

THREE

Researcher collaboration: Learning from experience

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Introduction

The notion of ‘researcher collaboration’ typically refers to the relationship between researchers and their participants, case site, or funding organisation (Engstrom, 1984; Katz and Martin, 1997). Less commonly discussed, though no less important for the process and outcome of research, is the relationship between researchers. Given the recent ‘reflexive turn’ in research methodology – and critical management (CM) research in particular (Alvesson et al., 2008; Linstead, 1994) – it is perhaps surprising that more attention has not been paid to the role of inter-researcher relations in framing, shaping and producing research (Wray-Bliss, 2003). It is also curious since so much of our research is focused on the working relationships of others, and on power relations. In failing to evaluate our own, often hierarchical relationships (Rogers-Dillon, 2005) we fail to be critical or reflexive about, and in, our research.

The topic of researcher collaboration has remained largely in the realm of gossip and informal conversation. Indeed, the genesis of this chapter, which initiated the book project, arose out of such a conversation: a meeting that was ostensibly about sharing research ideas and coordinating individual projects turned into a conversation about the meaning of collaboration and the expectation and regulation of collaboration in that particular research group. These concerns, we contend, are not uncommon. Conversations with colleagues lead us to believe that a surprising number of us have experienced unequal or challenging working relationships, as well as

fulfilling ones. Formally, however, these issues are rarely discussed and often play little or no role in texts that address the process of research. The issue of researcher collaboration is becoming a question of increasing relevance as institutional pressures require, or at the very least ask, researchers to collaborate more frequently, and often in situations that we might not otherwise choose. As a result there is a tendency for individual research projects to give way to collaborative research endeavours. Given the potential for these relationships to shape the research, and the researcher, we argue that more explicit discussion of them is warranted.

This project evolved iteratively – as collaborations often do – such that the final writing team for this chapter differed from the one at the outset. However, what brought the authorial team together was a shared concern for the precarious and often unspoken nature (in the formal or written sense) of these issues, a desire to explore some of these issues, and in doing so reflect on how relationships could be made more rewarding, democratic, non-exploitative and free(r) from conflicts. The authors are CM researchers, collaborating with and inquiring of – in the main – fellow CM researchers, who might reasonably be anticipated to draw upon their inclusive politics of equality (evident in their writing) in the research process itself. Clearly the issue of researcher relationships is not an exclusively ‘critical’ concern, but the quest for ethical relations is crucial for CM scholars if they wish to succeed (at least partially) in their emancipatory agenda in terms of both process and outcome.

Rather than rely on our own experiences, we sought to draw upon a broader range of experiences and reflections from the field of CM research from which others can learn. To this end the chapter aims to give voice to researchers, highlighting the precarious and, at times, unequal nature of collaboration. It then seeks to explore the nature of these relations and reflect on why such relationships may arise and what might be done to improve relations. In line with the book’s purpose to encourage reflections on research practices within the field of CM, we hope that the empirical material and discussion presented in this chapter will inspire scholars to reflect on their own researcher collaborations, and to see considerations regarding the processes and outcomes of these collaborations as an inherent aspect of the methodological approach to, and ethics of, research projects (an aspect that also has important broader consequences for shaping relations within the scholarly community) as well as the outcome of the research endeavour.

The chapter begins with a brief summary of existing framings and conceptions of researcher collaboration. It then gives an account of our research methods, and subsequently explores issues related to researcher collaboration that have emerged from our empirical research on the collaborative practices of critical scholars. The analysis mainly reflects on the understandings of collaboration, with whom people collaborate, the intentions and reasons for collaboration, and experiences of and challenges in collaboration. It also offers additional reflections on the nature, value and process of collaboration. The discussion concludes by outlining the main insights from these accounts, which we hope will inform collaborative practice, particularly addressing

the issue of (in)equality within collaborative relationships and the need for more reflexivity in CM field-specific collaboration practices.

Reasons for, types and effects of researcher collaboration

The phenomenon of research collaboration has greatly increased over the past few decades. The contemporary research environment has been described as characterized by a 'partnership or perish' (Berman, 2008: 167) climate, whereas entering into collaborative relationships has been considered as an essential route for individuals to acquire the skills, knowledge and social relations necessary to participate in science (Bozeman and Corley, 2004). This can be explained by a number of both macro-level and institutional trends that affect the way research is conducted (Katz and Martin, 1997; Morrison et al., 2003). Of particular importance here has been the emergence of incentives and demands by policy-makers and research funding bodies, seeking to encourage collaborative research (Smith, 2001). Current performance measurement regimes, such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK, also stipulate performance indicators in terms of the quantity and quality of publications, with both sets of criteria more likely to be met by researchers working collaboratively rather than individually.¹ A growing specialization of science, coupled with a greater complexity of investigated problems and cross-disciplinary work, further promotes collaborative work (Leahey and Reikowsky, 2008).

