Paradoxes of collaborative governance: investigating the real-life dynamics of multi-agency collaborations using a quasi-experimental action-research approach

Maurits Waardenburg, Martijn Groenleer, Jorrit de Jong & Bas Keijser

To cite this article: Maurits Waardenburg, Martijn Groenleer, Jorrit de Jong & Bas Keijser (2019): Paradoxes of collaborative governance: investigating the real-life dynamics of multi-agency collaborations using a quasi-experimental action-research approach, Public Management Review, DOI: 10.1080/14719037.2019.1599056

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1599056
Paradoxes of collaborative governance: investigating the real-life dynamics of multi-agency collaborations using a quasi-experimental action-research approach

Maurits Waardenburg, Martijn Groenleer, Jorrit de Jong, and Bas Keijser

ABSTRACT
The literature suggests that collaborative governance efforts typically face three types of challenges: substantive problem-solving challenges, collaborative process challenges and multi-relational accountability challenges. In this article, we investigate how these challenges manifest themselves in practice and explore potential ways in which collaborators can deal with them. To do so, we studied eight multi-agency crime-fighting collaborations in the Netherlands using a quasi-experimental action-research approach. We found that the challenges present collaborations with a set of paradoxical demands. Collaborations that were able to make progress transcended the paradoxes by adopting a ‘both/and’ rather than an ‘either/or’ mindset. Our findings contribute to knowledge about designing effective multi-agency collaborations.

KEYWORDS Collaborative governance; multi-agency collaboration; quasi-experimental action-research approach; public problem-solving; collaborative process; multi-relational accountability

Introduction
Public agencies increasingly seek to collaborate, realizing that no individual agency alone holds the key to resolving complex societal problems (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006; Duit and Galaz 2008; Weber and Khademian 2008). These collaborative efforts are the object of our research. We define them here as ‘the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management’ that bring together stakeholders from across the public and private sector ‘in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished’ (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012, 2), and to achieve what is known as the collaborative advantage (Huxham and Vangen 2005; Doberstein 2016).

The collaborative efforts of public agencies produce novel governance challenges. Three main categories of collaborative governance challenges arise from the public management and governance literature (e.g. Ansell and Gash 2008; Provan and Kenis 2008; Moynihan et al. 2011; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012; Bryson, Crosby,
Substantive problem-solving challenges comprise the technically and politically difficult work of defining the problem a collaboration should work on, developing a collaborative response, and designing measures of success (Waardenburg et al. 2018). Collaborative-process challenges pertain to reconciling different perspectives and interests and building trust. Finally, multi-relational accountability challenges refer to tensions between new channels of accountability, including to other organizations and society at large, and old channels of accountability.

There is little empirical research concerning the real-life dynamics of these collaborative governance challenges. We do not exactly know how collaborators deal with these challenges in practice: on the one hand, navigating the tensions associated with participating in a multi-agency collaboration to tackle complex cross-boundary problems; on the other hand, faithfully representing the perspective and interests of one’s ‘own’ agency, and continuing to work on more routine problems having off-the-shelf solutions.

This article therefore seeks a deeper and richer understanding of the real-life dynamics of collaborative governance challenges, arguing that multi-agency collaboration is challenging because of its inherently paradoxical (i.e. seemingly contradictory) nature. We address two interrelated research questions: What paradoxes underlie commonly observed collaborative governance challenges? How do collaborations deal with these paradoxes?

To answer the above questions, we used a quasi-experimental action-research approach, zooming in on the complex cross-boundary problem of organized crime (see also Waardenburg et al. Forthcoming). We facilitated and followed the formation and functioning of eight crime-fighting collaborations in the Netherlands over an 18-month period. We intervened in their collaboration process while interrogating and observing them closely along the way and gathering data about the collaborative governance challenges they face, the underlying paradoxes, and their responses.

Before we detail our approach, we first synthesize what is known about the governance challenges collaborations face and their typical responses. We then present the results of our research on actual challenges, pinpointing paradoxes faced, and coping strategies deployed. We also explore – in a preliminary fashion – what factors could explain why some collaborations succeed in dealing with the paradoxes of collaborative governance, whereas others do not (or to a lesser extent).

The challenges of collaborative governance

We briefly describe the three main categories of collaborative governance challenges that can be distilled from the existing literature and what makes them particularly complex. We use this to guide our empirical inquiry into the real-life dynamics of these challenges and underlying paradoxes.

Substantive problem-solving challenges

For problem-oriented collaborative governance efforts like the crime-fighting collaborations we looked at, the problem-solving process begins with identifying a specific undesirable situation, and attempting to define the problem and its root causes. This,
however, is notoriously difficult for the non-routine, complex or ‘wicked’ problems that many such collaborations have been asked to solve – defined as societal problems ‘that are inherently resistant to a clear definition and an agreed solution’ (Head and Alford 2015, 4). The different perspectives of the organizations around the table further complicates problem definition (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000). Basadur et al. (2000) describe the collaborative problem-solving process as resembling a game of bargaining with different parties entrenched in their own perspectives and interests. Yet, this game must be played, as the very idea and value of collaborating is to combine partners’ perspectives to redefine the problem at hand and find new inroads where none existed before (Sorensen and Torfing 2011).

Once the problem is defined, collaborators must develop a sound theory of change (Poister 2003; Sparrow 2008). Rogers et al. (2000) describe this as a model that causally links the inputs and activities of a program to intended (or observed) outcomes. The wicked nature of the problems that many collaborative governance efforts address makes developing a sound theory of change especially difficult: even if it were possible to clearly define the problem, there are not likely to be any standardized approaches to solving it, particularly given the cross-boundary nature of the problem. This often makes it hard to determine an ‘access point’ for tackling the problem, resulting in inaction (Weber and Khademian 2008; Head and Alford 2015). In addition, the fluid nature of policy networks and actors involved makes developing a sound theory of change a much less rigid and linear process than it would be in non-collaborative settings. In fact, the process resembles policy games, ‘a series of [non-linear] interactions between actors concerning certain policy issues’ (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004, 10).

