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Police Scotland and Local Government Collaborative Leadership Pilots Evaluation

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Executive Summary

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the evaluation of the Police Scotland and Local Government Collaborative Leadership Pilots (hereafter referred to as 'the programme'). This evaluation has been undertaken independently by Dr Kristy Docherty and Brigid Russell on behalf of the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) between August 2021 and February 2022.

The objectives of the evaluation were:

- To critically examine the programme.
- To capture and analyse information about the activities, processes, characteristics, and outcomes of the programme.
- To offer insights and suggestions for future action with the purpose of improving programme effectiveness, and/or to inform and shape future programme decisions.

It is important to note that our evaluation took place while the programme was still running, participants were at various stages and they had not completed all of their sessions. This 'formative' approach was deliberate and links in principle with the embedded evaluation process adopted by the facilitation team.

Background to and rationale for the programme

The programme has been designed, overseen, and facilitated collaboratively between Police Scotland, the Improvement Service (IS), and Collective Leadership for Scotland (CLS), a team situated within the Scottish Government. The programme comprises pilots in three different locality areas which were drawn together for the final phase in January 2022, and each group consisted of 12-14 members. The four phases of the programme took place between March 2021 and January 2022.

The context for the programme is characterised by a need to move beyond *talking about* working collaboratively across Scottish society to actually *doing it* more effectively in practice, as originally outlined in the Christie Commission report (2011). Specifically in the report published in September 2020 by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) there were recommendations for 'leadership training' to be undertaken jointly with key partners across the public sector. In response to this context and the future challenges facing the public sector in Scotland, the purpose of the programme has been to strengthen participants' collective leadership skills, and to offer personal and self-development. In essence, this is about working better together, across boundaries, in collaboration. It requires people to develop a different set of skills, behaviours, and ways of working. In turn, this

requires a focus on the collaborative 'group process' and a reframing of leadership, and what both mean within an inter-connected work and policy context.

The structure and content of the programme draws from the theory and practice of collective leadership, systems thinking, and wicked issues, all of which are seen to be highly relevant to the current context and future challenges of public services in Scotland. This theoretical base has been supported and complemented by an experiential and practical exploration of cross-boundary collaborative working in context. There was an intentional design decision to enable learning on the programme to take place within a real work context, aligning with the core principles of the approach developed and delivered by Collective Leadership for Scotland. (See section 2 for more on the background and rationale for the programme).

Methodology and stages of the evaluation

The experiential ethos of the programme influenced our qualitative evaluation methodology, and a narrative approach was applied. This is intended to best capture the experience and relational learning of the programme. (See section 3 for more on the evaluation methodology).

There were three key stages to the evaluation:

- Stage one - a rapid review of academic literature relevant to the programme which offers perspectives on the nature and challenge of collaboration within a public context (see section 0).
- Stage two – semi-structured interviews with the five facilitators involved in the programme delivery which provide further understanding of, and context for, the programme (see section 0).
- Stage three - a selection of narrative interviews with programme participants, together with a thematic analysis and commentary on the findings, which provide a comprehensive picture of the qualitative experience of the programme (see section 6). Further detail is captured in 'experience maps' for each of the interviewees with their informed consent (see Appendix).

Key findings

The stated purpose of the programme was that it was "*intended to inspire personal development and more effective local partnership and collaborative working*" (see 2.2). Our evaluation findings demonstrate that this intention has been achieved during the course of the pilot programme. It is our view that, in terms of both its collaborative approach and impact, the programme is meeting the recommendations of the HMICS Report (2020) in respect of 'leadership training' undertaken jointly by Police Scotland and public sector partners (see 2.1).

It is our further assertion that the participants' learning, and the associated impact from participating in this programme, will continue to unfold over the coming months and years to come, with benefits evident both to individuals and the wider system.

This programme - in its inception, design and crafting - considers public services as an interconnected system. In this sense, it is a highly relevant and timely developmental approach which addresses practically the pace of change around, and the effectiveness of, cross-boundary collaborative work. Furthermore, in the reframing of leadership and the shift towards working differently, there is a clear acknowledgement of the challenges faced by those who are working on complex issues within and across difficult contexts.

Drawing on our analysis of the participant interviews in particular, we have provided a consolidated view of the overall programme learning and the early indications of the application of this learning in practice (see section 7). Four key strands of learning have emerged, as follows:

- **Understanding the complexity of collaborative working** – participants broadened their theoretical understanding of collaboration, its relevance within a public service context, their appreciation of its practical, cultural and relational challenges, and what it takes to work more effectively within collaborative structures and on cross-system issues.
- **Principles for collective leadership** – participants gained a greater appreciation of wicked issues, how to recognise them and to acknowledge their complexity. This learning was allied to the importance of collective leadership, a process and practice that can unlock and enable a collaborative cross-system approach to address the shared, intractable issues that continue to persist.
- **Building stronger relationships** – the programme provided a supported learning space within which participants could both understand the central importance of developing stronger connections and relationships across the system as well as put key relational skills into practice.
- **Promoting a collaborative culture** – a core strength of the programme is that it provides participants a practical space in which to experience what effective collaboration actually feels like, and there was considerable evidence that this 'situated' understanding and learning was drawn on and applied beyond the programme within participants own contexts.

We have provided (below) a summary of the **successes** of the programme to date as well as **issues for consideration and further discussion** around the design, development, and positioning of the programme, together with several **suggestions for future action** (see section 8). While summarised here, these key findings and insights can be more fully understood by reading the report in full – both to appreciate the wider context as well as the potential opportunities for further exploration within this and similar contexts.

Successes:

- **A learning community.** The experiential nature of the programme has provided participants with practical opportunities to learn from each other, to experiment with

newly learned leadership practices in context, and to share reflections on their learning.

- **Bridging theory with the realities of practice.** The theoretical base has provided a bridge to the reality of the work context, and the actual practice of leadership. This has been received positively by participants, and seen as providing a framework for collaboration in practice.
- **A relational approach.** The use of a relational lens in terms of programme design has enabled participants to develop effective collaborative relationships within the programme community, in the place-based action inquiry work, and within their respective organisational contexts.
- **The place-based approach and potential of learning in live work.** The adopted action inquiry process has enabled participants to develop, transfer and sustain their learning in their own practice. This is where the opportunity for change will be realised in terms of collaborative working, inter-connectedness across the system, and a more collective approach to leadership.
- **A consistent, supportive, and participatory facilitation approach.** The way in which the programme is facilitated supports the learning of the individual participants and further develops the capacity within the system to work collaboratively. The practice of facilitation has been regarded as high quality by participants, and it is identified by the evaluators as being both necessary and helpful when attempting to work differently through a collaborative approach.
- **Co-ownership of approach.** Participants have valued the opportunity to contribute actively to the construction of the programme, and to the shared learning.

Issues for consideration and further discussion:

- **Understanding of structural and cultural tensions.** The ethos of this programme is about working in a more joined up, relational, and collaborative way across the public service system. This raises significant tensions associated with traditional public service governance structures and silos, and prevailing hierarchical leadership cultures. Acknowledging and exploring how a shift in working (as modelled through this programme) impacts on the wider environment, stakeholders, and on the participants themselves is necessary.
- **The legitimacy and nature of the space for learning.** There is a challenge for participants in balancing the tension between the busy-ness of the work context, and being fully present in the slower paced and reflective learning environment of the programme. This tension needs to be widely understood, and it reinforces the key point that collaborative cross-system work is necessarily messy, emergent, and comes with multiple 'owners' and stakeholders.

- **How to get the 'whole system in the room'.** There is a need for wider representation and involvement in this developmental approach from across all parts of the public sector, and beyond, in a particular place.
- **Collective learning.** Of all the skills required for effective collaboration, collective learning is, in our view, the most valuable. In order to support this, the focus of leadership development becomes a collective one where participants learn together. This goes beyond the methods and content covered in 'training' courses and looks very different to traditional 'leader development' approaches.. Further consideration is needed relating to how collective learning is described and achieved, this transparency will build (much needed) understanding about *how* and *where* the learning and development happens.
- **Practical and programme design suggestions.** There is a need to provide clearer information up front about the nature of the programme, and expectations of participants. This would enable even more active participation in the programme, as well as supporting participants to manage the learning alongside the demands and expectations of the day job. There is a creative opportunity to explore the blend of virtual and in-person approaches.

Suggestions for future action

In making these suggestions for future action we have taken account of the successes and considerations outlined above, and our intention is that these should be seen as ways of supporting and further developing the programme:

1. Continue the delivery of a programme focused on fostering collaborative effectiveness.
2. Seek wider system involvement.
3. Communicate more plainly the purpose and benefits of the programme for participants and wider stakeholders.
4. Ensure programme recruitment is appropriately targeted.
5. Continue to be flexible and creative in the design and facilitation of the approach.
6. Develop a more flexible approach to the 'live work'.
7. Sustain the learning community beyond the formal programme.
8. Focus on the collective learning process in order to aid understanding of this practice-based programme.

1. Introduction

1.1 As part of its Responsive Research Fund, the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) has provided funding to support the evaluation of the Police Scotland and Local Government Collaborative Leadership pilot programme. The aim of the pilot programme is to provide an understanding of the theory and practice of collective leadership in relation to addressing complex and wicked issues in the real work context. The learning and development activities on the programme are designed to better equip participants in their work, with an emphasis on building capacity for leadership that focuses on the whole public service system, as well as directing attention towards the behavioural, inquiring, and relational aspects of working together across organisational boundaries.

1.2 The evaluation objectives were:

- To critically examine the programme.
- To capture and analyse information about the activities, processes, characteristics, and outcomes of the programme.
- To offer insights and suggestions for future action with the purpose of improving programme effectiveness, and/or to inform and shape future programme decisions.

1.3 The background context and rationale for the programme in terms of its design, delivery, and intended outcomes are outlined in section 2. An explanation of the evaluation methodology and the stages of the evaluation process is outlined in section 3. Sections 4, 5, and 6 (together with the Appendix) set out the detail from each of the evaluation stages: literature review, facilitator perspective, and participant experience, respectively. A further analysis of the learning and application of the learning from the programme is provided in section 7. The conclusions about the experience, effectiveness, and impact of the programme are set out in section 8 together with suggestions for future action.

A glossary of terms is provided at the end of the report.

2. Collaborative Leadership Pilots – background and programme rationale ¹

The political and strategic context has inspired the ambition to support and enhance collaboration and partnership working amongst many who lead and work within public services. In September 2020 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) published a report regarding leadership training in respect of Police Scotland. This report made seventeen recommendations, with the following two being of particular note;

- *Police Scotland should ensure senior police officers and support staff are provided with Leadership Training beyond technical training for specific roles, as a matter of urgency.*
- *Police Scotland should work collaboratively to develop a strategy which supports the delivery of joint training with other key partners across the public sector, including local government and health.*

2.2 In relation to 2.1, Police Scotland, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (SOLACE Scotland) worked together to explore a leadership development programme underpinned with a collaborative focus. This scoping exercise involved inputs from a number of stakeholders including academics via the Scottish Institute of Policing Research (SIPR) who have funded this evaluation, the Improvement Service (IS), and Collective Leadership for Scotland (CLS). Along with supporting the development of the pilot proposals, CLS provided the facilitation resource for the programme supported by Police Scotland. The collaborative leadership pilots were intended to inspire personal development and more effective local partnership and collaborative working. The structure, processes and approach taken for the programme were crafted by the CLS team and further developed through collaboration with the named partners.

2.3 Collective Leadership for Scotland (CLS) is a collaborative network of public service professionals working together to address complex and systemic issues. This initiative evolved from the Scottish Leaders' Forum, and is focused on taking forward the recommendations set out in the Christie Commission report (2011), particularly those related to collaboration and participation. CLS is made up of a small, skilled practice development team within the Scottish Government, dedicated to supporting leadership and collaboration across the public service system in relation to complex issues. Learning and development activities are designed and delivered to better equip public service professionals in their work; this includes facilitation support for

¹ Information in this section has been sourced from a police and partners briefing document and original evaluation tender.

teams in their places of work (Collective Leadership 2018², 2019³). The CLS team, working with Police Scotland, took on the role of hosts and facilitators for the programme.

2.4 The pilots were made up of three different locality areas which were drawn together for the final stage of the programme in January 2022. The pilot areas were identified as, North - Aberdeenshire Council, West - West Dunbartonshire Council and East - West Lothian Council. Each group consisted of 12-14 members. The three cohorts will be referred to as North, West and East from this point onwards.

2.5 The learning objectives and purpose of the pilots were designed to effectively strengthen participants' collective leadership skills and offer personal and self-development. The structure and content draws from the theory and practice of collective leadership, systems thinking and wicked issues. This was further supported and complemented with an experiential and practical exploration of cross-boundary collaborative working in context, where the learning was applied to a relevant and live shared issue. Important to note is, 1) the use of Action Inquiry⁴ to underpin the work, 2) the style of facilitation to support the process, and 3) the focus towards ongoing learning within the groups, facilitation, and programme overall.

2.6 The four phases of the programme took place between March 2021 and January 2022 and were defined as follows,

- Phase 1 – Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Collective Leadership
- Phase 2 – Hosted Group Co-Inquiry of Complex/Wicked Issues
- Phase 3 – Reflection and Review of Collective Leadership Experience
- Phase 4 – Collective Leadership in Practice.

This evaluation specifically focuses on capturing participant reflections from phase 1 and phase 2, where much of their programme experience and learning takes place. Phases 3 and 4 took place during the latter stage of the evaluation exercise.

² Collective leadership, 2018. *How can we build capacity for collective leadership in Scotland?* [Online]. [Accessed on 22 June 2018]. Available from: <https://collectiveleadershipscotland.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/how-can-we-build-capacity-for-collective-leadership-in-scotland.pdf>

³ Collective leadership, 2019. *Collective leadership for Scotland: Year 1 report – Building the foundations* [Online]. [Accessed 6 January 2019]. Available from: <https://collectiveleadershipscotland.com/wpcontent/uploads/2019/03/collective-leadership-first-annual-report-march-2019.pdf>

⁴ Action Inquiry is a process of transformational learning that individuals, teams and organisations can undertake if they wish to become capable of realising future visions, to understand the risks and opportunities facing them, to increase capacity to respond, perform and improve effectiveness and innovation (see Torbert 2004).

3. Evaluation methodology

3.1 The purpose of the programme is to support the development of meaningful collaborative working across public services, in response both to the current context and future challenges facing the public sector in Scotland. In essence, this is about working better together, across boundaries, in collaboration. It requires people to develop a different set of skills, behaviours, and ways of working. In turn, therefore, this means a focus on the collaborative 'group process' and a reframing of leadership, and what both mean within collaborative contexts.

3.2 The experiential style of the pilot programme influenced our qualitative evaluation methodology, and a narrative approach was applied. The intention is to best capture the experience and relational learning of the programme.

3.3 There were three key stages to the evaluation:

Stage one involved a rapid review of academic literature relevant to the programme. This literature review is intended to offer additional context to the programme and the nature of the collaboration challenge within a public context (see section 0).

