Collaboration involves two types of negotiation: (a) negotiation about what the problem to be solved really is and how members are going to work together, and (b) what the solutions might be and the final agreed goals for action. Negotiation is often presented as an adversarial process – based on ‘I win’ or ‘I win better than you’ objectives and tactics. However, there is a form of negotiation which has very similar properties and outcomes to collaboration where everyone wins (win/win). This is called integrative or interest based negotiation.

**Negotiations: focusing on interests**

Integrative/interest based negotiation focuses on identifying and responding to underlying interests – finding out what is really important to people so they can find some common ground with others. For example, instead of approaching an issue from the standpoint “I represent the child education centre” the approach would be “I am interested in better education for children”. This encourages a broader consideration of the issue and allows everyone to better understand one another’s perspective.

Understanding why people feel the way they do and what interests underlie their stated positions and demands is the key to successful integrative negotiation. Underlying interests include needs, desires, concerns, limitations and fears. The way to get beyond stated positions and to underlying interests is to ask questions which dig for the information people often do not immediately present to others.

**Such questions include:**

- What is the issue for you?
- What do you hope to achieve?
- Why can’t you do this?
- What are your limitations?
- Why do you need to do this?

‘Framing and reframing’ are useful tactics in gathering interest based information. Framing highlights the good points of a particular position, while reframing allows a problem or issue to be examined from a range of perspectives. Framing and reframing can be used to present a problem or issue in a way which encourages members to see things in a new light. This helps to reconcile differences and generate new solutions.

Ideally, questions and issue framing, and the ensuing discussion, should be conducted face to face. In circumstances where this is not feasible there needs to be an alternative process to gather information. This process may involve a moderator or interpreter.

The ARACY Networks have been established to support our work in building cross-sector collaborations capable of implementing action that addresses the complex problems impacting the wellbeing of children and youth in Australia. The six Networks focus on exchanging knowledge and facilitating long-term working relationships and collaborative efforts between sectors and agencies.

**For more information please contact ARACY on 02 6248 2400.**

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Dealing with facts, not opinions

Integrative negotiation involves establishing a process which allows members with different viewpoints and interests to work together to develop and share information, analyse facts, develop common assumptions and use this information to reach an informed decision.3

Factual data can facilitate this process.

Data that is based on independent research is more likely to be impartial and acceptable to network members.

A good way to build factual, impartial information into negotiation is for collaborative members to discuss and agree on underpinning assumptions that are acceptable, which data are appropriate and how they will go about checking and monitoring the relevance of the information available.4 The development of an agreed data or fact set enables parties to feel confident in the quality of the information.

Creative problem-solving

Integrative negotiations, especially those that are complex, require creative thinking to generate new ideas and solutions. Going beyond the obvious effectively expands the ‘negotiation pie’ by increasing the potential pool of resources and options available and makes a win–win solution more possible.

Consider, for example, the case of the Goodna swimming pool. Goodna is a socially disadvantaged region in south-east Queensland, Australia, which has very hot summers. The local citizens had been agitating to government to provide a community swimming pool. After conducting a feasibility study, the state government provided a community centre, without a pool. The result was stalemate. The community was perplexed and angry at the government’s response to their needs. The government was annoyed at the lack of appreciation demonstrated by the citizens. This led to a disconnect between the community and government, which impacted on further negotiations for local resources.

The local primary school had a swimming pool that was not used outside school hours. Agreement was reached that this pool could be transformed into a local community pool. The department responsible for employment offered traineeships for gardeners and the Department of Sport and Recreation provided life saving traineeships. Community organisations formed voluntary committees to manage the new facility.

By thinking ‘outside the box’ this community was able to draw on existing local and government resources to secure a swimming pool. The members of this community used a number of conventional tools to reshape their thinking and action, including brainstorming and divergent thinking. As with many successful social entrepreneurs they were prepared to be risk takers, to shift outside conventional responses to find new ways forward.5

Claiming value

Once you have built a solid relationship, explored each other’s interests and creatively expanded the negotiation pie, the final negotiation step is to slice up and claim resources or other value. This can be particularly tricky because collaborative behaviour is used to solve problems while competitive action is necessary to claim that slice of pie.

The challenge for collaborative negotiators lies in finding a balance between maintaining the relationship and leveraging benefit for themselves.

Conclusion

Blending diverse organisations and their resources to create collaborative advantage relies on iterative rounds of negotiation directed at establishing how members will work together (the rules of the game) and what they will work on (outcomes).

Although the emphasis of integrative/interest based negotiation is on achieving mutually agreed (win/win) outcomes, collaboration members must not lose focus of the need to seek and acquire value for their own organisation. This means being aware of and open to opportunities as they emerge and working to realise these opportunities.

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The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) is a national, non-government organisation which focuses on bringing together researchers, policymakers and practitioners, to turn the best evidence on ‘what works’ for child and youth wellbeing into practical, preventative action to benefit all young Australians. We are making this happen by creating collaborative opportunities, through our Networks, events, state convenor activities and regular publications, that work to break down traditional barriers in addressing the major problems affecting our young people.

About the authors of this fact sheet

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