bit about, you don't crowd…it's allowing… it's kind of holding that space, so there's space around what seems to be a really important question rather than jumping in."*

Another element of the facilitation was to act as what might be termed a 'constructive disruptor'. That is, seeking to disrupt conventional practices and purely transactional discussions and help to open a more imaginative discussion.

The PCL facilitators sought regularly to help the board take notice, and not lose sight, of the level of their ambition, as this extract illustrates:

> *"We did have to kind of come back quite a bit sometimes, to reminding people of things that they'd said … and I think latterly we had…there was a bit of the work was to remind people about how aspirational they had been."*

Supporting new ways of working

The facilitators point to a particularly significant point where the board learnt that 27 different local service practitioners had worked with one family. The felt reality of this experience for that family appeared to particularly strike home. In the following, the facilitators reflect how they supported the board to pause and reflect on the implications of that information:

> *"There was a sense of, what must it be like to be working with that family, so there was a sense of mirroring back, and just creating, I think, a bit of a pause and a space. It was quite a dramatic moment, really, because people were quite upset about really thinking, and a sense of the realisation of what would it be like to be in your family, and you've got all these different people coming in, and not being able to make any sense of it."*

The facilitators reflected that this led to a significant shift in perspective by members of the board. They supported different kinds of discussion and invited the board to a deeper

reflection on the experiences of vulnerable families and how public services could truly respond.

> *"There was a bit of taking people beyond the normal business conversation we might have to something that actually was about... 'can you imagine what this must be like?' And I think the quality of the discussion was different from my experience at this kind of formal board. That for me wouldn't necessarily be the sort of territory people would get into. So it took people into a different level of reflection.*

From this deep reflection and discussion, the facilitators helped members identify two inquiry questions that the Board decided it was important to devote time and resource to pursue, to hear directly the voice and experiences of families and practitioner. The questions were:

'What is it like to be "me" in this family?'

'What is it like to be a practitioner working with this family?'

The facilitators point to this as the crucial point in their work with the Board where it moved into a period of active inquiry:

> *"We'd done a lot of work to hold them in that inquiry space, and then when those questions started to crystallise, the work started to kind of flow."*

The material that the board received back, particularly about how families felt and how they described their experience, had a deep impact.

A reflective session was held at the meeting of the MTP board in January 2016 at which the board were invited to draw out the learning from their work with PCL, examples of which are presented in the two boxes below. Members recognised the importance of identifying important questions, actively listening, and giving space and time to reflect.

"[we have] put reflection at the very centre of the work we've been doing"

"To ask open questions which keep the discussion flowing and not close down ideas or thinking"

"Learning to ask questions even if outside my comfort zone to focus on leadership and outcomes"

"Learnt: more about space to reflect- before decision/action"

"To listen really actively to what partners say"

Board members reflected how they had made a point of including multiple contributions in reaching a true understanding of the nature of the situation for families; from the families themselves and the practitioners who work with them. They also highlighted the importance of accepting what they heard at face value and not trying to place a professional interpretation on them.

Board reflections on paying attention to all views

"Creating space for everyone to contribute to change, valuing the contribution of practitioners and families"

"[we] worked hard to include voices we don't normally hear"

"listening to lived experience"

"Acceptance of family stories for what they bring (even though practitioners often had a different professional view)"

These different ways of working also had an impact on the relationship between the project board and the project team, which might be understood as 'vertical collaboration'. The project team heard, and believed, this new message from the board and a commitment to doing something different. The importance of trust in this relationship is highlighted by a participant in the following extract:

> *"One of the key things for me was about the project team really understanding that the board were actually committed to making a difference and they were quite sceptical at times. For them it was more*

about trusting that the board actually wanted to make a difference and the board were listening to the same stories. So building that trust between the two was quite important."

The facilitators brought a range of tools and approaches to their facilitation. The following extract from an interview with a participant illustrates an example of how using creative approaches to group work helped surface and 'unlock' some key differences between collaborating partners on the project team. It allowed them to recognise and to work through these differences.

"Jen helped us to do a session where we looked at sort of service planning differently, we used little, kind of, figurines and marbles to think differently about how it would work. And in doing that, it really raised some tension in the project team and, you know, people putting their cards on the table and saying, 'this isn't my preferred option, I want to do this'. But, it allowed us to work, to bring it to the surface and then work through it and present options to the board for them to decide on."