Stage two consisted of semi-structured interviews with the five facilitators involved in the programme delivery. The intention here was to capture an understanding of the programme to date, the issues, challenges and opportunities from their perspective as well as to inform stage three of the evaluation process (see section 0).

Stage three involved carrying out a selection of narrative interviews⁵ of programme participants who (depending on their cohort) were at various points in the programme. When taking a narrative approach to an interview, interviewer interventions are limited in order to provoke storytelling. This lack of intervention and promotion of 'space' can lead to discoveries about the participants' values, ideologies and perceptions on elements often not entirely realised through other more structured interview techniques. For example on: collective leadership, the programme itself, the process, core activities, learning and outcomes.

Taking a narrative approach to the interviews provided the opportunity for a selection of (volunteering) cohort members to talk about their experience of the programme in an informal and unstructured way. This style of interview signifies a shift in the way 'research roles' are often thought about: from researcher/participant into narrator/listener. In practice, this took the form of participants being asked one main focused question which was '**can you tell me about your experience of the programme?**' This then elicited a narrative of the participant's involvement in a collection of experiences and events of relevance depending on what they wanted to speak about.

⁵ See Holstein and Miller (2020), Orr and Bennett (2017) and Ospina and Dodge (2005) for further background and exploration into narrative inquiry as a method within a public context.

The interviews lasted forty to sixty minutes and were digitally recorded. All interviews were professionally transcribed. The data were thematically analysed by defining, categorising, exploring and 'experience' mapping the content.⁶ The main steps in this process consisted of: 1) transcription and familiarisation, 2) generation of initial codes, 3) code refinement and search for themes, and 4) identifying key themes. The process for organising and analysing the data was aided by the utilisation of software programmes (Excel, MindManager). The aim was to build an emerging set of constructs and themes that describe participants' understanding and experience of the programme. Essentially coded themes were clustered to produce a smaller number of broad categories which, after further organisation, were developed into the six key areas of:

- reason for joining,
- (initial) reactions,
- content and facilitation,
- self-development,
- application, and
- future programmes.

The analysis and discussion draw from the six identified areas.

Lastly, some weeks after their interview took place, participants were invited to review what they had said and how this would be represented. Our experience has been that the participants valued this approach and appreciated having the opportunity to feedback or to ask questions.

⁶ See Braun and Clarke (2020)

4. Stage one - Rapid Literature Review

This section presents a review of the current policy context and scholarship concerned with collective approaches to leadership and collaboration within a public context. The literature studied was predominately drawn from the public administration and leadership fields, with the aim to provide background and context in terms of understanding the contemporary challenges faced by public services and the relationship with leadership development.

4.2 National policy context

The mid 2000s in Scotland saw a shift towards greater collaboration and for services to be designed and built in partnership. This message was clearly reported in the Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services in Scotland – also known as the Christie Commission (2011) – and further supported by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act in 2015, with the need for public service reform to harness the full range of skills and capacities of public services, citizens, third sector organisations, businesses and citizens. This emphasis on the need for much greater collaboration across public services is firmly focused on the need to support COVID recovery and to achieve better societal outcomes.

The development of the National Performance Framework (Scottish Government 2018), highlights the rich array of cross-cutting and interrelated themes that come together to express an aspirational vision for Scotland. This framework promotes an organising structure which supports and enables collaboration through the adoption of broad strategic intentions (Mackie 2018). The momentum for increased collaboration responds to the challenge and uncertainty that resides when leading, managing and delivering public services. As a response to the combination of complexity of issues, political and financial uncertainty and the change agenda and ambition, working and leading together in order to achieve objectives across organisational, sectoral and even national boundaries have become routine.

While academics and practitioners support cross-stakeholder collaboration as a way to respond to complex challenges across a range of settings and contexts, working with others and creating the right conditions for effective collaboration is challenging and places considerable stress on public workers as they navigate the complexities of these arrangements. There is growing conceptual, empirical and practice based work focused on how to improve the effectiveness of collaborative work (see for example, Docherty 2021, 2022 and Sharp 2018, 2020). In particular this work, including programmes similar to the Collaborative Leadership Pilots, concentrates on how to support a shift in working practices in order to promote a more collective, relational and shared approach to leadership when working across boundaries to address systemic issues.

4.3 Wicked and complex issues

The concepts of wicked and tame problems have attracted increasing attention in research and practice over recent decades. Tame problems are defined as challenges

that involve few, similar stakeholders with a shared context. The problem itself, although complicated, is clearly defined, likely to have occurred before and considered solvable with a known solution. Wicked problems, in contrast, are those that necessitate an alternative approach and way of thinking; they are complex with no obvious connection between cause and effect (Brookes and Grint 2010). In these situations, problems are deep-rooted, intractable and cannot be addressed by a single leader or organisation (Kellis and Ran 2013). Furthermore, they are considered unsolvable by many and to break them down and attempt to deal with each discrete issue worsens the situation (Ackoff 1974).

Clearly tackling wicked problems is difficult, not only because of their complexity, but also because of the bureaucratic nature of public service organisations (Hood and Lodge 2004). The hierarchical structures, organisational silos, process rigidity and compliance monitoring do not respond well to complex issues and problems, limiting the space and time to think and work differently. In part New Public Management (NPM), introduced from the 1980s, was a response to the complicated mechanisms of public service management (Hood 1991; Pollitt 1990); however, NPM practices are largely not suited to dealing with wicked problems. NPM systems and controls focus on results and performance outcomes and contractualism, and favour a rational and technical approach to finding solutions; this limits the scope for creativity, and stifles alternative means and opportunities to reach positive outcomes (see Head and Alford (2015) for a detailed discussion).

4.4 Systems change

Many scholars and practitioners, frustrated and dissatisfied with responding to complex social problems from a rational and technical approach, have moved towards the challenge of addressing wicked issues from a systems perspective, where problems cannot be understood or tackled in isolation from their context, and a more holistic approach to cause and impact is preferred (Rutter et al. 2017; Braithwaite et al. 2018). Adopting a systems approach requires thought in relation to the contributions, processes and outputs from all relevant organisations across any given system, including citizens, all of which are considered to impact on the outcome (Bianchi et al 2017). Systems thinking is found to be helpful in mapping the complexity of problems, connecting issues and people, and transferring knowledge across boundaries and organisations (Carey et al. 2018). Often discussed together with systems thinking, systems change refers to a deliberate process to alter a situation by re-designing its current form; this can include altering policies, services and the fabric of whole communities (Foster-Fishman et al. 2007).

Conventional top-down, planned responses are rendered ineffective in dealing with complex problems, where efforts to change and transform public services clash with the different priorities, values and aspirations of a diverse range of stakeholders, failing to consider the wider system, relationships and connectivity (Hatch and Cunliffe 2018). While planned interventions often focus on the mitigation of restrictive environmental pressures, emergent change efforts focus on identifying the enabling forces and enhancing them (Livne-Tarandach and Bartunek 2009). Emergent change theories emphasise the processual nature of organising and highlight how people's

relationships and interconnections lead to often unpredictable outcomes (Hosking and Morley 1991). Scholars like Bamford and Forrester (2003), and Carnevale (2018) explore emergent versus planned responses to dealing with complex problems from an organisational perspective, suggesting that there is a requirement for organisations to consider aspects of hierarchy and control, attend to collaborative processes, and learn how to acknowledge the small changes which may lead to big impacts.

4.5 Colliding perspectives

How problems are framed, viewed and defined become increasingly problematic as they increase in their 'wickedness'; moreover, disagreements relating to their nature and significance are common, particularly in public service contexts, where issues persist relating to, for example, poverty, crime, immigration, welfare and health, with the root causes and best approach to addressing them remaining unclear and dependent on worldviews and knowledge (Senge et al. 1999). Responses to disagreements between stakeholders, where conflicting experiences, assumptions and perceptions exist, have been a focus for scholars and debated as being a fundamental cause of wicked problems. Paying attention to these tensions by improving relationships and dialogue and through bridging difference is a potential way forward, with participatory and dialogic approaches used in different settings and contexts (Head 2008).

An alternative view taken by Petticrew and Roberts (2008) considers that the fundamental problem is that not enough is known. There are knowledge and data gaps which must be improved in order for decisions to be made and evidence based policy making is not sufficient. Practical solutions such as increased cross boundary collaboration (Bryson et al. 2006) have become widespread and accepted responses to grappling with intractable issues (Weber and Khademian 2008). Wicked problems can be associated with the multiple interests and values of stakeholders, organisational complexity relating to leadership, structures, collaboration and governance, and unknown or missing information. These problems are somewhat defined by the lack of an answer and the inability of a single leader or organisation to know how to deal with them; this signifies the importance of a system focused, collaborative process, where the collective becomes necessary for addressing them (Crosby et al. 2017; Gray and Purdy 2018).

4.6 The collaboration challenge

The challenge associated with creating the right conditions for collaborative groups to succeed is discussed by many authors (e.g. Currie et al. 2011). These scholars agree that care is needed when designing processes and that attention must be given to structural dilemmas, power imbalances, performance management regimes and relational sensitivities. Oborn et al. (2013) discuss the difficulties and tensions that exist between stakeholder groups, particularly when dealing with complex issues. These scholars argue that relational processes are complicated by the unique histories, structures and cultures of the various organisations and individuals involved. Consequently, in order to try and establish a solid basis to start from there needs to be a desire to meaningfully commit to this way of working and to focus on

how to align working practices, processes, assumptions and goals (Selden et al. 2006).

From a policing perspective, Zaghloul and Partridge (2022) acknowledge the lack of empirical research linked to understanding the effectiveness, challenge and impact of such collaborative arrangements. Their research supports a view of inter-organisational collaborative success closely linked to senior leadership style and commitment, leadership within the collaboration itself and strategy in terms of the approach or model applied. Moreover, the challenge (and importance) of collaboration across policing and public health cultures is discussed by Martin and Graham (2022) within the context of reducing violence and anti-social behaviour. This work, while presenting clear benefits from the highlighted case studies, illustrates the sheer effort required from partners, the tensions associated with variations in working practices and the longer-term resource and structural implications linked to collaboration initiatives.

4.7 Collective approach to leadership and collaboration

Collective leadership theories are closely linked to the navigation of complexity and uncertainty in pursuit of a shared purpose. They present a different way to think about leadership: a move away from a traditional, hierarchical, leader-centric model towards a collective, whole systems approach to relationships and to problem solving. The term 'collective' in collective leadership implies viewing leadership as a phenomenon that includes all members of a group instead of a focus on one leader. Focusing in on the collective components of leadership is a relatively new turn within leadership studies, the terminology is fluid and there are innumerable complementary theories and concepts which are available but lack clarity in their distinctiveness and contextual framing.

Ospina (2017) argues that collective leadership theories build from the relational nature of leadership by moving beyond leadership as a characteristic of particular individuals to one where leadership is generated from a co-created process, in pursuit of the conditions that support the formation of leaderful, relational and learning organisations (Raelin 2005 2016). Thus leadership is viewed as both process and outcome as capacity is generated in the collaborative spaces where members work and produce results together (Drath 2001; Drath et al. 2008). Relational and collective leadership theories do not propose to replace or criticise other leadership studies or debates, for example they do not dispute the importance and significance of the formal leader, but they do offer the researcher and practitioner a way to consider how leadership may unfold and emerge within collaborations and the wider system.

4.8 The importance of facilitation

The academic literature emphasises the role of facilitation or identification of an enabler who can support a collaboration by promoting reflection, assigning time to evaluate learning and progress, detecting common ground and raising or highlighting the uncomfortable questions (Crosby et al. 2017; Forester and McKibbin 2020). This role requires the ability to build trust quickly, and the expertise to bring together the group in order to activate and support effective collaboration. Moreover, consideration

must be given towards supporting individuals in order for them to thrive in a collaborative context. O'Leary and Vij (2012) suggest that individuals, if taught particular skills, are likely to learn from others; furthermore, the transactions between them will generate reciprocity, trust and cooperation, resulting in the development of social and knowledge capital and shared meaning, cultivating a culture of collaboration.

Fulop (2012) comments that when it comes to leadership development, too much attention is directed towards 'fixing' individual competencies and skills, detracting from gaining knowledge about the different priorities, systems and structures that must be navigated when collaborating with others. Furthermore, studying leadership development from a process perspective and drawing from collective and relational theory and practices could support a more effective, meaningful and balanced approach to collaboration, acclimatising participants for a more collective form of leadership (Raelin 2019).

Support with building stronger relationships, gaining trust and learning from different social and political contexts will help to provide groups with a clear sense of identity, a new context and a different way to work towards shared goals (Ospina 2017; Orr and Bennett 2017). This is described by Head (2008) as a shift from functional collaboration, where individuals behave in a way that benefits each of them differently, to effective collaboration, where a group of people behave in a way that not only produces individual benefits, but also leads to a degree of success belonging to the group and can only be achieved by group members working and leading together.

5. Stage two - Facilitator Interviews

5.1 We interviewed the five programme facilitators between August and November 2021. The interviews were designed to capture the facilitators' views, reflections, and insights about the need for and purpose of the programme, as well as their lived experience of the facilitator role.

5.2 Facilitators were invited to share reflections on their observations so far on the learning of the participants, as well as the impact on their practice. However, these observations have been incorporated as part of the discussion about the context for and nature of the programme rather than as participant outcomes (which are covered extensively as a first person inquiry with the participants into their learning from and impact of the programme in section 6).

5.3 Following a thematic analysis of the five interviews, an interpretation and discussion based on the facilitators' reflections is presented in a commentary style and organised under four key themes (direct quotes from facilitators are included in italicised text to further illustrate particular points). This commentary contributes to understanding the need and intentions for the pilot programme. It therefore provides additional context for considering the effectiveness of the programme through the experiences and outcomes identified by participants (in section 6).

5.4 The need for and importance of a programme of this nature

All of the facilitators talked about how widely accepted it is that, ten years on from the Christie Report, there is a need to move beyond talking about working collaboratively across Scottish society to actually doing it more effectively in practice. A particular driver for the timing and positioning of this programme was explained as the development of a public health approach to policing.⁷ This development exemplifies both the need for, and nature of, enacting cross-sector collaborative working and a collective approach to leadership across the system, both in local places between local partners as well as nationally in terms of policy and practice.

There are lots of leadership offers which are around developing individuals as leaders... I think the shift of this is about how do we develop capacity for change in a system, through people who are taking a leadership role, and who are doing that individually and collectively. So it's not just about developing an individual leader... It's about how do people really tackle extremely difficult conflicts, and complex issues... There's something beyond individual leadership development, something about the capacity of the system, and leadership within the system to enact positive change. (Collaborative leadership pilot facilitator)

In the current context, the practice of leadership is necessarily shaped by emergence, tolerance of uncertainty, comfort with 'not knowing', and humility. This was already the

⁷ See [news item](#) from Police Scotland website (July 2021) about launch of collaborative approach to public health policing between Police Scotland and Public Health Scotland.

case, and it has been further emphasised and exacerbated over the past two years through the response to and the need for recovery and renewal from Covid-19. Therefore, and as the facilitators identified, the need is for a programme focusing essentially on the development of collective capability and capacity for the collaborative work required between partners across the system. This programme is said to meet the need to go beyond the talk as it invites participants to consider and experiment with different practices of leadership, aiming to foster the behaviours and processes required to work better together to address systemic issues.