Collaborators must also solve the problem of developing performance measures to gauge their performance against their theory of change – evaluating whether partners are deploying resources as planned, whether resources are being combined to generate desired interventions and outputs, and whether the outputs are actually yielding the envisioned societal (or public value) outcomes the collaboration sought (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006). Because individual contributions to collectively pursued activities are hard to isolate, results will seldom be attributable to single-organization efforts. There is also the difficulty of conceptualizing and enumerating complex and multi-faceted societal outcomes and measuring them without benefit of counterfactuals (Stoker 2006; Moynihan et al. 2011). Finally, dynamic policy discourses and different stakeholder agendas often leave room for multiple interpretations of what outcomes should be pursued and how to measure them (Guarneros-Meza, Downe, and Martin 2017).

**Collaborative process challenges**

One of the key preliminary steps in any problem-oriented collaborative governance endeavor is to reach a shared understanding on goals and approach (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012). Usually, there is an underlying structure of interests that creates the context for collaboration to solve a particular problem. This context may consist of some overlapping values, goals, and commitments, but also some widely disparate ones. The more partners, the more difficult it tends to be to find common ground (Provan and Kenis 2008). Here, however, ‘it is important to stress that there is no incompatibility between collaboration and conflict’ (Crosby, ‘t
Hart, and Torfing 2017: 664). Thus, the main challenge lies in turning antagonistic conflict into constructive conflict that broadens participants’ objectives and improves solutions.

In tandem with the process of finding common ground on objectives, individual collaborators need to gain basic trust in each other. This can serve as a substitute for formal procedures for cooperation (Ring and Van De Ven 1994). Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2012) call trust a sine qua non for collaboration. Apprehension about other collaborators’ good intentions or capacity can imperil the effort’s success (Das and Teng 2001). As Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh explain, a pre-condition for collaboration may be ‘the confirmation that participants in a collective endeavor are trustworthy and credible, with compatible and interdependent interests’ (2012, 14). Once this has been confirmed, collaborators must generate reciprocal commitment to each other’s good intentions (Bardach 1998; Ansell and Gash 2008; Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2015).

Given the sometimes arbitrary nature of how collaborative efforts come about and possible prejudices about other collaborators’ way of working, this process of building trust is key in establishing effective partnerships, but may at times be the most complex challenge of all (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006; Thomson and Perry 2006). If initial mistrust is high, the only way to build trust is through principled engagement that leads to intermediate small wins that may be celebrated together (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012).

Another part of building trust is establishing a primary commitment to the collaboration, resisting collaborators’ competing commitments to their parent organizations and overcoming reluctance to participating fully because they are too busy, unsure of the results, or anxious that other collaborators will dismiss their perspectives and interests (Ansell and Gash 2008). To overcome these inhibitions, collaborators need to work together to create an environment focused on mutual gain, both professional and personal (Thomson and Perry 2006; Ansell and Gash 2008).

**Multi-relational accountability challenges**

The last category of challenges concerns the relationships between the collaboration and ‘outside’ actors, including the collaborators’ own organizations, with regard to rendering account for collective actions. ‘Accountability is a particularly complex issue for collaborations because it is not often clear whom the collaborative is accountable to and for what’ (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006, 51). Functioning in a collaboration opens new channels of accountability and creates tensions with old channels. Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) note that evaluations of collaborations should reflect not just the perspectives of participant organizations, but also the perspective of the collaborations’ external governance regimes and, ultimately, the public value goals they pursue.

Collaborators almost always experience tension between their collaborative activities and the accountability systems in their parent organizations (Moynihan et al. 2011). Internal performance review structures and accountability arrangements may either not recognize contributions made in the context of the collaboration or directly discourage them. As such, collaborators often appear to face a conundrum: fulfil their organizational responsibilities and fail to be accountable for their collaborative performance, or vice versa (Page 2004; Ryan and Walsh 2004; Page et al. 2015).
An additional challenge relates to the need for collaborators to account for their performance to unfamiliar partners. Some collaborators may be unwilling to be held accountable in this new setting, fearing an additional yardstick (Page 2004). And even if all collaborators accept mutual accountability, it remains hard to delegate responsibilities and credit contributions among partners (Bardach and Lesser 1996; Sparrow 2008; Page et al. 2015). As a result, shirking and gaming behaviour can hinder success (De Bruijn 2002).

Nascent external channels of accountability pose a final challenge for collaborative governance efforts. Collaborations often use the flexibility and discretion their collaborative setting provides to implement new approaches, which often do not fall under the mandates of any of the involved organizations. They therefore depend on the acceptance and support of the broader public and must be able to defend the actions they undertake and the outcomes they generate in the democratic arena (Klijn and Koppenjan 2000; O’Flynn 2007; Gains and Stoker 2009). In the new governance context, in which citizens become active participants and partners in the process of generating public value (Moore 1995), collaborations must ensure their democratic legitimacy (Heinrich 2002; Rogers and Weber 2010; Moynihan et al. 2011; Page et al. 2015).

Table 1 provides an overview of the collaborative governance challenges synthesized from the literature and forms the framework along which we derived our empirical findings regarding underlying paradoxes.

Method and data: a quasi-experimental action-research approach

To investigate the collaborative governance challenges and how collaborators dealt with them in practice, we adopted a quasi-experimental action-research approach. According to Stringer (2013, 1), unlike ‘experimental or quantitative research that looks for generalizable explanations related to a small number of variables, action research seeks to engage the complex dynamics involved in any social context.’ Action research is an iterative process, repeating cycles of adjusting practice based on research and building understanding based on the preceding research cycles. As such, action research is rooted in the principle of learning while doing (Reason and Bradbury 2008), much like the methodology that engineers use to pilot consecutive versions of a model (Herr and Anderson 2014).

An action-research approach allows one to quickly, and with limited resources, single out salient issues before committing to a large-scale experiment to test what seems to work (and what does not) (Lindblom 1990). It heeds the call to go beyond case studies and embark on experimental research in public management and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Overview of collaborative governance challenges.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantive problem solving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-relational accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
governance (Margetts 2011). It also provides a partial answer to the endogeneity problem in observational case studies, as discussed by Blom-Hansen, Morton, and Serritzlew (2015). In fact, action research resembles small-scale and field-based quasi-experiments in which ‘interventions’ are introduced exogenously (by the researchers), but the treatment group is not formally randomized versus a control group.

