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Chapter 5

Catching Up with Catching Up: Collaborative Policy Work, Informality and Connective Talk

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Abstract

In this chapter, I ask what catching up means in the practice of collaborative policymaking. During ethnographic fieldwork among municipal policy-makers and semi-public managers in child and family services in the Netherlands, I found the central actors constantly catching up. These are not interactions that we generally see in accounts of public policymaking, nor has this ‘mundane’ activity been systematically analysed. Based on many hours of participant observation, and illustrated through a composite narrative, I demonstrate how catching serves to construct the participants’ identity (who am I in this meeting), and relationship (what is our relation in this meeting), and to make sense of the specific situation of the meeting (what is it we are doing here) and of the larger ‘world’ beyond (what has happened and might structure what we will be doing here). I argue that catching up is a connective practice, connecting temporalities, spaces, knowledge and people. Within its actions, the informal and the formal are entangled.

Keywords: Informality; institutional talk; policy work; collaborative governance; ethnography; relationality

Before entering the meeting room, two municipal policymakers and two managers from a local child and family service provider, the CJG, walk towards a coffee machine in the hallway. After a quick introductory handshake with a new manager, Charly, the

managers have been ‘picked up’ by the policymakers at the reception downstairs, where modern entrance gates separate those who have access passes to the municipal building from those who do not. The beautiful ancient building which is used only for policy work and meetings, separated from other municipal buildings with public functions, has recently been modernised on the inside. A sleek, white spiral staircase leads guests up to a mezzanine in the otherwise largely open-plan hall that has a canteen, coffee bar and several flexible workspaces. Upstairs in the mezzanine three meeting rooms face a central coffee area, separated only by large glass walls that enable what happens inside the meeting rooms to be displayed, materially representing the new ‘transparency’ of ‘public’ buildings.

While pushing the button for a *caffè latte*, policymaker Emma asks whether everybody has read the article about the effects of the recent decentralisation of child and family services in the local newspaper. Manager Natalie says she has not, while policymaker Amy and manager Charly noddingly confirm they have. Emma starts to explain the article to Natalie, stating the negative depiction of the decentralisation efforts. She says she recognises parts of the story. Many errors are being made, and some things still are not properly organised even two years later. But, she argues, here in Dunetown, we have positioned ourselves closer to the actual provision of child and family services. We collaborate closely with providers and monitor what happens. Amy and Natalie nod. Charly asks Emma what she thought of the comments on the number of children in ‘isolation treatment’. Emma, with an expression of dismay, responds that it is terrible to read. Children with problems should not be isolated but instead receive necessary care and support that helps them. The thing is, she argues, we do not contract providers at the lowest possible cost. If you do, then providers might not have the capacity to do otherwise, to not put them in isolation. Our approach to providers is more relational.

Before starting their meeting, the municipal policymaker engages in a conversation with her colleagues and CJG managers that – although related to their work – is not part of the purpose of their gathering, nor does it obviously contribute to decision-making. Not only do they discuss the newspaper article, but the policymaker seems keen to position her organisation and her organisation’s work in relation to the article.

During my ethnographic research among municipal policymakers and managers of the semi-public child and family service organisation CJG,¹ these kinds of

¹The organisation is semi-public as it is organised exclusively to provide public services and is non-profit. CJG is a general acronym used in the Netherlands, for anonymity the name that follows the acronym has been deleted.

interactions were not an exception, nor were they limited to coffee breaks. Before, during, and after collaborative meetings, actors were catching up on personal concerns, on developments that influenced their policy goals or tasks, on developments that happened parallel to their meetings and on developments that were seemingly completely detached from what they aimed to do in those meetings.

Such interactions are generally absent in accounts of public policymaking or collaborative governance. Scholars have highlighted the importance of network creation, trust, mutual goals, engagement and shared motivation (e.g., [Ansell & Gash, 2008](#)). Yet, these elements are treated as static once they are in place, with attention rarely paid to how relationships are built and sustained ([Bartels & Turnbull, 2020](#); [Visser & van Hulst, 2024](#)). In response, various studies have shown the complexities of organising and reconciling the differences between actors in multistakeholder collaboration ([Blijleven & van Hulst, 2022](#); [van der Woerd et al., 2024](#); [van Duijn et al., 2022](#); [Waring & Crompton, 2020](#)). Recently, scholars have proposed to analyse ongoing – mundane – *actor positioning-processes* in which actors strive for different, actor-based understandings of the nature of the issues discussed, the purpose of the collaboration and its rules of engagement as an important part of understanding collaborative policymaking ([Bannink et al., 2024](#); [La Grouw et al., 2024](#)). Yet, empirical studies that scrutinise mundane interactions and their meaning in processes of collaborative policymaking remain scarce.