It is clear how important it is for both facilitators and participants to be engaged in an ongoing and dynamic conversation about the programme approach and outcomes with key stakeholders across the system. The very nature of such a programme represents a challenge to the status quo in terms of its collaborative approach, reflective pace, and collective ethos. This needs to be acknowledged, in particular as it impacts the understanding of stakeholders (including participants) about what successful outcomes and the impact of the programme might actually look and feel like. A key challenge inherent in the programme is that participants are encouraged to develop perspectives about cross-system collaborative working and approaches to leadership in practice which may actually run counter to the prevailing cultures. The strategic positioning of this programme is therefore an important consideration in its effectiveness.

The programme also undoubtedly provides a development experience for individuals in leadership roles, and by enabling them to come together as a community of leaders, supports the development of their capacity and practical capabilities to lead and work relationally.

5.5 The purpose of the programme

At its heart, the programme is described as connecting participants with the real work requiring collaboration and a collective leadership approach. Facilitators support the participants to see and to think about work across the public service system differently provided via a lightly structured learning and development experience, in real time.

This approach is considered to provide opportunities for experiencing a different way of working, for interacting and leading within the context of the programme, and simultaneously taking this learning back into the workplace context.

It's looking at leadership in practice, and it's really about leadership in practice... It's to give people some new frameworks of ways of thinking about their work. But it's also to help leaders to think about themselves, and how they take action, and how they take action collectively. (Collaborative leadership pilot facilitator)

As noted in 5.4 above, the focus is clearly on building collective leadership capability and capacity. It achieves this through taking an action inquiry approach to the real work between partners within a place. In addition, participants are encouraged to take

their learning about approaching the work differently into their respective work context alongside the programme, and in turn to bring their reflections back into the programme community in support of their own and other's learning.

The facilitators acknowledge that the scale and nature of the challenges facing people working within public services is huge and complex, and yet this kind of learning approach demonstrates pragmatically that small changes in our own perspectives and practice have the potential to make a big difference. To quote Myron Rogers, one of the systems thinkers / practitioners whose work has influenced the programme content, "start somewhere, follow it everywhere".⁸ Rather than just talking about the different ways of working and enacting leadership, the programme supports people individually and collectively to put changes into practice as an integral part of their learning.

The creation of a community of leaders as part of the programme provides both a 'safe space' for learning and reflection, as well as a place for experimenting live with the ideas and approaches covered. The programme is in effect a living inquiry at first, second, and third person levels. The live experience of dealing with the response to Covid-19 over the past two years has shone a light on the increasing need for a relational and inter-connected approach to shaping and delivering public services. In addition, as one of the facilitators highlighted, there has been growing recognition of the need to consider in the broadest sense the well-being of all leaders, along with all workers, in public services. The relational and collaborative approach fostered in this programme enables this heightened focus on supporting well-being.

When considering the purpose of the programme, and in the spirit of collective leadership, the facilitators highlight the potential for wider systemic impact and influence beyond the development experience of the programme itself. Through their active participation in the programme, participants come to recognise that they have influence, impact, and indeed responsibility, in respect of how leadership is enacted across the system, and how leadership capacity is nurtured and developed.

5.6 Design and application of developmental approaches

The theory input to the programme is positioned pragmatically to provide a space in which participants are encouraged and challenged to see the work of the public sector differently, and to think differently about the nature of leadership and their responses to the work. This is not an academic-led programme where the theoretical content is learned in the abstract. Rather the theoretical ideas and frameworks are used to support a dynamic exploration of the live societal and leadership issues facing all different parts of the public sector. In this way, the exploration of theory provides a dynamic way of experimenting with inquiry in practice, and developing personal and collective capacity for curiosity, challenge, and open-mindedness.

In essence, programme participants are encouraged and supported by the facilitation

⁸ One of the six Myron's Maxims as outlined in this [blog](#) on the 'Heart of the Art' website (2016).

team to co-create a space between them in which they can experiment both with their understanding of the relevant theory, and with leadership practices which relate to working collaboratively and leading collectively. In this developmental space, participants hear examples of different practice from the lived experience of both external contributors as well as colleagues within the programme cohort. In this regard, the group's process – in plenary and within each of the smaller action inquiry groups – is at the heart of the learning experience.

I've noticed people recognising the power they have as an individual within the system, and how significant they can be by changing their reaction, their response, their behaviour to something, or how they host or complete something, just doing that differently. (Collaborative leadership pilot facilitator)

Participants are encouraged to take their learning back into their own work context as they go along, thereby enabling their own and other's development within their local teams and partnerships. Facilitators shared numerous examples of participants taking both their learning from the theory, as well as the leadership practices, into their own work context alongside their participation in the programme. For example, experimenting with and modifying their approaches to managing and interacting with their own teams. The creation of a dynamic learning community on the programme is further enhanced by encouraging individuals to share their live reflections and further learning back with their fellow participants; in effect, an action learning cycle.

A fundamental cornerstone of the design of the programme is the use of small action inquiry groups, organised around a local place-based issue and providing the opportunity for a collective living inquiry into how to work collaboratively and lead collectively in the real work. The use of such a place-based approach builds on the wider work of Collective Leadership for Scotland, as well as connecting with other similarly focused local initiatives. This is about bringing people together in a particular geographical place, both from across a single organisation as well as between partner organisations, to work and learn alongside each other in the real work.

Throughout the programme, participants are encouraged to engage regularly and consistently in reflexive practice. The programme is said to include plenty of space for reflection, both individually and collectively, within the core design. The core practices of inquiry and curiosity, in particular, are explored and experimented with on the programme. These are seen as fundamental to building the capacity and capability for collective leadership.

It is important to acknowledge the particular challenge facing both participants and facilitators of working and learning largely in a virtual space throughout the pilot programme (in the context of Covid-19). It is clear that the facilitators have put much thought into working creatively with and mitigating the impact of this pandemic reality. For example, there has been extensive use of approaches such as 'dialogue walks' which enable participants to experience and develop a more intensive personal connection with one other person on the programme, and to develop the practice of listening deeply to each other without interruption.

A further practical and conceptual challenge is the tension felt between the frenetic pace and busy-ness of the actual work context and the slower more reflective space of the programme environment. One facilitator commented that participants can come *"screeching into a session having already had so many different Teams meetings that morning..."* The use of approaches such as meditation practice and guided journaling, together with pauses for stillness and reflective practice, enable people to slow down, inquire more and to be more curious. There is compelling evidence from facilitators (and participants) who have noticed the differences in actual practice as a result. As one facilitator observed: *"slowing down and being reflective... feels so different to the prevailing culture"*.

5.7 Facilitation skills and challenges

In effect, it is our view that the facilitator team for this programme are modelling an approach to collaborative working and leadership both in how they design, oversee, and facilitate the programme. This is not an 'expert-led' programme, although the facilitators do need to have expertise and in-depth experience in facilitating complex and dynamic group processes.

In addition, it is clearly critical for the facilitators to have an in-depth and current understanding of the policy and live practice context. This is not a 'teaching' role, but the facilitators do need to have a 'finger on the pulse' of the purpose of public service work, system change, and the context for collective leadership. The way in which they bring in theory and share leadership practices with the participants is in support of enabling the real work of the group, not as a demonstration of 'expert power'.

In this respect, the facilitators need to be comfortable with not being in the role of expert, while being able to share their expertise in the practices of collective leadership, relational group process, and facilitation with a light touch. In parallel with the need for leaders to be comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity in the complex adaptive context of the public sector, so the facilitators need to be comfortable with a developmental approach which is unfolding and flexible to the changing needs of the group and the live collaborative work of each action inquiry group.

There's a sense of helping people feel a bit empowered to do something... Though there's a bit about how do you hold the space so that people feel challenged enough too? And that's not about you, it is what you're doing in service of the group. It's not about coming up with something clever, but actually being able to see the connections between things, and being able sometimes to make sense of that in the wider system. (Collaborative leadership pilot facilitator)

A core capability for the facilitator is being able to hold space with sensitivity, flexibility, and curiosity. This is not about controlling or directing the learning. It is about noticing, and offering feedback to the group about their interactions in support of their ongoing learning, and being open to this in return from participants and fellow facilitators. The intensive and ongoing nature of the work between facilitators and participants, particularly through the action inquiry groups, means that facilitators are

able to notice and observe at first hand the tangible developmental impact of the programme learning in participants' practice. Lastly there is a creative tension for the facilitators in being able to bring themselves fully to the work, and being able to hold the space dynamically and safely alongside the participants and fellow facilitators. Again, there is a parallel with the reality of working collaboratively across the system. This is at times messy and hard work.

6. Stage three - Participant Interviews

6.1 All programme participants were invited to take part in a narrative interview. We interviewed nine programme participants (see Table 1 below) between November 2021 and January 2022. The interviews were designed to capture participants' thoughts, insights, and reflections about their experience of the programme so far. Those interviewed volunteered to take part and each interview lasted approximately 50 minutes.

Table 1 – Overview of participants

Participant	Cohort	Role	Organisation
1	North	Partnership Manager	Health and Social Care Partnership
2	East	Divisional Coordination	Police Scotland
3	East	Deputy Local Area Commander	Police Scotland
4	North	Area Commander	Police Scotland
5	North	Detective Inspector	Police Scotland
6	West	Communities and Partnership Manager	Local Authority
7	West	Service Manager - justice	Local Authority
8	North	Head of Children's Services	Local Authority
9	North	Chief Inspector	Police Scotland

6.2 The main interview question was '*can you tell me about your experience of the programme?*' This question was intended to facilitate a narrative and encourage the participants to begin where they wished. Much of the participant reflections focused on phases 1 and 2 of the programme (see 2.6).

We have provided a visual summary of each participant's experience of the programme (see Appendix). Each *experience map* is unique to each participant; they are centred around six key themes interpreted from the interviews. Further analysis and discussion continues in 6.3, organised under these six key themes.

6.3 Interview discussion and analysis

Participants were invited to talk about their overall experience of the programme, and as shown in each of the 'experience maps', six key themes were identified. This section takes a closer look at each of the themes and presents further analysis supported by participant accounts.

1. Reasons for joining,
2. Programme reactions,
3. Content and facilitation,
4. Self-development,
5. Application, and
6. Future programmes.

6.3.1 Theme 1 - Reasons for joining

Participants talked about what drew them to take part in the programme. Many responses referred to three key reasons outlined below:

1. Recognition around the need for, complexity and challenge of collaborating across boundaries
2. Search for 'naming' the expertise and skills that they identified with having
3. Interest in learning more about how to collaborate more effectively and apply the learning

Participant quotes are provided below to illustrate each of these three key reasons, in turn:

[1] I think it's probably one of the hardest things ever, to work across different sectors and services and to keep the focus of what we're doing in sight. And I think what often happens, in my experience, is people come to the table with an agenda...and a bit of, well we know best because this is our area of expertise. This results in people coming to the table with solutions rather than being open to listen and understand the root causes and it takes a long time to work through some of that and get people to leave preconceived ideas at the door. (P8)

[2] I was making decisions before the national decision-making model came but that doesn't mean that it wasn't useful, the same way that I was doing partnerships before this stuff came in, but if it gives me structure round what I'm doing – or that was my hope anyway – so that I have a proper format and understanding of why I'm doing it. (P9)

[2] I'm fortunate enough to have been involved in very big projects and having worked collaboratively and learned to work collaboratively that I forget what skills are involved in that, because it's a natural thing. (P6)

[2] I've got that understanding of how important it is. But I knew that there was always more to learn out of it. (P5)

[3] It was about, is there stuff that I could learn from this particular group and then perhaps replicate that in a broader sense across the division. (P2)

[3] ...we are never going to be able to solve that issue on our own. We've tried numerous times and we've made some minor improvements, but the answers lie with others, ultimately, we have managed to put a sticking plaster on that wicked issue as best we can but it's not a particularly good fit. It's creating real challenges for us, there will be people who can assist us with that. And I think looking into it from that perspective was helpful for me and I also think it broke down maybe some of the partnership barriers in terms of anyone who was approaching it from a protectionist perspective of thinking. (P3)

The 'collaborative' challenges were discussed and understood by participants in different ways as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – the challenge of collaboration (participant reflections)

The challenge of collaboration:
Different organisational cultures (including leadership)
Assumptions made around organisational accountability and responsibility for issues
Organisational response to risk and failure (linking in with culture)
Trouble aligning/consolidating processes and procedures
Blurred boundaries in terms of complex issues
Individual accountability and responsibility pressures.
Lack of understanding across roles and organisations

Other reasons given for being involved in the programme included;

- Current role concerned with partnership working and collaboration.
- Interested in different conceptions of leadership beyond command and control.
- Wish to explore systems, cross organisational and agency focused and 'big picture' issues.
- Belief that collaborations and partnerships are not delivering as well as they should.
- Useful networking and to make system wide connections.
- Learn about theories of leadership.
- Personal development.
- Linked to promotions ambitions (specific to police participants)

6.3.2 Theme 2 - Reactions

The programme was described by all participants as different to others they had been on in the past:

Quite often you'll go along to a course for a new idea, and you'll do a bit of group work and you kind of finish that, and then you go back to your day job...but this has been different. (P1)

This difference was explained in terms of the:

- 1) Participatory and experiential nature rather than wholly 'taught' and transactional where knowledge tends to be imparted and received.
- 2) Close links with 'live' and relevant collaborative work issues underpinned by theoretical principles,
- 3) Cross-system yet place-based mix of participants,
- 4) Focus on understanding and capturing the personal learning impact from inception and throughout.

Participants were invited to talk about their overall experience of the programme. The following accounts provide a sense of their thoughts focused on the aforementioned four points.