Capturing the learning

One of the facilitators recorded the ongoing group learning by writing a 'learning log' of every board meeting. This was a separate document from the formal minutes, and circulated with the papers for each board. It followed a structure that recorded the questions, reflections and learning that were surfaced and discussed by board members, under five categories of learning and action, illustrated graphically. As such, the look, feel and purpose of the logs was very different from the formal meeting minutes.

Illustration 3: The learning logs' five categories of learning and action

The following is an extract from one of these learning logs that illustrates the kind of information that was recorded, in this case a series of reflections by Board members prompted by the EERs model (Annex B).

Extract from Learning Log September 2015

Using the EERS model we took some time to reflect on how we were doing with our:
- personal inquiry (me)
- our collective inquiry about how we are working together (us) and
- our inquiry on behalf of the families and the wider system (them)

What's changing for me?

"My biggest learning is someone comes and we say "let's fix it"– the inquiry has taken us down a very different route, thank goodness, and I now have better understanding and appreciation of how complex this is."

What's changing for us?

"People are being prepared to step outside conventions and structures – like the conversation we've just had – commitment to really wanting to do things differently."

"As a Board we believe in this and are committing people in our agency to be more creative and providing "top cover", a safety net for people."

"Discussion is much more inquiring than it has been."

"It just takes time – it's sobering – we want to do it now but it takes more time and patience. We need to communicate the time it's going to take."

What's changing for them?

"Values and vision of taking different approach has to be central – housing workers need to able to see that they have time. We've not cracked the culture in collaborative approach but we've made big strides at the senior level. We also need to consider how practitioners work routinely – how we do things and be more holistic."

It was quite a time commitment to produce the learning logs, and the facilitators were thoughtful about whether and how it contributed to the impact of their work with Musselburgh.

> *"Sarah took on that role really well of writing these reflective logs... there was also that challenge of how do we actually get them to reflect themselves? I think we did, I think some people did read them, but I don't think some people did."*

It would seem to be unrealistic to expect all members of the board to have the time and opportunity to formally record their own learning and reflections (although one or two did). In the context of that likely reality, the role of the learning log seems important. It provides a group record and as such serves as a *resource* for members to use to support their own learning.

The outcome of the collaboration

The collaborative work with PCL has supported the board to work in different ways that they feel strengthened collaboration. That led them to make decisions about new models of service delivery and agree new joint resourcing arrangements.

A participant in Musselburgh provides a rich reflection on how far the board had come. They recognise the diversity of background and experience among the members of the board (a characteristic of any public service collaboration), and the significant shift in understanding – both individually, and as a group – that had occurred through the process. This different understanding was fundamental to decisions to design a brand new model of service for vulnerable families, and to jointly resource that service.

> *"The board haven't all been involved in work with vulnerable families, maybe never exposed to that work because of their role and their personal circumstances or whatever, and they are all individuals and different. But, I think definitely over the course of listening to the families' stories it did shift their understanding of what vulnerability means and the complexity that is around vulnerability. So, it's not one single factor, it's a complex mixture of things, and I think that is the bit that is, I suppose, most powerful in the work is about that understanding and shift."*

The new model of service has been strongly informed by the voice of the families that came back through the exercise to focus clearly on the two central inquiry questions, described in this extract:

> *"This is a new service with a coordinator, three support workers, but they've completely changed around what those roles might be, so the job descriptions are very different from any roles that are around at the*

moment, and they've got a sort of operating protocol, which again is just really different…"

"We've heard the family voice and we want that family voice to be at the very heart …so this is really about what families need from us, and that's the way we're working now."

The following extract from the reflective session with the board, illustrates some of the learning members had taken from their collaborative experience.

Board reflections on collaborative working
"Challenged partnership commitment." *"Learnt that partnership is easily frustrated. Drops in priority as 'my' business takes priority."* *"[I made] extra effort to contact/build relations with individual partners - by phone, face-to-face, meeting."*

It was evident that one or two partners were not as equally committed to the collaboration. The inconsistency of that involvement could be a frustration. It made the collaboration more difficult but did not 'derail' the productive work, as one of the participants reflects in the following:

"People, kind of, were there for one meeting and then never came back. We saw that a few times and that inconsistency of representation isn't helpful in this type of process…"

"One of our board members was saying, 'you know, it's hard to have a shared vision of doing something if you're not sitting at the same meetings and creating that'."

