

better connected services for kiwis

A Discussion Document For Managers and Front-Line Staff
on Better Joining Up The Horizontal And The Vertical

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VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wānanga o te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui



SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT
Te Kura Kāwanatanga

Better Connected Services for Kiwis

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Introduction

The New Zealand public sector has focused each public organisation on clearly-defined core business. For many services provided by government agencies, this approach works well and has resulted in demonstrable improvements in performance and service delivery. At the same time, agencies have difficulty responding to complex issues. Public services and agencies can never mirror the complex needs of citizens or businesses and, increasingly, they need to work together to provide the best response.

Responding to complex situations requires agencies to grapple with issues that do not exactly 'fit' their business or their professional paradigm. What are the catalysts that get agencies to do this? When should agencies consider a different approach? What is the best way of co-ordinating services? And how do agencies go about it? This discussion document illustrates how people have responded to these questions. Sometimes it is a family member or a staff member who takes the initiative. Sometimes it is a precipitating event, or the realisation that no-one is quite sure what the problem really is, or can describe it fully. The document also illustrates the benefits to be gained from joined-up working – for citizens and businesses and for the organisations themselves.

We have called this a Discussion Document and we hope that's exactly what it generates. Our main aim is to spark off and contribute to the discussion that is emerging about the evolution of public management in New Zealand.

If we, at the School of Government at Victoria University of Wellington, can assist and contribute to the discussion, we would be pleased to play a role.

Please contact us at IPS@vuw.ac.nz.

Acknowledgements

This project illustrates the power of partnership. It shows, as well, what can be achieved by bringing together a mix of practitioners and academics, drawing on a range of country experiences, to work on a practical public policy issue.

We would like to acknowledge:

- The Reference Group that has assisted the project from the start. Without their passion, support and advice, the project would not have been able to realise its potential
- Interviewees in the case studies and participants in workshops
- The work of the High and Complex Needs Unit (HCN) within MSD on which this document has drawn
- Chris Harrington who was the writer for this document as well the HCN's good practice advice *Better at Working Together*
- MSD Regional Offices, for their support in running the regional workshops and
- The PSA, who helped identify front-line staff to participate in the workshops.

The researchers are indebted to the dozens of ordinary kiwis working in the public sector who shared their experiences of working collaboratively to achieve some extraordinary results in seemingly commonsense, everyday ways. Joined-up government is not about throwing out everything we currently know and do. It is about adding new ways of working to the repertoire so that better outcomes for Kiwis can be achieved more often and in a wider range of circumstances.

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Summary

A focus on better co-ordinated services for citizens

This discussion document is one product of the work commissioned by public service Chief Executives and led by Victoria University of Wellington, focusing on three questions:

- What are the preconditions for more joined-up citizen-centred services?
- What are the characteristics of the policy areas where more joined-up citizen-centred services are found in New Zealand?
- What helps and what hinders the diffusion of more joined-up approaches to citizen-centred services?

The answers to these questions are important because several factors are creating a demand for public services that are more responsive to the needs of citizens:

- The more diverse political environment under MMP
- The involvement of more local government and non-governmental organisations and community groups in the delivery of public services
- The changing nature of the problems government agencies are having to address and
- The enabling capacity of information and communication technologies.

The project on *Better Connected Services for Kiwis* brings together academic and practitioner perspectives of what is happening on the ground in New Zealand. It draws on the practical experience of front-line staff and managers in the New Zealand public sector, the experience of other administrations such as The Netherlands, Australia and the United Kingdom, and on the public policy literature.

Joined-up working is happening across the public sector, often with outstanding results. Very often it depends on creative and energetic people who can see the potential for a better outcome and who know how to use the system to achieve it. In practice, there is only limited organisational support for this approach, although there is a lot said about collaboration, joined-up government, and inter-sectoral working. What is lacking is a system-wide understanding of what is involved, when it might be worth the effort, and how it should be initiated and supported.

The researchers who were part of this project have gone out to meet some of the people, to see what is happening, to find out what makes for success, and to try to understand what agencies, head offices and the state sector generally need to do to support collaboration.

First things: the key learnings

The project description talked about ‘joined-up government’, ‘wrap-around services’, ‘co-ordination’...But we quickly realised that what the people doing these things was about ‘managing for outcomes’ – people making sure the outcomes are what the client needs, doing whatever is necessary, and going beyond the rules to make it happen.

- ...when you’ve realised that your agency can’t do it by itself, that the problem or issue is complex, that you also have to rely on other agencies
- ...when you’ve come to the point of realising that if you do the ‘normal stuff’ in the existing ways of doing things, it’s not going to work, you’re not going to hit the mark
- ...and so new ways of working, innovations, have to be created between all of you.

We’re talking about what has come out of some case studies where agencies have done a superb job of ‘managing for outcomes’ – where they have achieved fantastic outcomes for clients (whether an individual, organisation, group, community or society). And they have done this by creating new ways of working, achieved when – and only when – they learned to collaborate, when they learned to work together in entirely unusual ways (unusual compared with ‘standard operating practice’ anyway).

It would be a mistake to think of this as a continuation of, or an evolution from, the present.

One of the critical factors in the success enjoyed by these cases was the participants realising that the past and present ways of working would not work and, in fact, that they were probably part of the problem. Another way of saying this is that if standard operating practice were OK, we would already have joined-up government. There has to be something new and unusual for it to be achieved – perhaps even something that overthrows existing assumptions and practices... So getting there will be scary; it will take you into new territory; and you’ll have to take risks.

And so, what else? What other critical factors? These are the kinds of things we’ve found.

It seems that there are almost always at least six critical factors present (in addition to the ones we’ve already mentioned – which we can define as **outcome-orientation** and **treating work as action learning**).

Although there is some pretty unexpected stuff, we already know that when we describe these things, many people chuckle and nod because they recognise the realities they describe, and the things that go on 'under the radar'.

An 'a-ha' moment

- There's a moment of realisation that the reality doesn't fit the theory and there's a need to change radically – that in some critical sense, the problem is complex, and 'cannot be resolved by reference to the expected'. The recognition, perhaps, that what you thought was normal and uncomplicated actually isn't
- Recognition that the system is designed to facilitate the 'vertical' (which relies on disaggregating problems and breaking processes and problems into rational, linear steps)
- ...and that success at achieving holistic solutions means incorporating the horizontal, which might mean unwinding fundamental questions like, 'what is it that we (usually) do?' and 'what are we expected to achieve?'
- The 'a-ha moment' might come from the client or a thoughtful official – it might equally be a moment of crisis demanding immediate and effective action, or the sudden appearance of a case that doesn't fit the standard categories at all.

A 'public entrepreneur' is

- Someone in the middle, is sometimes within an organisation, sometimes outside, who is focused on the outcome and who is marvellous at working with others – a 'networker' (usually an official, most often a line manager)
- ... who listens first to the client, who works with and not 'over' or for the client, using resources at their disposal to achieve what's needed (working with the client as a co-producer, and empowering the client to do so)
- ... who doesn't regard rules as fixed or as a constraint (they don't let themselves be weighed down by the system) someone who invents new ways as they act (but regards themselves as acting normally). They sometimes act first and apologise later, for having acted differently, because they thought the situation demanded it
- ... who has a 'can-do' attitude but also a deeply-felt grasp of the public interest in a democratic society and the role of the official within that
- BUT: they often keep quiet about what they're doing.

A 'guardian angel'

- A manager one or more steps above the public entrepreneur in the organisation or system, and
- A protector, adviser and mentor who...

- Values innovation, flexibility and new thinking
- Knows how to step back and facilitate, i.e. to let it alone to develop while they keep a watching brief
- Manages upwards
- Knows when to 'go public' and when not to.

'Fellow-travellers'

- Like-minded people who see themselves working as part of the network on a common problem (not agency representatives – the important issue here is the extent to which they can put resources on the table for others to share and use)
- Focused on common goals and synergies and who operate on the basis of trust and reciprocity and who are
- Proactive, not reactive.

This trio, who are not necessarily one person, and not one person all of the time, acts in a way that combines the vertical and the horizontal by:

- Balancing overall strategic goals and particular circumstances
- Balancing system demands and case conditions
- Focusing all on the common goal
- Creating new ways of working that involve all the parties.

Often there is also an active client involved in 'co-production'

- The client may be an individual, organisation, group, community, or society
- ... who is actively engaged in co-production – able to trust, articulate, demand, engage, co-produce – in other words, to become a member of the policy community in defining the nature of the problem and to participate in creating the solution
- ... who is not a passive recipient – although possibly disempowered initially, hence empowerment required
- Co-production is critical, the active client is an acting subject in the process and not a reified or passive object (this is the factor that's probably furthest from the assumptions of the standard ways of doing things).

'Policy learning' and 'learning by doing'

- The last of the factors that seems absolutely essential is a set of working relationships, a group or network culture focused on learning by doing
- It's not possible to figure out the answer first and then apply it (thinking cannot be removed from acting, we're talking about practice, not planning)

- Solutions can only be created by doing. This needs risk management, tolerance of failure and a culture of no blame
- Note something very important – most organisational contexts don't allow this, so most of the work done through the network is kept below the radar (the role of the guardian angel is critical) until an appropriate time (which may never come)
- In fact, this is an iterative process or 'double-loop', one involving learning from others, then learning from action, and reviewing.

One more critical factor: 'spread by diffusion'

- Getting others to start acting similarly can't be engineered or commanded top-down
- The approach spreads by 'creep', by 'strategic groping'
- It doesn't and won't spread until others in the organisation get used to seeing these ways of working (and/or they're given a tick) and have their own 'a-ha moment', in which they come to understand the essence and not just the form of what is being done, at which point their own cycle of organisational learning, practice and development begins.

Pulling all this together

So, to pull this together: what has been the major learning from the project? What are the factors that seem to be essential for effective policy-making when problems are complex and the outcomes are shared?

- **First**, remaining focused on achieving the collective outcomes, which are often best defined along the way, rather than being clear from the outset. Don't be distracted by the means, i.e. the paraphernalia of joining-up. Focus on the outcomes and do everything – but only what's needed – to achieve them. A corollary of this is, let the ends justify the means: if the objective can be achieved entirely with, say, simple co-ordination, then that's all that's required. We should also add that practice, ongoing work and the systems and models that underpin them, should be always treated as action learning – not routinised, standardised procedures – and modified as know-how develops and circumstances demand
- **Second**, the trio of roles (not necessarily single individuals), the public entrepreneur, their guardian angels and their fellow-travellers – form the core of this networked way of doing things. Without people playing these roles, the conditions for achieving shared outcomes for complex problems won't be present, since nothing else can follow
- **Third**, co-production with clients is often necessary for dealing with complex issues. In many circumstances, there must also be a process of empowerment for clients to overcome the power imbalance and allow them to act proactively, as an 'agent of change'. In other words, the people

in this trio realise that it can't progress in an outcome-oriented way unless the client is treated as a partner, a co-producer – a subject and not an object

- **Fourth**, developing and implementing policy solutions for complex, whole-of-government (or sectoral) issues demands ongoing policy learning and learning by doing
- **Fifth**, effective diffusion of these learnings can occur only via processes like the one described here, mirroring the collaborative processes across different levels of organisations
- **Sixth**, success is difficult – working collaboratively is hard and it takes energy and commitment. It involves working on the edge and taking managed risks. It also requires managing the dynamics as the group goes through phases – initiating, working together and sustaining, while being supported and learning. (The material in this document is organised around these group dynamics.)

And if you stand back and reflect on these points, it quickly becomes obvious that the realities they point to are very different from the conventional picture of what it is to work and manage in the public sector. That's an important realisation for you to come to. And if you do, you'll also realise that this is a real 'a-ha moment' for you – one of the critical conditions for progress that we've identified. So, what you need to do now is.. what?

Drawing on the lessons learned in this project, what's the best way forward to spread the word? That's also a critical question for us which we're looking for ideas on...

Now this is a trimmed-down picture of the key learnings arising from this project and it may be simplistic. There are many related matters that a more nuanced and generalisable account needs to identify. The following discussion provides those details – but the way we've laid them out risks having you think they are all equally important or follow in a logical and linear order. That's not so. Remember that the points we've made above stand out as the critical ones.

1 Setting the Scene

Given the increasing complexity of issues and higher expectations about public services, how can government agencies respond to needs in more co-ordinated and effective ways? While there is no 'recipe for success', the project team has tried to capture the experience of interagency working in New Zealand in the framework described in this section. It has also used this framework to organise the material that follows.



“All the people involved needed to reach an accommodation between their formal role within their home organisation and how they responded as part of the agreed interagency approach.” [Case manager in South Auckland]

This discussion document is intended for staff in public organisations, to assist them to work together more effectively across agency lines. The objective is to speed up the learning process by reporting on the experience to date so that agencies do not need to reinvent what others already know.

The focus is on working across agency boundaries because working together will become increasingly important. The Government of the Future (see inset) will face increasingly complex and cross-cutting problems that do not fit into the bureaucratic boxes, no matter how the government structures and restructures itself.

The Government of the Future

“The government of the future will face increased competition and interdependence, and developments are increasingly complex, multi-sourced and multi-faceted” (OECD, Government of the Future). Looking ahead, the next generation of issues could include:

- Internationalisation – we can't do it on our own – both competing and working with other nations (e.g. regulation of therapeutics)
- Responsiveness to ageing and more diverse populations e.g. Pasifika and Asian people in Auckland
- Changes made possible by technology (e.g. personalisation of services)

- Increased expectations of generations Y and Z for individualised services
- Effectiveness (making a difference) not efficiency (doing more with less) and
- Tackling ‘wicked’ problems – gangs, family violence – which are difficult to define and difficult to solve
- Declining trust of government and increasing demand for participation.