Our research problem and question lend themselves well to such a quasi-experimental action-research approach. There is an abundance of theoretical work on collaborative governance challenges (synthesized above), but little empirical research on how collaborations deal with these challenges and why some seem more successful than others. The approach allowed us to see and interact with the challenges that collaborators face and their underlying causes up close, which is hard to do from the traditional independent, external researcher position. It enabled us to test ideas about why collaborators faced these challenges and hone our understandings of them by continuously prototyping new interventions and observing responses, which would not have been achievable through a traditional case study design. It would, at the same time, have been premature and prohibitively complex to perform full-scale, controlled experiments, especially since we lack propositions informed by empirical evidence suggesting potentially effective interventions. A quasi-experimental action-research approach enabled the formulation of such preliminary propositions.

The obvious drawback of our approach is the potential bias that direct interaction with research subjects may produce. To limit our bias, we carefully recorded all of our analytic process steps and tested our thinking with independent academic observers, in line with Herr and Anderson’s (2014) recommendations for safeguarding validity with an action-research approach.

Selection of collaborations

As part of the approach, we studied collaborations around a particularly wicked problem: organized crime involving drug and human trafficking, fraud and money laundering, and cybercrime. We selected collaborations fighting organized crime for several reasons.

First, crime-fighting collaborations provide a particularly rich and vivid picture of the collaborative challenges under study, as new forms of networked crime are near-perfect examples of the wicked problems an increasingly connected and globalized world introduces. In the Netherlands, especially the southern part, criminal networks are increasingly entangled with legitimate society. Societal actors from accountants to car rental companies, and even municipalities and government agencies such as the immigration service, knowingly or unknowingly facilitate criminal networks. Citizens or companies who refuse to cooperate face intimidation or violence, as do politicians who act against these networks. Such displays of illegitimate power and the failure to curb criminal networks undermine the authority of the government and the integrity of societal institutions.

Second, these crime-fighting collaborations represent a larger set of collaborations attempting to fight wicked problems in novel multi-disciplinary governance arrangements. Realizing that no single agency can resolve wicked problems introduced by an increasingly globalized, digitized environment, public agencies in the Netherlands have sought to collaborate in innovative ways. The new approach seeks to use the full range of measures at the disposal of collaborating partners, both public and private.
In accordance, across the Netherlands, more or less formalized multi-agency collaborations emerged to work with and alongside the police and public prosecutor’s office to frustrate criminal activities and erect economic and social barriers within criminal networks.

Finally, due to the felt urgency of the problem in the Netherlands and the absence of any approaches that work well, we enjoyed extraordinary access to the crime-fighting collaborations and exceptional willingness of the involved stakeholders to join in experimentation, learning and innovation. The collaborations we studied were formed within the framework of the Task Force Brabant Zeeland, a regional initiative of the police, the public prosecutor’s office, the tax authority, and local governments to stimulate collaborative efforts to fight organized crime.

Under the auspices of the Task Force, and in coordination with our research team, eight particularly wicked crime problems identified in the southern part of the Netherlands were selected (see Table 2). These were multifaceted problems that mono-disciplinary efforts had not solved, for which no off-the-shelf solutions were available, and in which different stakeholders had markedly different interests and viewpoints (cf. Head 2008). For instance, while municipalities saw the degradation of trailer parks primarily as a public nuisance to address through enforcement of zoning and administrative laws, prosecutors saw them as nests for heavy criminals who should be brought up on criminal charges.

Individual collaborators to participate in the collaborations were identified by their superiors based on their involvement and expertise in the respective crime problem and/or their interest and motivation in engaging in the collaborative effort. Collaborations included at a minimum police officers and public prosecutors, but

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Team name</th>
<th>Crime problem</th>
<th>Team composition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘Lou Poekele’</td>
<td>Deteriorating living conditions in trailer parks, domiciles of large criminal families</td>
<td>Public prosecutor, police, tax office, local government, and iCOV&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘Catch me if you can’</td>
<td>Porous transport hubs (small airports and harbors), gateways for criminal activity</td>
<td>Public prosecutor, constabulary, local government, customs department, and police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>‘Away from it all’</td>
<td>Lawlessness in recreation parks, safe havens for criminals</td>
<td>Public prosecutor, police, local government, RIEC&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;, and customs department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>‘Cooking and disposing’</td>
<td>Large-scale synthetic drug production, from labs to export, including illegal dumping of waste</td>
<td>Public prosecutor, police, tax office, and provincial government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>‘Kwatta’</td>
<td>Growth of criminal motorcycle gangs, networks of criminals</td>
<td>Public prosecutor, police, local government, tax office, and RIEC&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>‘Lease Bling Bling’</td>
<td>Lease and rental companies used to facilitate logistics for criminals, as well as money laundering</td>
<td>Public prosecutor, police, local government, tax office, and TLN&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>‘Shock and Awe’</td>
<td>Marijuana plantations in regular homes and neighborhoods, intimidation and violence against citizens</td>
<td>Public prosecutor, police, tax office, local government, and energy distribution company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>‘Olympus’</td>
<td>Use of legal loopholes to circumvent taxes, enabling money laundering</td>
<td>Public prosecutor, tax office, police, and local government</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> iCov is a joint initiative of the tax authority, public prosecutor, police and the Financial Intelligence Unit, to shed light on large unexplained criminal assets

<sup>b</sup> RIEC stands for Regional Information and Expertise Centre

<sup>c</sup> TLN stands for Transport and Logistics Netherlands
most also included local government representatives and tax officials. In several collaborations, representatives of other public agencies, joint initiatives, or private entities took part, depending on the nature of the crime problem addressed. Collaborations consisted of five to six members.

**Introduction of interventions**

Our involvement began with the formation of the collaborations in March 2015 and ended, after an 18-month period of facilitating and following the functioning of the collaborations, in August 2016. At the request of the Task Force, we trained and coached the collaborations on how to define their respective crime problems, develop a theory of change, take coordinated actions, and ultimately, account for results. Beyond training and coaching, our involvement made it possible to investigate the challenges that collaborative governance efforts face and study responses to these challenges up close.