Together with the rise in collaboration, the subject of research collaboration has attracted a certain amount of scholarly attention, albeit mostly beyond the field of CM. In particular, scholars have sought to establish what can be defined as collaboration, what are the motivations behind and benefits of collaboration, and what strategies and patterns of collaboration tend to be adopted by researchers. While research collaboration has been – seemingly straightforwardly – defined as 'the working together of researchers to achieve the common goal of producing new scientific knowledge' (Katz and Martin, 1997: 7) or 'a research endeavour that pools the resources of any variety of researchers, agencies, scientists, clinicians and representatives from different disciplines' (Engstrom, 1984: 78), the concept of collaboration has occasionally also been regarded as far from obvious and unproblematic (Katz and Martin, 1997). As a way of operationalizing collaboration, Katz and Martin (1997: 7) suggest applying a number of criteria allowing for distinguishing between collaborators and other researchers. In their view, collaborators typically are:

- (a) those who work together on a research project throughout its duration or for a large part of it, or who make frequent or substantial contribution;

¹See <http://www.ref.ac.uk>.

- (b) those whose names or posts appear in the original research proposal;
- (c) those responsible for one or more of the main elements of the research (e.g. the experimental design, construction of research equipment, execution of the experiment, analysis and interpretation of the data[,] writing up the results in a paper).

The identification of activities that are considered collaborative is important for this chapter, since one of the questions of concern was the way in which scholars negotiate the distinctions between collaborators and non-collaborators, and the implications of such distinctions in personal, emotional and political terms.

We were also interested in what motivates researchers to enter into collaborative relationships. Here extant literature offers a useful starting point, as it suggests a number of reasons and motives behind researchers' engagement in collaboration. Chief among them are the opportunities to share with others: workload and experience (Hauptman, 2005), knowledge (Katz and Martin, 1997; Beaver, 2001), skills and expertise (Bammer, 2008), equipment and resources (Stillman et al., 2005), intellectual interests and ideas (Hauptman, 2005; Smith, 2001), and the general risks associated with the research process (Morrison et al., 2003; Ritchie and Rigano, 2007).

Typically, authors who have studied collaboration in different disciplines highlight its 'instrumental' and 'measurable' influences, such as a positive effect on research productivity (Ponomariov and Boardman, 2010), impact factors (Bouyssou and Marchant, 2011), the number of citations attracted by a given publication (Sooryamoorthy, 2009) and, thus, the greater visibility and prestige seemingly connected to collaborative efforts (Katz and Martin, 1997). In this manner, collaboration tends to be perceived as improving researchers' prospects of securing important contacts, funding or future employment (Beaver, 2001). While less frequently mentioned, the – difficult to capture through measurement – personal and emotional impacts of collaboration are also raised in the literature. For example, several authors associate collaboration with: greater creativity, a solution to the loneliness frequently accompanying the research process (Smith, 2001), as well as chances to provide researchers with a sense of pleasure and positive emotional energy (Katz and Martin, 1997; Melin, 2000; Ritchie and Rigano, 2007). Generally, most of the literature places an emphasis on the advantages of researcher collaboration. However, a few authors, Katz and Martin (1997) among them, also refer to certain costs of collaboration, mainly in terms of financial resources, time, and increased administrative burdens.

Our interest in the practices of collaboration has, moreover, drawn our attention to extant typologies addressing the levels, patterns and strategies of collaboration. In relation to collaboration *levels*, Katz and Martin (1997) distinguish between inter-individual, inter-institutional and international levels of collaboration, whereas Smith (2001) makes a distinction between interpersonal, team and corporate levels. John-Steiner (2000) furthermore discusses four types of research collaboration *patterns*, referring to the extents of formality and hierarchy (see also Morrison et al., 2003), namely: distributed, complementary, family, and integrative types. Yet

another criterion – collaboration *strategies* – is adopted by Bozeman and Corley (2004) who distinguish between six, in their view, independent types of collaborating researchers: the Taskmaster, the Nationalist, the Mentor, the Follower, the Buddy, and the Tactician. These typologies provide us with certain insights into the motivation behind, nature of, and concerns regarding collaboration.

However, the recent increase in research interest in collaboration has been particularly visible in the medical and natural sciences (John-Steiner, 2000). Here a bibliometric methodology is usually employed in order to quantify collaboration, identify appropriate measures of collaboration, and correlate measures of collaboration with other variables such as research output (Liao and Yen, 2012), propensity to collaborate (Birnholtz, 2007), and factors that may influence this, such as tenure or international networks (Van Rijnsoever et al., 2008). While bibliometric studies tend to operationalize collaboration in terms of the co-authorship of scholarly publications, authors within this area do not focus on or critically appraise the relations and (in)equalities among collaborating researchers, or explore other forms of collaboration. Questions of power and hierarchies within collaborative relationships and practices, however, become problematized when viewed from the perspective of social sciences and, more specifically, CM studies, where scholars raise questions of reflexive methodology (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000), and espouse ethical and political commitments to equality and to scrutinizing the power relations imbuing their own research practices (Hardy et al., 2001). Cheek (2008) stresses that it is essential to reflect on one's role as a researcher throughout the research process (see also Ritchie and Rigano, 2007), and more broadly on collaboration, especially as it has generally come to be understood as a benign, positive aspect of a research endeavour. Cheek (2008) encourages researchers to consider the assumptions underlying collaboration, and to question its taken-for-granted desirability, and how collaboration and discussions about it are connected to the political research context within which they occur. The latter is seen as crucial in order to effectively navigate through the different demands of academic or corporate research funding bodies (see also Smith, 2001: 137).