At the same time the authorising environment is becoming more complex because of the demands of MMP, citizens and business. This will require a move from ‘in spite of’ to ‘because of’ and ‘in addition to’.

One way of illustrating the issues is to consider the needs of children with autism. Parenting children with disabilities such as autism is a difficult journey. As well as the challenge of parenting and keeping other family relationships intact, it involves navigating through a range of government-funded services, including Needs Assessment and Service Co-ordination (NASCs), Group Special Education of the Ministry of Education, Work and Income, social workers from District Health Boards and social service agencies, and sometimes Child Youth and Family (CYF). Each service has its own process and criteria. Most staff do their job to the best of their ability, treating each case on its merits to ensure that families receive the supports and services they entitled to. But some staff define their role as broker and facilitator to join up access to services. The breakthrough comes when they cease to see the client as a case and focus on the holistic needs of the individual person. What matters is the ability of the staff to ‘connect the dots’ and ‘join up the services’ in ways that suit the needs of particular clients at particular times.

It is worth noting, in this context, the comments we heard about the different approaches of ‘Wellington’ and front-line managers. While policy work tends to define problems and develop solutions issue-by-issue, work at the regional and local levels seems to be more cross-cutting. When Wellington has designed processes for the regions (Strengthening Families, YOTs, HCN and so on), front-line managers, at least in some locations, have merged them into a broader-based collaborative process that is more suited to local needs.

This discussion document is concerned with a paradox – it is intended as a guide to working together but as one staff member observed, “no system can join you up.” There is no recipe for success. When we asked staff to generalise from the stories they told, and when we read the literature, we were stuck by the diversity of the experience. Each story was different, so any attempt to lay out the ‘steps to success’ would be bound to fail. We have deliberately avoided a ‘best practice’ approach, which prescribes formal terms of reference, a lead agency, or a formal mandate from the Minister or Chief Executives. But this raises the question, what can usefully be said?

1.1 A framework to describe an organic process

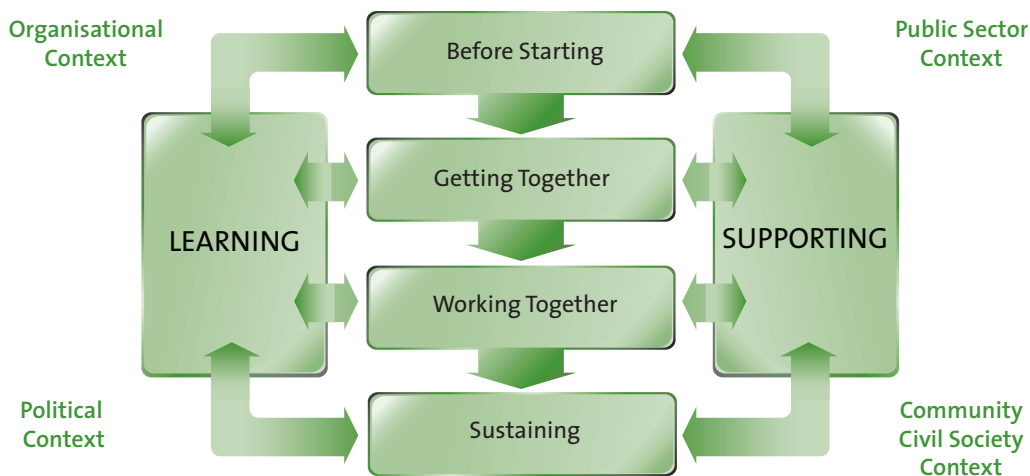
The answer seems to be that while all the stories about working together were different, at another level they were all the same. When we listened to staff telling their stories, we heard them describe a group dynamic – preconditions before starting, initiating, working together, learning, supporting and sustaining. We have tried to capture that dynamic in Figure One below and we have used the framework to organise the material in this document.

The framework is not a planning tool or a ‘recipe for success’. The framework and the associated diagram necessarily explain a complex and dynamic process in a linear and two-dimensional way. The processes we observed were organic and sometimes attempts to plan and structure them would have been the death of the initiative.

The framework can be explained by analogy with chemical reactions. **Before starting** the process, the elements are in a stable state or, staff are working within their vertically aligned organisations to deliver services. Making chemical elements bond in new ways takes energy and a catalyst. Similarly, in working together, **an initiating agent** is required who has the passion, the energy and the credibility to break down the vertical bonds sufficiently to enable resilient horizontal bonds to be established. Organisations can create an environment and culture which makes this process easier. **Working together** is hard unless the bonds are reinforced in various ways – by **support** from the host organisations (coaching, financial resources, time and administrative back up), by a **learning** process within the group. Learning and reflecting and doing leads to a process that is **sustaining**. Without these key components, joining up will fail and the elements will return to their initial state.

Very often, when key staff in an interagency process are transferred to another role in their agency, the collaboration stalls and sometimes fails. This last point explains the need for the outer sections of the diagram – chemical reactions don’t occur in a vacuum, they occur in the **context** of the **organisations** involved, **the public sector environment** and within **political and civil society**.

Figure 1: Joined-Up Public Services



1.2 How to work together?

One of the key questions to be addressed before starting is, how to work together? Staff described a variety of ways of working together, from relatively informal and low intensity sharing of information and resources, through to high engagement (and sometimes highly formalised working) where staff were involved full-time on shared issues.

Figure 2 below sets out a continuum from co-existence to collaboration, where:

- **Co-existence** is the lowest level, where organisations are self-reliant and have no formal communication – this is virtually unknown among government agencies in New Zealand
- **Communication** is the commonest form of interagency working, involving informal meetings and sharing of information as required
- **Co-operation** involves more formalised meetings and exchanges of information so that the organisations involved can achieve their respective goals more effectively
- **Co-ordination** involves organisations moving beyond information-sharing to sharing resources and working together. Undertaking tasks jointly enables the goals of the independent organisations to be achieved more effectively
- **Collaboration** is a more intensive process, sometimes involving a formal partnership to achieve common goals based on shared understandings of language and values.

This discussion document focuses on the most intensive or collaborative end of the spectrum. Collaboration is a more radical activity than co-operation or co-ordination. It is more likely to lead to new ways of working and innovation. It is also the hardest to make work and the most resource-intensive. Collaboration involves seeing the world from a new perspective, one which starts with outcomes, works back in terms of ‘what is therefore needed’, and then redefines what providers and agencies need to do – a radical shift which usually seems to require a recognition of failure before it can occur. It also involves an inversion of meaning that redefines the normal as part of the problem. Sometimes this comes from the client, sometimes from the staff. Almost all of the case studies being reviewed have these characteristics.

promote the success stories and the lessons learned, and provide a forum for continuing learning and exchange. See section nine, conclusions and next steps, for further comment and our contact details.

Specific points to note

There are some points to note, about the language we use and specific parts of the document on which we invite comment and contributions:

Language –

- We use ‘agency’ when we mean government agencies and ‘organisation’ when we talk about issues of culture and behaviour that can occur in any organisation
- We use a number of terms interchangeably, depending on context and to avoid being repetitive – cross-sectoral, interagency and joined-up
- We describe the issue for managers and local staff as one of ‘joining up the vertical and the horizontal’ – where ‘vertical’ refers to the core business, services and accountabilities of an agency and ‘horizontal’ refers to collaborative work, to provide a more broadly-based response to complex issues
- We sometimes describe complex issues as ‘wicked problems’, a term originally proposed by Rittel and Webber for problems that are highly resistant to resolution. Wicked problems are difficult to define clearly, have many interdependencies and are often multi-causal; they are often unstable, usually have no clear solution, and are socially complex; they hardly ever sit conveniently within the responsibility of a single organisation, and involve changing behaviour. Some are characterised by chronic policy failure. Attempts to address them often lead to unforeseen consequences.

What seems to work – each section includes comments on what seems to work, which reflect what we heard during workshops and interviews and what we have taken from the research.



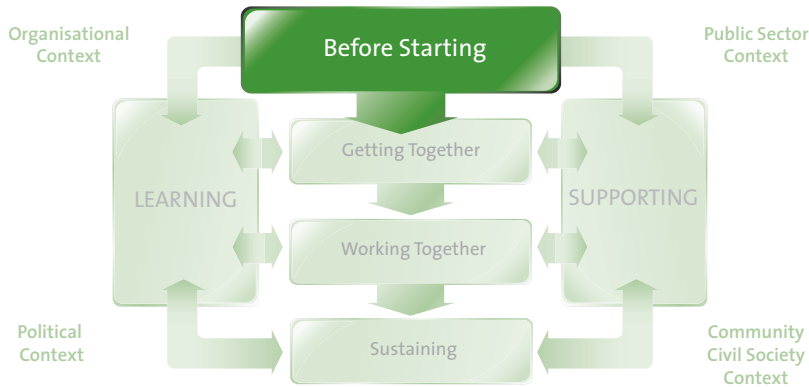
Useful links – each section concludes key references. We have tried to point readers to the best resources on each topic, rather than providing an exhaustive list. These are marked by the useful link icon shown on the left.



Where possible we have used people’s own words – these are shown by the speech icon on the left.



Where specific enablers or derailers are identified – these are shown by the tools icon shown on the left.



2 Before Starting

Organisations are designed to carry out tasks that are beyond the capacity of individuals or informal groups. Working with different parts of an organisation is not always easy. Working across organisational boundaries can be much harder still. But sometimes the complexity of the issue to be addressed requires more perspectives and resources to solve it than one organisation could possibly have.



“When ERO said that fifty schools in South Auckland were failing, some said getting them to do a better job was just about giving the schools more resources. Others said there was more to it. The families and the communities felt let down by their schools who, in turn, felt blamed and misunderstood by the agencies and the community. Previous attempts to improve the quality of the schools had been fruitless or short-lived. In short, the experts didn’t understand the problem and neither did the schools or their communities.

This lack of a clear picture was the trigger for a process of learning across government, non-government and community organisations involved with these schools and led to new understandings of the multi-dimensional nature of the issues. It also led to the understanding that no one agency or organisation had the information or resources to address the issues. For the government agency it meant doing things differently and listening to others about their experiences and understanding of the issues.” [The SEMO project – Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara]

2.1 Matching Complexity Of Response To Complexity Of Needs

Not every situation calls for an interagency response. For the reasons outlined in the previous section, however, there is an increasing demand for government agencies to be more joined up, in order to respond to complex individual circumstances and local situations. People and their issues do not always fit

into boxes. Sometimes a single-agency response is not adequate, and ready-made interventions sometimes have unintended effects.

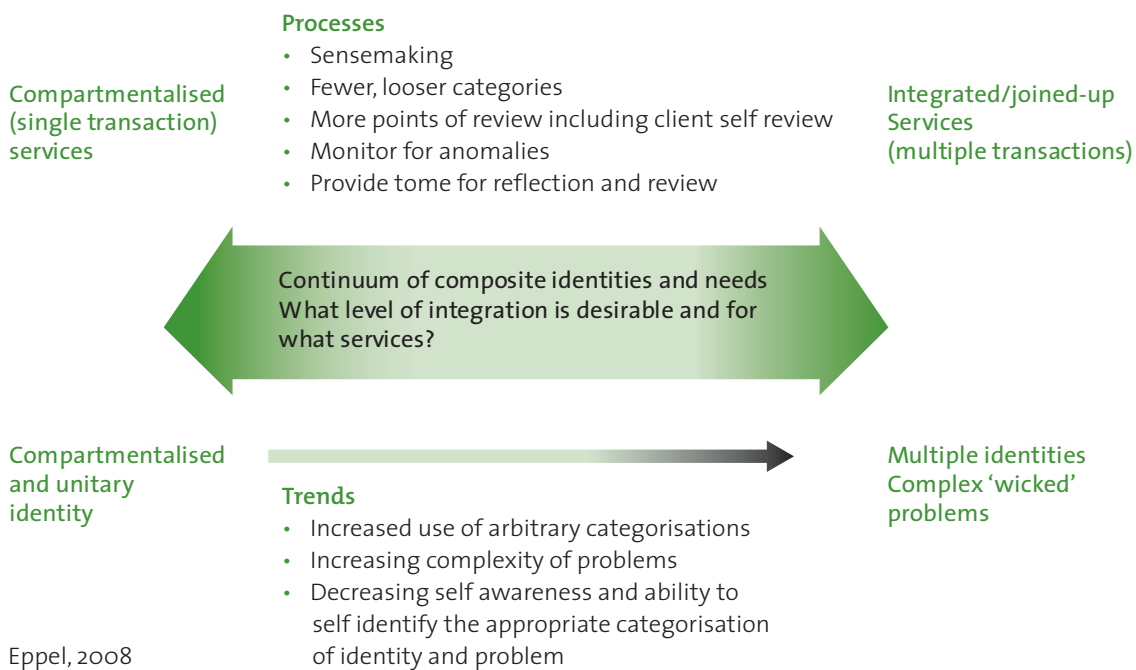
At one end of the continuum, citizens and businesses are usually well served when they are dealing with a government agency over a straightforward transaction – the issuing of a driver’s licence or a passport, for example. In these cases, both the agency and the individual citizen understand that the only relevant aspect of the person’s identity is the licensed vehicle driver or the citizen wanting a right of passage overseas, and that all other aspects of their identity (mother, student, taxpayer and so on) are irrelevant.