To help the collaborations manage the three types of collaborative governance challenges identified in the literature, we introduced three overarching interventions. First, in coordination with the Task Force, we developed a structured working process with milestones to support the collaborations in tackling substantive problem-solving challenges. Upon their formation, all collaborations received a basic description of the particular subversive crime problem that they would be responsible for tackling. At designated times, collaborations were asked to hand in predetermined deliverables, including different iterations of the problem definition.

In June 2015, all collaborators came together in a weeklong workshop to help deepen their understanding, learn from each other, and develop innovative approaches. The workshop consisted of both case-based, interactive lectures and working sessions to continue to develop the collaborations’ approach. At the end of the workshop, all of the collaborations presented their draft approaches to the management of all of the parent organizations at an ‘innovation market’. All the collaborations agreed to come back together and submit progress reports after four months and after one year during specially designed ‘stocktaking sessions’.

Second, to address collaborative-process challenges, we ensured that gatherings and planning took place away from the usual organizational environment of the collaborations and the collaborators’ normal working spaces. The kick-off meeting to get collaborators acquainted and familiar with the trajectory took place at Tilburg University, as did the weeklong workshop. Stocktaking sessions took place at the seat of the provincial government in Den Bosch. The physical relocation of the work aimed to free the collaborators’ minds from the usual organizational work patterns.

Third, to address accountability tensions, we tailored a structure to support the collaborations. Superiors promised participants flexibility and a degree of autonomy, and all collaborators and their superiors committed to participate in the stocktaking sessions in which collaborations presented their progress to their superiors and received their input and feedback. This input and feedback was not binding, nor were the meetings necessarily evaluative, but the continued support of superiors was conditional upon sufficient progress of the collaborations.
While each collaboration was immersed in the same process and subject to the same interventions, there were differences in starting conditions that the research design could not control for. Arguably, a more specific crime problem definition or a particular team composition advantaged some collaborations. These different starting conditions may have factored into variations in responses to collaborative challenge (see below).

**Data collection and analysis**

Our quasi-experimental action-research approach allowed us to generate various kinds of data on collaborative challenges and responses. In total, the four researchers all spent seven to nine working days with the teams over the 18-month period, allowing up close observation. In addition, six experienced practitioner coaches from the various organizations involved spent a similar amount of time with each of the teams, providing another source of observations.

In addition to direct observations, we used interviews and surveys to ask the collaborators about the challenges they experienced. During the weeklong workshop, we conducted group interviews with each of the eight collaborations. We also conducted an anonymous survey among individual collaborators at the beginning of the workshop (all 40 collaborators completed the survey), as a basis for the group interview, and shortly after the workshop (35 of the 40 collaborators completed this survey), to observe any differences following the intervention of the workshop. Both surveys as well as the interviews asked a similar set of questions, involving ranking common collaborative governance challenges and stipulating the reasons why they ranked some as more complex than others.

Throughout the 18 months, we gathered collaborations’ deliverables and communications to enrich our understanding of their working processes. We asked the collaborations to submit a range of documents, from initial problem definitions to implementation plans and progress reports. We were also copied on most email correspondence among team members, revealing hidden truths about challenges and how they managed them.

All the data were converted into codifiable form. For instance, we synthesized observations and interview data into written reports, aggregated survey data and turned it into descriptive statistics, and arranged deliverables and communications by collaboration. Next, we used a grounded theory approach to interpret the data and make inferences. We performed a systematic review of all data to derive labels for observed phenomena, coding and counter-coding the data into the three categories of collaborative governance challenges and responses.

Though this process may sound linear, we approached the ‘analysis not [as a] structured, static, or rigid process. Rather, [it was] a free-flowing and creative one in which [the researchers] moved quickly back and forth between types of coding’ (Strauss and Corbin 2015, 58). That is, we started rather openly, and became more selective in coding. We drew on the principles of design thinking and abductive reasoning to continuously reflect back on our initial theoretical considerations, relating them to our emerging findings and, where necessary, adapting previously defined analytical categories. This approach allowed us to get much closer to the data and confirm observed phenomena in practice. Figure 1 depicts the 18-month process of interventions, data collection, and analysis.
Paradoxes underlying collaborative governance challenges in practice

Through the iterative analytical approach described, we were able to observe the collaborative governance challenges identified in the literature in practice. We saw challenges in all three categories and found that a number of paradoxes – seeming contradictions that can be resolved upon further examination – make them particularly complex to deal with. Table 3 shows an overview of the paradoxes we identified.

Substantive problem-solving challenges and underlying paradoxes

Invariably, in both interviews and surveys, collaborators recognized defining the problem they were working on as their greatest challenge. They struggled to pinpoint precise reasons for this, but often alluded to the ‘wickedness’ of the problem. A police officer explained, ‘If we were able to clearly define the issue, a solution would present itself.’

In a similar trend, defining a theory of change and identifying indicators to measure the results ranked as the second and third greatest challenges in our surveys.

Table 3. Overview of collaborative governance paradoxes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Paradoxes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Substantive problem solving</td>
<td>Analysing the problem before action versus action in order to know what to analyse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focusing on a single problem or concrete case versus the larger issue or an abstract phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative process</td>
<td>Relying on strengths of traditional roles in own organization versus trying innovative ways of working beyond the formal job description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Engaging in collaboration and securing successes to build trust versus trust as a ‘sine qua non’ for starting a collaborative process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-relational accountability</td>
<td>Need for discretion to experiment versus need for steering and support to guide the collaboration process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reporting progress along new channels versus meeting old hierarchical accountability requirements</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants in the collaboration fighting large-scale synthetic drug production explained that the structured problem-solving approach was ‘outside their comfort zone’ and amounted to ‘a completely new way of working.’ All collaborations struggled to define reliable outcome indicators beyond the traditional output figures of confiscated money, arrested individuals, or instances of criminal activity. For example, a member of the synthetic drug collaboration wondered: ‘Do fewer instances of dumping of waste of synthetic drugs production mean that the problem is solved or that the perpetrators are hiding the waste better?’ The overriding sentiment was that collaborators had heard about the need to adopt a broader, more strategic approach to creating public value, but that no one had ever demanded that they try such an approach or offered guidance in doing so.