The impact of this variable commitment was perhaps felt most keenly at the point at which joint resourcing decisions needed to be made. Those not so closely involved in the collective process of 'meaning-making' about the experience of families and developing an innovative response appeared to need greater persuasion to commit to the identified solution.

"It was about using our own resources differently, and that proves difficult when it comes to multi-agency working, and you begin to see where people have really invested in the programme over others. So, some people around the table came to every meeting, heard all the stories and very much on board, so when it comes to the resource shift at the end, they're like, absolutely, we will do it. Whereas others who maybe missed part of that journey, if you like, when it came to the end came back more to budget, saying 'so how much is this costing and how much will it save?' So, there was further work needed to be done to kind of overcome that bit around what we need to do."

The impact of PCL on individuals working in the groups varied to quite a large extent, from some who reported taking new ways of working learnt with PCL and applying in other settings, to others who were more passive participants.

Key learning points

PCL supported Musselburgh Total Place to strengthen its collaborative working and creatively to explore innovative approaches:

- Using action inquiry, the facilitators encouraged the board to surface two compelling questions: 'What is it like to be me in this family?' and 'What is it like to work with these families?' This galvanised action which could then be tested.
- When the family interviews were reported back to the board, they were received with an openness which sought to really hear the perspective of the families, without defensiveness or professional 'interpretation'.
- There were still a couple of partners who were not able to sustain a consistent commitment to collaboration throughout and this had implications for how easily joint resourcing decisions could be reached.
- PCL helped members of the board and project team to act in less familiar and less comfortable ways, that were supportive of collaboration: taking time and holding the space for reflection in meetings, and developing a deeper shared understanding of the experience for families that then drove a commitment to develop a model of public service delivery.

The facilitators point to several distinct conditions in place that appear to have created a supportive environment for the PCL work in Musselburgh:

- The board recognised its work had reached a point where it was not certain about what steps to take next. It accepted that sense of uncertainty and accepted the offer from PCL to help work through it.
- There was a senior champion for the involvement of PCL.

- Key senior individuals had a level of understanding from the beginning about why PCL was there, and that understanding grew over time.

4. What are we learning about collaboration?

This section:

- draws from facilitators' wider experience of working across three other local sites
- describes the broader learning that is emerging about:
  - assessing, and creating, the conditions for collaboration
  - entering into collaboration
  - facilitating collaboration
  - assessing the quality of collaborative work

1. Assessing, and creating, the conditions for collaboration

The PCL approach involves 'doing the work' with people in their work environment using the meetings, boards, and groups that already exist. The facilitators situate the work within the complexity of local work in sites and seek to create the 'space' for collaboration alongside this. It does not seek to create new meetings or workshops in which people enter to 'do PCL'.

This means there is some flexibility to 'create the conditions' that fit the local context. Facilitators have reflected on the challenge of judging how hard, and how quickly, to insist on the core elements of PCL, which echoes the experience in Musselburgh.

> *"It's this question of how challenging should we be right at the off in terms of saying, 'no, this is it' and how much you say, 'well, we need to kind of get'…we need to build our way in?"*

The experience of one facilitator working in two sites led them to reflect on this balance between demonstrating some flexibility to local conditions on the one hand and asserting the importance of the core elements of PCL on the other. They expressed frustration at what had felt like wasted time and opportunity where unsupportive local conditions had prevented progress with the PCL approach. They reflected on the importance they now placed on being clear from the beginning about what PCL involved in negotiating agreement, which they describe as 'to contract really strongly':

In the following extract, a facilitator pair reflect on their experience together in the early stages of assessing the conditions in a site. They recognise a difference in how far to probe the understanding and commitment of a site.

"I think what I might do differently is to be more searching before coming to any assumption. So, the conditions of that group and the work they were doing, it seems to me, just might not have been right."

"I wonder if that's one of the places where we, as we keep going with this, might find our positions slightly differ, because I think John will tend to probe more about what people are really understanding about inquiry and the potential value of it as a basis of an approach. And I'm a bit more - if we can get them in the room and hold them for long enough perhaps it will emerge."