At the other end of the continuum, there are individuals, families or businesses who have multiple and such complex needs that neither the individuals nor the government agencies can clearly articulate the issues or provide an effective response. This end of the spectrum also includes:

- Catastrophic events where the magnitude of the disruption or harm, actual or likely, requires an immediate and significant response from a number of agencies
- Situations where agencies’ sense of what is happening and what needs to be done is very limited or disrupted.

Figure 3 below illustrates the continuum from the individual wanting to conduct a simple transaction with a government agency, to complex situations involving several aspects of the lives of each person in a family/whanau. At the latter end of the continuum it is difficult to isolate parts of the complex web of issues and to decide how to deal with them.

Figure 3: Multiple Identities and Integrated Services



The difficulty for agencies is that a range of clients and things they do fall in the grey area in the middle. This means that it is not always easy to match needs and services, and categorisations inevitably become more arbitrary and inappropriate as the client's needs and issues become more complex. To deal with this, agencies need to use processes which help them to view the client and their issues from multiple perspectives. The use of fewer and looser, rather than tight categories is helpful. So too is having people who can look across categories and detect weak signs of difference and change, and regularly reflecting and reviewing categorisation with a focus on the margins to detect weak trends of change.

Most would agree that collaboration is unnecessary at the simple end of this continuum and essential at the other. But there is also a vast grey area in between, where processes are required to:

- Establish the nature of the issue from multiple perspectives
- Determine which agencies are best placed to do this
- Decide on the level of joining up needed for a successful response
- Monitor for anomalies and signs of change.

It is also the area where much innovation and experimentation is occurring.

2.2 Conditions Leading To An Interagency Approach

The case studies and the literature on joined-up service delivery point to a number of conditions that act as a trigger for collaboration.

When “the situation doesn’t make sense to me”

Sometimes what we experience in our work does not fit the usual patterns. As a result, we will be aware of a mismatch between the problem we are confronted with and the service that is usually provided. One natural response in such circumstances is to “do what you usually do”. Another is to do nothing. A third way of responding involves trying to make sense of what you are experiencing in ways that might allow you, with the help of others, to see the issue differently and respond differently.

When “we can’t do it on our own”

Collaborations begin with the realisation by at least one person that the presenting issues are too large, difficult and complex to be addressed by the usual response from the agency, and that they require action beyond the resources and information of any single organisation.

Often this key person uses their networks among government agencies, NGOs and the community to form a group with sufficient information and resources and the will to address the presenting issue. This is the critical first step and it is discussed more fully in the next section.

The critical imperative – when a crisis is the focus for action

An interagency response is often triggered by the harm or injustice that could result from the failure to act.



“A group of public sector people working in the Papakura became aware, through community and work related networks, of a number of teenage suicides in one whanau. Each of them began to think of the implications for their particular agency’s work. One took a further step and got the people from all the agencies and some key community people together to talk about what needed to be done to both prevent further deaths and help the grieving whanau.

The moment when one of the community people said, “everyone in this room is talking crap” became a key event in the formation of a group that began to invest more in understanding the complex issues from their clients’ perspectives i.e. those of the young people at risk, their families and the community they lived in. From then on a process of information-sharing and learning helped the group to work together to reframe the issues and work out how best to begin approaching them.” [Case manager in South Auckland]

The high public profile of an issue is also a trigger for action.



“The pip fruit industry in Hawke’s Bay suffers from seasonal labour shortages. Different agencies involved in economic development of Hawke’s Bay and pip fruit growers had begun to identify solutions which involved importing labour from overseas. Very quickly a number of issues began to emerge which looked very different depending on whether you were the badly treated temporary migrant worker, the orchardist who couldn’t get their fruit picked, the local firms depending on cash flow from the seasonal activity or the regulatory agency worried about overstaying temporary workers, or occupational health and safety issues.

The story could have become a cacophony of claim, blame, and counterclaim/blame. Instead one person initiated a process through which these multiple competing perspectives on the issue were first exposed and then reframed to help build a new approach that had better results for everyone.” [Recognised Seasonal Employers Scheme, Hawke’s Bay]

When the situation doesn’t fit with standard operating procedure

There are times when it is obvious to an individual or a team that their standard services or ways of responding will not be adequate and that some harm will result unless they do things differently. Empathy for the citizen needing help also motivates a response that is ‘outside the square’.



“We were notified late in the day, just before a long weekend, of a man who had been deported from Australia arriving back in New Zealand. He had no money. He had never lived in New Zealand and had no family here. I knew that if we just left him to fend for himself until after the

weekend he would most likely have committed a crime to get some money and would probably end up in jail. There wasn't time to follow the usual procedures of sending him to each agency so I got on the phone... I knew who to ring and ask for help. By the end of the day we had temporary accommodation for him, a Government number, an emergency benefit, medication and other support to see him through the weekend." [Regional workshop]

When previous attempts have failed

The failure of previous attempts to address a difficult and complex issue can also trigger a completely different approach to the problem.

"It's easy to get people to the table. What is hard is to get people to leave some things at the door. Six CEOs signed up to the Circuit Breaker teams on Family Violence but it died a slow death over two years. It died because the commitment wasn't ongoing from the CEOs. There was no endorsement to do it. Slowly people just dropped away. It had the potential to be successful." [Regional workshop]

Serendipity – when the opportunity presents itself

Chance can play a part in creating opportunities for doing things differently. The key is being in the right place at the right time and being willing to seize the opportunity.



"Autism doesn't fit a typical disability box. There can be a wide spectrum of physical, behavioural, speech/language and learning difficulties. The variety and uniqueness of each case can make it difficult for a parent to get the right help. An individual can become a champion for an autistic person. In one case, a teacher aide working in the classroom with an autistic child became the person who best understood the child's needs and was able act as an advocate and broker of appropriate services to support the autistic young person." [Autism story]

But also a catalyst

While all of these circumstances can trigger a collaborative approach, the circumstances are not, on their own, sufficient. Sometimes what is missing is a person who acts as a catalyst – who can take the ingredients and turn them into a functioning whole which is bigger and more capable than the parts. This is discussed in the next section.

2.3 What Seems To Work?



Specific enablers

- A client and outcomes perspective
- An externally-oriented and problem-solving culture
- Pausing, taking stock, looking at the situation from multiple and new perspectives
- Clarifying purpose – why do you want to collaborate?
- Thinking about who needs to be involved.

Impediments

- Sticking to core business, doing the minimum
- “We can’t see what to do, so we’ll just do the usual”.

2.4 Useful Links



The best resources we have seen on complex problems and the triggers for a joined-up response are:

- <http://www.apsc.gov.au/publicationso7/wickedproblems.htm>
- *Getting Better at Managing for Shared Outcomes – a resource for agency leaders* on the SSC website, under Work Programmes>Managing for Outcomes. See the section beginning on page 12 – types of sharing and shared outcomes. <http://www.ssc.govt.nz>
- *Factors for Successful Coordination – Helping state agencies coordinate effectively* on the SSC website under Work Programmes>Public management – good practice information>State services coordination. See pages 1-10 for the context for interagency co-ordination and the case for co-ordination.
- Bryson JM, Crosby BC and Middleton Stone, M, (2006). *The Design and implementation of cross-sector collaborations: propositions from the literature*, in Public Administration Review (Special Issue), 44-55. See comments on the initial conditions for collaboration.



3 Getting Together

This section comments on the behaviours of the people who bring groups together to tackle complex cross-sectoral issues. In some cases these people describe themselves as ordinary and ‘just doing their job’, while others might see themselves as having a role as a public entrepreneur and kick-starting collective action on hard-to-solve problems.

This section also comments on learning and ‘sense-making’ as key processes of collaboration. While learning to share information and perspectives is an essential step, the group also needs to make collective sense of what its members and their agencies perceive as the problem before they can take action together.



“I’m a public entrepreneur and basically I see economic development as a tool to empower people. I had worked in community economic development following the economic adjustments of the 1980s and I see collaboration as the only way to go. The idea of the Mayors’ Taskforce for Jobs came from a personal challenge to me to do something about the waste of human potential represented by youth unemployment.

I brought together a group of mayors (young, old, men, women, rural, Maori, pakeha) from different types of communities and with different political backgrounds but they shared a compassion for their communities and we began to bat the ideas around. We then went around trying to sign other mayors up and opening political doors and getting other partners from the private and public sectors.

We did some things that a government department can’t do but we also worked with the government departments.

I don’t see myself owning the project. I work to get others involved and owning the idea, and working on achieving the goals. When that is well under way I feel I can move on to new issues.” [Interview with Garry Moore]

3.1 Realising The Answer, As Well As The Problem, Is ‘Out There’

As this example and those in the previous chapter show, collaboration often begins when one or two people decide that getting a result depends on finding a new way of framing the problem. The people who start this process use their networks among government and non-government agencies and the community to bring together a range of people, to clarify the interests and perspectives of each, and to find a common approach to addressing the issue.



“When one key person brought all the agencies involved in maritime surveillance and protection together with the intention of getting them thinking about how they could share intelligence which would help them all do their job better, people initially remained firmly locked into their own organisational perspectives.

And it probably would have stayed that way if one person had not acted as if the institutional boundaries were not there and done something a bit out of character. He shouted and thumped the table! The result was that through this informal act which seemed to ignore inter-organisational niceties, he commenced the processes that have since seen the partial removal of the institutional mentalities and got a group of agencies, realising that each of them has only partial information and resources, working in a collaborative way to focus on their shared problem and shared results.” [National Maritime Co-ordination Story]

3.2 Someone To Take A Lead When The Problem Needs Reframing

An initiator

The research identifies the characteristics of people who are successful initiators of joined-up working. They are good at forming diverse and strong social networks among the government agencies, communities and organisations they work with. They are often focused on outcomes rather than on their specific organisational role. They see their organisation’s mission as an enabling framework which they use as a point of reference when they see the need to do things differently. And the perspective of the citizen or client is a key part of their frame of reference.



“I just can’t go home because I am worrying about these kids. My other work is suffering because I am focusing on this. It’s also having a wider ripple effect on our work.” [Case worker dealing with multiple youth suicides]

The people who initiate cross-sectoral processes are not necessarily leaders in the formal sense, and may not have a management position. But they use their influence to gain the confidence and trust of others, as well as getting commitments to address the issue and provide resources.



“As a person new to the public sector, I saw a gap. Things were not happening in any co-ordinated way. My colleagues in community development (all of whom had some funding and/or agency for initiating local projects) came together in the belief that more collaboration would make them all more effective. I facilitated a meeting with fifty-odd NGOs who were all very vocal about what needed doing. Now everyone’s work comes together under a joint outcomes statement. Over two to three years what was previously ad hoc has turned into a more systematised matrix of inter-agency process. No one person understands it all but collectively we do.” [Hawke’s Bay Community Development Agencies]

These ‘public entrepreneurs’ do not see themselves as having the solutions. But they identify issues that no single agency can solve and they build an interagency network to develop new perspectives and approaches to addressing them. It is possible to set up an interagency process without the skills of a public entrepreneur but their personality, their leadership style and their track record make it easier.



“The person would probably just see themselves as doing their job regardless of the system. They use their own time and resources. They like and connect with young people. They are good at connecting with others and are not shy – they have self confidence. They can make enemies but the kids benefit.” [Autism story]

“Entrepreneurship in the public sector is not an oxymoron. Public entrepreneurs defined their role to include keeping the flame alive and driving through to achieve success, sometimes at personal cost in terms of time, career and reputation. They exhibited a passion to make a difference. Some take comfort from the fact that ‘no-one ever got fired for doing the right thing.’ [Regional workshop]

Sense-making

The issues that agencies need to work on together are the more socially complex ones. An additional complexity is each agency and its staff having their own way of seeing the world. If agencies are to work together, they need to form a collective view of the problem that makes sense for each of them. Collective action will need to be based on this shared understanding of the situation.

Before this can happen, however, the agencies will need to recognize that organisations with different cultures will vary in the way they respond to complexity. Some manage complexity by *reducing it* – by developing categories and rules and a specific a set of responses. Others may absorb complexity by having multiple explanations of the environment they work in (the paradigms of different professions, for example), and by allowing a wider range of possible responses. An interagency group will need to understand how its member agencies normally respond to complex situations and then begin to develop new, reframed understandings of the issues confronting them. This process of examining issues from multiple viewpoints in order to reframe them and make new sense of them is referred to in the literature as sense-making.

Kurtz and Snowden (2003) advance a *sense-making framework*, reproduced below, which is a tool to help a diverse group understand an issue and what might be done about it.

COMPLEX	KNOWABLE
Cause and effect are only coherent in retrospect and the pattern is not repeatable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pattern management • Perspective filters • Complex adaptive systems 	Cause and effect are separated over time and space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analytical/reductionist • Scenario planning • Systems thinking
Probe >Sense >Respond	Sense >Analyse > Respond
CHAOS	KNOWN
No cause and effect relations are perceivable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability focussed intervention • Enactment tools • Crisis management 	Cause and effect relations are repeatable, perceivable, and predictable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legitimate best practice • Standard operating procedures • Process re-engineering
Act >Sense >Respond	Sense >Categorise >Respond

The framework helps people to identify how they perceive and make sense of a situation and it provides a way of identifying and discussing differences among group members. It also supports collective decision making.