Several paradoxes surfaced that seem to make substantive problem-solving challenges particularly complex in practice. One clear paradox was inherent in the ‘wicked’ nature of the problem for which crime-fighting collaborations are called into existence: to determine an approach and take action, the problem needs to be thoroughly analysed and its root causes laid bare. This requires data on the problem and an understanding of causal mechanisms. Yet, such data and understanding can be generated only by interacting with the data through actions in the field. But how to target such actions in the absence of clarity on the problem and its root causes? One tax official was particularly conscious of this paradox between analysis and action: ‘To gather data and understand the problem in all its facets, collaborative action is needed,’ yet collaborative action had not yet taken place because of insufficient data to support the development of a collaborative approach.

In addition to the action-analysis paradox, the collaborations struggled to resolve the apparent paradox between dealing with a single problem case and addressing the larger issue of which the problem case was a subcomponent. For example, one of the teams was uncertain about whether they were asked to solve a (criminal) case of a specific car lease company engaged in illegal activities, which their initial problem statement focused on, or the wider phenomenon of car lease companies facilitating organized crime. A member of this collaboration expressed the predicament: ‘We are not really sure if we are searching for an answer to the broader problem or the specific case, and what our specific role should be.’

**Collaborative process challenges and underlying paradoxes**

In response to these confounding problem-solving challenges and underlying paradoxes, collaborators often resorted to the typical means at their own organization’s disposal. For instance, one collaborator with a police background suggested, ‘Maybe we just need to make a few more arrests to get a grip on the situation.’ Being stuck in their professional frames of reference often limited participants’ ability to find common ground and innovative, cross-organizational solutions. In the group interview, the collaboration working on underground accounting recognized this as a prime challenge: ‘It is difficult to find common incentives, as everyone’s starting point is their own organization.’

Whereas fostering a shared understanding of the goals and commitment to the collaborative process was generally considered a significant challenge, only two out of the eight collaborations ranked building trust as one of the top two challenges in the surveys. Most collaborations recognized that the design of the process, which
forced participants to meet and get to know each other in person and gave a formal mandate to the groups, played a big part in overcoming typical initial trust deficiencies amongst law enforcement agencies (i.e. ‘this is my jurisdiction’). Individuals who cited trust as an issue seemed particularly fearful of sharing information held by their own organizations. One member of the team working on money laundering constructions explained that she lacked understanding of legal permissions and felt uncomfortable not knowing what other parties would do with information she shared.

Again, we found certain paradoxes making these common process challenges particularly complex in practice for collaborations. The collaborators struggled to reconcile the seeming paradox between the requirement to innovate beyond their formal job descriptions and the simultaneous need to draw on the strengths of their traditional roles and means at the disposal of their parent organizations. It seemed difficult for collaborators to keep one foot in each world. One public prosecutor lamented, ‘Isn’t the point of this [program] to innovate? What we have now is just a mix of old approaches in a new configuration.’

Another paradox pertained to trust and working together. In order to build trust, individual collaborators needed to engage in collaboration and see evidence that their collaboration could produce desirable results. Yet, in order to start collaborating and producing results by, for instance, sharing sensitive crime data, a basic level of trust was necessary. A member of one collaboration noted that ‘trust comes from successful collaboration, but collaboration is about building trust.’ Indeed, most questions from the collaborations during the kick-off meeting concerned the sharing of information and the legal barriers supposedly making this difficult or even impossible. These questions signaled a limited level of trust at the start of the process, which inhibited the collaborations’ ability to book the early results that would have created greater trust in each other’s abilities and good intentions.

Multi-relational accountability challenges and underlying paradoxes

The most apparent accountability challenge participants experienced was reconciling their accountability within the collaborative process with their traditional organizational accountability. Several individuals attempted to dislodge themselves from the process or refused to contribute due to a perceived or purported lack of authorization from superiors in their parent organizations. For example, one tax official repeatedly stated that he was ‘not authorized or in a position to comment on the issue’ and, as a result, limited his active participation in the process.

New channels of accountability also seemed threatening to the collaborations. The stock-taking meetings with top managers from other agencies were something the collaborators had ‘never encountered before.’ This raised many questions. What kind of authority would other organizations’ leaders have over them? How would the judgments of collaborating organizations impact their evaluations in their own organizations? Who would have final say over what direction their collaboration, and their role within it, would take?

As with the other two categories of collaborative governance challenges, several paradoxes inherent in the collaborative work seemed to underlie these challenges in practice. First, to innovate together effectively, the collaborators needed more time and room to maneuver from their immediate superiors – even as they needed more
concerted support and steering from their superiors to ensure success in this new way of working. Superiors were often apprehensive about providing more autonomy, preferring to monitor and assess their employees’ new role and achievements closely. Unable to resolve this tension, a number of collaborators were pulled out of the process early on by their parent organization. For example, in the collaboration working on porous transport hubs, the customs department, unable to perceive any clear short-term return on its investment after the initial phase, terminated its participation rather than stepping in to provide more concerted support.

Second, the requirement that collaborators report their progress directly to the top management of several organizations with new kinds of performance indicators while retaining their old hierarchical accountability requirements through traditional performance indicators seemed confusing and paradoxical to many. Collaborators time and again raised the need for new performance indicators that could gauge their achievements as (members of) collaborations more reliably. At the same time, for many collaborators, still accustomed to familiar bureaucratic accountability mechanisms, reporting to more than one authority about the same task using innovative measurements seemed an oxymoron. ‘It’s nice that the top of these different organizations requires us to work on this, but I still have my regular tasks to perform. Should I ask top management to tell my direct superior that I can’t do my daily tasks because I am working on this?’ one tax official wondered. Few participants recognized that the work they were doing in the context of the collaboration could be seen as a natural extension, or even an acceleration, of their daily tasks.

Variation in collaborations’ responses to collaborative governance challenges and paradoxes

Unable to resolve some or all of the above challenges and their underlying paradoxes, many collaborators felt stuck. During one working session in the weeklong workshop, we observed a police officer telling his partners: ‘We seem to be going back and forth without any progress.’ Most collaborations dealt with the uncertainty by sheltering in the apparent safety of continuous analysis without making concrete plans or moving into action. Predictably, however, this only brought new problem-solving and process challenges to the surface, leaving collaborations further mired in uncertainty and increasingly anxious about how to account for their progress.