In the end facilitators will only be able to positively influence local conditions to a certain extent. The following extract illustrates such an example; the attention of a group was on rapidly completing a very specific task – the production of a strategic plan. This focus limited the time and space available to PCL, and created a group dynamic that arguably did not support reflection and inquiry.

"They were all focused on the plan… to get a strategic plan ready. They were focused on that. They were rushing that and you could feel the pace, the tempo in the room was quite harsh because of that… people's attention wasn't on [PCL]."

The absence of partners from meetings, and frequent changes in the participants who did attend, were described by facilitators as common challenges. In the early stages of entering into collaboration with sites, it meant that the PCL offer needed to be repeatedly explained, disrupting the process of reaching agreement on how to work together. When work was underway, the absence of key partners or 'churn' in group membership could interrupt the progress of the work PCL was seeking to facilitate.

In one site, the PCL offer had been written down as an explicit proposition. This seems like a practice that might usefully be applied more generally, although it is not in itself a guarantee for sustained work with PCL.

Key learning points

- PCL facilitators could more explicitly assess the local conditions for collaboration and whether there is sufficient local capacity, capability, or motivation to work with PCL. Where there is not, PCL facilitators may be able to suggest other approaches or interventions that suit the local collaborative environment.

- Facilitators could also choose to encourage potential sites to decide sooner whether they will work with PCL. There is a risk that as PCL is a 'free' offer, there is less incentive for sites to think hard about whether they can commit.
- There is emerging learning about the conditions that support entry into collaboration; which might be understood as a set of local 'minimal conditions'. The facilitators can influence those conditions to some degree by communicating a clear offer and modelling the facilitator role in practice.
- Facilitators may be able to identify sooner when those conditions are not present and cannot be built, and consciously decide to withdraw.

2. Entering into collaboration

PCL has received continuing interest over the period of its existence. This is evident in the spread of attendance from across national and local government, public services and third sector at taster sessions, peer learning sessions and the facilitation network, as well as wider international interest in its approach.

PCL is building rich experience of making its offer in a variety of ways. These offers have been met positively in many places; nevertheless, there have been challenges in turning such interest into concrete, shared proposals for PCL to enter into collaboration. There seem to be issues about the capacity of local partners to broker and support PCL's approach to collaboration, even where the inadequacies of existing ways of working are acknowledged.

From the early stages of PCL, facilitators have brought out learning associated with what could be called the 'starting conditions' in sites, reflecting that these conditions can have a significant impact on what can be achieved as work progresses. They are starting to draw on experiences to consider what 'ingredients' may make the difference from a site moving quickly into productive action inquiry or not moving into this territory at all.

The facilitators describe the early engagement with an interested site to explore whether they wish to work with PCL as a process of 'contracting'. The early contacts involve developing a shared understanding of the PCL offer and what the work will involve for participants, building the credibility of the facilitators, and a recognition of the value PCL could bring to specific collaborative work. It concludes by reaching agreement about how PCL and the case site will work together, what might be called the 'terms of engagement'.

The process of engaging with a potential site can be an extended one and has tended to involve a series of meetings over a period of at least a few months. One or two facilitators may meet 'local advocates' who are aware of PCL and see its value in supporting efforts locally to build stronger collaborations and develop new ways of working on a specific piece of work. The local advocates may then arrange a meeting with one or two more senior leaders who may act as 'champions' for bringing PCL into an existing collaborative or

partnership environment. In other instances, PCL's initial contact has been directly with senior leaders.

In the following extract, a facilitator reflects on the experience of a local advocate who was unable to get broader agreement to work with PCL. This was explained explicitly as a need to prioritise 'action' over reflection.

> *"She said, 'I'm going to go back to the group and explicitly suggest that we engage with you and write a contract about how you'll support us with understanding what we're learning about collaborative leadership'. She emailed us straight after the meeting saying, 'I'm really disappointed but they said 'this is the time for action not reflection''."*

In another site, there was a different experience: the advocate for PCL's involvement appeared to have a more limited idea about how they wanted PCL to support their local work, and regarded PCL facilitation simply as a resource to get that work completed.