Sense-making and shared learning are not one-off activities but are an integral part of the group’s ongoing activity. They help the group to see the issue in new ways and to develop interventions to bring about desired changes.



“Staff start in different places with different views about their roles, different ideas of what is important and, sometimes, completely different meanings for key shared terms. Over time, a quality process leads to shared understanding of these differences. Often the breakthrough comes when they cease to see the client as a case and focus on the holistic needs of the individual person.” [Regional workshop]

Enlisting support, clarifying purpose



“Find the natural leader and fund them, reinforce the natural networks.” [Wellington workshop]

The person who initiates the process starts bringing together a group of people who have a breadth of perspectives and the resources to tackle an issue they all have a stake in.

Group members might share their points of view and decide to continue to address the issue through their agencies’ existing processes. Information-sharing and co-operation among the agencies might improve without any reframing of the problem or any additional collaborative process.

Alternatively, the group might begin to see new perspectives which help them reframe the issue and reach a new and shared understanding. This is often the beginning of a process of collaboration among what were previously separate individuals and organisations. Deciding to work differently and 'horizontally' using collaborative processes has implications for the individuals involved and their organisations. Some process of commitment by members is needed to formalise this step. Section 3.4, below raises issues to be considered if a group intends to set up an interagency process.

Group membership

Who needs to be involved? There are no easy ways of deciding which agencies and individuals to involve. It is a matter of talking about the issue in the local context to identify people with 'a piece of the jigsaw' in the form of knowledge or resources to address the issue of concern. It's a matter of 'horses for courses'.

Open or closed membership? Membership of a collaborating group can be tight and selective and closed off to new membership, or it can remain open to new members who identify themselves as the work progresses. The former has the benefit of stability but risks a lack of diversity in perspectives and the emergence of 'group think'. New members can disrupt processes and cause a review of some previously accepted givens but they can also bring knowledge resources, new perspectives and new energy. Creativity and innovation are more likely to occur in the latter scenario.

Mandated or self-selected membership? Sometimes government agencies or national offices simply announce who will participate on their behalf. This is not a recipe for success. The individuals mandated to work together might not understand the reason for this, or the practical implications. It might take some considerable time before effective collaboration occurs and, without some luck or determined facilitation, collaboration might never produce results that are any different.

Self-selection means starting with people who know about the problem and the context but who also want to get to a better solution. To be successful, members of a self-selected group have to be willing to listen to other perspectives and be willing to reframe the issue in new ways.

A 'requisite variety': Solving complex problems requires as much variety among the problem-solvers as there is in the problem to be solved. It also needs a diversity of knowledge and perspectives so beware of forming a group that is made up of individuals who are too similar.

3.3 Collaboration in Different Sectors

Our research brief asked whether joining up is different in different spheres of government activity, e.g. the social sector versus the economic development or environmental sectors. We have formed the view that collaborative approaches and ways of working are needed in all sectors and are that the nature and complexity of

the issues is the determining factor rather than the sector. Maritime surveillance or regional economic development exhibit the same features of social complexity that are faced by the agencies dealing with individuals and their families. The main difference we could detect was the immediacy and severity of the outcome for individuals in the social sector portfolios if complex problems are not addressed adequately. While we have no hard evidence, we were advised that the issues of staff understanding and skills for collaboration were greater in some sectors than others.

3.4 What Seems To Work?



Specific enablers

- One or more people with the 'heart' to want to make a difference, and the 'smarts' to get people from different organisations together to make the system work for a better outcome for clients
- People with resources, nous and authority, and the trust of their organisation
- Some members who bring experience of collaborative working
- The group recognising that the citizen is the centre of the process
- Time – for members to understand each other's perspective, to reach a collective view of the issues and to agree on a shared plan of action
- Relationships based on trust
- Individual members giving up their usual positions, preconceptions and ways of responding and contributing to a collective view.

Impediments

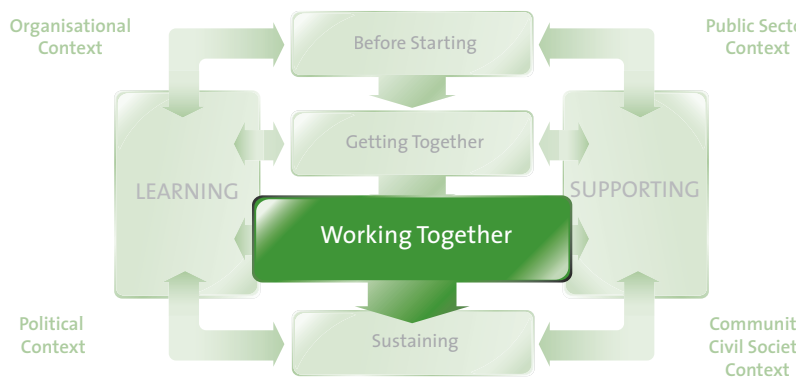
- Any one individual or organisation having a fixed view of the issue, or a commitment to a single solution
- The use of power or resources within the group to minimise some perspectives and prematurely define solutions
- Group members promising more than they or their organisations can deliver.

3.5 Useful Links



The best resources we have seen on getting together are:

- www.cognitive-edge.com/articlesbydavesnowden.php
- <http://www.waitakere.govt.nz/ourpar/collabproj.asp#sumofachieve>
- Eppel, E. *Better Connected Services for Kiwis – achieving outcomes by joining up: a literature review*. See the section beginning on page six, on the nature of the problem
- Bryson JM, Crosby BC and Middleton-Stone, M, (2006). *The Design and implementation of cross-sector collaborations: propositions from the literature*, in Public Administration Review (Special Issue), 44-55. See comments on structure and governance.



4 Working Together

Collaborative groups tend to form in response to a specific contingency and they vary in the way they organise themselves. Group members find themselves in multiple roles, with accountabilities to their own agency, to their colleagues in the collaborative process and to their clients and community.



“The most fruitful discussions were when team members put aside their previous beliefs and started talking about things they could do to change the relationships between the child, their parents and significant others.”
[Autism story]

“You plan for an innovative service with good research and good intentions BUT things work out differently and you need to be flexible with implementation.” [HCN pilot projects]

4.1 Listening To Others, Making Concessions, Focusing On Outcomes

Group members will need to listen to the perspectives of others in order to reach a new understanding of the issues. It is likely that agencies and group members will have to give up some of their beliefs and usual positions and move to common ground. (It becomes easier to concede on details when everyone is focussed on a goal or outcome.) Members may have to make further concessions to the collective process as the group organises itself, looks for resources and commitments and begins to tackle the issues. The first real test of the group may occur when members begin to feel they are contributing more than they are receiving, or that the collaboration has become a ‘cost’ to their agency. It is important that the group deals with these tensions and finds ways to recognise contributions, build trust and manage issues of power and resources.

4.2 The Group Finding Its Own Way Of Working

Recognising the contributions of each, shared leadership, shared responsibility

Collaboration involves people with different perspectives on an issue, and different strengths, setting up a joint process to achieve a collective result. The roles and contributions of the members are worked out through the collaborative process and are likely to be unique to the particular group of individuals.

In deciding to collaborate, group members recognise that each has part of the information, resources or influence needed to define and address an issue. Roles within a group might change over time, with different people taking the lead and responsibility for action according to the shared understanding of the issue and the goal. Each member takes responsibility for the actions (or inactions) of the group and makes clear their own operating limits if these are not compatible with the goal of the group.

Key roles and tasks

The literature tells us that there are certain roles and tasks required of any group wanting to collaborate effectively. These roles and tasks are the responsibility of the group rather than particular individuals and the group needs to take collective responsibility for them.

Leadership and management of the collaborative process involve:

Activation – identifying participants and tapping their knowledge, skills and resources. Work will be required to arrange, stabilise and nurture the collaborative structure

Framing – establishing the operating rules of the group, influencing its values and norms, and altering the perceptions of the participants

Mobilising – obtaining members' commitment to the joint undertaking and to keeping that commitment. Members, in turn, will need to mobilise their organisations and get agreement on the role and scope of the collaborative process

Synthesising – creating the environment and enhancing the conditions for productive interaction. The group will need to find a way to blend the diverse goals, different perceptions and dissimilar values of its membership to fulfil the group's strategic purpose

Game management – facilitating interactions among participants, reducing complexity and uncertainty through information-sharing, promoting co-operation, helping the network to become self-organising, and engendering effective communication among participants.

All the members have a shared responsibility for the group's success. Each must contribute their own perspective and value the perspectives of others.

Organic process, practical steps to support it

One of the workshop participants described an organic process that had developed over several years. The successful outcome seemed to depend on the quality of the relationships, creative thinking, a willingness to engage with new issues as they emerged and the commitment of all the parties to finding a solution. But there were also some practical steps that contributed:

- A vision that was developed and shared by all
- A roadmap for achieving it
- A process of relationship building
- A single plan that everyone bought in to
- Rules of engagement – e.g. only one agency “holding the ball” at any one time
- All the agencies doing their own job very well
- A memorandum of understanding.

‘Learning how to learn’

Relationships within the group are built through the process of working together. Members need to ‘learn how to learn’ from each other in order to form a new and collective understanding of the issues. During this process, the group will come to understand the problem differently and restate it in ways that open up new possibilities for addressing it. The process will show up the competing views within the group and it can be fraught with tension and conflict. Nevertheless, a critical step on the way to addressing the issue involves members valuing the different viewpoints and reaching a deeper understanding of the problem.



“Trust builds up. Doing things together creates shared history and experience and makes it easier the next time because of that shared experience and learning.” [[Integrated Case Management \(ICM\) in South Auckland](#)]

The group’s own processes

The group must invest in its own processes to enable it to work effectively. The relationships in a group of individuals from several organisations are different from those within a single organisation. It takes time and effort to establish new ways of thinking about the group and its goals and deciding how it will monitor and report its results.



“Front-line staff report making the system work, managing within the formal system by coming up with a way to work around, and working up to and testing the boundaries of the formal system generally without explicitly breaking formal laws.” [[Regional workshop](#)].

Leadership and management tools

Traditional notions of leadership within organisations do not translate well to ‘horizontal’ groups, where leadership often has a more distributed character. As well, interagency groups need different processes and structures for governance, management and monitoring. The tools used by ‘vertical’ organisations cannot be used without careful adaptation.

Managing power imbalance and building trust

An imbalance of power and resources within a group can be an impediment to collective learning and action. If one group member has more resources than others, this can be perceived as diminishing the contribution others can make. Powerful players need to be willing to share resources and power with others in the group in a way that does not create dependency or patronage. The issue needs to be dealt with explicitly by the group in order to reach an accommodation that is acceptable to all the members.



“In the schooling improvement project, one central agency had the majority of the resources. The community and the schools tended to take the view that it should just give them the resources and they would fix the problem. The agency for its part could not see that what was being proposed by the communities would bring about a more sustainable fix to the problem than had transpired in previous experiences.

What they did was use the resources to invest in deepening the shared understandings of the problem and bringing neutral researchers into the project to provide additional perspectives and critique and ultimately led to new and innovative insights and solutions.” [SEMO]

When one agency has most of the resources and holds the balance of power, extra care needs to be taken to avoid stifling the perspectives of other participants and impeding the collaborative process. The onus for dealing with the situation lies with the powerful participant. They will need to take steps to build trust and equalise the relationship wherever possible. In two of our stories the chair of the process was not the agency with the majority of the resources, and this helped to redistribute the power.

The multiple roles and accountabilities of members

Interagency groups are not an alternative to conventional bureaucratic hierarchies – they are in addition to them. As a result, the members of a collaborative group find themselves in multiple roles and with accountabilities to their own agency, to their colleagues in the collaborative process, and to their clients and community. There are tensions between the processes that operate within an agency and those of an interagency process. It is more often than not the individual who needs to manage the tensions between their commitments to the collaborative process and the demands of their agency. Often they receive little recognition or support to manage these issues.



“Front-line staff report a strong sense of loyalty and responsibility to their colleagues in their network and to the client or service user. They manage in multiple worlds, balancing their ‘horizontal’ responsibilities with their formal accountability upwards within the organisation. Often this formal accountability is seen as secondary and is just part of the formal system to be managed.”[[Policy Quarterly](#)]

Managing accountabilities when working ‘vertically’ and ‘horizontally’

The performance management and accountability frameworks for public sector organisations are well established and clear. The demands these processes make on members of the organisations can shape behaviours and responses. While horizontal processes should be no less accountable for outcomes, the accountability relationship is different in nature when it is distributed across organisations and carried by a group of individuals working collaboratively. The group will need to clarify for itself and for the contributing organisations what it is accountable for and how it will demonstrate this accountability. Imposing the tools of vertical accountability on horizontal processes often impedes the horizontal process or causes it to fail.

A key challenge in one of the examples we studied was about the difficulty of getting the participants in a joint agency office to move beyond their vertical accountability to a shared understanding of what could be achieved. For the agencies involved, “vertical accountability was hard-wired” and “it was difficult to get to a collective understanding of common outcomes.” People got “fixated on the vertical accountability.” What GUEDO demonstrates is that top down mandate and external imperatives, while helpful, are not enough on their own. Building collaboration takes time, skilled leadership and passion but ‘when there is a will there is a way’.