In this chapter, I ask what catching up means in the practice of collaborative policymaking. To do so, I draw from theories of institutional conversation and sensemaking ([Gherardi, 2012](#); [Goffman, 1959](#)) and argue that catching up as a part of collaborative policymaking serves to both construct participants' identities and relationship among them. It informs how participants make sense of the specific situation of the meeting and of the larger 'world' beyond. This way, catching up is in essence a connective practice. Furthermore, I argue that given the plurality of action contexts and authorities, collaborative policymaking is inherently relational and requires different kinds of encounters and forms of communication.

This chapter opens with a composite narrative of typical interactions of catching up in a policy meeting between public policymakers and external, semi-public managers. In this account, I have merged the characters and events from multiple ethnographic observations into a single composite narrative ([Jarzabkowski et al., 2014](#)). Following this is an outline of the local context of the policy meeting and the ethnographic methods with which data have been collected, before I analyse the functions of catching up and reflect on how this connective practice is a particular, yet vital, aspect to collaborative policymaking.

Typical Interactions of Catching Up

'I'm sorry I'm late', Kate exclaims as she enters one of the three meeting rooms that had been left open in anticipation of her arrival. She has just hung up one mobile phone before entering

the room but is still finishing an email to an Alderman² – while walking – on another. Kate joins the two municipal policymakers and two managers already in the room. She closes the glass door in the glass wall with a bang and briefly lifts her shoulders in response to the sound, puts the two phones in a shoulder bag now placed on the table in front of the last free chair and sits down. She sighs, ‘I do not know how I can do this anymore’, while she takes a notebook and pen out of the bag and removes the bag to the floor. The others had stopped their conversation having just observed the scene and laughed in response to Kate’s comment. It is crowded in the small meeting room which fits no more than a rectangular table and six chairs around it. All of those present at the meeting have a bundle of papers, a notebook and pen or a tablet in front of them along with the takeaway coffee cup. The two visitors to the building had hung their coats over their chairs. They all seated themselves around the table intuitively as there is no meeting chair, nor a secretary to make the minutes.

There is also no agenda to steer the meeting and the ‘official’ start of these biweekly meetings between the municipality and the CJG is lowkey. Sometimes it happens when one of the participants makes a comment proposing to start the meeting but just as often the conversations from the coffee machine naturally evolve into conversations about new topics. After Kate settles down, the others look at her expectantly. She brings an energy of excitement with her, she is busy and one can feel and see her enthusiasm for her work, not least because of the enormous smile she has on her face whenever she starts talking about it. Kate leans towards Charly and rhetorically asks: ‘So you’re the new recruit?’ ‘Yes, I’ll introduce myself’, Charly responds, explaining that he has recently joined the CJG management team and will manage the relationship between child and family services and schools. He goes on to describe his previous work experience and expresses his excitement to have started. Manager Natalie responds that ‘they’, at the CJG, are happy that Charly has come to strengthen their management team and are back at full capacity now, expecting to be able to pay more attention to specific developments as they arise. ‘Good to hear’, Kate responds, ‘and good to have you back as well. How was your holiday?’. ‘Oh, it was wonderful, I had such a relaxing week’, Natalie responds, with a soft, friendly voice, but a – seemingly reserved – straight posture and a small nod with

²In the Netherlands, an Alderman (*wethouder*) is part of the municipal executive, comparable to the Office of Minister at the national level.

her head. 'Where did you go again', Emma interrupts. 'Greece', Natalie replies, 'two weeks. I lay on the beach, read books, and just relaxed'. 'That sounds lovely', Kate responds, 'I feel I have not read a book since Zoe was born'. The lower part of Natalie's face folds into something between a smile and a grimace. 'Well deserved', Kate continues, 'after the year we've had'. 'We have, have we not?', Natalie replies. 'So, what have I missed, how has it been here'?