Ritchie and Rigano (2007) highlight the need for exploring the relations, which are little discussed in the literature, such as expectations and the emotional aspects of collaborating with others. An inherent part of collaborative relationships are 'errors', instances of 'confusion' and 'regrettable decisions' – all of which emotionally affect the involved parties and have an impact on their relationships, well-being, careers and so on. Recognizing and learning from such experiences require a commitment to honesty and reflexivity (Goldstein, 2000). By taking a critical look at collaborative processes and relationships, especially the power relations and practices within them, and the ensuing risks, challenges and emotional responses of those involved, we seek to contribute to understandings and evaluations of research collaboration among CM researchers. In turn, we reflect on the implications for CM scholars.

Reflexively exploring researcher collaborations

When working on the chapter, we aspired to develop our own collaboration as a democratic, trust-based and joyful process, considering it a worthwhile endeavour in personal and intellectual respects (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007; see also Goldstein, 2000). We aimed to share the responsibilities equally between the three of us, and to jointly shape the direction of the chapter's development, ensuring that the 'voices' of each of us were present in the text.

Our empirical study consists of seven interviews we conducted with critical scholars who were selected on the basis of their seniority (3 professors, 2 mid-career and 2 early-career researchers), gender (3 females, 4 males), and experience (including experience of collaboration). The interviews drew on an internationally diverse cohort, with five of the seven participants having worked as academics in at least two countries. The interviews were conducted with colleagues whom we knew, but did not necessarily have a close (or collaborative) working relationship with, in order to balance the familiarity required for achieving an open, trusting conversation with the avoidance of any potential conflict of interest. For the purposes of anonymity, all names that appear in the empirical section are pseudonyms.²

The semi-structured interviews were developed on the basis of the literature and our own knowledge of the subject matter. Each interview lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. The interviews were not designed to be representative but allowed for in-depth exploration of the issues. Despite the small number of participants, theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) was suggested when their accounts, supplemented by the researchers' own knowledge of the field – in terms of their own experience and the accounts of the experiences of others, and their prior research in this field – resulted in consistent themes being drawn from the data.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Themes were drawn from the data and agreed upon based on a series of conversations between us. Aiming to engage in reflexivity and to learn from each other at all stages of the research and writing process, we strove to mutually question and problematize our theoretical and methodological pre-understandings as well as our paradigmatic and field-specific assumptions (such as that collaborations are rewarding *or* exploitative; CM researchers are less instrumental and/or more reflexive than mainstream management scholars) (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011: 253–255; see also Chapter 2, this volume). Questioning and refining the modes through which we collectively constructed and developed knowledge and insights was also central to the process of analysing and interpreting our empirical material (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000: 8). In writing up

²In addition to the pseudonyms, we indicate the seniority level of our interviewees: ECR = early career researcher, MCR = mid-career researcher, SCR = senior career researcher.

the chapter, we took turns to ensure that we all worked on each of the sections, as we wished for the final text to reflect, throughout, the merging and interweaving of our voices.

The fact of collaborating on a piece about researcher collaboration was not without impact on our own reflexive processes regarding our relationship as co-authors. Within the course of writing we started to consciously scrutinize our own practices and attitudes underlying collaboration. In doing so, we were aware of challenges and uncertainties accompanying the attempts to address and negotiate personal and scholarly views, perceptions and attitudes to reach an 'equality of voices' and contributions. We therefore made a deliberate effort to 'look after' the emotional aspect of writing together and encounter each other, in scholarly terms, as 'critical friends'.

Reflections on researcher collaboration

In the following we discuss the collaborative practices and relations of the CM scholars interviewed. More specifically, we reflect upon the various meanings, intentions, experiences, challenges as well as the evaluations associated with researcher collaborations that inform and shape both the research and the researcher, and the nature of future collaborations.

Meanings of research collaboration

Our participants' understandings of what constitutes research collaboration, include, for some, such diverse forms of collegial engagement as establishing and participating in reading groups, commenting on each other's work, co-organizing conferences and symposia, and carrying out editorial responsibilities. For most, a distinction was made between collaboration – meaning 'labouring together' – and 'exchange', though precisely what was meant by 'exchange' in this context was not always clear (the exchanging of ideas could often be the basis of collaboration, whereas 'swapping names' on papers was evaluated more negatively). Collaboration was also understood as a particular relationship or project, a way of working or a 'mutual process of learning', and in relation to a particular community or working environment. However, there was also an implicit hierarchy of collaboration. For example, one participant noted that they 'romanticize' the 'ideal collaboration' as a community of scholars discussing and exchanging ideas but describing such collaboration as 'not formal'. Generally, collaboration was seen as existing between people, not institutions (Smith, 2001).