4.3 What Seems To Work?



Specific enablers

- Recognising that people bring different mental models to the task
- Having people who span boundaries and act in a number of roles, not just their formal one
- Participants having personal qualities of openness, willingness to engage with the unfamiliar, a ‘can do’ attitude
- Getting clarity about leadership and decision making – within the collaborative process and in the contributing organisations
- Getting commitments and knowing how each member and organisation will contribute

- Establishing ground-rules, knowing how the group will deal with issues of power and conflict, access to resources and changing membership
- A 'no surprises' approach
- Having a process that suits the task and is no more bureaucratic or formal than it needs to be.

Impediments

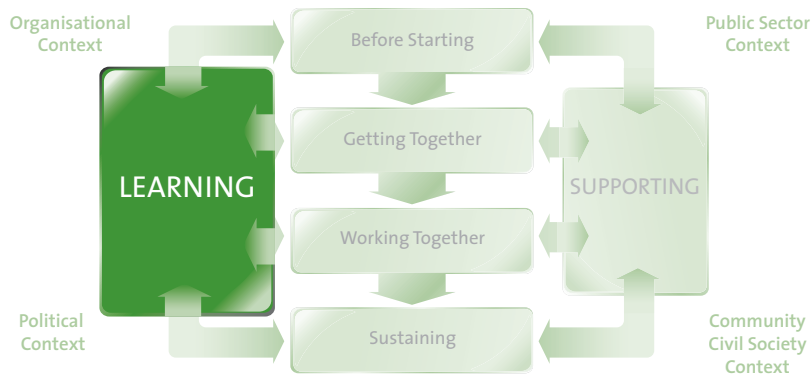
- Members 'nodding and smiling' when they are with the group but not following through on commitments
- Members insisting on doing their own thing
- Members running separate and conflicting agendas
- Members failing to gain the support of their organisations
- The group failing to recognise and manage risks.

4.4 Useful Links



The best resources we have seen on interagency groups working together are:

- *Better at Working Together, Part II: Advice on good practice*, on the website of the HCN Intersectoral Unit. See section 4, on the group working together. <http://www.hcn.govt.nz/publications.htm>
- <http://www.waitakere.govt.nz/ourpar/collabproj.asp#sumofachieve>
- Bryson JM, Crosby BC and Middleton Stone, M, (2006). *The Design and implementation of cross-sector collaborations: propositions from the literature*, in Public Administration Review (Special Issue), 44-55. See comments on process.



5 Learning, Sharing and Reflecting

Learning is at the heart of joining up the vertical and the horizontal through collaboration:

- Learning about the perspectives of others and the processes that support knowledge exchange
- learning to work together in order to 'learn as you do' by sharing perspectives on what is happening
- Learning from the results and using them to engage participants and plan future action
- Mining and reflecting on the knowledge gained in particular contexts for its wider applicability.

5.1 Building-In The Expectation and The Capacity For Ongoing Learning

Collaborative approaches are sometimes tried because the old ways of working and the old solutions have not been successful. Inherent in the collaborative approach is an understanding that no one person has the whole picture and that action will involve an element of learning. There is also much to be learned through monitoring and evaluation of both process and results. The latter can help refine future action and inform organisational understandings of the issues involved.



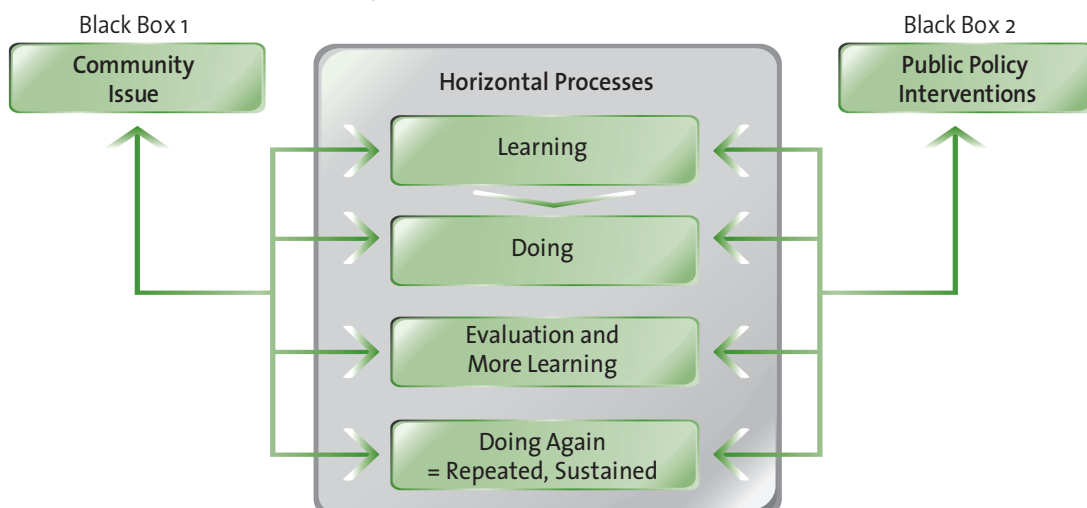
“One key decision made early on was to have observers work alongside the actors in a trusted confidant role as the external researcher/evaluators. These researchers became integral to recording the story as it emerged and critiquing the actions of the actors and the results they achieved in terms of the overall goal. They helped the actors to learn as they tried to understand the various dimensions of a very difficult and entrenched problem and tried out new things and new ways of working.” [SEMO]

5.2 'Learning To Do' And 'Learning From Doing'

This section highlights the different aspects of learning which lie at the heart of collaboration:

- The ongoing process of learning to work together is shown in Figure 4 below. Each person who is part of a collaborative process will bring different perspectives on an issue and the group needs to manage itself so that these different perspectives can be exposed and understood. This is about active listening, learning from each other and seeking to understand and value what each member of the group brings
- The second phase is about learning together – using all the information gained from new and multiple perspectives to make sense of the problem in a way that works for everyone involved and enables action steps to be agreed upon jointly
- Each step the group takes will inform the group's thinking and further action. It is helpful if the group assumes that its understanding and its answers are only partial and that there is more to be learned from doing. Learning will be assisted if ongoing evaluation is embedded in the process
- Periodically the group should review its objectives and its progress towards them. It should also reflect on the group's processes, what has been learned and what could be done better. The group will need to decide early in the process how it will review its performance, when it will do this, and how it will measure progress and success. It will need to identify key aspects of both service delivery and group process to be taken into account. Taking stock doesn't just happen at the end
- Translating knowledge from the group to the 'vertical' organisations needs to be thought about and built into the process. Diffusion of the knowledge gained from a joined-up process will need an active process of information gathering, reflection and transfer if it is to inform the thinking and actions of the agency more generally and assist in the design of policy and new interventions.

Figure 4: Joined-Up Services = no one organisation has all the necessary knowledge or resources to solve difficult issues



Doing and measuring the wrong things because we don't understand causality

Karl Weick warns about the interaction between the present situation and past experience. He says *...the past is reconstructed knowing the outcome, which means that things never happened the way they are remembered. Retrospective sense-making does erase many of the causal sequences that made it harder to accomplish the final outcome.*

This is a caution about thinking that we know and understand a complex situation because we have read about it or studied its history. Each situation has its unique aspects and it is not possible to fully understand why particular actions have had certain results. This is the awkward lesson of attempts to replicate successful collaborations. Often people replicate the form without having understood the essence and as a result do not achieve the expected results.

5.3 What Seems To Work?



Specific enablers

- Building-in a process for reflecting on the collaboration
- At the beginning of the process, identifying aspects of the group's goals and deliverables, as well as its process, to be reviewed
- The group finding a way to transfer learning to the contributing organisations – this also helps the group to renew and refresh its task.

Impediments

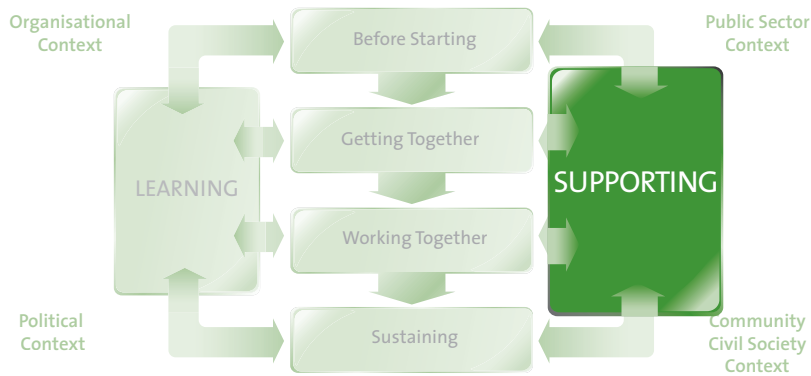
- People with a fixed view of the problem
- People with a mind closed to other people's ideas or views
- Too little information
- Too narrow an understanding of the issues
- Fixed boundaries.

5.4 Useful Links



The best resources we have seen on group learning and publicising the results is:

- Atkinson, M. (2007) *Better at Working Together, Part I, Literature review*. See section 5, from page 60, on evaluating collaboration. <http://www.hcn.govt.nz/publications.htm>



6 Support From Participant Organisations And Managers

The organisations and managers of people involved in interagency work play a vital role in the way they support their staff and the collaborative process. This support ranges from direct engagement in the decision to take a collaborative approach, to ensuring adequate support and resources for participants and managing risks to the process. It often involves briefing the Chief Executive and Minister and getting their support. The right connections between the ‘vertical’ and the ‘horizontal’ can make the difference between success and failure.



“Managers had to go the extra mile. No way could I have done my job without the support of my team, my office, my managers and the community. I might have been the front person but I wasn’t alone. It was a team effort.” [Regional workshop]

6.1 Collaboration Is Another Tool In The Organisation’s Ways Of Working

Members of a collaborative group remain accountable to managers in their own agencies, and these managers have a key role to play in supporting the collaborative process. They are the project sponsors and can act as a trusted confidant of the person involved in the collaboration. They link the collaboration to the organisations’ objectives and work programmes, and it is their role to ensure that their organisations understand and value the work. They also help the group by managing risks to the process. The organisations need to view the collaborative approach as another tool in the corporate repertoire, and develop ways of supporting the process. Some of the supports that agencies and managers need to provide are outlined below.



“My own regional manager was brilliant. He allowed me to exercise a lot of discretion. I explained why, and the circumstances and how the wrap-up services from other agencies would happen to manage the risks.” [front-line staff member, Papakura]

“The manager has to be able to think outside the square and also to protect the people who work with and under them.”

[Regional Workshop]

“Networks have to be sustainable beyond the personalities and sustainability has to be supported at multiple levels.”

[Regional Workshop]

People within the agencies who are not directly or consistently involved in the collaborative process can provide support in a number of ways. They can be critical friends, risk managers and risk takers. These roles are not always played by the same person but might be distributed among several people in the organisation. Collectively they help create an authorising environment for the collaborative process, within the organisation and externally, with other national organisations and with Ministers. They also support the people involved in the collaboration by seeking to understand what is going on and learning from it.

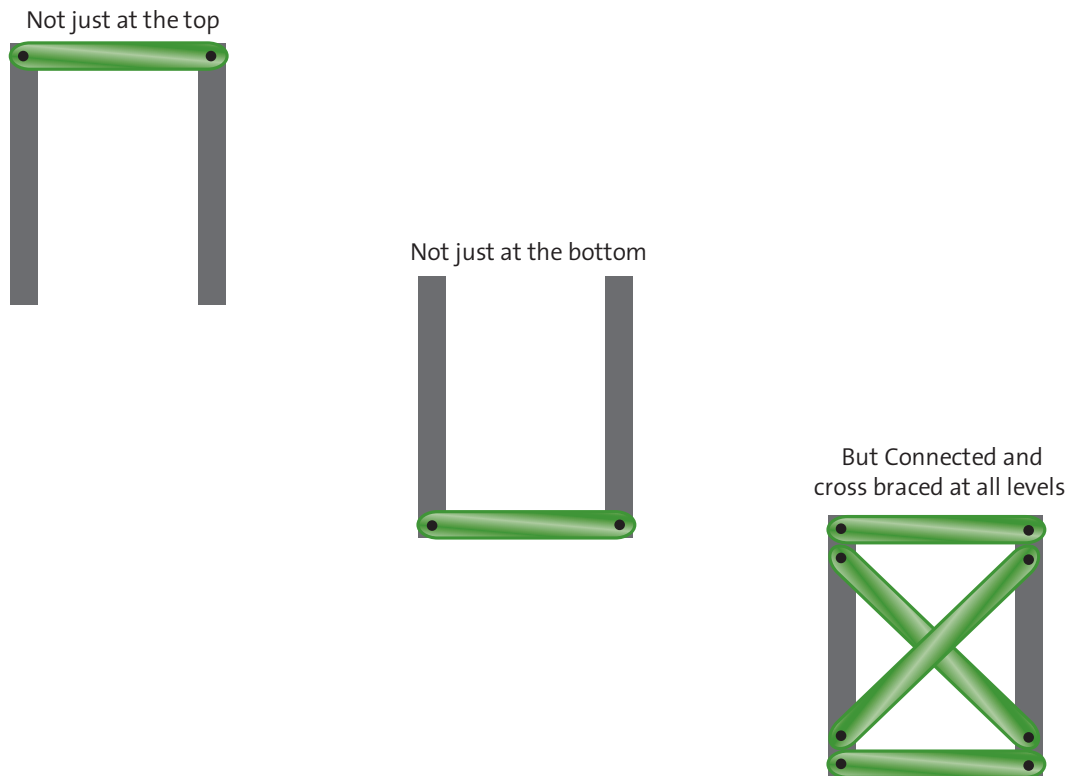
Other people, outside the organisations, who might be part of the authorising environment, can also provide mentoring and support for the collaborative process.



“Most government departments are enormously inward looking so collaboration still mostly happens ‘in spite of’. The rhetoric of ‘do the right thing’ isn’t enough, and all the other forces of bureaucracy within all the layers in between, muddy the waters, constrain, and create boundaries.” [Regional workshop]

People at the workshops provided us with insights into where organisations need to join up. Figure 5 shows that it was not enough for organisations to be connected only at the top, or only at the front-line. Their examples illustrated why collaborative service delivery needs to be mirrored at the CEO and senior management levels of the organisation and at the levels in between. They pointed out the instability and fragility of the two structures on the left compared with the sturdiness of the structure on the right.

Figure 5: To Sustain Collaboration Organisations Need to be Connected



Capability to think as well as do

Collaboration implies a willingness to do things differently. It is not always possible to start with a detailed plan because no one participant has the full picture and the plan needs to emerge from the process. One way that agencies have dealt with the challenges of planning and thinking as the work is being done is to create a 'thinking function' alongside the 'doing function'. The MSD's Regional Social Policy capability is one example of this.

The Ministry of Education took another approach in SEMO, by making use of external researcher/evaluators as critical friends to the project so that the evaluation findings were fed into the process as the work went on, to inform future planning. A reference group representing national organisations, which was part of the authorising environment, also helped with the thinking about the issues and possible solutions.

6.2 Examples Of Support

Resources to enable an interagency group to act differently

If agencies are looking for a new approach to a complex issue, they may also need to be flexible about providing support. The key issues for the interagency group are: time to form new relationships and a collective view of the problem; encouragement to think broadly and act differently; and permission to try out new ways of working. The group also needs to know it has the administrative support it needs, and funding for the service response it develops.



“Improving the quality of the education outcomes for students in South Auckland schools required changes to be made. The government agency had resources to facilitate change but was also convinced that it lacked understanding of the complex issues that result in school failure to know exactly what should be done – and in what order – to bring about lasting improvement. It believed that part of the long-term solution lay in the schools themselves and in the local community. Key people on school boards and in the community became key resources who helped to define the issues and, over time, developed the capability to do things differently.

What eventuated was a resourced and deliberate learning and capability-building process in the schools, the agencies and the community to better understand what would need to change if all the children in these South Auckland schools were to experience successful learning. Both money resources and time were dedicated to this learning and capability-building process, with external researchers acting as critical friends to the project.” [SEMO project story]

Time to build both capability and relationships is perhaps the most important resource in the early stages. Working collaboratively could involve working from a different location some of the time. The group, as it develops and work gets under way, will need some scope to develop its own processes – for capability building, monitoring and accountability, for example. Because the task of the group will be different from that of any one agency, it is likely that the approach the group takes will be different from the usual processes, and the agencies need to be willing to accommodate this.

Organisational cultures that define the task broadly and encourage problem solving

The culture of an organisation shapes the views of staff members about the range of acceptable responses to issues that arise. Where there is a focus on outcomes, staff have a point of reference that helps them to identify when it might be appropriate to go outside the standard procedures. It is easier to deal with unusual situations if the organisation defines a person’s job broadly – staff can then judge whether an alternative response would be consistent with the agency’s outcomes.



“We are allowed to choose a special project each year to work on and I chose this one.” [Papakura case worker]

A culture of organisational learning enables the agency to adapt standard procedures to changing demands. The agency also develops a better understanding of the way different service responses influence the outcomes it is trying to achieve.

Permission to try out new ways of working

The research identified many instances where the participant in the collaborative process was supported to do things differently by the implicit or explicit support of their manager. Many people stressed the importance of a trusting relationship between front-line staff and their managers. It is often front-line staff who are confronted by situations that cannot adequately be addressed by the services available through their agency. Their actions, when this occurs, are affected by the relationship they have with their manager.



“I explained to my manager that there were going to be problems following the usual procedures, which would have taken three weeks. We relaxed the policy and did things differently to allow us the space to begin to make some changes.” [Papakura frontline agency]

Funding

While the major resource involved in inter-organisational processes is staff time, doing things differently does need new information, new capabilities, and new tools. And resources are needed to create them.



“If there is no money on the table within six weeks I stop coming. It’s dead in the water.” [Regional workshop]

Accountability and reporting

Collaborative processes need to be accountable and results need to be reported as part of the organisations’ performance. However the reporting tools used by an organisation may not capture the results of the collaborative process. Standard tools and measures will need to be modified to reflect this alternative way of working. Thinking about how to do this needs to be built in from the beginning of the process.

6.3 What Seems To Work?



Specific enablers

- Managers and organisations making it known they support collaborative working and that they are looking for outcomes
- Organisations acknowledging that collaboration and horizontally networked ways of working are part of their core business
- Organisations being ‘tight’ on outcomes but ‘loose’ on specific steps and process

Better Connected Services For Kiwis

- Organisations giving staff opportunities to build inter-unit and inter-organisation relationships
- Good relationships between each member of the group and the manager they report to in their home organisation
- Time and resources for the collaborative process
- Flexibility to redefine roles
- Flexibility to vary standard procedures, rules and policies
- Practical support for the collaborative process – access to administrative support etc
- Support and resources to reflect and learn from doing
- Recognition and rewards for creativity and innovation linked to outcomes.

Impediments

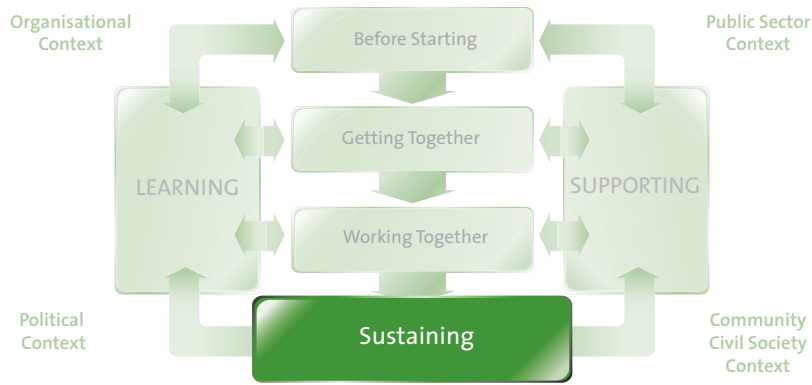
- Agencies not recognising the amount of time it takes for collaborative groups to form and become effective. (Front-line staff frequently referred to actions of Head Office and 'Wellington' that stopped interagency processes)
- Agencies withdrawing from the collaborative process, or undermining it, by taking unilateral action
- CEOs and senior management not understanding the problem or the context from the point of view of the clients and front-line staff.

6.4 Useful Links



The best resources we have seen on the way agencies support collaborative working is:

- *Better at Working Together, Part II: Advice on good practice*, on the website of the HCN Intersectoral Unit. See section 5, on administrative support and financial and other resources. <http://www.hcn.govt.nz/publications.htm>



7 Sustaining Collaboration

A key issue for any interagency group is how to refocus and re-energise when the issues seem intractable, points of emphasis keep changing and the group is flagging. The previous section has commented on the support that group members need from their managers and the group needs from the contributing organisations, this section focuses on things the group and its members can do.



“Networks have to be sustainable beyond the personalities. And sustainability has to be supported at multiple levels.” [Regional workshop]

“Successful collaboration takes –

- Listening
- The perspectives of all the players – you need to uncover the different perceptions of the issue
- Understanding the system you’re dealing with – it’s bigger than all of the agencies involved

And it depends on:

- Relationship-building
- Trust that we’ll all do as we say
- Capacity-building for all of the above
- A long timeframe to build the group process
- Support and recognition of its fragility.” [Wellington workshop]

7.1 Being There For The Long Haul

Collaborative groups are usually set up to deal with the most complex and intractable problems. They face special difficulties because of the issues involved, and because collaboration usually occurs on the margins of the agencies. In addition, they will go through the usual stages in the life cycle of any group. Members will need to be aware of the group’s own process and life cycle and find ways of supporting each other through the difficult periods.

7.2 Locating The Group In Its Life Cycle

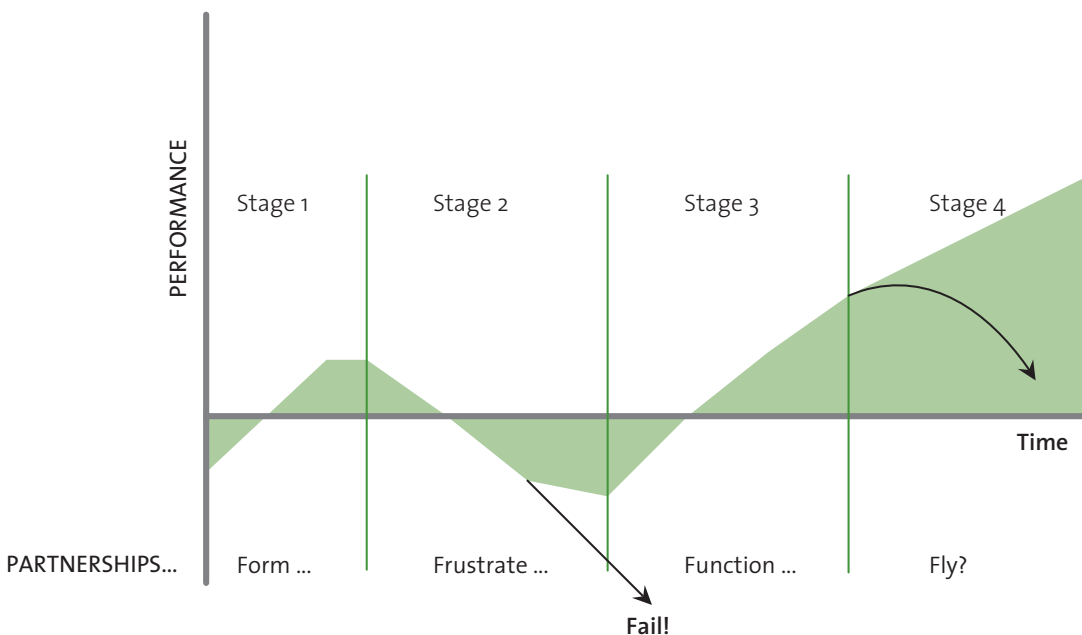
Forming and maintaining a collaborative process takes time and valuable resources. If the process is to be effective, group members will need to learn how to work together, to plan, strategise, and evaluate together, and to learn together. These are significant upfront costs but they are offset by results that are not possible without this approach. They will also be part of the ongoing activity, even when the group is succeeding.

Over time, the group can be destabilised by changes to its mandate and the support it receives from agencies. Sometimes the group itself will generate these changes, as it achieves its goals and redefines itself. Sometimes changes made by the agencies and not necessarily related to the group will have an impact – changes to policy, processes and organisational structures.

Partnership life cycle

It is helpful to think of partnerships as going through a series of stages, during which particular tactics are appropriate to ensuring progress and success. These are similar to the stages that any team is likely to go through, as people come together to achieve common goals, and are shown on Figure 6.

Figure 6: The Partnership Life Cycle



Typical characteristics of each stage:

Stage 1 Forming

- Common cause, arising from shared interests, opportunities, threats
- Early enthusiasm: new challenge, new relationships
- Exploring what's needed, what's possible
- Nature of commitments unclear

Stage 2 Frustration

- Partners feel 'in a fog'
- Disputes or tension over priorities and methods
- Individuals questioning purpose of the partnership and reasons for being there
- Hidden agendas influencing what partners do
- Doubts about what each other brings to the party
- Partners competing for credit and control

Stage 3 Functioning

- Renewed vision and focus
- Progress through joint project teams
- Partners talk in terms of 'we' not 'you'
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Full accountability to each other for actions

Stage 4 Flying

- Successful achievement of partnership goals
- Shared leadership
- Partners changing what they do and how they do it to achieve
- Partnership objectives
- Trust and mutual respect
- Partnership priorities central to partner activities

Stage 5 Failing

- Disengagement
- Lack of commitment
- Recurrent tensions
- Breakdown or frittering away of relationships

Source: HCN Part II Appendix 2 P28-31

Moving partnerships forward If you're at this stage... consider...	
Forming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create opportunities for people to get to know each other Encourage partners to focus on a common vision, the difference they want to make together Define tasks and tangible outcomes Shepherd the process of building the partnership agenda – including through use of research Ensure neutral meeting ground
Frustration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revisit the common ground – allow time to redefine issues, purpose, etc Maximise opportunities for practical involvement Implement actions that demonstrate progress ('little victories') Encourage open expression and constructive disagreement Clarify benefits to individual partners Promote mutual appreciation of what each other can contribute Fix the problem, not the blame
Functioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree clear objectives, milestones, responsibilities, success measures Establish principles/protocols for collaboration Encourage shared leadership and accountability Develop common methods and quality standards Seek learning consciously through cross-partner project teams joint training and reviewing activities
Flying	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anticipate future challenges and build partner capacity to respond Take stock of how well the group is performing Keep working at communications Avoid any unnecessary partnership working Ask: does the partnership still serve its purpose? Ensure that all partners are getting the benefits they expect Continue to celebrate success
Failing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go back to the advice offered for stage 2 – frustration Wind up the partnership

The partnership life cycle in practice

Some partnerships may never get beyond Stage 2, Frustration, and may skip directly to Stage 5, Failing in Figure 6. This is where the partnership disintegrates, for example, for want of a sufficient common cause, changes in people involved or a failure to work at partnership.