6.3.2.1 *Participatory and experiential*

All participants referred to the nature and style of the programme delivery:

It's not been driven by them, it's more driven by us, with them just kind of questioning...asking questions around what? And why? (P4)

I think that it's felt different because the whole experience has been very relational, I felt that I wasn't there to receive training or be trained but instead, I was a valued contributor to the journey that we were all on to learn. And that felt very different from some of those more transactional experiences whereby we are asked to think about what we have heard and then essentially go away and get on with it. This felt much more reflective and honest and whilst there were facilitators, they were very skilled at facilitating us to shape our own journey as equals. (P8)

[The facilitators are] at pains not to direct us more than is absolutely necessary so the answers to the questions or the questions that we develop are our own. (P3)

6.3.2.2 *Quality of materials and tools, linked to relevant issues and collaborative practice*

Participants discussed different aspects of the programme content with several explaining that they now felt like they had a 'framework' with which to approach collaborative work:

I really liked the five components of collective leadership, I liked the living systems, the explanation of how systems work and how to get the best out of them...Also, for me, was the self-management side of stuff that they gave you as well. The journaling is something I still use now, I hadn't thought of doing it before. (P9)

There's a few things, definitely the art of powerful questions. We did have that article as one of the group exercises and it wasn't actually mine, I was given a different one. But

then I was so interested in it I went away and read the full article and shared it with my team. (P1)

This course has given me some tools to take that step back and reflect on what we need to do. (P4)

I think the theory was very good. I think the elements of practice and scope and the continuation of structure to bring them in was really good. So, reflecting, journaling, being purposeful, thinking about listening to people. Those personal skills were really good. (P6)

I enjoyed the dialogue walk, getting to know someone from another organisation completely different from my own. And the theory behind it all, it reminded me of my university days when I had to read papers, I was like, I can't remember the last time I had to read a paper and actually understand it and think, what's the meaning? (P5)

6.3.2.3 Close links with current work and own practice

Many participants commented on the impact in terms of their own work and leadership practice, linking in with the programme's focus on offering tangible benefits:

I've actually managed to use this programme as a means of addressing it [wicked issue] and getting partners around the table and utilising the course for an actual, practical benefit. So, for me, that has been really positive. (P4)

It's been relevant for my job and the projects that I've been doing. So, I'm really grateful for the insight coming into it. (P6)

This course has had a particular focus around making you stop and think about how you behave as a leader and the way you go about your job on a daily basis. (P8)

6.3.2.4 Place-based mix of participants

All participants supported and welcomed the diverse range of roles, organisations and professional backgrounds represented within each locality and across the programme more widely. The benefit of sharing perspectives and experiences, establishing new relationships and connections or building on existing links was discussed by all as a particular highlight and real strength of this programme.

I've never been on a course where we're all from really different backgrounds and our day jobs are so different but we're all completely on the same page with what we want to get out of it, the problems that we face in the workplace, the barriers... So, actually, hearing from others about similar issues, in terms of my own personal learning and development, have been really valuable. (P1)

Being in the cohort of the leadership programme was just fabulous. We got to know each other so well and the trust got built up really quickly. The programme saved us months of establishing a relationship. (P7)

6.3.2.5 New knowledge

Personal learning was a common point of discussion in the interviews with all participants taking something of value away from the programme to inform their own learning:

We were encouraged to be active and take action around what we were learning...Hearing from others about similar issues, for me, in terms of my own personal learning and development, have been really valuable. (P1)

There's definitely learning that I've taken on board and hopefully, in my new role, it will come even more because of the type of role it will be. (P5)

Keen to put into practice what we were learning, and it triggered loads of ideas. (P8)

6.3.3 Theme 3 - Content and facilitation

6.3.3.1 Content

The early components of the programme (Phase 1) were described by participants as being particularly valuable. They referred to learning about wicked issues, systems theory, and the principles of collective leadership and how this compares to other forms of leadership.

I think organisations will always go for the quick wins, push, push. And I think to bring in, at leadership level, that's not the approach we need, is actually quite powerful. I thought that was really excellent. (P1)

Equally the action inquiry practice, reflective work and relational focus including the tools and techniques (for example, questioning, listening and working in an emergent way) introduced and role modelled by the facilitators, were also found to be extremely helpful and worthwhile.

Participants had mixed reactions to the meditation and mindfulness elements weaved throughout the programme, but on the whole they were said to be in keeping with the overall purpose and its distinctive nature, adding value to personal goals regarding well-being, time management, viewing problems and building relationships.

All participants commented on: the importance of developing strong relationships when collaborating, the necessity to develop cross system relationships, the relational focus of the programme and the positive impact of this approach.

Building those relationships with people from different organisations, and it might be there's not anything now, but a year down the line if a wicked issue presents itself, I would feel confident going to anyone that was in my pilot group and saying we've been finding some issues, have you been experiencing that? Shall we do something? So, really working across organisations. And I think that's really where we want to get to. (P1)

The relational lens applied throughout the programme, intended to promote and build connections between participants, was presented and facilitated through a range of different exercises and techniques such as check-ins and dialogue walks.

The following account from Participant 2 described their experience of the dialogue walk, the benefits as well as concerns around how such an activity might be more widely received within their own context:

I did the dialogue walk with someone from the health service and there's that initial awkwardness. But going back to that point about personal relationships, when you're forced to talk continuously to someone for 15 minutes, and you do it in an open way, the conversation actually became quite personal. We were talking about personal challenges and how our lives have developed over the years, the impact that has had personally and professionally, our hopes and aspirations with regards to things like family or work. So, actually, having never met someone, the conversation actually became quite deep for the 30 minutes that we spoke 15 minutes each side. To the point where I came off the call and thought, I really like x, we're very similar, our outlooks are similar, our work ethic. And what comes off that, if I had a health query out in West Lothian, picking the phone up and speaking to (...) would be dead easy. (P2)

The *Hosted Group Co-Inquiry* stage of the programme (Phase 2) consisted of splitting each cohort into smaller groups and to put their learning from Phase 1 into action by collaborating together on a complex issue. Early insights from Phase 2 were discussed by participants and at the time of this evaluation only a limited number of participants had reached this point within the programme (representatives from the North and West groups).

Some participants were able to identify a shared complex issue and to take steps to collaborate as described by Participant 1 below:

We have identified an issue around about one of the academies in (...) where there is a problem with young people becoming involved in drug dealing... And we've now got terms of reference for what we want to do about that, what we want to find out and then how we could use that to have better outcomes for those young people. We're gonna have an appreciative enquiry session on the 30th November with, both people with lived experience, young people and families that are willing to be involved, then some of the teachers and school nurses, local police officers roundabout that locality. Let's try and see if we can understand the root cause of the issue. We don't quite know where that's going to take us at the moment but that's in the diary and it's set up. And I think that will be really interesting. (P1)

See Figure 1, below, for a visual of the promising four steps taken so far by one group as described by **two** of its members:

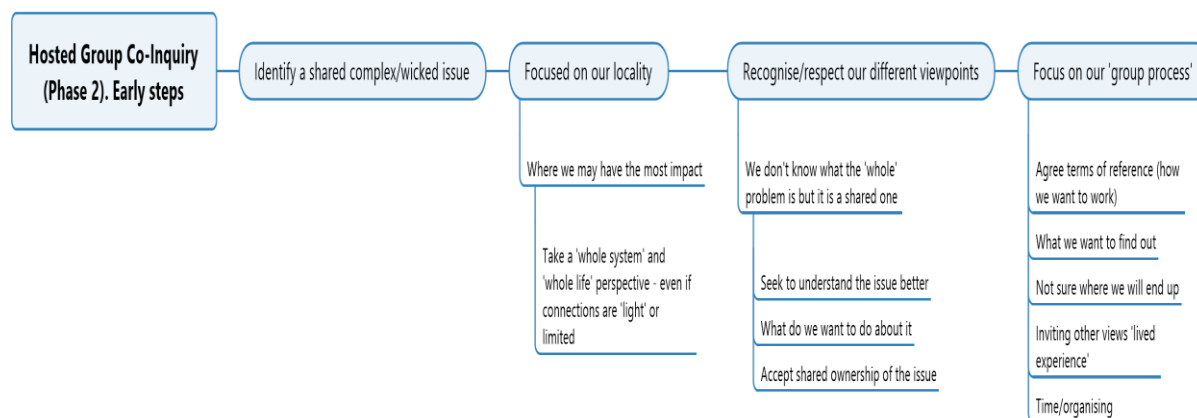


Figure 1 – Early steps in the 'live-work' exercise

However, other participants found this activity difficult and were unable to agree on a shared issue. Observations from participants related to the numbers in the group being too few (around 6) which was said to make it difficult if some members could not attend, that perhaps this activity would be better held in person and the online format made it problematic, that a wicked or complex issue could be identified earlier in the programme or even in advance of it starting.

Phase 2 of the programme clearly has promise yet deserves further analysis, discussion and reflection for future programmes and could be looked at again once the programme is complete in order to ensure its potential is maximised, for all participants to have the opportunity to put into action their learning from Phase 1 and for participants to be involved in a purposeful collaborative process linked to a 'live' concern.

6.3.3.2 Facilitation

All participants referred to the knowledge and passion of the facilitators and how they sensitively hosted this virtual programme. Their use of skilful questioning, 'check-ins', nudges and deliberately standing back to allow participant contributions and insights were highlighted as core and fundamental to the style and overall success of the programme.

I think the facilitators have been excellent, I really do. I think they clearly have a plan, but they've been very careful and deliberate in that they haven't pushed us in a deliberate direction. They've tried to focus our own thoughts and views, but it has been our own thoughts and views. It's not been something that's been, well we need to do something and here's your options, so pick one. It's been, what do you think? And I think that's been valuable. (P3)

Other comments about the facilitation team included;

The facilitators...they've been really amazing. And, again, I guess that's just a skill that they have, and doing it on Teams as well, it hasn't been face to face and they've done so well. And they believe in it, and that's quite an important message...The environment that we've learned in has been so supportive and so safe. (P1)

It's not been driven by them, it's more driven by us, with them just kind of questioning...Asking questions around what? And why? ...It's been driven by us with just a nudge from the facilitators, which I think is actually good. Because if you do something yourself, you actually learn more instead of getting preached at. (P4)

6.3.4 Theme 4 - Self-development

Spending time inquiring into issues and problems and any deeply held personal values was considered to be a significant tool and key learning point for all participants. Pitched by the facilitators as a quest for fresh knowledge about wicked issues, the self and how we work with others across the system, the need to be open and curious, asking more questions and enabling different perspectives was encouraged through the inquiry-led approach.

Your mind is thinking way down the line rather than concentrating or listening to what's in front of you... It's definitely said to me, you need to slow down a wee bit sometimes and think about the bigger picture more, rather than just jumping and firefighting all the time. (P5)

But for my own development, the thing I've taken mostly from it is about asking questions, the art of powerful questioning rather than jumping to solutions and providing everyone else with solutions that they're looking for. Which has always been my failure as a leader, people come to me with a problem, and I just tell them what I'd like them to do. But ultimately, I need to throw a question back at them, ask them what they think they should be doing, or why they're doing that or just being more open around it. That's probably my gut feeling about the whole programme. (P4)

Hearing from others about similar issues, for me, in terms of my own personal learning and development, have been really valuable. (P1)

It has given me some confidence in the knowledge I have already but also respect for the collaboration programme and the people around it...For me, that's a really interesting network of what's going on that I could potentially link into. (P6)

6.3.5 Theme 5 - Application of learning

It was clear from the interviews carried out that all of the participants are applying the learning gained from the programme, or intend to. Accounts were given relating to projects that are being approached differently, management and leadership styles are being adjusted, reflective practice is being incorporated into day to day work, learning is being shared with others and the tools role modelled by the facilitation team as part

of the programme are being utilised. Three accounts have been set out below to offer a sense of the programme application beyond the core activities and formal sessions:

Account 1 – Participant 1

We've got a lot of projects and programmes of work, transformational projects, that kind of thing. And certainly, if I was leading on one of them, I think I would try and take a different leadership approach around spending a lot of time at the outset thinking about understanding the issues, what we're trying to fix, what we're trying to change, before jumping in too quickly to what we think the solution is going to look like. I have got a project just now, it's a place-based review in one of the localities in Aberdeenshire where we're doing a strategic needs assessment to understand what the health and social care needs are going to be for the community so we can shape them in the future. There is a lot of community interest, a lot of disquiet etc. I suppose the approach we are taking is really to hear from people, what services do they need? What do they value? What do they benefit from? What could be better? For all of our services...and then try to co-produce for that area. So, I think it's the key is in that bit around kind of, listening, understanding, working with the community and giving them ownership as well as to what things are gonna change, what things are gonna look like and not rushing in with what I think might work or what somebody else thinks might work. (P1)

Account 2 – Participant 4

Another example that I've started doing since I've been on the course is engaging with the (...) community in my area. There's a large community and I see them reflected disproportionately in domestic violence and crime files. I was originally concerned that I was stereotyping...but then I did some analysis and there was a disproportionate amount of representation. So, I was thinking about how well we engage with that community, and it's not very well. Because typically they are a community that doesn't engage with the police, from taking the time to sit and reflect and identify that this has been a wicked issue. So, here's a community that doesn't overly trust or engage with the police. And the typical community engagement means; social media, community councils, aren't really engaging with a community that, for the most part, speak a different language. So, taking the time to identify that problem, I've been speaking to people, I've had some community advisors, some religious leaders locally in to speak to me and I'm actually identifying solutions for how we can engage with this community better. So, I suppose, what I'm saying is that I identified an issue that, had I just been doing my day business, I might not have addressed by taking the time to think about it. And it's something we need to do. I've been able to actually start working on that issue and improving our engagement with this whole community. And also, from this, other than doing it all myself, it's been delegated to other people to take on different aspects of this. So, it's not just me. Hopefully, in the longer term, I'll start changing a bit of the culture around how we engage with this community. I've identified an issue and I'm trying to do something

Account 3 – Participant 9

My team went away and did a whole system operation. It was off the back of enforcement and social work, health was there. It was a drugs operation to recover drugs, 100 people were visited as welfare oriented in tandem with the enforcement operation but separate. This whole system appeared which, and I didn't tell them 'Do it that way'. That was the moment for me when I was like, this works. Give them the space and you give them the understanding of what they're trying to do, it's not rocket science, but I now have a phrase to put to that. These things like, 'start anywhere, follow it everywhere', that stuff is gold dust when it comes to empowering teams and getting them understanding that they're not blockers. Not knowing where to start is not a blocker. This is just giving you that ability to talk it through in a way that makes sense. And there's a structure round it. (P9)

Further comments linked to application of the learning include:

We're listening to partner's perspectives more than we ever did. And I think I do too, [the programme] emphasises the importance of that to me. (P4)

I've tried to do is create a culture similar to what they did on the course by asking a couple of questions, what are you hearing? What resonates with you? What do you want to find out more about? And that's the only thing they're allowed to talk about to begin with, to set that boundary around it, you know, we're not going to talk about solutions in the first meeting, or maybe not even in the third one, we're going to think using these tools, those questions as a tool for shaping an entire meeting. It means you have to slow down, and you have to be comfortable with trusting a process and not jumping to solutions really quickly. So, I suppose, that's what I think the tools have been for, for me, in my real world as well as in the work that I've done as part of the course. (P7)

6.3.6 Theme 6 - Future programmes (suggestions going forward)

All participants were clear that this programme is of value and should continue. Many offered specific observations, suggestions and reflections about future programmes, considered helpful for next steps, planning and collective discussions going forward. Some helpful comments were made about the programme delivery and practicalities which could be considered for future programmes:

6.3.6.1 Information provided in advance

My experience of going into it was, that I felt like I hadn't been given enough information. There was no collaboration with us at the start to say, how are we going to collaborate and work on this together? I think they did do that by checking in and I think they got better at that. I think they were understanding when we raised an issue, there just wasn't necessarily an understanding of that before you enter the space, an insight before we started the programme. (P6)

6.3.6.2 Online delivery

In terms of the online nature of delivery, responses were on the whole very positive. However some participants (while taking care to recognise the current conditions) did miss face to face contact at times:

The phone call with the walking dialogue that I had, it was great, but actually, if we'd been able to have that over a cup of coffee or face to face, it would have been nice. And I think there were bits of it that were quite stilted because we weren't fully involved, sitting next to each other having a blether. (P5)

Using Microsoft Teams has probably been a limiting factor, I would have to suggest. Don't get me wrong, if we weren't doing it on Teams we would be delaying it into next year and I get that Teams and other applications have allowed us to progress some elements of training that we simply wouldn't have done if we didn't have it. But it comes back to the importance of relationship building and really listening... building relationships online require a different technique than just bringing people into a room. Because bringing people into a room you can feel the energy and we just pick it up, as humans, and we can respond to that. In an online forum, you can't, and eye contact is difficult as well. It's hard to know who is agreeing with you and who is in the same space as you. So, I did feel that in doing it again, there could be more relationship building, parts of it. (P2)

6.3.6.3 Structure and timing

When thinking about the challenge of taking time away from the day job, team members, colleagues and other stakeholders:

Delivering in the services that I deliver in, and also, with others who are with me delivering in the services that they are delivering; you can't have a whole day blocked out. You need to understand in that day when you can come away from what you're doing in order to be able to pick up critical business... So, what was happening was we were being disrupted during the day by our own workloads and our colleagues because there was no structure to the meetings. I had things coming through and people phoning my mobile and I had to say, I have to come out right now to answer this. Whereas what I could have said was, I know I'll be free at half eleven, I'll phone you back then. (P6)

In a similar vein Participant 6 made additional comments about the length of some sessions without a break:

My personal style is one of movement and activity as well as reflection. I find it really hard when I'm just in that two-hour reflective space. I kind of pace all the time and I'm having to just stare at a screen. Sometimes I just put my video off so I could walk around the room for five minutes. (P6)

6.3.6.4 Recruitment of participants

Thoughts were provided about who may benefit the most from the programme going forward and the selection and/or invitation to participate:

There's people who would really benefit from just having the understanding of collective leadership and the ethos and then there's people who have a problem to solve. (P9)

I did feel at times that the conversations they were talking about, I didn't have that opportunity to use some of the tools that they were telling me about. (P5)

6.3.6.5 Content

Many participants discussed the phase 2 collaborative group exercise in a positive way but also offered thoughts on specific areas to explore:

I think what would have made it easier would have been an initial conversation around, you are going to be asked to work on a project and I wonder if you want to give some thoughts to what that project could be, not will be, because it might evolve as the discussions. You might want to then ensure you have the right people around the table with you who have the capacity to drive this forward. (P8)

Participant 6, linking in with the learning associated with the live work activity commented: *Once you can get the mechanics of a collaboration right, of which self-awareness and self-management and skills of working with people are in. Which, I think there was a lot of enthusiasm about the learning of, and styles of working. I think people are taking them into their*

own team and their own style of working. What that doesn't do is cross culture, cross cultural organisation, cross collaborate. So, for me, I felt like it didn't do what I thought it was going to do; mechanisms to reach across cultural boundaries. (P6)

6.3.6.6 Endings

Participants commented on what may happen beyond the programme:

There's a lot of times I've been on courses, and you finish the course and then off you trot, you don't hear or think about it again. So, I suppose it's making sure, I don't know if there's a check-in or maybe I have to take some personal responsibility to keep in touch with my syndicate and see how things were working out. I suppose if I'm reflecting myself on what I'm doing then part of that reflection needs to be, am I still employing the skills I learned on this course, going forward? Or have I reverted back to dishing out answers to everyone that comes looking? So, I think it's the closure aspect on it. Does everyone move on or do we ensure that there's a continuing process of review and learning? (P4)

7. Programme learning and application

7.1 In this section our intention is to consolidate and discuss the overall programme learning, and to capture its applied nature. Figure 2 provides an overview of the four key learning strands. The strands have been identified as: complexity of collaboration, principles for collective leadership, building stronger relationships, and promoting a collaborative culture. Each strand links to the identified actions and changes described by participants (and evidenced in their accounts) where they were able to apply alternative leadership approaches to a situation, problem, experience, or event.

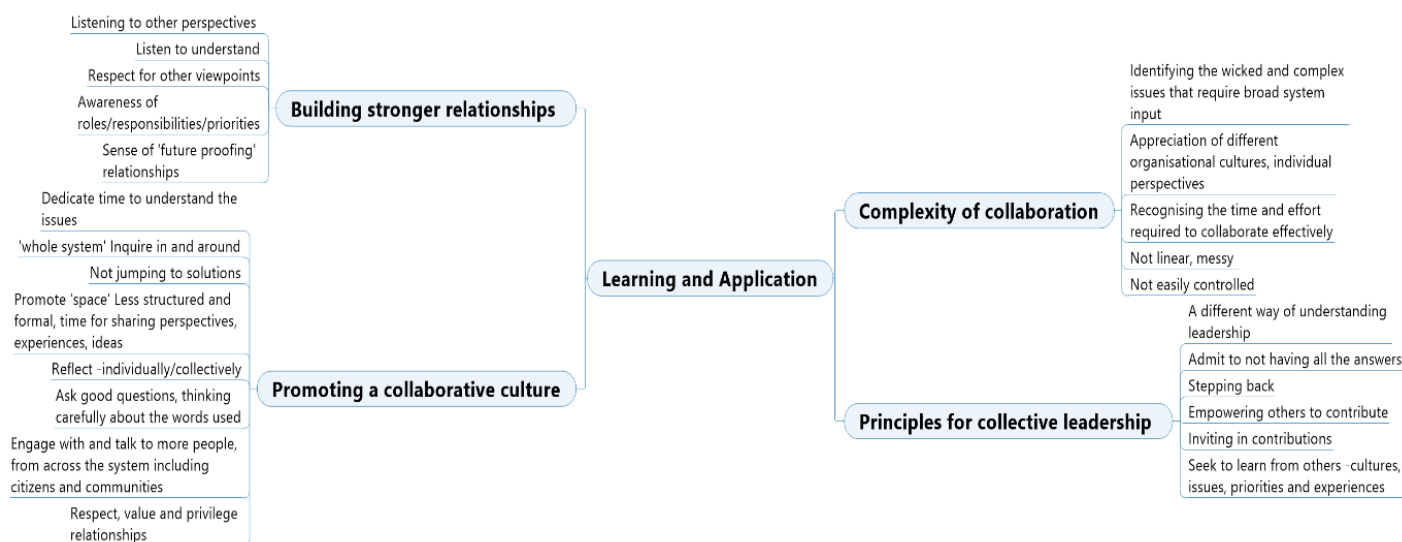


Figure 2 – Programme Learning and Application

Each strand is discussed in more detail below alongside evaluator insights (provided in a table format).

7.2 Complexity of collaboration

Understanding the complexity of collaborative working – *including what it takes to work more effectively within collaborative structures and on cross-system issues.*

The overall focus of the programme (and its content) on the challenge of partnership and collaborative working was appreciated and commended by all of the participants. It is our assessment that participants arrived into the programme with some understanding of this challenge, but their practical appreciation differed depending on their role and professional background. Certainly the materials provided and what was covered were found to be helpful, informative, relevant and could be utilised for their own context. Importantly time and space were given towards supporting and generating meaningful conversations and place-based connections within the groups combined with support in terms of bridging theoretical principles with collaborative practice. Within the overall public service landscape,

the intellectual appreciation of the challenge of collaboration attended to on this programme, employed within a place-based group context, feels timely and valuable.

Complexity of collaboration	
Evidenced programme learning	Evaluator insights
Identifying the wicked and complex issues that require broad system input	<i>This is important as technical problems often have solutions/known outcomes, they have been faced and managed before, they respond well to project plans and often do not require a complex collaborative response. Wicked, systemic issues require a different approach.</i>
Appreciation of different organisational cultures and individual perspectives	<i>Fundamental for effective and meaningful collaboration.</i>
Recognising the time and effort required to collaborate effectively	<i>Recognising what is required in terms of resources and quick fixes and timescale pressures do not support effective collaboration.</i>
That collaboration is not linear, it is messy work	<i>This implies that traditional performance, target driven monitoring regimes for collaboration of this nature are not appropriate.</i>
Collaborative work is not easily controlled	<i>Multi-stakeholder, often cross-system collaboration (including citizens and communities) require an emergent rather than a planned approach. Single point (leader or organisational) control of emergent work is counterintuitive and unhelpful.</i>

7.3 Principles for collective leadership

Understanding principles for collective leadership – *discussed in terms of how this approach differs from other more traditional and hierarchical forms of leadership, linked with the nature of problems and the power of connections.*

A key message from the participants was the importance of recognising a wicked problem when it arises and to acknowledge its complexity. Participants discussed collective leadership as an approach to better address complex issues and to empower others to contribute towards achieving improved outcomes. For example, seeking to hear and understand cross system perspectives about the same or a similar issue was said to broaden understandings around issues, priorities and cultural differences. Furthermore this focus on relational and social interactions between people turned attention towards the processes that produce leadership in collaborative settings.

It was difficult to gauge from the interviews if participants understood the difference between the role of the leader and practice of leadership within a collaborative context as two distinct concepts. There were certainly indications of this from the language used,

however it was not possible to explore this further within the scope of the evaluation. Certainly collaborative (and collective) leadership is not a straightforward concept to unpick, particularly within hierarchical organisations where horizontal working is required but not fully embedded (for example, there are often technicalities and tensions associated with structures, silos, budgets and accountability). Consideration of the practical implications from a leadership lens could be explored further by participants, supported by the facilitators, for future programmes.

Principles for collective leadership	
Evidenced programme learning	Evaluator insights
A different way of understanding leadership	<i>Towards leadership as a process and as a practice rather than heroic, leader centric conceptions, common within hierarchical structures.</i>
Ability to admit to not having all the answers	<i>Taking a personal risk, again going against traditional understandings of what a leader or leadership should be, in pursuit of a better outcome.</i>
Stepping back (e.g. perhaps keeping silent)	<i>For leaders in formal positions, not jumping in with a solution runs counter to our pattern for working. For collaboration (and other non-crisis team working situations) traditional, e.g. command and control/transformational approach to leadership, can get in the way of wider contributions.</i>
Empowering others to contribute	<i>Applying a leadership style that allows space and 'permission' to challenge others and to be challenged.</i>
Inviting in wider contributions	<i>Take a whole systems view towards collaboration, not fixing the agenda and the participants up front, being open to hearing from (often) difficult and challenging voices.</i>

7.4 Building stronger relationships

Building stronger relationships – described as beneficial for establishing and nurturing cross system connections to support collaborative practice and local team work.

Participants discussed the benefits of establishing stronger connections with others across the public service system and that the programme offered the opportunity to learn from one another and share experiences of difficult issues. This approach deliberately forced the programme participants to engage consciously with the nature of collaborations, that is, they are (often) formed to address complex systemic issues, composed of a wide range of individuals, each holding their own beliefs, opinions and values. In addition, and in keeping with the makeup of the programme participants, collaborations are also characterised by a mix of organisations, departments and professions, all closely aligned to specific goals, missions and priorities.

In our view this individual burden of internal and external pressure (articulated by many participants) makes up much of the collaborative challenge. The carefully constructed building blocks of the programme, particularly in terms of its place-based nature, participant diversity, relational lens and system focus, meets this pressure head on.

Building stronger relationships	
Evidenced programme learning	Evaluator Insights
Listening to other perspectives	<i>Often when we collaborate we come together with people for the first time, we make assumptions. Consciously focusing on what 'others' do and listening to their experience is necessary.</i>
Listen to understand	<i>While someone is talking we are often thinking about how to answer, this distracts from truly hearing them. Being open to hearing the views and ideas of others and willingness to having your mind changed is central to relational work.</i>
Respect for other viewpoints	<i>Giving partners time to offer their views/experiences builds trust and promotes the development of a shared way forward.</i>
Make a conscious effort to get to know others and the work that they do	<i>This begins to build understanding and trust, necessary when collaborating and to innovate.</i>
Sense of 'future proofing' relationship	<i>Acknowledging the importance of system wide purpose and strive to support others.</i>

7.5 Promoting a collaborative culture

Promoting a collaborative culture – *to build personal and group capacity, to strengthen existing skills and expertise, to test out ideas and to work differently.*

The participant accounts gathered in this evaluation illustrate the spirit of what a more collaborative culture could be. The content and tools provided have added value to participants' knowledge and day-to-day work. Participant accounts demonstrate changing behaviours linked to empowering others to contribute or lead on initiatives, to ask more questions, create space for more emergent conversations and to listen more effectively. They also offered knowledge, learning and insights from the programme itself to interested colleagues and detailed how they will promote and take forward new ways of working within their own teams and for wider collaborative projects. The experience of the collaborative leadership pilots is discussed in terms of small, local changes and adjustments that can be made; this is in contrast to the fixed narratives of transformation and large scale change initiatives. Notwithstanding this point, it is our view that there is a clear opportunity for this programme to promote change and innovation through its focus on building capacity for more effective collaboration across the public service system.

Promoting a collaborative culture	
Evidenced programme learning	Evaluator Insights
Dedicate time to understand the issues (with others)	<i>Opening up issues (rather than breaking them down) is counter to much of our problem solving practices. For complex issues making sense of them and any root causes collaboratively will influence the conversations people choose to have.</i>
'Whole system' inquiry – in and around	
Not to jump to solutions	<i>This requires a different skill set (and leadership range), being able to suspend judgement, to ask questions and to get a sense of the wider picture.</i>
Promote less structured and formal 'space', take time to share perspectives, experiences and ideas	<i>Creating the conditions for a more collaborative culture requires giving space within the day to day for people to share thoughts, ideas and experiences.</i>
Ask good questions, thinking carefully about the words used	<i>Beginning an inquiry into complex issues (as well as values, behaviours and beliefs) is a mind-set and a necessary input, this will lead on to further questions and potentially new knowledge.</i>
Reflect individually/collectively	<i>Individual development and collective growth relies on the ability to reflect and learn.</i>
Engage with and talk to more people, from across the system including citizens and communities	<i>Fostering diversity in terms of service and policy decisions and understanding what is 'local' and of value connects with this work, inviting in voices and experiences from across the public service system will fill knowledge gaps.</i>
	<i>Improving the quality of our relationships is just as complex as many of the issues faced by public</i>

Respect, value, and privilege relationships

services. Consciously strengthening system wide connections is necessary for enhancing collaborative work and to achieve better outcomes for citizens.

8. Conclusions and suggestions for future action

8.1 As set out in 2.2, *the collaborative leadership pilots were intended to inspire personal development and more effective local partnership and collaborative working.* Our evaluation findings demonstrate that this intention has been achieved during the course of the pilot programme. It is our view that, in terms of both its collaborative approach and impact, the programme is meeting the recommendations of the HMICS Report (2020) in respect of 'leadership training' undertaken jointly by Policy Scotland and public sector partners (see 2.1).

8.2 It is our further assertion that the participants' learning, and the associate impact from participating in this programme, will continue to unfold over the coming months and years to come with benefits evident both to individuals and the wider system.