The two areas of activity that were universally recognized and particularly relevant for the scholars we interviewed were those associated with being a member of a research team, in particular applying for research funding and jointly fulfilling project obligations, and those activities involved in the publication of academic

texts, especially co-writing and co-authoring.³ While meanings of collaboration also appeared to shift during researchers' careers (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007), the accounts given illustrate that co-writing forms the most prevalent meaning accompanying researcher collaboration and that meanings and experiences of collaboration were significant in forming and shaping careers.

Who academics collaborate with

Collaboration partners are not chosen at random. For most of our participants it is important to work with someone whom they know and with whom they have a personal relationship (Melin, 2000). In some cases, these relationships are friendships that can be traced back to the early stages of their academic career (Smith, 2001).

Choosing to collaborate with friends (see also Katz and Martin, 1997), is often explained by reference to an ideal of a research collaboration in which there is a 'meeting of minds', referred to by one participant as 'pure pleasure', and by another one as a 'dream' about a 'wordless understanding' that leads to a collective generation and expression of ideas in an atmosphere of trust. For some, the friendship and the 'cementing' of the relationship were a primary driver for collaboration (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007):

I don't think I would even consider meeting someone at a conference: 'well, let's write something together'... I do think it works better within friendships, because it does require quite a bit of good intentions from both sides. It's not easy if somebody deletes your stuff or changes things ... In order to know that you have similar ideas about something, I think that already requires quite a bit of conversations and time spent together. (Jacob, MCR)

Most interviewees stated that they look for long-term, or 'buddy' (Bozeman and Corley, 2004) collaborative relationships, and well-known 'duets' were cited in positive terms. Such relationships were seen as better suited for addressing the emotional and intellectual complexity of collaborative processes and in some cases for improving the quality and efficiency of the work. One participant reflected on the synergistic effects of the 'duet' by noting how their close collaborators 'help me in getting [my voice] across more clearly and I help them in getting their voice across more clearly'.

Despite the emphasis on friendships and long-term relationships, often with peers or (former) supervisors, several interviewees also indicated they worked with a broader community of scholars. For example, some of the more established scholars

³The distinction is important and reflects the different styles of writing articulated, for example: some academics literally 'work together' (to the extent of sitting in front of a computer together to write) while, at the other extreme, scholars 'divide tasks'. It also reflects the distinction between writing and contributing to the work in another fashion (such as providing the ideas) or even just being named as an author.

referred to mentoring relationships and, thus, to collaborations with junior colleagues (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007: 142; Morrison et al., 2003). Other participants stated that they had worked with people they had met only a few times at conferences, and that they used conferences and international networks to cultivate collaborative partnerships. Thus, not all collaborations were based on close personal relationships. One participant even indicated that they had never met some of their collaborators.

There was also evidence of potential collaborator scrutiny, with evaluations of their 'skills', 'reading and attainment', 'general intelligence', 'track record', 'spark', 'chemistry' and 'self-irony'. There was a concern to ensure there were 'shared passions', 'common ideas and language', 'openness and respect'. The notion that a collaborator could 'add something' was also crucial, or as one participant expressed it: 'am I going to get enough from her?'

Intentions and reasons for collaboration

The motivations for collaborations reflect both scholarly and instrumental underpinnings, often simultaneously (see also Katz and Martin, 1997). Several accounts were given referring to collaboration as a 'default' way of working and as a means to avoid being 'lonely' in one's work (Smith, 2001). Yet for others it was part of a more deliberate strategy to develop an international profile or become more 'efficient' and produce 'outputs' that would count in terms of helping one secure employment or career progression (Van Rijnsoever et al., 2008). Collaboration was also viewed as 'necessary', such as for achieving research funding, or 'required' in the context of institutional or academic pressures in general.

Some academics spoke about the instrumental aspect of their own approach to working with others. As 'tacticians' (Bozeman and Corley, 2004), they opted for collaborations to complement their own skills or make up for deficits (Morrison et al., 2003; Leahey and Reikowsky, 2008):

It often doesn't really pay off to learn a methodology from the start because you know in the long run you won't need it so much. So it's just the other people's knowledge, competencies ... that have to pool together. (Sabine, MCR)

Time pressure seemed to serve as another common motivation for collaboration:

It allows getting things done quicker. If I do everything myself, I just can't write as much ... So the fact that I work with someone else does save me time and makes it easier for me to get [ideas] out. (Claudia, ECR)

The importance of outputs was reflected in the speed of turnaround and the joys of being able to 'share the burden' and 'hand it on' as well as the 'discipline' of co-working (Morrison et al., 2003). It was also presented as part of a strategy for achieving high-ranking publications:

In the recent paper I've been doing ... it's been going on for about two and a half, three years, we've had one rejection from a 4 star and now it's at a 3 star ... Latterly, [co-author's name] wanted to bring on board an American professor that I'd never met ... It's just somebody that has written in this area and was likely actually a previous reviewer when we got rejected ... We brought them on board like a Trojan horse and they were happy to do that. They had a real effect. (Bob, SCR)

Comparisons of inputs (time and effort) to outputs as a means of evaluating the projects were also prevalent in many accounts (see also Melin, 2000; Smith, 2001). However, the adoption of an instrumental approach to managing one's collaborative relationships does not tend to sit comfortably with the simultaneously upheld ideal of the non-careerist purposes⁴ and outcomes of collaborations:

The goal is not to get published, I mean of course you want to get published, but that's not the goal of the enterprise. It is about getting an idea that you have on paper. (Jacob, MCR)

In contrast, another academic described the ideal collaborator in output-orientated terms:

[S/he] would have time, be very interested in producing output because at my stage in career, I unfortunately have to be interested in really getting published. So a person who is under the same pressure, I think that would lead to a more productive relationship if both of us would push or be pushed. (Sabine, MCR)

For many, struggles between instrumental and non-instrumental purposes were not easy to resolve in an unambiguous manner and illustrate a variety of possible inconsistencies. One academic, for example, spoke about how, while not being 'strategic', he had become, nevertheless, 'opportunistic' in his approach to research collaboration. Another declared his lack of interest in publication rankings, and at the same time admitted to directing his efforts at submitting manuscripts to highly ranked journals. Another, young, scholar only approaches very senior and experienced academics for collaborative projects, and yet claimed not to collaborate with them because of their 'big names' (see also Bozeman and Corley, 2004). A senior academic highlighted the responsibilities he took on to assist his doctoral students' publishing while simultaneously admitting not being able to fulfil his tasks and duties within collaborative projects. Where reasons behind the differences between their ideal and actual approach to collaboration were considered, the current institutional environment with which our participants consider themselves obliged to come to terms was often invoked as an explanation.

However, despite the strategic, pragmatic and 'semi-opportunistic' approaches to collaboration, the desire for intellectual discussions and inspiration, and the aim to

⁴It is noticeable that it is always *others* who are 'intellectually instrumental and corrupt' in their collaborations.

produce 'something of value' was evident in all the accounts (Smith, 2001; Ritchie and Rigano, 2007). Also present were personal anxieties about one's own capabilities, and not 'trusting oneself' to work as effectively alone. Whilst the interviewees described how they used people 'to their advantage' and to 'help fulfil personal goals', there was much to suggest this is partly driven by a need to compare favourably with colleagues.

Experiences of collaboration

The awareness of power asymmetries and institutional pressures was manifest in accounts of their own position within collaborative relationships. For example, some of our participants mentioned how, over time, their position had shifted from being the one who approached others and asked them to collaborate, to finding themselves on the receiving end of such requests. Other senior academics made a distinction between their early experiences of research collaboration and those since they had become professors or heads of large research projects. The perceived 'obligation' to support junior colleagues was often cited as a source of anxiety in terms of potential exploitation, sometimes predicated on their own experiences. However, their concerns could often be contrasted with their current approach. One participant noted that:

The first time I collaborated with someone who would be more senior to me, was a professor at work who I wrote a handbook chapter with. And he wrote something, and sent it to me and this is like ... shit basically. Then I kind of rewrote the whole thing ... and then it was like okay. Yeah fine, he didn't really read it ... and then it got published ... that partially confirms some of my assumptions about what it means to work with a more senior person, essentially they just exploit you. (Thomas, SCR)

But later went on to advise junior scholars to:

Work with the best people you can ... learn a lot from that. Realize that you are probably going to have to do a lot more of the work ... But also be clear about ... what the boundaries are ... The other person should really bring something substantive to the table ... [Be] cognizant if you're being exploited, but also questioning your own ideas about what it means to be exploited ... because I think sometimes ... [it's] learning.

Another senior colleague similarly noted that there is 'always a slight imbalance', whereas junior and mid-career researchers more frequently indicated their 'anger' at this inequality. Our participants also distinguished between collaborations they entered of their own free will and ones that might have been imposed upon them, for example by their superiors who require them to contribute to particular research projects (Smith, 2001). In some extreme cases, such 'forced' research collaboration confirmed inequalities within the project team; though, examples of 'hierarchy ... slipping in' were also evident in mutually engaged collaborations. Despite the evidence of 'power under the surface', participants generally agreed that 'equality'

including 'alphabetical order' in publications was, or should be, an assumption (John-Steiner, 2000).⁵

The interviewees also provided insights into the relevance of collaboration for their professional and scholarly self-positioning, whereby academics reflected on the interplay between working with others and working on their own, and on the ways in which different experiences of research collaboration constitute exposure and, in doing so, tap into their personal insecurities and uncertainties, and affect their sense of self-worth (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007). One of the participants, for example, commented on how a particular collaborative relationship, which ended in a conflict between him and his co-author, has enabled him to show his worth as high-quality scholar:

The motivation to doing that on my own was ... in this antagonism with my co-author [co-author's name]. I thought, 'I'm going to show you, you fucker, again, that I can write some a, really good paper'... And it's been very important to me actually. I've learned that ... I can produce work of the highest quality now, journal articles, without other people if I so choose ... it's been extremely empowering. (Bob, SCR)

Such accounts illustrate that collaborations present power relations that are often intellectually, personally and thus emotionally intense (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007). There is frequent evidence of 'anger' at others, as well as personal anxiety and guilt about one's own contribution (to the extent that one participant indicated he became 'afraid to open ... emails').

The participants noted the need to get used to 'different styles' and 'rates of work' and 'responses'. The terms of engagement and approaches to collaboration vary from those who prefer to work together in blocks of time, or engage over a longer period of time and 'turn taking', and whether they like to share roles or take on different tasks (ideas, writing, editing and so on). Most indicated they preferred working face-to-face and to deadlines. Relationships were supported by 'backslapping emails', using emoticons and attaching pictures and introducing social elements. The importance of, ideally physical, proximity was often highlighted as a significant factor in managing the collaborative relationship, not least 'to heal rifts' when they occur.

Overall the interviewees have experienced a mixture of good and bad collaborations. Most of them seem to be positive about the need to collaborate because of the sense of intellectual stimulation, fulfilment and enjoyment they potentially get out of the process, and the satisfaction they are able to feel with its outcomes. According to the accounts given, collaboration offers various opportunities to learn and develop, to correct and discipline each other in a productive way and, more broadly, to share the joys and sorrows accompanying the research process. However, asymmetries within collaborative relationships as well as institutional pressures

⁵One participant noted that they worked to the '70:30 rule' whereby authorship was alphabetical unless the second (alphabetical) author had done 70% of the work. However, this is both hard to determine and possibly not as universal an understanding as implied.

academics face, give rise to a number of risks and challenges associated with collaborative work. It is to these that we now turn.

Challenges of collaborations

The accounts reflected the risks and tensions of the collaborative relationship that is dominated by too much closeness and proximity. The most frequently mentioned area of difficulty referred to the extent to which different collaborators contributed to co-writing texts or met the requirements of funded projects. Typically cited were cases of collaborators not meeting deadlines or 'backing out' after making the commitment (sometimes many years before). It was generally assumed that colleagues had 'good intentions', saying 'yes, of course' before not delivering and letting the project 'drop off the radar'. This usually meant others picking up the rest, and sometimes 'the lion's share' of the work. The frustration with free-riding and broken promises was articulated as a 'lack of responsibility'. In some ways even more problematic were collaborator's 'shifts in involvement' where the extent of commitment is at stake:

I've worked with some people who I've found frustrating... [You] put in a lot of time, go back, thinking about things and then you send it to the other side: 'Okay, I've got one day in my diary, I've spent the day on it you know, basically I checked all the things off on my part so it is fine' ... It's not simply just work because they deliver ... but then there's also depth of work and commitment. (Thomas, SCR)

Similarly, the quality of work raised challenges:

[I]t's been sometimes difficult then to kind of say, 'Well this isn't good enough. Go back and do it again' kind of thing... [I] end up in that position doing it myself. (Thomas, SCR)

Unequal distributions of workload⁶ often resulted in a feeling of exploitation and could lead to the termination of a collaboration (Morrison et al., 2003). However, inequality of contribution was identified as an aspect of collaboration that could not easily be resolved. It was generally agreed that these were difficult issues to approach and, as a consequence, they were often accepted. One participant noted:

It's also hard for me to really approach somebody and say, 'I have the feeling you have not done enough for the paper'... Actually, I've done it twice with the same person and I was really explicit and mentioned it before I gave this person another chance and said, 'Okay, maybe I can see from your excuses and everything that you were really under pressure during that time. But now I have another project and it would be nice if now you could do 80% and I've already done the 20%'... [but] it turned out the same again. (Sabine, MCR)

⁶One participant observed that in Italy some publications indicate the proportion of contribution, which she felt was a good idea.

Challenges were also faced in negotiating the different styles of working and balancing the need to be 'open to learn' and coping with having 'work edited out' whilst at the same time 'retaining control'. Indeed, a 'bad collaborator' was described by one participant as someone with an 'intransigent intellectual view'. This was often made more difficult when there was a hierarchy:

And working with more senior people ... The thing which I found really difficult here is the kind of struggles and battles which go on between you trying to assert yourself and saying, 'No, we should do it this way' and them saying, 'No, we should do it that way', particularly when they don't listen. (Thomas, SCR)

Another interviewee raised the notion of collaboration serving to homogenize thinking and conceptual development, particularly where there was a compulsion to collaborate and/or a dominant 'voice' in the process.