'Yes, let's continue, we have some points we would like to discuss and decide upon, but we also need to catch up and look ahead today', Kate says. Kate and Amy start by explaining the procurement trajectory with regional child and family service providers. Their summary feels improvised by the way that they complement each other's stories and switch between topics and storylines. There has been a lot of technical back and forth with providers, they explain, and yesterday the results were published in the digital procurement system. They both talk quickly and with varying pitches, sometimes disapprovingly shaking their heads while at other times smiling. They give the impression of finding it frustrating and exciting at the same time. One of the larger providers has not enrolled in the procurement process, they reveal, which is problematic as the welfare services they deliver cannot be stopped. Many children are receiving treatment from the particular provider. The municipality will either be required to prolong the existing contract and its associated conditions or a temporary contract will have to be drawn up. Manager Natalie is bent over her tablet, taking down notes for herself. She continues for a couple of seconds after Kate and Amy have stopped talking and then looks up and responds while rolling her eyes: 'That will cause us a lot of extra work', referring to the possibility of having to draw up a temporary contract every time a CJG professional refers a family to that provider. They continue to discuss why the provider might not have enrolled, followed by ten minutes of detailed discussions about the enrolment and conditions that particular providers must adhere to.

The discussion almost seamlessly morphs into talk about related topics, until Natalie brings up the situation of a family that is in need of a personalised solution, one that would require involvement beyond contracted providers. 'I am not involved in the substance of cases', Kate says while her upper body bends further over the table towards the managers, her voice both pronounced and soft as if to indicate annoyance in a friendly manner. 'I keep being contacted and consulted on many complex cases'. Contrary

to her statement, she continues with her views on the case, arguing the solution the CJG has proposed is good, and that she likes the fact that the family can receive tailor-made support. Charly, being new to the collaboration, nods and asks who must be contacted to ask questions about the substance of specific cases. Kate confirms that most people ask her but argues that she does not have the time to spend much of the meeting discussing cases. Together, they will need to find a new way of working between them. Natalie nods with a serious face, saying pensively, 'Yes, working together requires regularly evaluating our communication processes. This will take some time to restructure and get right, though'. A large smile forms on her face which is reciprocated by the others.

Next, municipal policymaker Emma introduces another topic for everyone to catch up on, introducing the change by shifting in her chair. In a meeting she participated in, somebody from the municipality had complained about the CJG. The person was frustrated that a specific youth-focused team had not offered proper 'street-work' for the local young people. 'It's because of the image they have of the CJG's tasks', she says. Kate shakes her head, stating: 'We have to do something about this. They still don't have the right understanding of our task'. Manager Natalie has been nodding and responds: 'Streetwork is completely different than what we do. People should know that. But we are not there yet. We have to clarify the different roles and tasks because they seem to fade away when we do not communicate them actively'.

As the participants continue their meeting, they switch between catching up on developments discussing solutions and making decisions. Topics are introduced by all those present which gives the impression of an equal relationship between the participants. The way the meeting progresses appears familiar to the participants, although unexpected topics or tones sometimes throw participants off briefly. Their meeting ends as it had started, a bit scattered, with its final conclusion having been understood spontaneously by the participants. Some summarising of what had been discussed re-affirms tasks that have come out of the meeting. They each pick up their bag from the floor and put away their tablets and notebooks. The managers put on their coats while Amy gathers the empty coffee cups, and all participants proceed to walk back into the coffee area towards the stairs. In front of the stairs, they pause one last time for some final exchanges before they say goodbye and walk their separate ways: the managers go down the stairs, while the policymakers enter a hallway towards another meeting room.

Locating Policy Practices in Local Child and Family Services

The above narrative is situated in policy and governance meetings between a municipality in the Netherlands and a local child and family service provider which the municipality has outsourced local access to care to. Key to the collaboration between the two organisations is the aim of experimenting together in their search for the best possible child and family service provision. This approach requires trust, regular deliberation, negotiation and continuous adaptation. The collaboration between the two organisations is based on mutual dependency. The municipality is the commissioning party, is financially and politically responsible and plays a large role in developing the operating policy framework. In turn, the service provider receives a subsidy to allocate to services and also delivers primary services, having a legal mandate to make allocation decisions and corresponding expenditures. The service provider has the professional expertise and everyday experience to potentially improve service provision. These policymakers and managers have been working together for several years, regularly holding this type of meeting.