Partnerships need to work through the stages of the life cycle in order to function with greatest effectiveness (or 'fly'.) Even in the best partnerships, there is a tendency for partnerships to falter and perhaps fail, unless the partners consciously manage their progress through the critical stages of the life-cycle.

Quite often, partnerships find themselves in a 'crossover' zone between Frustration and Functioning. In these cases, partners may have a heightened sense of the partnership failings, and may doubt the point of the partnership. Action may be needed to get the partnership refocused on the partnership potential and vision, the benefits and some early wins to build confidence and commitment.

Mistaking Stability for Equilibrium

When collaboration is working well, everything looks easy and to those involved it is. The collaborating group has developed a sophisticated and distributed understanding of the issues and ways to address them. No one person may have a full understanding but collectively they do. At this stage one and one really do seem to equal five. Such circumstances can appear deceptively simple to people and organisations with a less deep understanding of what is going on and how such apparent order and stability has been achieved. This system of interpersonal relationships and processes cannot be fully documented because it is dynamic and adaptive. It is vulnerable to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. New members or processes that are externally imposed in ways that limit the adaptive capability of the group, i.e. without collaboration with the group, may lead to failure to achieve the desired results.

It will be difficult to capture the essence of what contributes to success in a particular instance. If successful collaborative approaches are to be sustained and replicated then it is the essence of the dynamic process rather than its form that must be understood by the agencies.

'Collaboration fatigue'

The group will need to be clear about its place in the wider work context, especially when group members are involved with other collaborative processes in the same area. Members need to recognise that collaboration fatigue occurs when:

- Expectations are unrealistic
- The interagency work is too reliant on the passion of the individuals involved
- The work is not supported by the agencies.

7.3 What Seems To Work?



Specific enablers

- Recognising where you are in the life-cycle of the group and making ‘course corrections’
- Keeping an eye on the group’s process as well as its goals and objectives
- Understanding *essence* over *form*
- Having critical friends who can walk alongside the group
- Using the public entrepreneurs in the group to market the collaboration with stakeholders
- Having good linkages between group members and their organisations
- In dealing with complexity, sensing changes in the pattern and monitoring feedback loops
- ‘Managing on the edge of chaos’ by encouraging desirable patterns and creating barriers to the undesirable.

Impediments

- Agencies imposing new instructions or operational procedures top-down, without knowing about existing ways of working
- Taking a ‘one size fits all’ approach.

7.4 Useful Links



The best resources we have seen on sustaining collaboration are:

- http://fivevital.educe.co.uk/fs_5vital.htm
- *Better at Working Together, Part III: Self-assessment tool and principles for collaboration*. See the self-assessment tool. <http://www.hcn.govt.nz/publications.htm>
- Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, London (2003). *Assessing Strategic Partnership – The Partnership Assessment Tool*. <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/assessingstrategicpartnership>

8 Understanding The Context: Joined-Up Government

Collaborative approaches are developing in response to the increasingly complex issues that confront government agencies. They also reflect the increasing expectations of citizens and of our political leaders. Experimentation and innovation involve risks, however, and the staff involved in interagency processes need to have a good sense of the environment they are working in.



“When the second suicide in the whanau occurred, I talked to my manager because I was sure there was going to be a ripple effect. The first one had been under the agencies’ radar because the young person had not been involved with CYF. After that first death there had been a meeting with the whanau that I wasn’t at, and promises had been made, but nothing had eventuated. I now felt sick worrying about what worse things might happen for the whanau following the second death. My manager was great and the result was a change in caseloads to allow me to work exclusively with the whanau to get a better understanding of how we needed to work with them and support them, if we were going to avert more tragedies.” [Case manager, South Auckland]

“Collaboration occurs in spite of the public management system, not because of it.” [Regional workshop]

“No system will join you up.” [Regional workshop]

These comments illustrate the context within which service delivery and collaborative working occurs. This context includes the organisations that employ the group’s members, the state sector and its systems, and the changing political and social environments.

Staff who are part of an interagency group continue to be accountable to the organisations that employ them. But agencies’ systems, which are designed around

core business and a specified range of services, may not accommodate joined-up ways of working. Similarly, the public management system defines outputs and reporting requirements in terms of agencies' performance agreements and there is virtually no systems support for collaboration. There is also a political context within which staff work. In some circumstances this can encourage innovation and collaborative working. In others it discourages them.

The literature suggests that working together gives an interagency group the advantages of being small, such as the flexibility to respond quickly and in new ways as circumstances change. At the same time, the group can draw on the resources of its much larger parent organisations. The discussion of South Auckland schools, for example, showed the power of being able to access evaluators who could walk alongside the process as 'critical friends'. When it works well, collaboration brings together the advantages of both the small group and the large organisation.

8.1 Organisations

Some people found the organisational mission and culture an enabling touchstone.

Many of the participants discussed how the commitment to collaborative working varied, even within a single organisation. Some people were more inclined to working in this way and staff would go to them for help with resources to solve shared problems.

As well, organisations differed from each other in their support and commitment to collaborative working. Some staff who were part of an interagency group were encouraged to work collaboratively but others in the same group were not. Some group members would 'manage' their agency by revealing little about what was happening in the interagency group.

Problem-solving vs. following process

This variability is, in part, explained by the mental models of agencies and differences in the ways they and their staff approach the world. Some staff repeated the message of their Chief Executive, that "no-one ever got fired for doing the right thing." This empowered staff to adopt an externally-oriented problem solving approach. Sometimes this was reflected in a more flexible approach to rules – "it's better to ask forgiveness than seek approval." Work under the Review of the Centre showed that this approach was crucial for encouraging innovation.

By contrast, other staff – sometimes staff within the same organisation – said, "no-one ever got fired for following standard operating practice". This exposes a tension between the problem solvers and the process followers. "I am just doing the right thing... I keep my head down... my colleagues all handle everything in the same way."

Policy vs. practice

One organisational issue that emerged repeatedly was the disconnection between agencies' policy thinking and capability – generally based in Wellington – and practice in the regions. "I keep my project under the radar until it succeeds, then I get it evaluated to get funding. I keep policy analysts away as they add no value."

Even where regional policy capability existed (in MSD for example), this was often regarded by local managers and staff as being relatively ineffective. Some local managers also felt they could not engage with the regional policy function over complex issues that cut across ministerial portfolios and agency boundaries, but where this had occurred there appeared to have been good results which strengthened the collaboration.

Loyalty to the interagency group vs. the parent organisation

Staff reported a tension between their loyalty to their colleagues in the cross-agency group and their accountabilities to their own agency, and sometimes to their profession. One approach to managing these tensions is drawn from the policy context and is outlined below.

Treasury practice for managing an interagency role and agency responsibility

For many years it has been Treasury practice, if a staff member is part of an interagency process or taskforce, for the Treasury's advice on the issue to be prepared and signed out by staff other than those directly involved. The staff member would be consulted on the advice but they would not be responsible for providing it. This means that their perspective is reflected in the advice but the potential conflict between the Treasury view and the taskforce view is addressed.

8.2 The public sector

Stronger accountability, weaker connectedness

A feature of the New Zealand style of public management is that the system is focussed on organisational accountability and performance. This is a strength, in that it creates a focus on 'vertical' accountabilities for outputs. The cost is a lack of focus on the cross-cutting or 'horizontal' issues that do not align with any particular agency's responsibilities.

Managing for Outcomes was intended to increase the focus on how agencies work with others to achieve the desired results. But the formal systems are still largely focused on the agencies' outputs and their responsibility for particular lines of business.

Boundaries and other obstacles

In two of the three locations we visited, staff pointed out that the boundaries for government services differed from each other and from the boundaries of iwi and local authorities. Building relationships and trust became more difficult when more than one office of the same agency needed to be involved with a particular issue.

The budget constraint

We tested with staff the effect of the output-based budgeting system, which is often cited as a barrier to interagency work. The Public Finance Act now explicitly provides for joint agency outputs, although this provision has never been used in practice. Discussion with staff suggested that the budget system is used as an

excuse for not collaborating (when the will was lacking) but it was not the reason that collaboration didn't occur. What did matter was the overall budget constraint, and how budgets and contracts are defined and measured – “payments are tied to widgets and ignore complexity.”

Remuneration and rewards

Another issue that was raised was the remuneration and reward structures of different organisations. We explored with staff how the formal systems affected their ability to work together.

Staff felt that the formal management systems did not support interagency working but, at the same time, these systems were not a fundamental blocker. We were told, “no system can join you up” and “when there is a will there is a way”. Differences in employment conditions, while acknowledged, were not seen as an obstacle to working together. On reflection, this is consistent with the experience of a number of countries where wages and salaries of staff in NGOs are around 2/3 of their government and for profit sector counterparts and yet partnerships between government and NGOs are a widespread and growing phenomenon.

The Privacy Act – balancing responsiveness and the right to privacy?

The Privacy Act was widely reported as a significant obstacle to interagency collaboration, in particular in getting the services that citizens needed. At one level this is not surprising. The Act was designed to protect privacy by restricting the sharing of private information without consent, and Principle 10 of the Act limits using information obtained for one purpose from being used for other purposes. At another level, experience suggests staff in agencies may not be interpreting the law correctly and may perceive a barrier that does not exist in law. Like any law the Privacy Act needs interpretation and Principle 10 does permit exceptions, for the maintenance of law for example.

There were notable differences in approach to privacy issues across staff and organisations, with some reporting following the ‘black letter of the law’ and others being more flexible. Staff responded to the privacy issue in a variety of ways – from getting consent in advance to finding work-arounds on the basis it is “better to ask forgiveness than seek approval.”

8.3 New Zealand society – the political and community context

Unlike other jurisdictions, New Zealand has relatively few mandated interagency processes. Instead, interagency working tends to develop from the ‘bottom up’ or the ‘middle out’ in response to problems that cannot be addressed effectively through the normal service response. Staff were sceptical about the value of centrally-mandated solutions – “mandated, clearly-defined joint outcomes don't work for wicked problems.”

Staff also commented on citizens' increased expectations of the quality of service delivery, the growing scrutiny of the public sector and the decline of the belief that the professionals know best. We live in a world in which, increasingly, power is shared and in which many groups have a role to play in issues of public concern.

The government of the future will need to find better ways to meet the needs of kiwis. This will mean new ways of working. It will mean taking an 'outside in' viewpoint – starting with more engagement of citizens and business in the design of services – in order to achieve outcomes more effectively. Inevitably this will mean addressing hard issues and solving problems that span agency boundaries. This creates issues of joining up and greater collaboration. The focus in public management thinking in New Zealand and overseas is already shifting to the 'hows' of service delivery – how Government services can meet the needs of New Zealanders better. (See the State Services Development goals and associated reports at <http://ssc.govt.nz/display/document.asp?navid=242>)

One of the key issues relates to risk, given the increasing scrutiny of the public sector. Managing risk was particularly important for agencies such as CYF, Customs and Corrections. People at the workshops commented on Wellington's aversion to risk and its focus on managing media attention, even if decisions were justifiable as good practice.

The Local Government Act – the role of the centre in empowering joining up

The Local Government Act involved a sea change for the role of local government, moving from the traditional focus on provision of local public services, 'rubbish, roads and rats', to a focus on the four well-beings – social, economic, environmental and cultural. One of our detailed examples was a partnership between central and local government in reducing youth unemployment – the Mayors' Taskforce on Jobs.

"I never could have got the Taskforce off the ground it weren't for the reform of the Local Government Act. The conservative councils would never have got on board without the mandate from legislation implied by the four well-beings."

Staff in the smaller centres also discussed the tension between being a public servant and having a role outside of work as a community leader. This was particularly important for Maori staff who had to balance their role as a public servant with their responsibilities to their whanau and iwi.

Iwi /Maori participation

An interagency group will need to consider:

- The role of Maori staff – recognising that some Maori staff may have accountabilities to both their agencies and to the Maori community that go beyond their work role.
- Whether the collaboration needs to involve Maori in a partnership role or whether the group will be consulting with Maori. It is important to clarify this, in order to reduce possible confusion or ambiguity about working together.
- Who can provide appropriate advice to the group on these issues?



Useful Links

The best resources we have found on context are:

- Mosaics, pages 35-46, on removing barriers
- <http://www.privacy.org.nz/privacy-principle-ten/?highlight=principle%2010%20> is the best reference to the Privacy Act.

9 Conclusion And Next Steps

Emerging conclusions

The work to date suggests that the factors described in this document have a significant effect on the success or failure of joined-up ways of working. One observation we heard repeatedly, from New Zealand and overseas sources, is that success is difficult – working collaboratively is hard and it takes energy and commitment. It involves working on the edge and taking managed risks. There is a lot of ‘learning by doing’ going on but a lot less organisational learning. At the start, few of the people involved seemed to have a clear idea of the factors that would make for success.

External environmental factors

- Recognition that no one person or organisation has the knowledge or resources to deal with complex problems. “We can’t do it on our own” comes up repeatedly.
- Fragmentation begins at the top with about eighty Ministerial portfolios. When Ministers themselves speak with many voices, the agencies find it harder to work together.