Facilitators recognise the importance of building a wider constituency of support in any site; the critical mass necessary to reach local agreement to work with PCL.

> *"So, there was a, kind of, growing set of people who were ready to see the value of this and push for it, and yet that wasn't enough. So, when it came to the crunch those voices still didn't have the, the… you know, I like to imagine that they might have been advocating for it."*

As in Musselburgh, facilitators reflected on the importance of building quickly their own credibility and the confidence of 'gatekeepers' in sites. They also recognised the need potentially to offer a challenge where it appeared the intention was not to fully engage with PCL or rather to use facilitators 'instrumentally' as a skilled resource to help meet a pre-existing task or priority. That was a difficult balance to strike.

The following reflection from a facilitator offers an example of judging the degree of challenge to present in an early meeting with two senior 'gatekeepers' in one site.

> *"There was a really memorable moment in the conversation when I thought the two senior officers from the council and the health board were, kind of, saying 'what can you tell us about collaboration, because we're doing it or trying to do it for real' and almost, you know, 'who the hell are you?' John [the other facilitator] said, 'no, we've not presented the offer correctly if that's what you think we're here to say. We're here to ask you whether, when there's learning about collaboration, you take the chance to alight on that, describe it and learn from it as you go*

along'. At that point, certainly, the NHS board chief exec really lit up and said 'well, if that's what you are about I'm really interested'… So, they seemed to really get this notion of the importance of taking the time to learn and think about what we're learning."

The final step in this early engagement has tended to involve facilitators being invited to describe and explain the PCL offer in a formal collaborative setting, for example to a project board, or a community planning partnership. The following extract provides an example of this experience. It illustrates vividly the challenge of entering such a setting. The facilitators describe being able to shift the tone and dynamic of the meeting from a rapid transactional one, to one which provided a more reflective space. They were given time to facilitate the group exploring what appear to be fundamental questions underlying the basis of the collaboration.

"We went in at the beginning… and business was being transacted at a high rate without really very much engagement. But then they stopped and said, 'right now we are going to listen to David and John tell us about Pioneer' and the tenor and pace of the thing shifted round…"

"We did that mixture of trying to give a wee bit of a theoretical framework around complexity, the importance of collaborating to respond to today's issues and ways of understanding what that might look like, mixed with getting them to have conversations in threes where they were asked to listen attentively in silence. That seemed to be quite impactful in itself, from the feedback they gave. We ended up asking them to talk about any particularly motivating or compelling questions that had arisen from the conversations. We'd offered them a bit of a shape to go through and… there seemed to be a degree of resonance across the group about one of the questions, which was, 'who am I willing to trust with my money'?"

Key learning points

- It can be quite an extended process to engage with potential sites about PCL, which involve several meetings to communicate the offer. This period of 'contracting' can be a significant time commitment for facilitators.
- It appears necessary, but not sufficient, for there to be local advocates and senior champions for the PCL approach to support the contracting process.
- Facilitators need to build local understanding of the PCL approach, and their personal credibility. This is not easy and requires early relationship-building and

sometimes the delicate application of early challenge, as part of testing whether there is the necessary local commitment to engaging with the PCL approach.

- Facilitators may wish to try and judge sooner whether there is sufficient support to build broader agreement to work with PCL, and consider the possible advantage from being more 'ruthless' about pushing potential sites to commit to PCL sooner. There is a risk that as PCL is a 'free' offer, there is less incentive for sites to think hard about whether they can commit.

3. Facilitating collaboration

From the outset, PCL has set out a distinctive approach to facilitation. This has involved developing a shared capacity and skill set grounded in 'action inquiry': enabling participants to learn individually and together in the course of 'business as usual' through facilitated prompts and support to question and inquire into new ways of working. This includes drawing on, and investing in, people who are already employed in public service (through the facilitation network, peer learning and a facilitation pool) where skills and shared 'know-how' has developed.

The role of the facilitator

Drawing from the experience in Musselburgh and the other sites described above, it is clear PCL requires facilitators to have a range of personal qualities to negotiate the challenges of entering collaboration and sustaining engagement. They include:

- a level of personal confidence, relational 'maturity', and sophisticated understanding of group process.
- technical knowledge and experience of applying a range of techniques and approaches
- resilience and emotional intelligence

The paired facilitation approach that PCL uses brings people together from diverse parts of public service. This means a wide range of approaches, insights and experiences are available to PCL sites. The model also supports cross-fertilisation of skillsets and facilitative practices between facilitators. The formation of facilitator 'pairs' appeared to be driven largely by who was available and willing to get involved in any particular site. There is perhaps an opportunity to take a more planned approach to this in future.