I followed everyday encounters between the municipal policymakers and semi-public managers between December 2016 and December 2017 to understand how they governed and adapted policy in this context. This fieldwork resulted in 71 hours of observation of meetings, many hours of additional observations of informal policy work and interactions, 27 interviews (all between one and two hours duration) in addition to many informal conversations with policymakers and managers about their work and their policy and governance practices. I supplemented these activities with an analysis of associated documents such as policy plans, performance contracts and meeting minutes. This chapter is the result of my curiosity being sparked by the practice of catching up that I observed so often. Why did they engage in this practice that seemed so mundane, so irrelevant, so inefficient from the perspective of an outsider, a layperson? Catching up seemed to flow by, yet it was repeated often. Inspired by the advice of organisational ethnographer Huising that reads ‘If it’s happening all the time and it seems boring, it’s likely gold. There’s a puzzle here’ (CIPA workshop Writing ethnographic field notes, 7 October 2020), I decided to delve deeper into the practice.

To do so, I first compiled a list of all events and quotes in which actors catch up. Then, I consulted literature on the role of talk and conversation in work and on the role of organisational meetings in search of possible explanations. I systematically compared and analysed whether the data I had on catching up fit with the explanations and categories I found in the literature. This allowed me to compose an explanation from different bodies of literature. Finally, I strived to present the data in a way that would render my fieldwork experiences and interactions with my research participants accessible. The collected data form a composite narrative in which the characters and events from multiple ethnographic observations are merged together (Jarzabkowski et al., 2014). The narrative above encapsulates typical interactions that I encountered across multiple observations of meetings.

This device allows for one vivid, unified tale, in a 'slice-of-life' fashion to make the tale as meaningful as possible for the reader, while at the same time presenting a tale that is more conceptually transferrable in revealing the patterns at work.

Analysing the Work of Catching Up

In this section, I analyse the purposes that catching up serves for the participants. The literature on institutional conversation and sensemaking offers multiple explanations of talk and conversation at work. Institutional conversation, also called discursive practices, enables the performance of work. That is, everyday organisational action can be achieved through talk-in-interaction (Llewellyn, 2008). In work contexts, people also use ordinary conversation, which can, for example, be used to create the work climate. Institutional conversations are oriented to a goal, task or identity associated with the institution concerned (Gherardi, 2012). It is a professional activity that draws on specific competence. Institutional conversation is distinguishable from ordinary conversation by different lexical choices. These tend to evoke the institutional context through specialised knowledge, the use of 'we' to denote the institutional identity and universalistic expressions that sanctify institutional discourse. Institutional conversations are structured by standard procedures and certain sequences and turns in interaction, for example, defined by meeting chairs, a meeting agenda or the setting in which the conversation unfolds. The conversations (re)produce social relations. Participants (need to) have specific knowledge about how to manage and construct those relations. Often, it is argued, institutional social relations tend to be asymmetrical, for example, in the case of doctors and patients or managers and street-level bureaucrats. These social relations can be uncovered by identifying who is addressing whom, who is listening, and who is present but not listening as indicated by body posture, tone of voice, direction of the gaze and turn-taking (Drew & Heritage, 1992). Looking into these characteristics, I identify four functions of catching up in collaborative policy work.

Catching up does not serve to 'get work done' in the sense of drafting an implementation plan, deciding on regulatory measures or a similar aspect of policy work. Looking more closely at the tale above, catching up can be understood as exchanges that do not entail discussing possible solutions or making decisions. The CJG and municipality regularly catch up on national policy developments, new professional regulations and changes among child and family service providers. They catch up on political gossip, the alderman's reactions to developments and the reorganisation of management structures and responsibilities. And they catch up on relevant newspaper articles or documentary releases, personnel changes and holidays. Catching up cannot only be recognised in what is being said. It is also present in how it is being said: in changing tone, speed and loudness of voice. In reciprocating smiles and other facial expressions or leaning towards other actors. Catching up unfolds when the groups of actors meet: with actors catching up before, during and after collaborative meetings. Generally, this starts already before a meeting begins, as they are walking towards a room, making a

stop to get some coffee, and there is a realisation, albeit tacit; ‘we are about to have a meeting’. Although they are not oriented towards drafting a plan or making a decision, the interactions of catching up that unfold can partly be characterised as institutional as they are oriented towards institutional goals, tasks and identities. More specifically, one of the functions is to (re)construct a situated social or organisational identity (Gherardi, 2012). That is, to define who a certain individual is in a specific interaction. Sometimes, individuals do not speak on their own behalf but represent a specific institution or a ‘user’ of that institution (Drew & Heritage, 1992). The identity construction can then invoke the institution’s identity and consequently reproduce the institution through interaction.

Looking closer at the narrative, once the involved actors have realised that they are about to have, or are already, in a meeting, they need to define who am I in this meeting and what am I doing here? Who is sitting in front of me and what are they doing here? In other words, they need to define their identities. We see this happening in the narrative when new manager Charly introduces himself. When his colleague Natalie responds that ‘they’ (as an institutional we) are at full capacity. When policymaker Emma responds to the newspaper article by saying ‘they’ do it differently. The actors are generating an identity that defines who they are and how they should be perceived in the meeting. In that sense, the first purpose of catching up is the formation of a situated social identity.

This does not have to start from scratch when the participants have participated in multiple meetings together. Some previous understandings remain, as we see in the narrative above. They know which organisation one represents, what that organisation aims to do in general terms and even some private details about the meeting participants. Yet, every new meeting represents a new situation as external developments might have unfolded, so new topics need to be discussed and agreed upon. Thus, even after sequences of meetings, participants need to validate their identities and possibly adjust them. Therefore, the meeting participants engage in identity formation continuously, and every time they develop a situated social identity, and – in part – this is done through catching up.

Second, scholars have argued that talk in organisations can contribute to the expression and construction of a sense of community (Gherardi, 2012). Stories are told that construct the categories that give names and meanings to events. Such talk not only maintains, develops and distributes practical knowledge within groups but also maintains, transmits and changes a code of behaviour, a professional competence and a community memory. All in all, this contributes to a group’s identity and the attachment of actors to each other (Gherardi, 2012). I transport these insights from within organisations to participants in collaborative policymaking across organisations; they also need to define who they are in relation to one another.

In the composite narrative, the actors are constructing their relationship, which is a dynamic process with provisional outcomes. The actors smile, try to put each other at ease and discuss their personal lives. They need to check: we agreed we were close and friendly, or perhaps we agreed to be more professional or even very formal. But this is a new situation, a new meeting. Are we still on

good terms, are we behaving in the same way, is our 'social' relationship maybe progressing towards something else? They have to re-enact the relationship they think they have. At times, the two groups of actors form a temporary collective identity, when they talk about how 'we' and 'our' tasks are misunderstood.

In addition, there is a political component to (per-)forming the relationship. They need to establish who has the authority to define what happens in the meeting and beyond. This can be partially structured through, for example, an agenda and a person who chairs the meeting. Still, in practice, the authority can be challenged, (re-)negotiated, disrupted or, just simply, momentarily performed differently. In the case described above, there is largely a mutual dependency, yet this is constantly re-enacted, for example, by checking whether they have each other's back, by informing the other early on about important developments or by sharing their assessment of a situation (Visser, 2024). Simultaneously, their positioning is often changed and challenged but is acceptable enough that it does not impact their overall relationship. Contrary to existing work on institutional conversation (Drew & Heritage, 1992), the social relations between the commissioning policymakers and implementing managers are not necessarily asymmetric to begin with, as policymakers have the power to end the subsidy, but the managers have knowledge of how to organise access to care and have the practical experience that allows improving and restructuring both policy delivery and procurement. The practice of catching up is one of the ways in which the actors negotiate and challenge their relationship.

Third, through talk, actors can define the situation and make sense of what they are doing in the meeting (Goffman, 1959; Schwartzman, 1989). They need to do so to decide how to make speech appropriate to the situation but also to define how to act, what to do and what to expect from the other. To be able to act, participants need to put circumstances together and transform them into a situation which is, or can be, verbalised and used as a coordinated system for action (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Sensemaking can be understood as a process of situation-building (Gherardi, 2012). Actors need to define: what kind of meeting are we in, what is it about, what will or can or should we do and how? There is a need to 'build' the situation in order to be able to act in the meeting and to collaborate as far as that can occur within the meeting. Moreover, everybody in the room must understand what they are doing there.

In the narrative, we can see how catching up serves to make sense of the meeting. Kate explains that she will not discuss the substance of individual cases in the meeting. Interestingly, in the past, she did engage in case discussions, but she argues that they need to change this part of their collaboration, indicating the need to re-establish this over time. If the process of sensemaking fails, there is a chance that the meeting will not accomplish anything as people are working towards different goals. Again, this is a political process, as participants have to agree on a shared understanding (Freeman, 2019). There is a possibility that claims concerning the definition of the situation are disagreed with, that they are challenged or imposed. The definition can be partly institutionalised through having a meeting agenda. Yet, an agenda does not exclude the necessity to discuss and negotiate the agenda items to the larger meaning of what the meeting is

about. In this sense, catching up is forward-looking, aimed to be able to provide conditions for future action.

Finally, beyond the meeting, there are developments occurring that impact what can and has to be done. Sensemaking and consecutive action also concerns the situation external to the encounter or an account of the world to which it is deemed to relate in some way (Schwartzman, 1989). There are numerous developments that might have preceded the meeting, ranging from regulatory changes to discussions that took place in concurrent meetings. There is a need to capture what has been agreed upon and ensure continuity between interactions in collaborative policymaking. In the narrative, the actors discuss the developments in procurement to make sure they know everything needed to make future plans or decisions. Catching up then serves to construct the context beyond the meeting, to understand the ‘world order’ in which they are acting. In this sense, catching up is also backward-looking, ensuring that they know what has happened that might structure what they are doing, ensuring that there is nothing else they need to know about before engaging in new actions.

Catching Up as Connective Practice

What I have purposively left in the middle thus far is whether or how catching up could be understood as informal. The analysis above helps to shed light on this. Catching up conjures an image of an informal practice, not part of the structures, legal rules, lines of authority and accountabilities that are deemed part of formal policy (Wagenaar, 2004). However, we cannot draw such a clear dividing line between catching up and seemingly formal policy practices. It does not have a clear boundary or demarcation. As policymakers and managers run the course of pre-meeting, meeting and post-meeting proceedings and move from the entrance to the lounge area, meeting room and back, they shift between different forms of interaction, between events and between spaces. The performance of catching up is not separated by time or place. The shift between catching as a type of interaction and other types (and forms) of interaction is not consciously or strategically made. In his argument that informality is a practice, geographer McFarlane (2012) has argued that there is a temporal aspect to informal–formal relations. Following those insights, we can recognise actors within catching up moving between formal and informal actions and arrangements over the course of time and place.

Sociologist Misztal (2000) characterised informality as a mode of interaction wherein participants possess a degree of latitude in interpreting the expectations of their roles. Traditionally, it has been linked with the realm of personal relationships, often denoted by its lack of structure, spontaneous nature and unpredictability. Catching up is not defined by written rules or outlined in policy tasks. What is said and done is not documented or inscribed and as such leaves no trace (Freeman, 2019). Yet, contrary to Misztal’s definition, catching up is not as unstructured. It is recognisable and intelligible to its participants, skilfully and knowledgeably performed in the narrative. Catching up is ‘remarkably organized’, and this order matters (Llewellyn, 2008).

To better understand how informality and formality are entwined, anthropologist [Koster \(2019\)](#) has proposed to understand community leaders as connective agents who connect the institutional with the personal and the official with the unofficial. Similarly, I argue that catching up can be understood as a *connective practice*.

Catching up connects events as it involves discussions of what has happened, what is happening and what will be done. It also connects what happens in the meeting with what happens preceding and following the meeting, as an inter-text. By being both forward- and backward-looking, it overcomes – imaginary – boundaries between the past, present and future. It makes encounters, gatherings and meetings intelligible as part of ‘a series of interactions of similar and different kinds’ ([Freeman, 2019](#)), in relation to other events and to other forms of interaction. Furthermore, catching up connects knowledges between people and time, building a provisional collective knowing that is necessary to act.

Catching up also connects people by establishing temporary identities of, and relationships between, collaborative partners in policymaking. It contributes to the building and sustaining of relationships of understanding, commitment and reciprocity that are vital to collaborative policymaking and that have been so often overlooked ([Bartels & Turnbull, 2020](#); [La Grouw et al., 2024](#)). As such, it also exposes that there is no singular network or process of collaboration to be understood ([Bannink et al., 2024](#)). Rather, it is in interaction that collectives can be temporarily formed but also broken down, that action imperatives can develop but also fail to do so. Given the plurality of action contexts and authorities ([Misztal, 2000](#)), collaborative policymaking is inherently a relational practice that needs different kinds of encounters and forms of communication. Catching up is one of them. It connects the formal and informal within its actions and interactions.

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