Throughout the 18 months, however, we found considerable variation in collaborations’ responses to the paradoxes identified above. This was partly a result of differences in initial conditions - including different crime problems and starting definitions, different team compositions, and differences in the historical, institutional, and political contexts in which problems had to be solved. Yet, there were also signs that differences in the day-to-day functioning of the collaborations allowed some to move forward in the face of these paradoxes while others got stuck.

Table 4 gives a sense of the rich variation in paradoxes each collaboration faced and their responses to them. To further explore this variation, we zoom in on three different collaborations, using team surveys and interviews, documents produced, and observations over the 18-month period to reconstruct their challenges and coping strategies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team name</th>
<th>Example of paradoxes faced</th>
<th>Response to these paradoxes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Lou Poekele’</td>
<td><em>Substantive problem-solving:</em> Team was unable to decide whether to focus on the larger problem of lawlessness at trailer parks or intervene in a particular trailer park. They cited lack of expertise and data on the issue as a particular struggle.</td>
<td>Initially stuck in back-and-forth on problem definition, the team eventually decided to focus on one particular trailer park to pilot potential approaches for tackling wider issue, allowing the team to forge ahead with a singular approach. Yet, given their lack of data and trouble onboarding a partner, team struggled to intervene in actual trailer park.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Catch me if you can’</td>
<td><em>Substantive problem-solving:</em> Team lacked clear information on the problem of illegal smuggling via small airports, which it could only gather through intervention in practice.</td>
<td>To obtain data and demonstrate the gravity of the issue, the team filmed an undercover agent passing through a small local airport with a rocket launcher without difficulty. This small-scale test showed there was a potential issue and raised stakeholders’ concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Away from it all’</td>
<td><em>Collaborative process:</em> One team member struggled to put trust in the seemingly unstructured process before results ('I would be more comfortable going straight to the target').</td>
<td>The team appointed the struggling team member as the process manager. This moved the team out of a cycle of blaming each other for slow progress and began to move the problem-solving process forward. Yet, given lack of early wins, the team process remained a challenge throughout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Cooking and disposing’</td>
<td><em>Collaborative process:</em> Team struggled to think beyond familiar professional roles and organizational strengths and to combine them in new ways. They wondered how they could add something to all the ongoing efforts targeted at local drugs production.</td>
<td>Team spent more time together on problem-solving process to come to some sort of resolution. Eventually it decided to focus on raising awareness about drugs amongst local users. In their struggle to deal with this large issue beyond their usual expertise, they did not attempt to crack the issue of international demand, which comprises around 90 per cent of the total market.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Kwatta’</td>
<td><em>Substantive problem-solving:</em> Team struggled to find an access point in the problem without covering the full phenomenon. Initial strategy included interventions covering the full range of the issue, which made the problem overwhelmingly large.</td>
<td>One team member eventually took charge of process management at the request of other members and was able to unite members around an approach. They decided to focus on the most problematic criminal motorcycle gangs first to set the example for others. This increased focus provided an access point, although the team continued to struggle to keep their approach focused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Lease Bling Bling’</td>
<td><em>Multi-relational accountability:</em> Team members questioned their own expertise on the topic and whether their immediate superiors would really hold them accountable for working on it. They experienced a conflict between reporting to other organizations’ top leadership for collaborative work and their day-to-day responsibilities.</td>
<td>Team members mentioned two interventions helped them advance. First, their immediate superiors expressed their explicit support. Second, in-person working and brainstorming sessions during the weeklong workshop helped to build trust and mutual commitment to the approach between the partners. This increased focus provided an access point, although the team continued to struggle to keep their approach focused.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The collaboration working on the deteriorating conditions in trailer parks initially struggled with the paradox between focusing on a single concrete case of a problematic trailer park versus the larger phenomenon. They initially struggled to see how interventions in particular trailer parks could lead to an impact on the larger issue of lawlessness on trailer parks. The team also failed to build sufficient trust to obtain critical data from a municipality that had been involved in a pivotal case involving trailer parks, partially due to the fact that they had been outsiders to the problem themselves and did not have any concrete results or data to share back. Generating more data to understand the nature of the issue would have required either getting the municipality on board or performing targeted enforcement activities in a particular trailer park. The team seemed somewhat paralyzed by their confusion about the problem scope and their struggle to get the right partners on board, and only moved to action toward the end of the 18-month trajectory, deciding to focus on one particular trailer park. This allowed them to pilot a potential approach for tackling the wider societal issue of lawlessness at trailer parks and obtain data for a better understanding of the problem. Despite this breakthrough, the team continued to struggle towards the end of the trajectory to intervene in practice.

Small (air)ports as hubs for illegal trafficking (‘catch me if you can’)  

Like the trailer park collaboration, the collaboration working on porous transport hubs was at first unable to garner the support of necessary partners, including the customs department and border control. In this case, however, it was due to the customs department’s initial opposition to investing in the collaborative process. They struggled with the paradoxes of unifying old and new channels of accountability: They saw no immediate benefit in terms of their own organizational output targets and did not want to be held accountable for their participation even if the case

### Table 4. (Continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team name</th>
<th>Example of paradoxes faced</th>
<th>Response to these paradoxes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Shock and Awe’</td>
<td><strong>Substantive problem-solving:</strong> Team wondered how such a small group of individuals could make a dent in the problem, given the thousands of marijuana plantations spread across the country.</td>
<td>The team ultimately defined an access point in the broad problem: safety and security hazards related to domestic marijuana plantations, which the collaboration could identify using electricity network data. This gave the team greater focus on a single approach and allowed it to undertake action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Olympus’</td>
<td><strong>Collaborative process:</strong> Team expressed significant trust deficit and lack of collaborative spirit from the start. Example quote: ’It is difficult to place oneself in somebody else’s frame of reference. […] Maybe somebody has a hidden agenda?’</td>
<td>Physical co-location and the collaborative effort of developing an approach and planning joint activities strengthened trust and allowed for some progress. Reconciling different organizational perspectives remained a struggle, however, which led to slower progress and a lack of concrete results by the end of the trajectory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Criminal families in trailer parks (‘lou poekele’)**