One facilitator reflected on the value they took from seeing their co-facilitator modelling facilitation in practice:

> *"Jan is incredibly experienced and really good at this kind of work, so it's really good to see that and have a model of that, because a lot of it was quite new for me."*

The following extract provides an example of the mutual support and opportunity for 'peer review' between a pair. They can reflect on their shared experience in particular instances in a site and discuss whether and how they might work differently.

> *"I think the fact that you can actually have that opportunity to reflect; that you've both been in that conversation or that board, and you can actually then say, what was your, kind of, sense of that, are we being challenging enough? …what should we maybe do next time, is that something we have to come back to, or did you notice the reaction to that?"*

A facilitator also highlighted that working together also provided encouragement, 'moral support', to take a risk and make an intervention or trying something different, which they might not have done on their own.

Working in pairs provides for greater flexibility and a division of labour, so that at least one of the two facilitators can in practice be present when needed. All of the facilitators work part-time on PCL and have a range of other responsibilities associated with their primary role. The demands of this other work and competing priorities can mean they are not able to attend every site meeting. This can be difficult for facilitators to 'juggle' but it is notable how well they appeared to manage this. But the challenges it poses to managing time and different priorities has seemed to be an obstacle to other people from the facilitation pool becoming an active facilitator. One facilitator reflected on this challenge:

> *"I'm also mindful that I did have a different job then, and I think that's one of the issues - you're relying on the goodwill of your organisation. They're not going to make this a priority. So, the sense of organisationally seeing that you're a public service and sharing resources, which is one of the aspirations of PCL for facilitation, is quite tricky in that you can't always get there."*

Facilitator support and development

From their experience of entering potential collaborations, initiating facilitation and in active facilitation, facilitators have increasingly recognised that the role is demanding and challenging. As well as the mutual support provided by working in pairs, meetings of the facilitation pool also provided an opportunity for reflection. The following is an example of the use of a technique from Theory U called a coaching circle, where peers helped a facilitator talk through some of the issues they face.

This was not a universally shared positive experience. One facilitator reflected that there had been a missed opportunity to create space for peer-peer reflections among PCL facilitators.

The nature of the challenges and demands experienced as a facilitator was recognised as PCL developed, illustrated by this extract from an email communication to the facilitation pool: 'it is difficult and demanding to facilitate complex wicked issues in public service collaborations, and it needs a certain level of readiness to engage with confidence'.[18]

As a response to this growing recognition, a self and peer assessment framework was developed called 'myself and my facilitation'. The framework supports and guides individual and group inquiry into facilitation practice, to help further develop self-awareness, reflection and feedback from others to deepen their facilitation practice and further build confidence. The framework also references some background theory on the facilitation of group learning, about the role of facilitators in making 'interventions' to support the learning of a group with which they are working.[19] This is summarised in the following diagram, reproduced from the framework.
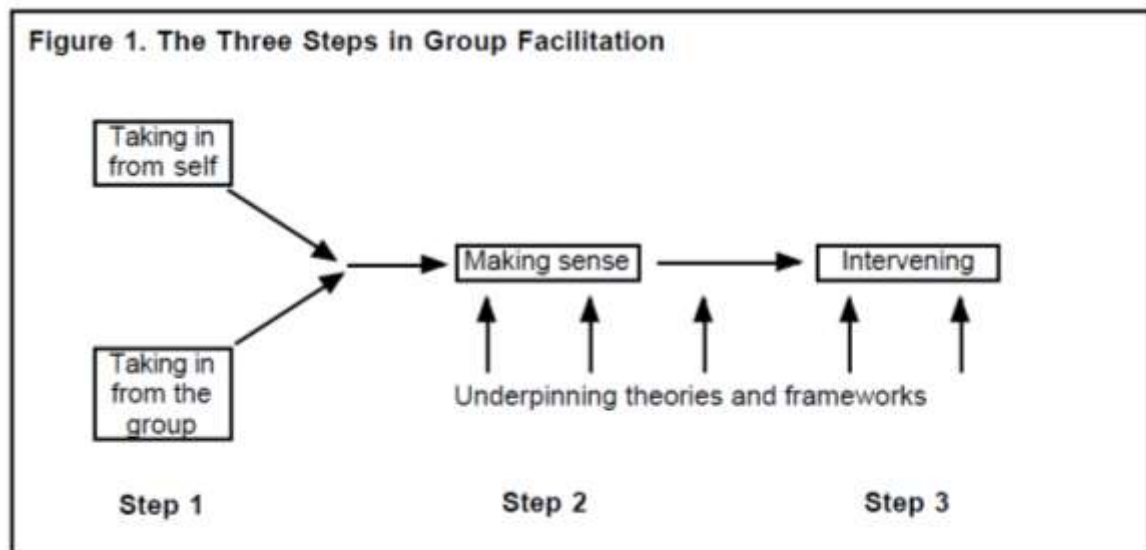