Most participants also indicated that they preferred working in one-to-one (or at least small-scale) collaborations. Where this was often not possible was in the case of large, externally funded research projects. One academic described some of the difficulties experienced in collaborative projects:

Once this multi-person research team grew bigger, it became really difficult because each of those members of the research team had very different agendas and different kinds of understandings of what is right and wrong. (Thomas, SCR)

Additional problems arose over the ownership and use of data, in some cases without the permission of the data collector. Another commonly emerging frustration, which most of our participants commented on, was the decision regarding the order of authors' names to appear in the publication. Here, the interweaving of the personal and professional dimensions of the relationships with the co-author(s) added a layer of difficulty to resolving the problem of unequal contribution and the perception of an unfair sequencing of the authors' names.⁷ In the extract below, one academic explained the personal consequences of a situation in which, despite feeling that he had made the most significant contribution to a publication, his two remaining co-authors had placed his name as third in the order of authors:

That definitely had an influence on the friendship ... So that was hard. But it's interesting that the sensitive issues are not ... about having completely different ideas and that you don't manage to create an argument together. Now it was about something extremely benign, right, it's about order of authors. I felt tricked or I felt that he was using me and it was a bit of a shock because I never thought that [co-author's name] would do something like this. (Jacob, MCR)

As already alluded to, the tendency to avoid confrontation was commonplace; to be open is thus perceived as a challenge. Often participants 'let things go ... because of the

⁷This was of particular issue for those who, by dint of their surname, often found themselves last on publications regardless of effort.

friendship' but at the same time acknowledged that this 'leads you not to be truthful' about the collaborative process (see also Ritchie and Rigano, 2007). It was often hoped, in the context of longer-term relationships, that things would 'even out in the end'. Interestingly, this did not always put an end to the collaborative relationship, or what one participant described as 'the battered wife syndrome'. These tensions were equally evident in collaborative relations between peers and within a hierarchical relationship.

Such, often unspoken, challenges exemplify that collaborative relationships are complex power relations with more or less asymmetry. The examples given illustrate that collaborative relations constitute different personal and project-related dependencies and micro power struggles, on all levels of hierarchy. Against this background, we highlight and summarize below how our participants reflect on their collaborative experiences.

Evaluations of collaborations and reflections

On balance, all our participants expressed their preference for collaborations that are participative and democratic in their orientation and, in doing so, stressed that their ideal collaborations are ones where their voice is not lost or dominated by that or those of the co-author(s) (Morrison et al., 2003). The ability to navigate this precarious terrain, and thus to negotiate collaborative practices and standards, can develop with experience:

Writing is also a form of negotiation. What do we regard as good? What do we regard as bad? Very often, I say, 'Yes, you are right'. But sometimes I think 'Actually, it is wrong'. Now I started to maybe build up a little more confidence to ... make my voice stronger and also change things. (Claudia, ECR)

The insights exemplify that there is both a wish and pressure to collaborate, as well as a desire to work on one's own scholarly reputation and 'brand' (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007). However, participants also noted how the 'social control' or 'sense of responsibility for others' meant they tended to prioritize collaborative projects at the expense of 'crowding' or 'squeezing out' their own projects, and often their 'core' professional identity. This sometimes led to a series of 'vaguely connected projects' on their CV and to a sense of frustration.

However, despite different collaboration experiences, altogether our interviewees shared quite similar ideas on what makes up a 'good' collaboration or collaborator. One participant observed:

Collaboration is a relationship, as the name indicates, so only collaborations can be good and not persons ... it's like a marriage. (Katrine, SCR)

In the context of discussing good collaborations, some of the interviewees also problematized their own collaborative behaviour, for example in self-critically admitting that they sometimes fail to 'deliver' or to 'deliver good quality' as they are involved

in too many collaborative projects. There were also a few who reflected on how their collaborators felt about shared projects and the collaborative process itself. Some participants made, above all, the 'rules of the academic field' responsible for 'bad' and unproductive collaboration practices. In contrast, other scholars gave more reflexive accounts of the rules of the publication and collaboration 'game' – even if they complied with them:

It sounds tough but ... it's your own fault in some ways, right? We have our masters and now we are slaves when it comes to publication. (Claudia, ECR)

The interviewees generally stressed the importance of finding the right collaborators. However, what made collaborative relationships successful, such as a close personal connection or 'understanding', also raised some of the more precarious challenges and dependencies, and resulted in unfairness that was difficult to address.

In summary, we can state that researcher collaboration presents a multifaceted, often intense and dynamic process (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007). This implies that there are a variety of aspects that might lead to the 'success' and/or 'failure' of the collaboration. However, our interviewees', and also our own, reflections on previous collaboration experiences highlight that collaborative processes and outcomes are often differently perceived, for example in regard to issues such as the value of time and ideas as contributions. Thus success (or failure) might be differently evaluated by parties involved in collaborative research projects.