The collaboration working on the deteriorating conditions in trailer parks initially struggled with the paradox between focusing on a single concrete case of a problematic trailer park versus the larger phenomenon. They initially struggled to see how interventions in particular trailer parks could lead to an impact on the larger issue of lawlessness on trailer parks. The team also failed to build sufficient trust to obtain critical data from a municipality that had been involved in a pivotal case involving trailer parks, partially due to the fact that they had been outsiders to the problem themselves and did not have any concrete results or data to share back. Generating more data to understand the nature of the issue would have required either getting the municipality on board or performing targeted enforcement activities in a particular trailer park. The team seemed somewhat paralyzed by their confusion about the problem scope and their struggle to get the right partners on board, and only moved to action toward the end of the 18-month trajectory, deciding to focus on one particular trailer park. This allowed them to pilot a potential approach for tackling the wider societal issue of lawlessness at trailer parks and obtain data for a better understanding of the problem. Despite this breakthrough, the team continued to struggle towards the end of the trajectory to intervene in practice.
closely aligned with their organizational purpose. The collaboration also struggled to define an adequate approach due to a relative scarcity of information on the crime problem they were assigned and as a result of the missing critical partner. Generating such information would have required intervening in the problem, but in the absence of the information the collaboration exactly struggled how to do this.

Despite this, the collaborators thought of an innovative way to overcome this initial analysis-action paralysis and gather data they could use to define a suitable approach. To prove the gravity of the issue, they filmed an undercover agent passing through a small local airport with a rocket launcher without difficulty. This raised all stakeholders’ awareness of the potential for illegal smuggling via these transport hubs. With the missing partners now on board, the collaboration was able to analyse dubious flight patterns and implement targeted enforcement activities against suspects at these hubs. The undercover operation thus provided an access point to simultaneously gather data on the gravity of the problem and advance toward its resolution.

**Marijuana plantations in local neighborhoods (‘shock and awe’)**

Like the others, the collaboration focusing on marijuana plantations struggled to define an adequate theory of change to intervene on this broad societal issue. With thousands of such marijuana plantations spread across the country, they wondered how such a small group of individuals could make a dent in the problem. Particularly, they wondered how their intervention in one or a limited set of cases could lead to any significant, broader results.

To move ahead, they took a leap of faith and narrowed their problem definition to domestic marijuana plantations and related safety and security hazards. Use of electricity network data enabled them to narrow down the locations of marijuana plantations that were stealing electricity to areas of about a dozen households. Representatives of several public agencies as well as the energy distribution company then went door to door, raising awareness among residents of the dangers of marijuana production at home, including fire hazards and extortion by criminal networks. This strategy, combining analysis and action, provided an access point to raise barriers in criminal networks’ opportunity structure. Their approach drew on existing data from the energy distribution company. The door-to-door visits also generated support from citizens for the approach and, indeed, informal enforcement capacity.

**Exploring variation in collaborations’ responses**

Our research did not initially set out to explain variation in collaborations’ responses. We nonetheless may explore here – in a preliminary fashion – what factors can explain why some collaborations succeeded in dealing with the paradoxes of collaborative governance, whereas others did not (or to a lesser extent).

One salient pattern that emerges from the ways in which the collaborations worked to overcome their initial paralysis in the face of the described paradoxes is the adoption of what we call a ‘both/and’ mindset rather than an ‘either/or’ mindset. Collaborators – such as those in the ‘Catch me if you can’ and ‘Shock and awe’ teams – who adopted such a mindset accepted that dealing with paradoxes is part of the work and should be embraced rather than lamented. They realized that while they may not be able to resolve tensions inherent in
collaborative governance work, they could make progress by acknowledging and working through them together, accepting both sides of seemingly contradictory demands on them.

In particular, collaborations that managed to get ‘unstuck’ settled on imperfect but practical access points – ways to attack the problem from a particular angle – knowing that they would probably need to adapt if and when they learned more about the issue. This approach, while not ideal, was better and more actionable than endlessly circling around the issue. These collaborations also accepted that building trust would take time, but put just enough confidence in the process to start sharing critical information with their new partners. Moreover, they (momentarily) put aside the concern that their joint efforts appeared work on top of their daily tasks and accepted and introduced new accountability structures for the moment, reaching out to their immediate superiors for support and assuming they, at some point and in some way, would get recognition for their collective work.

Collaborators with an either/or mindset struggled considerably more. They remained stuck in the ambiguity of the wicked problem they were trying to solve, (initially) unwilling or unable to choose an access point. Trust issues persisted as individuals maintained their organizational perspectives rather than building on each other’s strengths. They used their own organizational responsibilities to downplay their collaborative responsibilities, in some cases removing themselves from the process entirely.

Why were some collaborations, and some individuals, apparently more willing or able than others to adopt a ‘both/and’ mindset? One possible answer may be found in the ability to deal with multiple, seemingly irreconcilable commitments and requirements simultaneously. According to Kegan and Lahey (2009), it is often subconscious competing commitments that prevent individuals from advancing in the face of uncertainty. Only by making these competing commitments an object of thought (rather than being subject to them) and identifying the assumptions behind them can individuals overcome their internal resistance to change, resolve paradoxes they are facing, and make progress towards (societal) change.

To make progress in tackling wicked crime problems, at least some collaborations in our study seem to have explored and embraced contradictions in a similar fashion. For example, the ‘Catch me if you can’ collaboration resolved the seeming contradiction between action and analysis by addressing the underlying assumption that action was impossible without knowledge, expertise or involvement in the problem. Rather, they embraced that their limited expertise gave them a new external perspective to bring the issue of porous logistics hubs in a new, creative way.

The ability to deal with multiple, seemingly irreconcilable commitments and requirements simultaneously in such a way takes ‘a self-transforming mind’. This is a rare quality that is hard to nurture in individuals (Kegan and Lahey 2009) – let alone among collectives of individuals like the crime-fighting collaborations we facilitated and followed. Nevertheless, our research suggests that coaching collaborations to reflect on apparently contradictory commitments, imperatives, or requirements and to identify the underlying assumptions about their irreconcilability can help them adopt a ‘both/and’ mindset. In fact, the ‘Catch me if you can’ collaboration derived their innovative approach during a joint problem-solving session during which we explored the underlying reasons for the paralysis they were facing and brainstormed on alternative avenues to approach their problem.
Another possible explanation for variation in the adoption of a ‘both/and’ mindset might be found in the development of effective ‘teaming’ practices. As shown in Table 4, we observed several collaborations that relied on an intervention in their team process management to forge ahead and adopt a ‘both/and’ mindset when they felt stuck. For example, we observed two teams – ‘Away from it all’ and ‘Kwatta’ – explicitly appointing a process manager who could unite members around a purpose, plan ahead, and appoint tasks. Accordingly, our research also suggests that a focus on coaching collaborators with regard to what Edmondson (2012) calls ‘teaming software’ may help them deal with the paradoxes inherent in their work. In fact, the intervention of selecting a process manager for both collaborations discussed above was derived during a coaching session discussing their team process challenges.