Illustration 4: The three steps in group facilitation

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[18] Extract from April 2016 email from programme manager to facilitation pool
[19] David Casey, Paul Roberts and Graeme Salaman, Leadership & Organisation Development Journal. Vol.13 No.4.1992, pp. 8-11

In addition, a facilitation network was formed in early 2016 by Workforce Scotland and PCL. It was intended to act as both a 'feeder' to the PCL facilitator pool and as a forum to develop the skills and approaches necessary for enhanced facilitation. A LinkedIn group was set up and regular network events are organised by different facilitators. The first event was reported to have been attended by around 40 people.

The network provides a forum for what might be seen as a developing 'community of practice' in enhanced facilitation. It has also helped a couple of people become more confident and better understand the facilitator role in PCL, so they have started to become involved in some early activity with new potential sites.

Key learning points

The reflections of PCL facilitators on their experiences with sites, points to the importance of several personal qualities:

- personal confidence, relational 'maturity', sophisticated understanding of group process
- technical knowledge and experience of applying a range of techniques and approaches
- resilience and emotional intelligence to negotiate the challenges of entering sites, negotiating collaboration, and sustaining engagement.

Facilitators experience of working in pairs has provided a number of benefits:

- mutual support: practical and emotional
- peer review and reflection about their experiences with sites
- division of labour in attending site meetings and preparing and doing facilitation
- provides for a broader mix of facilitation skills, techniques and experiences

4. Assessing the quality of collaborative work

This section focuses on the quality of collaborative work that PCL is supporting. The core questions are: Is PCL resulting in better collaborative working by teams? And is there any early evidence that this better collaborative working is resulting in better outcomes for people?

PCL explicitly seeks to work with people and teams amidst the complexity and competing demands of their working environment. The approach proposes that, by situating learning within the context of real-life work – the 'day-to-day business' – it may result in better outcomes for people.

We might seek to assess quality in three stages of work:

- Entering collaboration and contracting the facilitation (see above)

- Facilitating collaboration – which this report focusses on as this is as far as most PCL sites have got at present
- Longer-term outcomes

It is not yet possible to judge whether these longer-term outcomes have been achieved as no site is yet far enough down the road to evidence this kind of change.

There is evidence, particularly from Musselburgh, that PCL can support more conscious approaches to collaboration by playing a role in opening questions and introducing perspectives that would not otherwise have been present.

It is not straightforward to differentiate the quality of PCL interventions amidst the larger systems changes that are also affecting groups. However, the learning from sites this far suggests that:

- Entering a collaboration is a crucial point for PCL facilitators to develop a clear understanding of the PCL offer, the credibility of its potential impact, and a commitment to working in this way, among a 'critical mass'. This requires a delicate balance of relationship-building and challenge. PCL may be able to judge sooner when these conditions are not in place and decide to withdraw rather than commit further time and resource unsuccessfully.
- PCL facilitators can prompt groups to recognise and pay attention to 'elephant in the room' type questions. However it is not always easy for people to take the time and hold the space to stay focussed on these questions because they feel there is a demand for 'action'.
- PCL tends to invite people to 'open up' as individuals. This can lead to potentially transformative impacts for some of those people but it can also feel scary. This can generate resistance if this work happens in a context that doesn't feel safe: gauging an appropriate balance is an ongoing question for facilitators.

