Multiparty Collaboration for Public Benefit

Curtin Corner 31 August
Contextualising collaboration

• Project overview:
  – 2015 workshop *Cross Sector Working for Complex Problems*
  – collaboration easier said than done
  – need for applied research
  – generate findings that support practicable actions
Approach & method

• Collective case study:
  – sought cases meeting predefined criteria
  – applied due diligence to shortlisted cases
  – selected 5 cases to study

• Semi-structured interviews:
  – 25 individual & group interviews
  – analysis using NVivo
  – triangulation with documentary evidence
Cases

1. Change the Story (Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth)

2. Community Based Emergency Management (Emergency Management Victoria)

3. Who Stops (Deakin University, Department of Health & Human Services, Primary Care Partnerships)

4. Throughcare (ACT Corrections, ACT Community Sector)

5. Children’s Teams (Children’s Action Plan Directorate / Ministry for Vulnerable Children Oranaga Tamariki)
Broad observations

• Collaboration as a response to crisis and complexity
• A dual operating system
• Counter-cultural, not counter-intuitive
Focused observations

• Consultation – internal and external dimensions; internal consultations underemphasised; focus on buy-in

• Evidence base – to support the case for a collaborative approach; to sustain commitment to collaboration; don’t ignore ‘soft’ evidence

• Expectations – patience needed; do not expect immediate impact; look for impact on organisational behaviour

• Formal and informal governance – both are important; formal governance linked to authority; informal governance linked to legitimacy
Characterising collaboration

• Collaboration takes a variety of forms:
  – occurs at the intersection of competing interests
  – highly visible & intensely scrutinised
  – operates against a backdrop of policy failure

• Two things interest us in particular:
  – the essence of collaborative practice
  – features of authorising environments that support collaboration
Not an end in itself

• Collaboration can be encouraged and supported by partner organisations

• Collaboration is not an end in itself and cannot be part of command system

• Requires reciprocal flows of:
  – authority from the executives of partner organisations
  – legitimacy from internal and external stakeholders at the coalface
Collaborative intelligence (CQ)

- Includes a range of attributes that equip people to forge and sustain productive relationships.

- Organisational culture can reinforce or inhibit CQ (or it can operate under the radar).

- Proposition:
  - organisations that do not incentivise CQ do not value relationships, stakeholder trust, or legitimacy.
Transforming BAU

- Collaboration often involves the violation of accepted conventions, norms, rules and boundaries
- About transforming ‘business as usual’
- Occurs in secondary operating spaces
- Exists in dynamic tension with the dominant culture of the primary operating spaces
Authorising environment

- Siloed behaviour represents a barrier to collaboration
- The authorising environment is critical to the success of collaboration
- Needs to be clear unambiguous authority to collaborate together with acceptance of associated risk
- Reciprocal flows of authority from the executive, and assurance from collaboration leads and partners
Leadership

- Creative rule breakers
- Superior relationship skills
- Strong understanding of systems
- Great political instincts
- Persuasive, inspiring, charismatic and confident, but able to step out of the spotlight
- ‘No surprises’ – keeps executive in the loop
Governance

• A conduit for authority
  – not all collaboration partners are authorised to collaborate

• Champions and influencers
  – essential ‘soft diplomacy’ to shore up internal and external support for collaboration

• Locus of decision-making
  – governance group or backbone group needs to have a clear understanding about the limits of its authority and influence
Building relationships and trust

• Engaging with internal & external stakeholders
  – it’s all about relationships
  – middle management resistance
  – expert facilitation

• Establishing trust and legitimacy
  – authenticity critical
  – lead entity need not be organisation with biggest investment

• Obtaining social licence
  – especially pertinent when indigenous communities are affected
Bottom-up or top-down?

• Tension between a desire for consistency and allowing bespoke solutions to emerge in place

• Can also be about ‘control’ and appetite for risk

• Collaboration can create new expectations that, if not matched by actions, can create resentment & cynicism
Managing expectations

• Long lead times typical
  – intensive, complex process of relationship building

• Impatience to see ‘results’
  – relationship building not counted as a ‘result’
  – insistence on orthodox indicators

• Almost by definition collaborations operate in policy spaces marked by a history of policy failure
Demonstrating impact

• Not easy to demonstrate impact, especially in early stages
• Big up-front investment in building relationships, trust, shared understandings & new ways of doing things
• Authorisers underestimate investment of time, effort & emotional energy required
• No established measures for effective collaboration
  – absence of clear indicators of impact need not mean collaboration is failing (at least over the near term)
A collaborative practice

- Not for the faint-hearted
- Don’t underestimate resistance of legacy systems
- Cannot be mandated from the top
- Needs buy-in from stakeholders
- Need to manage expectations
- Collaboration needs an enabling authorising environment
- About finding practical workarounds for systems that are demonstrably *not* working
Qualities of effective collaborators

- Maturity and judgement (life experience)
- Commitment and passion
- Honesty and integrity
- Interpersonal skills
- Charisma and capacity to inspire
- Consistency and follow-through
- Openness and humility

- Willingness to share power and credit
- Generosity, patience and compassion (empathy)
- Problem solver and self-starter
- Courage and emotional resilience
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Creativity, lateral thinking and reflectiveness
A mix of hard and soft skills

- Connectedness (within communities and communities of interest)
- Corporate memory and knowledge
- Systems knowledge and capacity to cultivate networks
- Negotiation, facilitation and conflict resolution
- Stakeholder relations
- Governance and assurance and risk management
- Interpersonal communication and relationship-based practice
- Change management
- Outcomes-focus and understanding of impact measurement
Is collaboration ‘scalable’?

- Collaboration can operate at different organisational and geographical scales
- However, collaboration cannot necessarily be transplanted from one location to another
- Nor is it feasible to mandate a standardised collaboration framework
- The strength of collaborative approaches is the capacity to allow for the crafting of bespoke local solutions with local stewardship
- Scaling up place-based collaborations requires an acceptance of diversity in coalface arrangements
Resourcing collaboration

• Assumes more effective configuration of existing resources
• Resource flows often constrained by programmatic rules
• Activities that support collaboration have a cost
Sustaining collaboration

- Informal or semi-formal nature of collaboration suggests impermanence
- Formalising collaboration can undermine its dynamism and sense of collective purpose
- Corporate memory is a highly perishable resource
- Little evidence (yet) that collaboration results in enduring organisational transformation in primary operating spaces
In closing...

- Article submitted to *Policy Design & Practice*
- Book manuscript in preparation for ANU Press
- Related articles: