



Managing collaborations

FACT SHEET 8

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There are many advantages of working collaboratively but the effectiveness of collaborations depends heavily on good management, both before the collaboration is formed, and during the operation of the collaboration. Good management in the first stage includes making sure conditions are appropriate, to enable the collaboration to be as effective as possible. In the second stage, the management focus is on building relationships and trust among the participants and leveraging these to achieve the collaboration's aims. At both of these stages, there must be movement away from traditional management methods and into new ways of thinking and managing.

Management in collaborations relies on having someone who is referred to as a 'network driver'¹. The network driver is not focused on accomplishing tasks as their primary goal, as is the case with traditional management. Instead the network driver's role is to help shape new relationships, move participants from discussion to dialogue and change attitudes, perceptions and norms.

Shaping new relationships

Shaping new relationships is a key task in the formation and operation of a collaboration. Before the collaboration is formed the network driver acts to make sure relevant and influential people are committed to the collaboration². Although a collaboration may be set up by a specific agency or organisation, there will be other influential participants. Shaping new relationships involves working with the collaboration participants to de-activate 'fence sitters' or detractors and better align members.

There also will be prominent individuals and/or groups who have an interest in the collaboration but may not be part of it. They can be either strong advocates or detractors of the purpose or nature of the collaboration. These stakeholders need to be made aware of the advantages and needs of the collaboration. The network driver should help promote the vision of the collaboration to these stakeholders to gain their support.

The parent organisations of the participants need to be aware of what is occurring within the collaboration, but also must be willing to give participants the support and authority they need to work effectively. The role of a network driver is to ensure the ongoing relationship between the collaboration and the parent

The Advancing Collaboration Practice program has been established to support ARACY's work building cross-sector collaborations capable of implementing action that addresses the complex problems impacting the wellbeing of children and young people in Australia. The program builds stakeholder capabilities to establish and manage long-term joint working relationships and collaborative efforts. **For more information please contact ARACY on 08 9476 7800**

- 1 Keast, R. (2004). *Integrated Human Services: The Role of Networked Arrangements*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Faculty of Business, Queensland University of Technology.
- 2 This has been referred to as mobilisation. See: Agranoff, R, and McGuire, M. (2001). After the network is formed: Power and performance, in M. Mandell (Ed). *Getting Results Through Collaboration: Networks and Network Structures for Public Policy and Management*, Westport, CT: Quorum Books (pp 11–29)

organisations. This is accomplished by keeping the parent organisations well informed at all times and bringing their concerns back to the collaboration participants in order to resolve any differences.

Shaping new relationships also relies on the network driver identifying all relevant participants and tapping into their expertise³. This is critical because the effectiveness of the collaboration relies on all participants understanding that they are only one piece of a larger whole. The network driver must work with all participants to ensure that all interests are discussed and to help them develop new ways of dealing with each other based on their understanding of other participants' positions and motivations. In [Fact Sheet 6](#) it was pointed out that this 'getting to know each other' task can be accomplished through informal social interactions that help to build stronger relationships. The role of the network driver therefore is to ensure that enough time and space is afforded to the participants of collaborations to engage each other, not as representatives of their organisations, per se, but just as individuals who have come together to address common concerns. Based on these interactions new relationships are formed that can provide the foundation for more effective and sustained collaborations.

Moving from discussion to dialogue

Discussion involves making decisions whereas dialogue involves exploring options⁴. Unlike traditional management where the emphasis is on making decisions, in collaborations the emphasis is on making sure all participants are heard in order to build relationships. Building relationships among participants who may come from a variety of organisations and/or groups is not an easy task. It requires participants to develop trust and learn to deal with each other in new ways. To accomplish this, the network driver is involved in establishing the collaboration's operating rules (often different from those of traditional organisations) and influencing the prevailing values of participants⁵ to build

a common value set for the collaboration. Rather than trying to make decisions based on conflicting interests, the network driver needs to ensure that all interests are presented and explored.

In this way, the network driver helps create a favourable environment for dialogue that can lead to mutually agreeable and innovative solutions⁶. This requires changing participants' level of engagement, from just representing their own organisations and/or groups to understanding how they fit into a larger whole. This can be achieved by making sure all information is put on the table and developing new procedures of interaction and communicating early in the process (and throughout the process) so that no one participant, regardless of formal power, thinks that they are the only critical player in the collaboration.

Changing attitudes, perceptions and norms

All of the techniques described above provide the foundation for moving away from traditional, organisational interactions to the non-traditional, more interdependent interactions needed for collaborations to be effective. These techniques address two key challenges in managing collaborations.

Firstly, participants come into the collaboration from a variety of very different organisations and/or groups. Their ways of operating and their educational backgrounds lead them to think in different ways. These different views need to be meshed to form a new cohesive whole. This cannot be forced. Instead, the role of the network driver is to get participants to learn how to talk to each other, not *around* each other or *at* each other. This requires participants to develop the ability to 'step into each others' shoes'⁷ and adjust their behaviour accordingly. The network driver therefore must take on the role of facilitator, allowing participants to set the pace and providing guidance and assistance when needed.

3 This has been referred to as activation. See Agranoff and McGuire, 2001.

4 Innes, J.E. & Booher, D. (1999). Consensus Building as Role Playing and Bricolage: Toward a Theory of Collaborative Planning. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 65(1):9–24.

5 This has been referred to as framing. See Agranoff and McGuire, 2001.

6 This has been referred to as synthesising. See Agranoff and McGuire, 2001.

7 Mandell, M.P. (2001). "The Impact of Network Structures on Community-Building Efforts: The Los Angeles Roundtable for Children Studies". In M. Mandell (Ed). *Getting Results Through Collaboration: Networks and Network Structures for Public Policy and Management*, Westport, CT: Quorum Books (pp 11–29).

The second challenge involves changing expectations⁸. Participants need to be clear about their expectations of the collaboration and its potential to create innovative approaches to solving complex problems. To be effective, participants should understand that they cannot continue to work as usual and that no one individual, organisation or group can control the effort. Good management, in this case, involves two strategies.

First, parent organisations must give their representatives the authority they need to operate in the collaboration, and then they must step back and let the process take place. Parent organisations need to understand that this does not mean they are losing control over their representatives. Instead, it means they are willing to give their representatives the flexibility needed to develop innovative, systematic change and to feel comfortable taking the risks they will have to take.

Second, participants need to feel comfortable with the new non-traditional operating procedures that are required in collaborations. The network driver should help participants understand that the key results in collaborations stem from building new relationships, not just generating programs. This will take time and as indicated previously, the network driver's role is to help participants revise and adjust their relationships with each other and feel more comfortable working in new ways.

While shaping relationships and helping participants feel part of a 'coherent whole' is an important management task, collaborative advantage is only achieved when these relationships are actively leveraged and guided⁹. Without this directed focus collaborations run the risk of being little more than 'cups of tea, a bit of a chat and feel good results' (see [Fact Sheet 2](#)).

Putting it together

In essence, collaborative management involves building coalitions, mobilising support and developing new ways to cope with strategic and operational complexity. Traditional management techniques are replaced by an emphasis on shaping and influencing relationships and driving these toward collaborative advantage and achieving the collaboration's goals. Most importantly, collaborative management is focused on leveraging strong relationships to create better outcomes.

8 Keast, R., Mandell, M.P., Brown, K. and Woolcock, G. Network Structures: Working Differently and Changing Expectations. *Public Administration Review*, 64(3):363–371.

9 Keast, R. (2004). *Integrated Public Services: The Role of Networked Arrangements*, unpublished PhD dissertation, Faculty of Business, Queensland University of Technology.

Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth

ARACY is a national non-profit organisation working to create better futures for all Australia's children and young people. Despite Australia being a wealthy, developed country, many aspects of the health and wellbeing of our young people have been declining. ARACY was formed to reverse these trends, by preventing and addressing the major problems affecting our children and young people. ARACY tackles these complex issues through building collaborations with researchers, policy makers and practitioners from a broad range of disciplines. We share knowledge and foster evidence-based solutions.

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