PCL may introduce unfamiliar language – for some, this new language could help to accelerate a shift to new ways of working as it describes and helps to legitimate ways of enabling collaborative working ('hosting'); the value of reflection ('space'); the power of hearing different voices ('perspectives'); and other concepts that can help collaborative leadership move from words to action. However for others, this language can prove alienating.

Key learning points

- There is emerging learning about the conditions that support entry into collaboration, and how facilitators can build on that.
- Facilitators may be able to identify sooner when those conditions are not present and cannot be built, and consciously decide to withdraw.
- The characteristics of high quality facilitation include diplomatic but clear challenge.

5. Concluding reflections

The material presented in the report illustrates that PCL is generating a rich source of insight and learning about the conditions for collaborative leadership and the support it can offer.

PCL is clearly speaking to, and engaging interest and enthusiasm in, people across public services for support to deliver local collaboration and innovation. But these potential 'change agents' are not always able to activate a wider change agenda in their localities.

PCL needs local advocates and senior champions to support facilitators' entry into a collaboration, and to help create the conditions that will support productive work. It may be possible to judge sooner than has been the case so far whether the conditions are sufficient to build broader agreement to work with PCL.

Facilitators need to build an understanding of the PCL offer, and its credibility, very quickly. This is not easy and requires relationship-building and the delicate application of early challenge.

The learning from Musselburgh shows how PCL can help develop new working practices that are supportive of collaboration: holding space for reflection in meetings, developing a deeper shared understanding, and collective 'meaning-making'. This foundation served a commitment to develop an innovative model of local service delivery. Even in productive collaborations, it is difficult to ensure that all partners are equally committed. This suggests a level of pragmatism is required; it is still possible to make it work.

Workforce Scotland's collaborative ethos is reflected in PCL's resourcing which relies on facilitators who are prepared to contribute alongside existing commitments, and be supported in their organisation to do so. PCL has succeeded so far with a highly-committed core group of facilitators. The facilitation network PCL is helping to support is building a broader pool of expertise in advanced facilitation. Workforce Scotland and PCL may wish to consider what they consider the optimal level of scale to which PCL should aim, and the implications of that for the number of active facilitators that would need.

All the PCL facilitators reflect positively on the growth and development of their own facilitation practice which has come from their experiences in sites; their facilitation has progressed to a higher level. It risks widening the gap in expertise – and the confidence that stems from it – between this group and any new facilitators expressing interest in joining PCL. It is increasingly important for this facilitation skill and experience to be passed on to new facilitators to increase the capability of people in that pool.

PCL offers a specific contribution among the range of offers available to public services attempting to put the Christie agenda into practice. That contribution is its focus on collaboration and leadership, and its 'delivery model' which situates it in local collaborative challenges. But it has been relatively modest so far in its claims and in promoting its offer. Now may be the right moment for Workforce Scotland to support PCL to seek to become

more visible in the wider Scottish public service system and to consider how a wider constituency might best be introduced to the insights and learning that this report helps document.

43

The research reported here concluded in December 2016.

PCL is a dynamic initiative which continues to evolve, with an explicit emphasis on building from learning to action. For further information see: www.workforcescotland.com

Annex A: PCL outcomes - the 'Egg Model'

Pioneer outcome 1:

Public service leaders are better equipped to lead collaboratively and effectively in times of change.

Pioneer outcome 3:

Public service leaders have better networks which span organisational boundaries and specialism's.

Pioneer outcome 5:

Public service organisations have better evidence of the benefits of collaborative leadership.

Pioneer outcome 2:

Public service organisations are better equipped to recognise, nurture and share behaviours which enable collaborative leadership.

Pioneer outcome 4:

There is wider recognition that some issues are ambiguous, complex and uncertain and can only be addressed by collaborative leadership.

Pioneer outcome 6:

Public service leaders have an increased ability to understand and practice inquiry – at all levels; individual, group and wider system.

4. Outcomes for people and communities (us all)

3. Outcomes for the organisation & wider system (us)

2. Outcomes for Teams (we)

1. Personal outcomes for staff (me)

Annex B: EERS for Evaluation: reflection tool