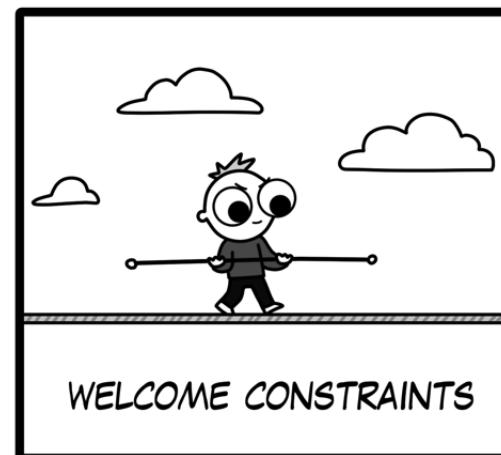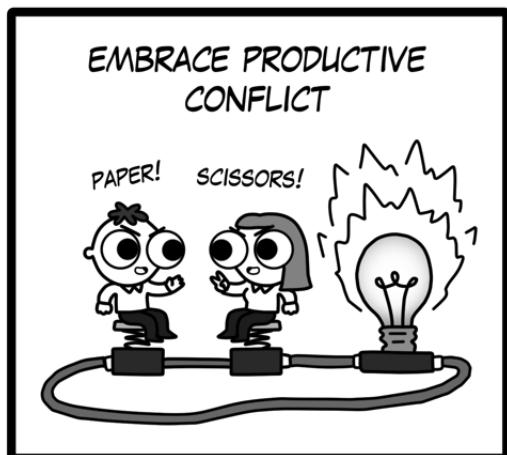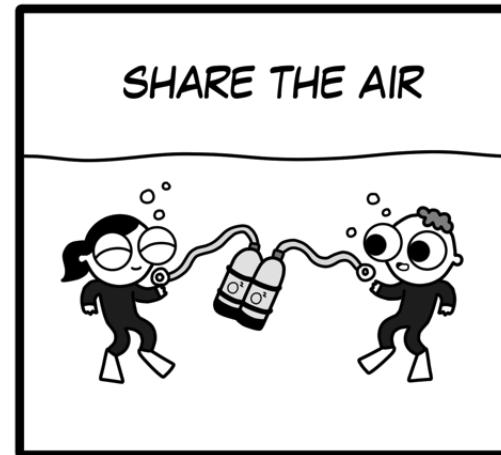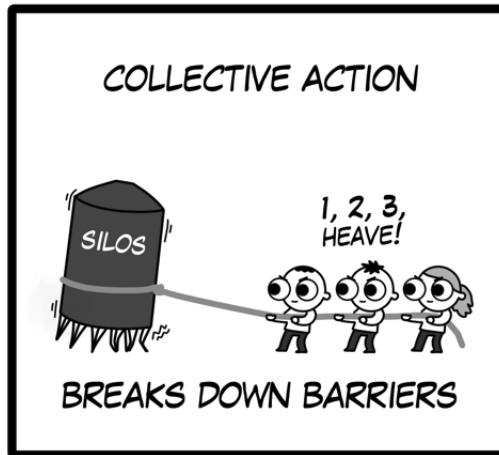# Collaborative Innovation Principles

Collaborative Innovation Principles

These six principles describe how collaboration actually works in practice, especially when different organisations, disciplines, or interests are involved. These principles are not about being nice or polite to each other. They are about making progress in complex environments.

1. Share the Tools, Share the Spoils

Collaboration breaks down when resources, knowledge, or credit are hoarded and not shared.

Sharing tools means giving others access to methods, data, language, and ways of working – not just being part of meetings. Sharing the spoils means acknowledging contributions and distributing value fairly when outcomes or progress are achieved.

People engage seriously when they believe effort and reward are aligned. If the benefits flow only one way, collaboration becomes performative not real.

2. Collective Action Breaks Down Barriers

Many problems persist not because they are hard, but because they sit in or between silos.

Collective action creates progress by coordinated efforts across boundaries – organisational, disciplinary, or cultural. This requires shared intent and visible action, not just alignment statements.

Working together on something tangible is often the fastest way to build momentum and reduce the barriers. Just meetings alone cannot lead to this mutuality, reciprocity and collective excitement from achievements, progress or even the rawness and honesty of shared setbacks.

3. Share the Air

In collaborative settings, attention and voice are limited resources.

Sharing the air means creating space for others to contribute, especially those who are quieter, less powerful, or closer to the problem (therefore believe it or not may have more to say). It requires restraint from those who are overly confident or accustomed to leading the conversation. This may be hard for some people.

When the same voices dominate, insights narrow, trust drops, collective energy is not maximised. When airtime is shared, understanding broadens and more people are invested in the collaboration.

4. Embrace Productive Conflict

Disagreement is not a failure of collaboration; it is often a sign that something meaningful is being discussed / addressed. This is a key moment in collaboration.

Productive conflict focuses on ideas, assumptions, and trade-offs – not on personalities or status. It surfaces risks early and prevents false consensus.

Avoiding conflict may feel comfortable, but it usually delays hard decisions and leads to weaker outcomes. Be vulnerable, let others prove you wrong. You will learn!

5. You Can't Enforce Trust – It Has to Grow Naturally

Trust cannot be mandated through rules, contracts, or slogans. Do not rush it, let it be built over time. It develops through repeated interactions where people observe reliability, competence, and fairness in the long run. Small commitments honoured consistently matter more than grand and too ambitious visions or gestures.

Trying to force trust usually leads to compliance and lower excitement, not commitment and more passion.

6. Welcome Constraints

Constraints are not obstacles to collaboration; they are often what make it effective.

Limits on time, resources, authority, or scope force prioritisation, creativity, and honest trade-offs. They reduce ambiguity and help groups move from discussion to action. In an unconstrained world, innovative solutions are not needed. Absence of awareness and acceptance of contrarians often leads to negative thinking: "someone else (typically the government) should provide …. the reduction of constraints (typically money and infinite time to results)".

Clear and accepted constraints make collaboration more focused, more positive and productive, not less.

In Summary

Collaborative innovation works when:

- value and credit are shared,
- action cuts across silos,
- voices are balanced,
- disagreement is handled constructively,
- trust is earned through behaviour,
- and constraints are treated as design inputs.

Collaboration should not be incentivised with money. One plus one needs to equal more than two. When the collaborating parties realise this, that is the right incentive for impactful collaboration. It may lead to more money but it should not start with it. Efficiency is also not the right early motivation for collaboration (broader impact is) because collaboration is often less efficient due to all the learning and alignment work that takes time, effort and cognitive as well as emotional investment of all involved.

Collaboration fails when it is treated as a virtue rather than a discipline.

The work is slower at first, but the outcomes tend to last longer.