Final thoughts

This chapter is interested in the investigation of and reflection on the meanings, experiences, and personal and scholarly challenges accompanying the process of researcher collaboration, particularly in light of the limited discussion of these issues in the literature (but see Cheek, 2008; Ritchie and Rigano, 2007). We hope the reflections of CM scholars contribute to an understanding of the unfolding nature of collaborative processes, related challenges and reflections on how collaboration shapes personal and professional relations as well as the research process itself in order to give voice to these experiences and consider the implications and possible responses.

The accounts highlight that the experiences of and attitudes towards researcher collaboration are diverse and varied, and frequently multiple and somewhat conflicting views are held at the same time. However, our participants share broadly similar ideas of what 'good' collaboration means and requires, even if there are no definitive 'norms' for collaboration. Reliability, commitment to the project, a 'common language' and understanding, openness and trust are mentioned as crucial elements for a good collaboration process. Several accounts of our interviewees also emphasize that the concrete practices and experiences often differ from this idea(l). Both personal reasons and institutional conditions are introduced as explanatory factors.

Even if the critical scholars interviewed present themselves, on balance, as appreciators of collaborative projects there are also many challenges faced in collaboration. The blurring of personal and professional boundaries seems to be one of the major challenges, and is widespread given the prevalence of the 'buddy' collaborator (Bozeman and Corley, 2004). The proximity and intensity that often characterize research within the social sciences, and CM research more specifically, can serve as a joyful and creative dynamic, but also as a source of power, deprivation and exploitation (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007) that can be challenging to negotiate. There was evidence of hierarchy, too, demonstrated by shifts in how more senior scholars collaborate now when compared to their past practices, and also the experiences of junior scholars when working with senior faculty. The accounts offer words of caution regarding the risks and consequences of unequal collaborations, even when they are founded in friendship or hitherto equal and respectful relations.

Our study concludes, like Katz and Martin (1997), that the concept of researcher collaboration and collaborators can by no means be taken for granted. The accounts given illustrate that the categories, standards and norms defining collaboration are variegated – often shaped by previous collaboration experiences and organizations or communities of which researchers are a member. Yet, the assumptions and aspirations in regard to collaboration seem to be rarely explicitly discussed or pronounced (John-Steiner, 2000). Many accounts exemplify that, in the course of collaborative projects, the lack or avoidance of discussion and thus the silence around expectations, perceptions and understandings of collaboration, often cause or strengthen unease, feelings of injustice and inequality among those collaborating (Ritchie and Rigano, 2007). Recognizing the widespread nature of these experiences may help give voice to these concerns.

These findings may be surprising in light of those interviewed who – as social scientists, and often critical scholars – would be sensitive to notions of power and also of reflexivity. The accounts reflect statements of what reasonable and fair collaboration comprises juxtaposed with practices that would call their own good practice into question, suggesting that whilst many were reflective of their collaborations they did not always demonstrate reflexivity in their intra-scholarly collaboration. Questionable practice was sometimes guiltily acknowledged, but other times it was not – perhaps remaining unseen, or seen 'differently' (in this particular case). This is worth noting, given that many of those affected by potential inequality were the more junior members of the profession, with more senior colleagues on occasion appearing not to recognize the role they can play in ensuring their unhappy experiences are not repeated with the next generation.

In practical terms, therefore, more needs to be done to openly reflect on, problematize and frame collaboration such that it can emerge as joyful, productive and fair for all parties. This is unlikely to be a formally managed process (as this was clearly articulated as a barrier to effective collaboration) but a community-level concern and negotiated accordingly. The discussion of collaborative relationships is an important concern since these relationships influence and (in)form the type of research undertaken

(projects taken or avoided), the inclusion or exclusion of scholars in collaborative efforts, the negotiation of the types of questions asked and what is written, as well as the personal impact on scholars and interests of justice. Attention should also be paid to what 'good' collaboration means and what constitutes it. 'Good' collaboration typically involves 'like-minded' people and thus can become not only exclusionary but also self-referential, less creative or reflexive in its process and outcome.

In accordance with the book's purpose to explore and inform the research process of critical scholars, we have sought to make a critical-reflective comment on the field-specific research practices that collaborative endeavours involve. Yet we acknowledge that this aim can only be achieved to a limited extent. In particular, the small scale of the study undertaken will inevitably surface a limited range of the issues at stake.⁸ Different cultural, institutional, disciplinary or group contexts will undoubtedly highlight different concerns and varying evaluations and responses to them. It is beyond the scope of this chapter, which seeks primarily to surface the issues, to provide extensive concrete 'solutions'. However, raising self-awareness, stimulating discussion and putting researcher relationships at the heart of reflexivity – theoretically and in practice – is an important first step. With its focus on the emotional and intellectual complexities and on the potential tensions, asymmetries and frictions of collaborations, it is hoped that the accounts presented encourage and enable considered and open discussions on the nature and ethics of researcher collaborations aspired to, especially among early-career researchers who are in the process of becoming critical scholars.

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⁸One of the editors noted problems arising from data pooling in which data are shared between researchers, raising issues about the use of data, such as potential ethical risks to the participants, issues of equality and access for contributing researchers, and the quality of the research produced.

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