**Conclusion and discussion**

This article sought a deeper and richer understanding of the real-life dynamics of multi-agency collaborations. We investigated the governance challenges that collaborations face in practice and how they manage these challenges, and particularly the paradoxes underlying them. We also explored variations among collaborations in dealing with these paradoxes and potential ways to explain such variations. To do so, we used a quasi-experimental action-research approach, facilitating as well as following the formation and functioning of eight crime-fighting collaborations in the Netherlands over an 18-month period.

Our research confirms that collaborative governance often comes with challenges around problem solving, collaborative process, and multi-relational accountability (e.g. Ansell and Gash 2008; Provan and Kenis 2008; Moynihan et al. 2011; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012; Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2015). Building on and further refining the collaborative governance literature, we also show that these challenges are particularly complex for collaborations due to the paradoxical (i.e. seemingly contradictory) nature of the requests imposed on professionals working in collaborative governance settings. These paradoxes are especially pronounced for public servants with one foot in the known bureaucratic way of working and one foot in the still novel networked governance. For example, it is easy to see how professionals conditioned to exercise caution and to fear the legal ramifications of sharing information are less than forthcoming in collaborative processes. A level of trust is required, but only by engaging in collaboration and, indeed, sharing information can they establish such trust (cf. Cuganesan, Hart, and Steele 2017).

By shedding light on these and other paradoxes, we grow our understanding of what lies beneath the typical collaborative governance challenges identified in the literature (e.g. Moynihan 2011; Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2015). Furthermore, in exploring the variation in responses, we show how a ‘both/and’ mindset has helped some collaborations and collaborators to overcome the paralysis in dealing with these paradoxes. While extreme care should be taken not to easily generalize from the case of crime-fighting collaborations and while our research may have formed a slightly artificial research setting that could alter collaborations’ behavior, we provide a first empirical underpinning for analyzing and comparing similar collaborations’ challenges, underlying paradoxes in practice as well as potential responses to these.

Moreover, our findings raise the question of how the adoption of a ‘both/and’ mindset might be promoted. What interventions, in addition to the basic support
structure put in place (a structured problem-solving process, a distinct collaborative space, and tailor-made accountability mechanisms) might be helpful? Our research suggests that collaborations can be coached to adopt a ‘both/and’ mindset: they can be helped to reflect on apparently contradictory commitments to deal with underlying assumptions, and to develop effective ‘teaming’ practices that can overcome collaborative paralysis. Yet, more research is needed to determine where differences in coping with the paradoxes exactly come from and through what interventions the adoption of a ‘both/and’ mindset might be stimulated.

Future research should also address and improve on some of the limitations of the present research. As noted, the starting conditions, including the selected crime problems and the selected collaborators, varied markedly between the collaborations. This heterogeneity in starting conditions made it difficult to make systematic comparisons between the eight collaborations or causal statements about differences in how they dealt with the paradoxes of collaborative governance. Future researchers should thus attempt to – as much as reasonably possible – control for the effects of initial conditions. Apart from selecting comparable problems and working with similarly composed collaborations, a more thorough comparison of coping strategies could be accomplished by following collaborations as they try to overcome the paradoxes of collaborative governance over a longer period of time.

With such adaptations in mind, follow-up studies could continue to benefit from a quasi-experimental action-research approach, which allows for further purposeful interventions in the day-to-day work of multi-agency collaborations as we study their dynamics. Rather than treating the roles of researchers and trainers or coaches as incompatible, this approach deliberately attempts to connect them: both following and facilitating collaborations, and both gathering data about (responses to) collaborative governance challenges and helping collaborations learn about wicked problems and develop innovate solutions along the way. Indeed, a quasi-experimental action-research approach closely resembles the ‘both/and’ mindset that we propose successful collaborations should adopt, helping to overcome the hurdles that have long made practical experimentation in this field rare.

**Acknowledgments**

We are grateful to all our collaborators from the various public agencies, private entities and societal organizations who were willing to embark with us on a journey of which the outcome would be unknown. We thank them for their confidence and collaboration. We also kindly acknowledge useful input from various participants at several events, including a meeting of the ‘Public Management and Governance Research Colloquium’ at the Hertie School of Governance in Berlin in 2015 and a research workshop on ‘Goal-Directed Networks: The State of the Art’ in Barcelona in 2016. Mark Moore and Malcolm Sparrow, whilst being critical, encouraged us to pursue this research and commented on it at various occasions. Three anonymous reviewers provided constructive feedback at the final stages of our endeavour.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.
Funding
This work was supported by the Netherlands Ministry of Justice and Security, the Public Prosecution Service, the National Police, the Taskforce Brabant-Zeeland; and the Dutch Science Foundation (NWO) as part of the Smart Governance research program [Grant number 409-13-038].

Notes on contributors

Maurits Waardenburg is a PhD candidate in the Tilburg Institute of Governance and the Tilburg Center for Regional Law and Governance, Tilburg University. His research focuses on performance management in collaborative governance settings.

Martijn Groenleer is professor of law and governance in the Tilburg Institute of Governance and director of the Tilburg Center for Regional Law and Governance, both at Tilburg University in the Netherlands. His research focuses on the analysis and design of regulation and governance in multi-actor and multi-level settings.

Jorrit de Jong is lecturer in public policy and management at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. He is faculty director of the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative and academic director of the Innovations in Government Program at the Kennedy School. His research and teaching focus on leading innovation in the public sector.

Bas Keijser is a researcher at the Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO), focusing on decision support and problem structuring in a defense and security context. He has an MSc. in Systems Engineering, Policy Analysis and Management from Delft University of Technology.

References