8.3 This programme – in its inception, design and crafting – considers public services as an interconnected system. In this sense, it is a highly relevant and timely developmental approach which addresses practically the pace of change around, and the effectiveness of, cross-boundary collaborative work. Furthermore, in the reframing of leadership and the shift towards working differently, there is a clear acknowledgement of the challenges faced by those who are working on complex issues within and across difficult contexts.

8.4 Drawing on our analysis of the participant interviews (in section 6) in particular, we have provided a consolidated view of the overall programme learning and the early indications of the application of this learning in practice, with four key strands of learning, as outlined in section 7.

8.5 In the following three sub-sections we provide an overview of the main findings of the evaluation. In particular we highlight the successes of the programme (in 8.6), offer thoughts in terms of refinement and development (in 8.7), and set out our suggestions for future action (in 8.8), taking into account the evaluation as a whole and the contribution of the programme to personal, organisational, and whole system learning.

8.6 Successes

- **A learning community.** The experiential and participatory nature of the programme provides participants with a practical opportunity to learn from each other's experiences, to experiment with newly learned leadership practices in their own work context, as well as to bring their reflections from their changed practice back into the programme. The pilot cohorts provide a 'safe space' in which participants feel able to be human and real with each other, and to explore and reflect on their leadership experiences in support of their continuous learning as well as their own sense of well-being. In this sense, the very nature of the programme approach is consistent with the ethos of collaborative working and collective leadership.

- **Bridging theory with the realities of practice.** The use of theory on the programme is intended to provide participants with a bridge to the reality of their work context, and the practice of leadership. In this regard, it is received positively by participants and seen as providing a framework for collaboration in practice. The theory input is not about imparting knowledge, it is more about supporting the development of inquiry, curiosity, and sense-making. Both the choice of theoretical frameworks and the way in which they are shared as part of the programme feel highly relevant to the live experiences of participants. Participants clearly value the opportunity to be both challenged and affirmed by new perspectives. For example, feeling affirmed in embracing the uncertainty in the leadership role and in not necessarily having to be the one alone with all the 'answers'.

- **A relational approach.** Consistent with the development of collaborative working and collective leadership, the programme uses a relational approach. Participants develop effective collaborative relationships within the context of the programme community, and in the place-based action inquiry work. There is also significant evidence that their learning in practice is developing and enhancing the quality of their relationships with team members and key stakeholders within their respective organisational contexts, through the extended use of practices such as listening more deeply to and empowering others. The impact of the participants' learning is being felt positively through their changing ways of working in practice. In particular, there is a positive impact as a result of the relationships developed within the programme on capacity to do the real collaborative work *in situ*.

- **The place-based approach and potential of learning in live work.** The action inquiry approach provides participants with opportunities to develop and sustain their learning in practice. While this is an undoubted strength of the programme, it is also the most challenging aspect. This is where the change will actually happen in terms of collaborative working, inter-connectedness across the system, and a more collective approach to leadership. If it feels stretching in the context of the programme, then this reflects the reality that working in this way can be hard-going and requires sustained attention.

- **A consistent, supportive, and participatory facilitation approach.** The way in which the programme is facilitated supports the learning of the individual participants and further develops the capacity within the system to work collaboratively. Participants benefit both from the style in which the learning space is held by the facilitators, as well as learn from it in developing their own leadership practices. In this respect, the programme is meaningfully addressing both the development of collective leadership capability and capacity. Both the approaches used and the facilitation style of the facilitators are regarded by participants as high quality.

- **Co-ownership of approach.** There is a sense of equality between participants and facilitators. Participants have clearly valued the opportunity to contribute actively to the

construction of the programme, and to the unfolding nature of the shared learning along the way.

8.7 Issues for consideration and further discussion

- **Understanding of structural and cultural tensions.** The developmental ethos of this programme, through action inquiry and collaboration, differs markedly from more traditional and programmatic approaches to leadership development. It needs to be acknowledged that this development is taking place within a system which is still subject to traditional governance structures, and with host organisations which are hierarchical in management and reporting terms.

There is therefore a significant tension between both the current governance structures and prevailing leadership cultures, and the collaborative and emergent nature of the programme. It is noted that this tension could be felt as a limiting pressure by participants, in the sense that their learning as part of the programme can sometimes feel at odds with their lived experience of the organisation and wider system.

There can be a similar pressure for the facilitators, some of whom also carry a particular responsibility for reporting on the progress and outcomes of the programme. It is an interesting parallel between the programme and the wider system that shows up most markedly in the experience of the "authorising environment",⁹ i.e. how the programme is positioned with and understood by key stakeholders in the system. There is a need for further dialogue involving facilitators, participants and formal leadership across the system around the tensions between the nature of collective leadership and the actual practice at national and senior levels in partner organisations.

- **The legitimacy and nature of the space for learning.** There is a very real challenge in balancing the tension between the busy-ness of the work context, and being fully present in the learning environment of the programme. In the highly pressured context of the pandemic response, participants have struggled to be able to take sufficient time for reflection and learning in practice, both within and in between the formal programme sessions.

We further recognise that this kind of developmental approach will challenge the notion some people have about programmatic learning. Perhaps it needs to be made even clearer that this is about learning alongside colleagues, in the real work, and in real time. While there are formal programmed elements, the nature of the involvement is much more ongoing and continuous than that, and in that sense does not have a defined 'end point'.

The very way in which the live collaborative work undertaken by each action inquiry group is selected and positioned is a huge part of the learning. In this sense, it can feel a real stretch for participants, as well as other stakeholders, because it challenges the prevailing way in which 'project' work is organised, i.e. with one clear 'sponsor' and formal lines of accountability. This reinforces the key point that collaborative cross-system work is necessarily messy, emergent, and comes with multiple 'owners' and stakeholders.

⁹ Mark Moore (1995) *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*. Harvard University Press.

- **How to get the 'whole system in the room'.** It is recognised by facilitators and participants alike that there is a need for wider representation and involvement in this developmental approach from across all parts of the public sector, and beyond, in a particular place.

In addition to including people from across other statutory services, we strongly suggest that consideration be given to how the approach would be enhanced by including people from beyond statutory 'services', e.g. third sector, community groups, people with lived experience of services and independent service providers. We realise there is a pragmatic balance to be struck around what is possible in terms of who actually participates in the development programme itself. There are perhaps creative collaborative ways, through the medium of the action inquiry work, to involve people more widely in the real work and learning on the ground.

- **Collective Learning.** Of all the skills required for effective collaboration, collective learning is, in our view, the most valuable. In order to support this, the focus of leadership development becomes a collective one where participants learn together. This goes beyond the methods and content covered in 'training' courses and looks very different to traditional 'leader development' approaches. Collective learning grows most effectively through dialogue and interaction while locating the learning and development in live place-based work. This programme exemplifies the value and potential of 'immersive learning' and real participant engagement, where its impact is dynamic and ongoing. Further consideration is needed relating to how collective learning is described and achieved, this transparency will build (much needed) understanding about *how* and *where* the learning and development happens.

Spreading the impact of such a developmental approach will take more than just simply running more programmes in more places. There are obvious limitations to the number of people who can participate directly in each programme, in terms of funding and capacity within the system to 'release' participants for learning. The constraints to 'scaling up' also relate to the challenges of finding the capacity for the required facilitation support. The experience of the facilitators in this pilot programme is that this developmental approach requires much more than simply delivering elements in a fixed programme; it is deeply relational work which requires ongoing and continuous connections. There is a wider conversation to be had about where this kind of facilitation support might come from across the system, and how it can be developed and supported on an ongoing basis. Lastly, it feels important both to connect up and build on (more) what people are already doing around place-based collective learning approaches in different locations across Scotland and beyond.

- **Practical and programme design suggestions.** In terms of its positioning and purpose, and practical communication of the approach, there needs to be a clearer explanation of the programme. Feedback from some participants suggests that it would be helpful to tighten up on aspects of the structure of the programme, and to provide clearer information up front about the nature of the programme, and expectations of participants.

This would enable even more active participation in the programme, as well as supporting participants to manage the learning alongside the demands and expectations of the day job.

The necessary use of MS Teams as the platform for group learning events has highlighted both the possibilities and the limitations of a virtual approach for this kind of relational development programme. Clearly it will depend on the unfolding situation with pandemic restrictions, but there is a creative opportunity to explore the blend of virtual and in-person approaches. For example, it may make practical sense to consider the delivery of core content (e.g. theory input) via a digital platform together with short focused virtual sessions. Whereas it feels important that the deeply relational work of the action inquiry groups can take place in-person, and in place, as much as possible.

8.8 Suggestions for future action

Drawing on consideration of both the successes (8.6) and issues for further consideration (8.7), our particular suggestions for future action including the future development of the programme are set out below.

1. Continue the delivery of a programme focused on fostering collaborative effectiveness.

It is highly recommended that every effort be made to secure long-term funding and other resource capacity for the continued delivery of this programme. The theoretical and in-practice elements have rich potential to offer a framework for a more collaborative culture.

2. Seek wider system involvement.

The success and impact of the approach to date could be further enhanced by including people from other parts of the statutory sector, including health and care, as well as from beyond statutory services, i.e. third sector, community groups, people with lived experience of services, and independent sector. There is the opportunity to be creative about what this involvement looks like in practice (as outlined in 8.7, above).

3. Communicate more plainly the purpose and benefits of the programme for participants and wider stakeholders.

Firstly, there is a need to be really clear about the potential benefits for individual participants in taking part in this programme, as well as the expectations of their active and ongoing participation.

Secondly, consideration should be given to how the programme is pitched and positioned. In essence, the purpose of the programme is about working better together, across boundaries, in collaboration. We recommend that it is framed more clearly around supporting the development of more effective collaboration across the system - through an action inquiry, relational, and emergent place-based approach.

4. Ensure programme recruitment is appropriately targeted.

In recruiting people to the programme, realistic consideration needs to be given to potential recruits' level of practical experience in collaboration, and the opportunity and capacity they have to apply skills learned throughout the programme.

5. Continue to be flexible and creative in the design and facilitation of the approach.

There are practical and realistic considerations around the capacity of participants to attend formal learning events, and to derive the full benefit of the learning and reflective practice. Without detracting from the value of the space for learning, there are opportunities to continue being both creative and flexible. Building on the spirit of collaboration, we recommend that participants are more fully involved in the design and implementation of the programme. In a practical sense this could mean including an early session prior to the programme starting to discuss the design, length, frequency, and pacing of learning sessions.

6. Develop a more flexible approach to the 'live work'.

This builds on suggestion 5, above. We agree with the ethos of the programme that the real learning about collaborative working will happen in the 'real work', i.e. the doing of collaboration. There are perhaps different ways of achieving this learning in practice, through a group of people in a place-based action inquiry group who are either 1) working together collaboratively on an agreed specific shared local issue, or 2) who utilise the action inquiry approach to discuss potential shared issues to collaborate on, or 3) they are doing distinct local place-based work and are using the action inquiry approach to surface, challenge and support the way in which they are doing the work in practice.

7. Sustain the learning community beyond the formal programme.

We recommend that consideration is given to the possibilities of extending and sustaining the learning beyond the formal programme - both through connecting with other similar programmes across the system,¹⁰ as well as continuing the opportunities to participate actively in live, place-based collaborative work.

8. Focus on the collective learning process in order to aid understanding of this practice-based programme.

The success of a programme of this nature relies on (in part) communicating its distinctiveness, process and impact. Attention towards place-based collective learning and the activities and actions involved are important. Of equal importance is inspiring those more familiar with traditional approaches to leadership and/or in formal leader roles to meaningfully engage in a reconceptualisation of leadership development from the individual to the collective, and to be involved in a concerted effort towards building a more connected system.

¹⁰ For example, the concept of past programme participants continuing to connect with each other through informal "common spaces" which is currently being explored by members of the four "leadership³" cohorts as part of Project Lift (a similarly constructed leadership development programme across health and care in Scotland which centres the learning in live, collaborative work).

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Evaluation Team

Kristy Docherty

Kristy has over 20 years leadership and collaboration experience spanning the public, private and third sectors and has held Director level positions for a number of organisations in the Renewable Energy, Social Housing and Urban Regeneration fields. Currently working as an independent consultant and business lecturer at Queen Margaret University, she has also recently completed her doctorate entitled: *Working together: exploring perceptions of collective leadership and collaboration in a public context* and has published a number of book chapters and papers in this field. Her research is specifically focused on multi stakeholder collaboration, complex 'wicked' issues and different conceptions of leadership.

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Brigid Russell

Brigid has 30 years consultancy and leadership experience across the public, third, and private sectors. She began her career in the NHS, and then spent ten years working as a management consultant with Hay Group. She worked as a leadership consultant in the national leadership unit (within NHS Education for Scotland) between 2008-2015. Brigid has run her own business as a coach and leadership consultant since 2015 (and practiced as an independent coach since 2006). Between 2018 and 2022 she was the external partner for leadership development with Project Lift, the national approach to talent management and leadership development for health and care in Scotland. She has recently started a Professional Doctorate on the *Executive Doctorate in Organisational Change* programme with HULT Ashridge. Her work is focused on researching relational approaches to leadership and community development.

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Glossary of Terms

Action Inquiry: Is a sophisticated process and research practice that seeks to use information (consciously) captured while the work/events are in motion. This approach is not straightforward mainly because it does not involve a linear step-by-step process, rather it requires a high level of awareness, changes to behaviour and often strategy while a situation unfolds. Learning how to best 'test' our assumptions, perspectives and even values through the action inquiry method can, in principle, provide opportunities for learning, change and transformation for individuals, teams and organisations.

Action Inquiry (Place-based): Situates the work of action inquiry within an identified geographical place. This enables those involved to build effective relationships and understandings *and* to consider shared concerns and priorities, while grounded in their local system.

Collective Leadership Process: Consists of an approach comprising a systems, relational and inquiry focus bound by an emergent approach to working. This method offers a more intense form of collaboration which may be helpful when addressing complex, cross boundary issues.

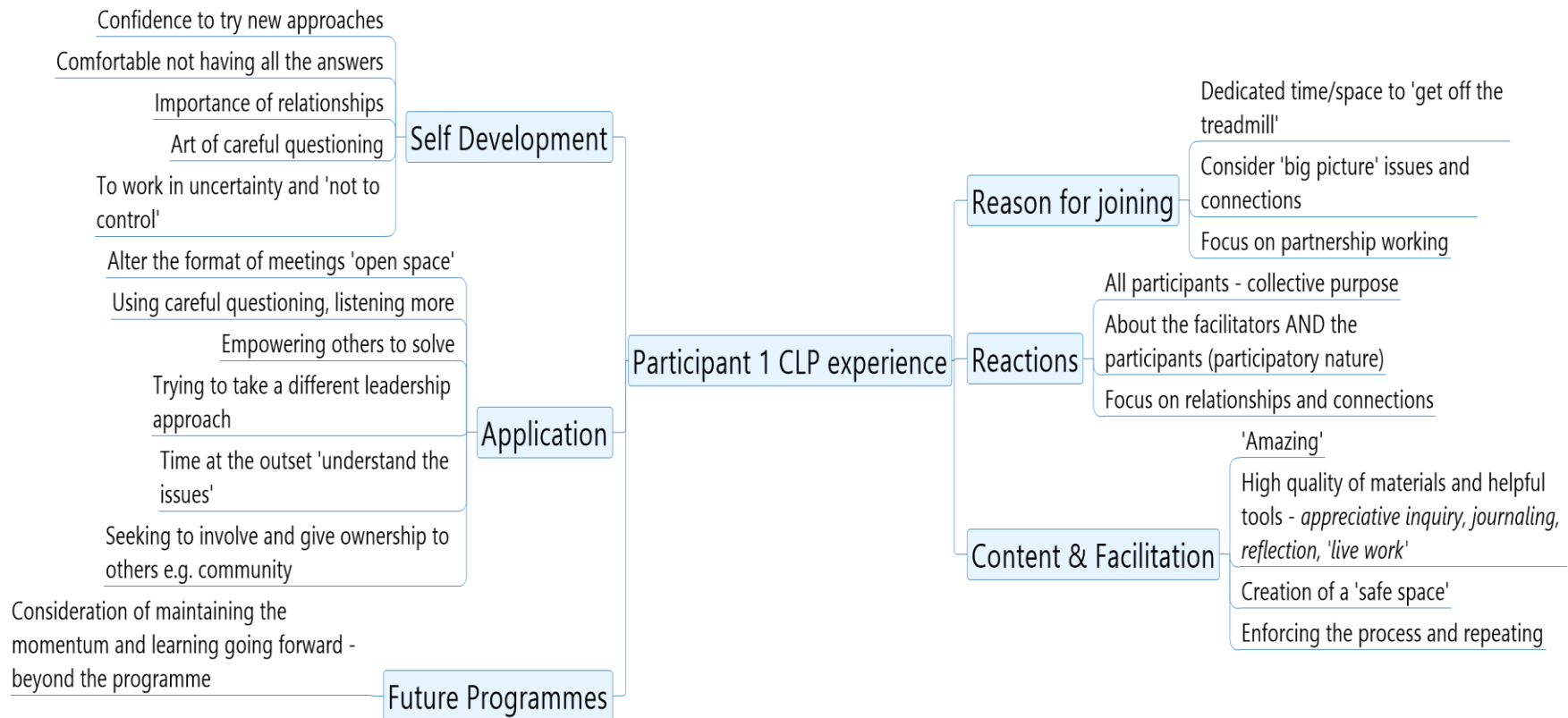
Cross Boundary Collaboration: Is the term used to describe groups, networks or partnerships made up of individuals from the contexts of government, business, third sector, communities and citizens, and where individuals work together, beyond their own departments or organisations, in order to tackle social problems and other complex challenges.

Dialogue Walk: A dialogue walk is a loosely structured, listening, inquiry and conversation tool which tends to involve two people walking 'alongside' each other. The space to access ideas, to discuss unexpected topics, to aid the flow of conversation and to listen more effectively are all considered benefits of 'walking and talking'.

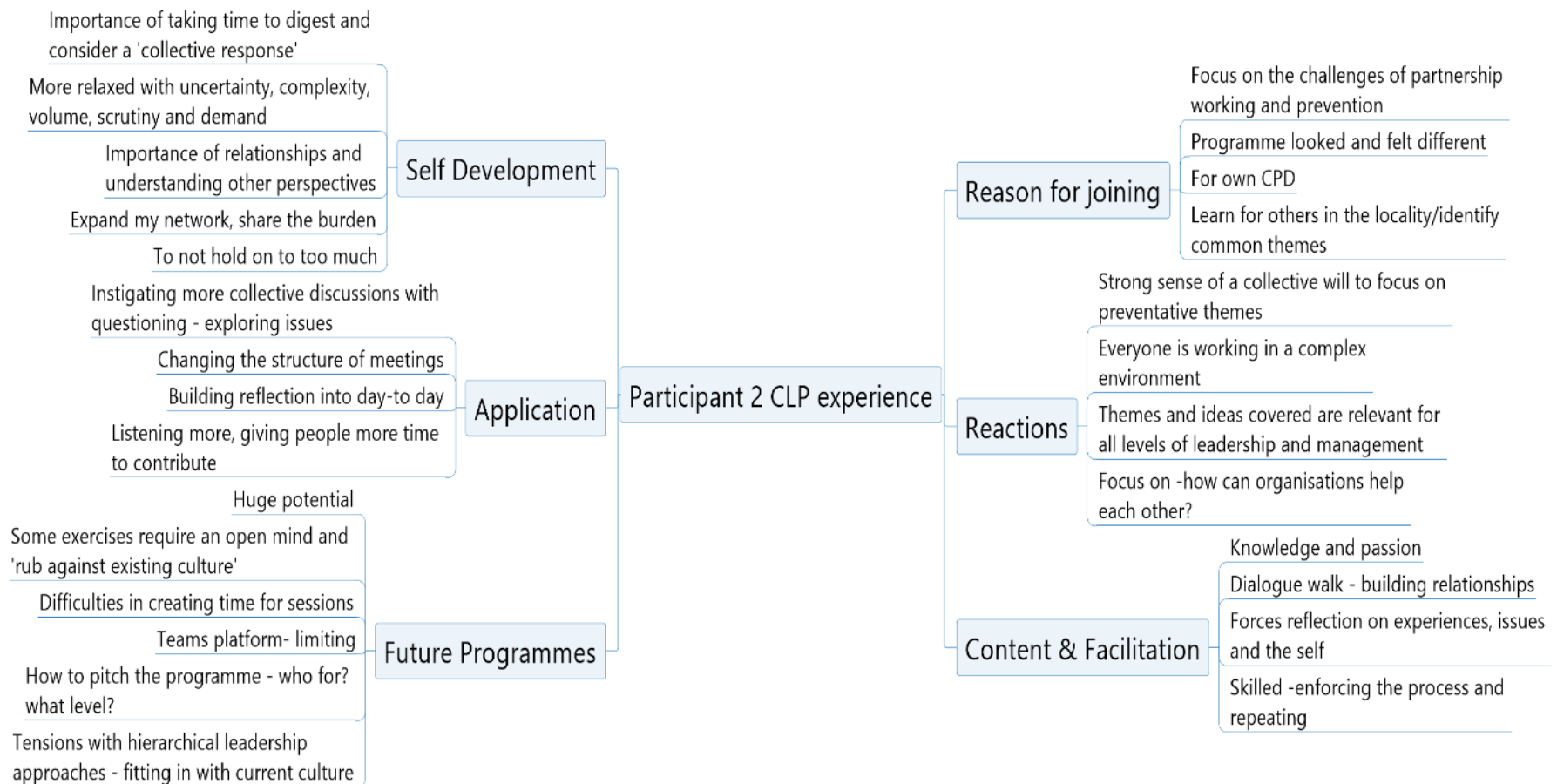
Leadership-as-Practice: Engages with the experiential, relational, interactive and situated aspects of work and explores connections with self, others and the wider system, often when complex problems arise and rational approaches are considered less reliable and attractive. It is a perspective where leadership becomes the level of analysis and where the empirical focus seeks to explore the leadership interactions, practices and processes.

APPENDIX

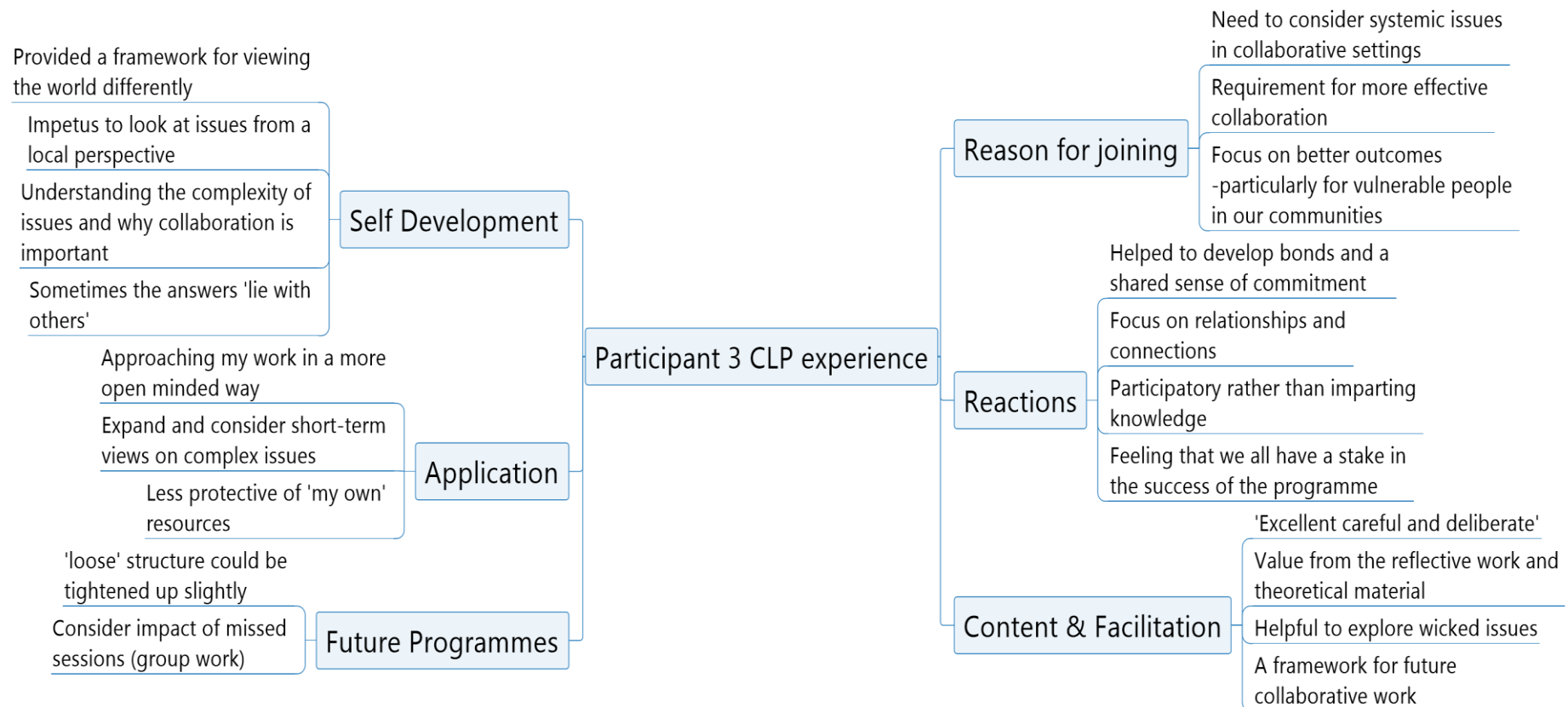
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Cohort – North
Organisation – Health and Social Care Partnership
Role – Partnership Manager



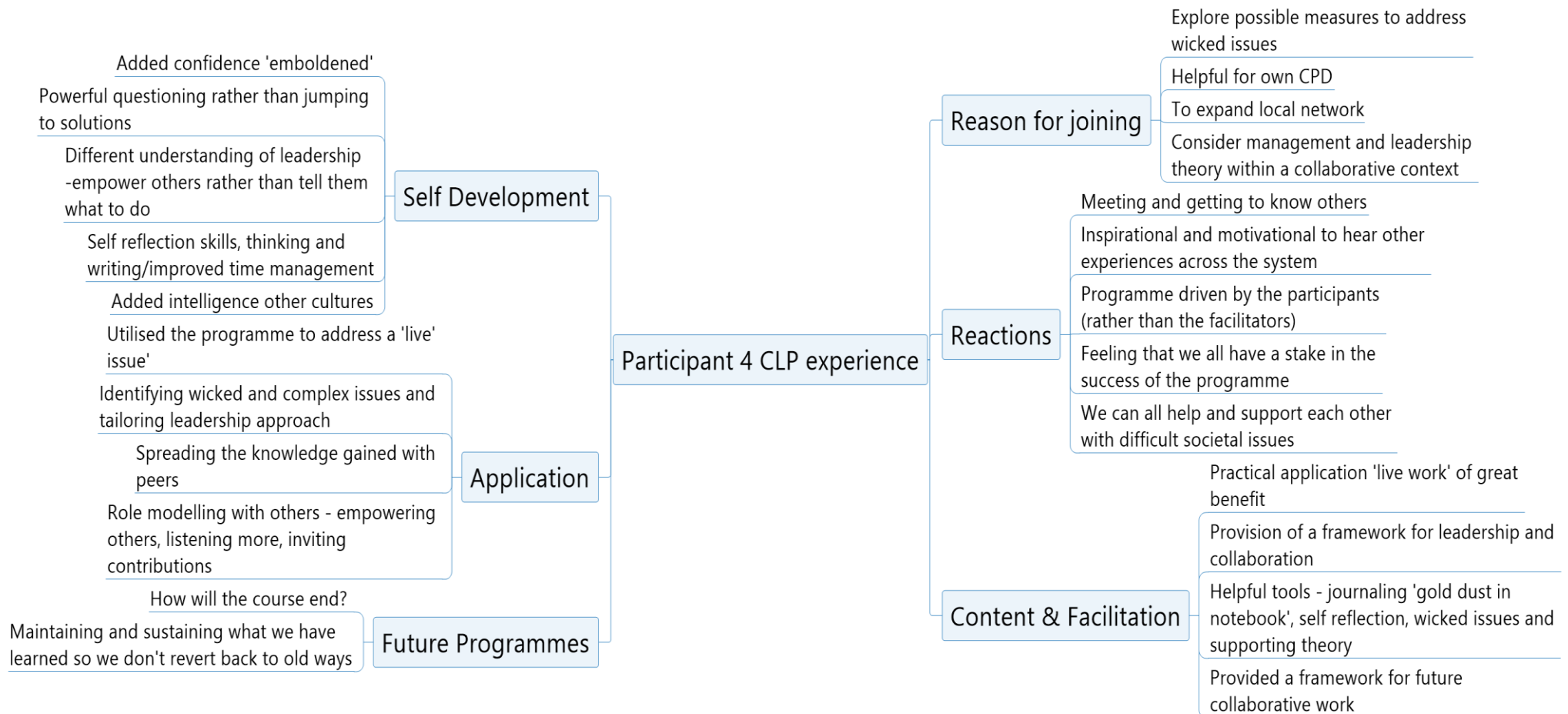
Participant 2
Cohort – East
Organisation – Police Scotland
Role – Divisional Co-ordination Unit



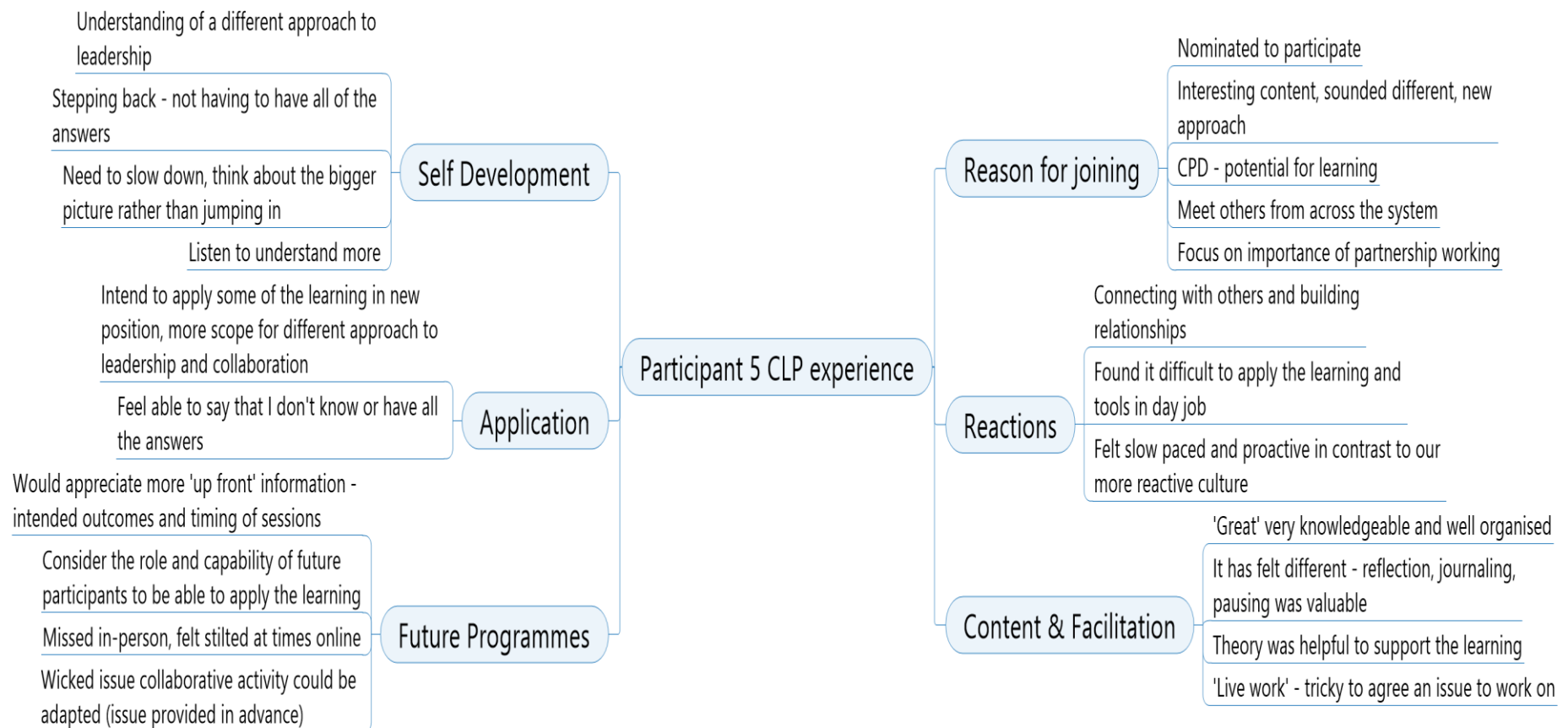
Participant 3
Cohort – East
Organisation – Police Scotland
Role – Deputy Local Area Commander



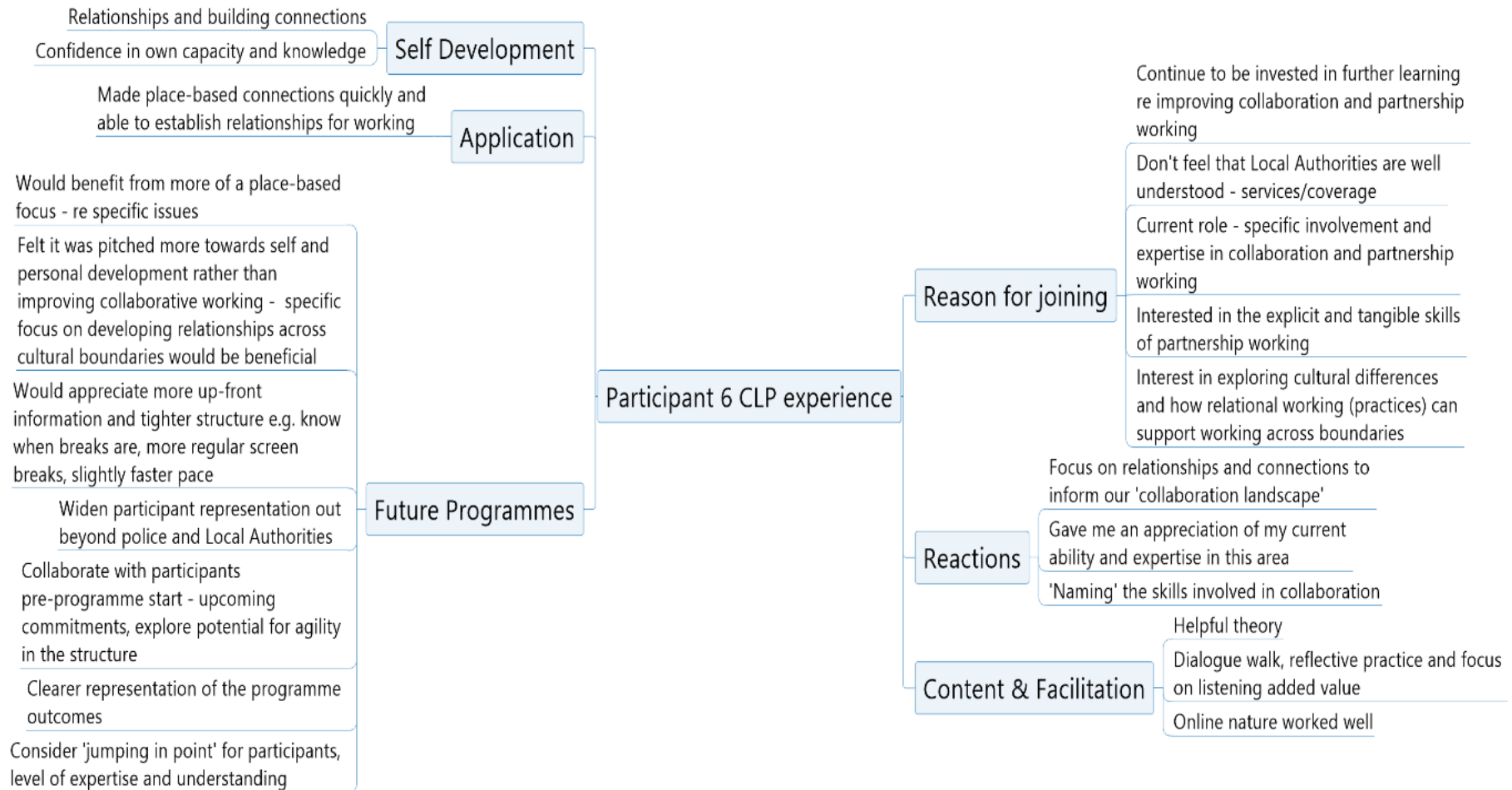
Participant 4
Cohort – North
Organisation – Police Scotland
Role – Area Commander



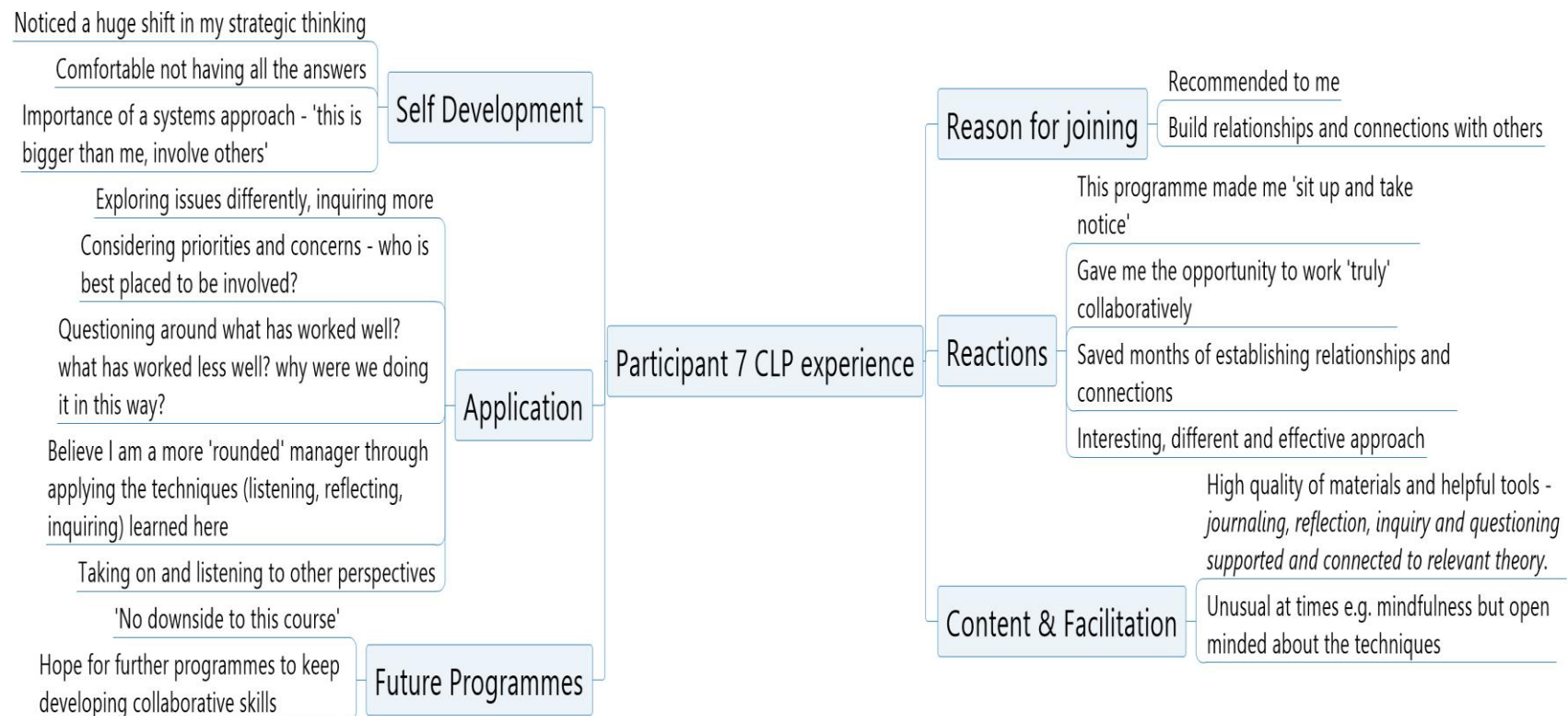
Participant 5
Cohort – North
Organisation – Police Scotland
Role – Detective Inspector



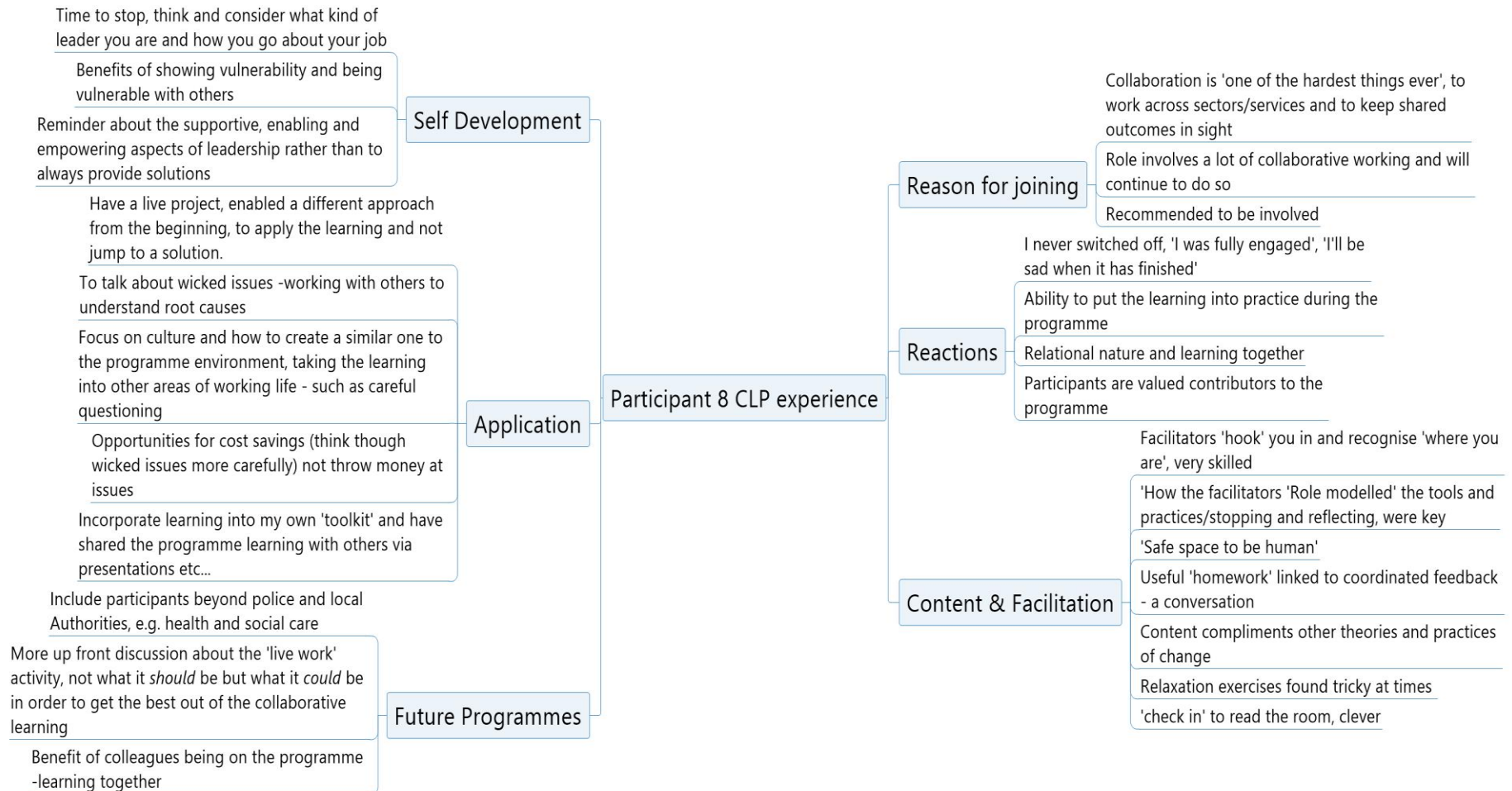
Participant 6
Cohort – West
Organisation – Local Authority
Role – Communities and Partnership Manager



Participant 7
Cohort – West
Organisation – Local Authority
Role – Service Manager - Justice Social Work



Participant 8
Cohort – North
Organisation – Local Authority
Role – Head of Children's Services



Participant 9
Cohort – North
Organisation – Police Scotland
Role – Chief Inspector