Internal system / organisational factors

- The lack of resources or space to seed new ways of working and, in particular, the absence of ‘angel funds’ or venture capital functions in the public sector.
- Quality process is also emerging as important, both in the literature and in specific case studies. In particular, joint working groups are more likely to succeed when they manage conflict, reduce power imbalances and build trust. Managing the power imbalance is particularly important where one large agency holds most of the resources.
- Different cultures allow varying degrees of discretion to bend the rules, depending on the mission critical imperative. Sometimes there are differences even within the agency (compare IRD’s tax collection and child support functions, for example).

Better Connected Services For Kiwis

- Collaboration at the service delivery interface is often not mirrored and supported by collaboration within the various levels of the organisations.
- System design needs to embrace paradox. For example, while agencies need to manage risk, they also need to allow staff to take risks and try new ways of doing things. While standard procedures build fairness into the system, fairness sometimes means doing things differently.
- Formal systems operate to constrain staff, so staff sometimes work outside the system. The trick is to allow them discretion to solve problems within the boundaries. This requires training, knowledge and flexible systems.
- Groups are more likely to succeed when linking mechanisms are already in place – for instance, existing networks and shared understandings about competing mental models and the meanings of key words.
- To be effective, staff in a horizontal network need ‘soft’ power or authority (access to resources, the ability to commit to actions). The use of ‘hard’ power, such as sanctions and threats, is often counter-productive. A quality process is needed, to ensure that the power of the different players is balanced and conflict is actively managed.
- ‘Public entrepreneurs’ have a key leadership role. In some but not all examples, leadership by committed sponsors and effective champions is also important.
- Public entrepreneurs are not ambitious for their careers but they are ambitious about the outcomes. They define their role to include keeping the flame alive and driving through to achieve success, but sometimes this was at personal cost in terms of time, career and reputation. They exhibit a passion to make a difference as well as the self-belief to set their own direction. Some take comfort that ‘no-one ever got fired for doing the right thing’. They do need to build a balanced team, however, that includes all the key players and the necessary range of skills.
- Innovation springs, most often, from middle managers who have resources, nous and authority and who have the trust of the system. It comes less often from front-line staff or from national office.
- Mental models are important because staff start with different views about their roles, different ideas of what is important, and sometimes completely different understandings of key shared terms. Over time, a quality process leads to shared understanding. Often the breakthrough comes when the group ceases to see the client as a case and focuses on the holistic needs of the person.
- Common purpose about making a difference is more important in helping mobilise resources and commitment to action than shared outcomes.
- Support for learning is important (someone walking alongside the team, for instance), formal evaluations are less so. There seem to be too few ‘guardian angels’ who understand collaborative processes and act as mentors, supporters and critical friends to horizontal processes.

Cross-cutting factors

- The interpretation of the Privacy legislation, with its emphasis on client confidentiality and the use of information only for the purpose for which it was collected, is emerging as the key systemic blocker of joined-up working for example on case collaboration shared assessments.
- The key issue about measurement is to focus on the right thing (what gets measured gets managed). The emphasis should be on empowering practitioners and supporting development, rather than on performance assessment and sanctions. We heard a range of views about the need for inputs, processes and outcomes to be closely tracked.
- While the budget system in the public sector is used as an excuse for not collaborating, it is not the obstacle it is claimed to be. “Where there is a will there is a way”. Amendments to the Public Finance Act, to provide for joint agency outputs, have had little practical effect. What does matter is the overall budget constraint, and how budgets and contracts are derived and measured (payment for transactions generates transactions).

Factors that did not prove to be significant

- Interestingly, the international literature comments on the use of formal agreements for success (plans and memorandums of understanding), but this has not come through as important in the dialogue with practitioners in New Zealand, where practice relies heavily on informality.
- Another open question is whether decentralised and self-governing networks are more effective than inter-agency groups where one agency takes the lead role.
- Agency specialisation and focus (fragmentation) has not emerged as a significant factor. The rhetoric of ‘overcoming barriers’ or ‘breaking down boundaries’ is often misleading. Rather, collaboration is about attempts to put boundaries in different places and to create ‘border crossings’ suitable for particular vehicles.
- Some staff work in a high-trust, high-discretion environment, others have less discretion. Even those with less formal discretion exercise judgement about how they apply the rules in any particular situation. All agreed that the job was about achieving the best outcome for the client or service user. Front-line staff talked about making the system work, managing within the formal system by ‘working around’, as well as testing the boundaries of the formal system without explicitly breaking rules.

Public sector innovation is not an oxymoron!

The Review of the Centre commissioned an exhaustive study of public sector innovation that examined eleven case studies, held focus groups and discussions with experts and winners of innovation awards and reviewed the relevant literature. The results are strikingly similar to those found in our research. The study found plenty of examples of incremental innovations but few examples of step changes or successful cross-organisational diffusion. The study identified the following as key enablers:

- A mandate for change – from the Minister / CEO
- Leaders who empower the front line
- Being tight on results, looser on means
- Agencies that are forward-looking, opportunistic and externally engaged
- Time, space and money for sound implementation
- Clever measurement
- Celebrating success and diffusing learnings.

It also identified the following derailers:

- The absence of a sponsor or champion
- A focus on performance measurement: planning is linear, innovation is organic
- Few incentives to share and diffuse learnings
- The process foundering in a sea of small other changes.

This research is no longer available on the central agencies websites but copies can be made available by request to derek.gill@vuw.ac.nz.

Next steps

It is clear that collaboration is a way of working that the public sector is just starting to understand. Although we have heard about successes and localised networking, there is a lot more to do before we could say that joined-up working is a feature of public services in New Zealand.

We have been told that the best way to promote joined-up working is to let the ripples spread from the groups who are already doing it well. We hope the discussion document and the specific examples will stimulate a wider interest in collaborative ways of working, more information-sharing about what is already happening and, ultimately, more responsive and innovative services for citizens and businesses.

We will continue to work on these issues and will publish other material over the coming months. In the meantime, we would be interested to hear from you, whether this is about your experience of joined-up working, or your comments and questions about resources, contacts and practical advice.

Please contact us at IPS@vuw.ac.nz. We look forward to hearing from you.

Appendix 1

Seven Stories of Joined-Up Government

More stories of joined-up government were told to researchers through individual interviews with participants

1 Integrated Case Management (ICM) in South Auckland

A number of people from the government agencies (Child and Family, Education, Housing, Work and Income, Police) working in the Papakura area became aware, through community and work related networks, of a number of teenage suicides in one family. Each of them began to think of the implications for their particular agency's work. One took a further step and got the people from all the agencies, and some key community people, together to talk about what needed to be done to both help prevent further deaths and help the grieving families.

"I knew this whanau. I had worked with them over the years and not with much success. There wasn't a relationship as much as a track record of demands from the whanau and government agencies and games being played. I began to wonder what if... what if I did something different? Would we get a different result? So I went to the meeting and I listened. There was a woman from the whanau who seemed to have something to offer. So after the meeting I invited her to come and see me again and bring some other whanau support with her if she wished. I told her that I didn't know how best to help the whanau and I would like to hear what she had to say."

"I wasn't sure she would come. But the next day she did come to see me, with some of the aunties and we talked. They had some insights into what was happening. They were dealing with multiple government agencies, there were significant issues. These people deserved my respect for all they had been through. What we needed to do as agencies was suspend our judgements and step back a little bit and say, how have we got here?"

"I listened for three weeks to try to understand their priorities. It hadn't worked with plans and priorities being set by government agencies so I thought we should try it their way. I got the other agencies together and rules of engagement were set for all sides. It wasn't about the agencies doing anything special, it was about doing what we should be doing. It was a very extreme case. I would never break a rule or spend a dollar inappropriately but I was driven by what is the right thing to do here."

"That is the point at which it was agreed to form a quite tight team of front-line agency people to work with this whanau. One person from one agency, who had already established a personal trust relationship with key community and whanau contacts, took on a temporary role as key contact person for all the government agencies."

"The agencies agreed with the whanau that they should only have to deal with one agency over an issue. Imagine it as a game with only one ball – only one agency can hold the ball at a time. So there were times when the other agencies had to just get out of the way and let the agency with the ball do its job."

"From then on a process of information-sharing and learning from each other and their clients helped the group to work together to reframe the issues and work out how best to begin approaching them. Some agencies modified their organisation's standard operating procedures in some way to respond more effectively but also because it was going to be a more effective way of dealing with the high level of needs and the intensity of intervention required initially."

"My own regional manager was brilliant. He allowed me to exercise a lot of discretion. I explained why, and the circumstances, and how the wrap-up services from other agencies would happen to manage the risks."

"The agencies involved all had sufficient discretion and resources at the regional or local level to respond differently and they did. As one key person said, 'If I am not here because I can make a difference, then what am I doing here?'"

"By agreeing to work first on the priorities set by the whanau, the agencies were then able to get whanau support for some longer term goals. It was difficult to know where to start. The people involved said, decide on somewhere, do one thing and make it work and see where that leads you."

"One of the agencies had noted that many of the children belonging to the whanau were not attending school

regularly or at all. We reached agreement with the whanau that all the young ones should be in education, training or work. Getting the kids attending school was seen as Education's core business, so on that issue they took the lead on working with the parents and getting the kids back to school and attending regularly. Many of the young people were driving without having driver's licences so we helped them get licences, which also helped some of them find work."

"All the people involved in this case management example needed to reach an accommodation between

them how they responded as part of the inter-agency agreed approach and their formal role within their home organisation. A number of people involved talked about their own organisation's culture and mission as empowering touchstones which helped them to do the right thing when the rules and procedures were inadequate for the circumstances they faced. A broadly rather than narrowly defined mission critical task (MCT) assists problem solving because it opens the way for multiple perspectives to be brought to bear on how the MCT might be achieved."

2 Schooling Effectiveness in Mangere and Otara (SEMO)

The SEMO story is one of many actors, no one of whom can be credited with knowing what to do, or with the success that began to emerge over the following eight years. It is also a story of passion for children's rights to good schooling and successful learning. It is equally a tale of ideas, innovation, and creativity. There are leaders, heroes, and probably some villains too but they are not any one person, they are lots of people at different times along the way.

The setting:

Briefly setting the context, in 1996 ERO said that fifty schools in South Auckland were failing. The newspapers said that Otara and Mangere children were illiterate, which initially incensed parents until they began to compare notes about their children's educational success and realised that there was some truth to the reports.

At the time the schools were fighting, the principals were slugging each other off in the media, rolls were falling and a significant number of children were being bussed out of the area to attend other schools. All the schools had fences built around them, if not physical fences, then metaphorical fences in that there was no communication between the schools and little between the schools and their communities. There was also little communication between the schools and the Ministry of Education because, in the words of one participant, the Ministry didn't know how to talk to the schools.

The route to school improvement and better learning outcomes was different in Mangere and Otara but there are some common threads which have much to tell us about collaborative processes.

The actors:

Ministry of Education national office (the CEO, deputy CEO, Schooling Improvement Manager, Auckland-based project managers)

Ministry of Education regional office (Regional manager and staff)

Education Review Office

School Boards of Trustees

School Principals

Parents

Community groups in Mangere and Otara (e.g. Maori, Samoan, Fijian, Tongan, sports clubs, churches)

External researchers

The story:

This story started without those involved knowing where it was going to go and how exactly it might end, i.e. in the beginning there was not a detailed plan or a plot outline. There was only a big hairy and, what more than one person thought, achievable idea. The idea that the children in the South Auckland schools were entitled to schooling as good as they would get anywhere in the country and a realistic expectation of learning and achievement drove a number of people's actions throughout this story. Telling the tale from where it is today makes it all sound easy and doesn't really give a sense of the doubt, tension and drama between the actors as the story was being created. It is also difficult, when a story concerns such a wicked problem as the underachievement of children in low socio-economic areas, to say that the story has ended, because the challenge continues even though significant progress has been made.

One key decision made early on was to have observers work alongside the actors in a trusted confidant role as the external researchers/evaluators. These researchers became integral to recording the story as it emerged and critiquing the actions of the actors and the results they achieved in terms of the overall goal. They helped the actors to learn as they tried to understand the various dimensions of a very difficult and entrenched problem and tried out new things and new ways of working.

There are a number of versions of the story, how it begins and evolves, depending on which actors are telling the story. This is to be expected because all of the people we talked to played a part in creating the story. The story plays out on different levels, or sub plots, if you stay with the analogy.

On one level there were innovative and new practices in Auckland which introduced new actors to the usual policy/implementation mix. The introduction of new actors was a vital element in the emergence of new perspectives on the problem and new and innovative approaches. There was also some re-learning and revisiting of the fundamentals of effective teaching and learning.

Different actors in Mangere and Otara meant that the story evolved along different lines in each community. There is also a Wellington change story which occurred because of a deliberate decision to learn from what happened in the experimental processes in Auckland and

over time integrate the learning and practice that worked into organisational thinking, policy and practice.

In Wellington there is the story of a portfolio manager who wasn't content to take the same old approach that hadn't worked in the past. She had savvy and political nous and had carefully begun to line up the ducks because she was sure there could be a better approach and better outcomes. There was a cautious, experienced senior manager who slowly bought into the idea of a different approach, and a CEO aware of the risks, aware of the cost of failure, and willing to risk doing things differently to get a different result. And, of course, a Minister who was also briefed by all three. The risks were made a little more acceptable because of previous failed attempts to improve schooling in these areas and the lack of alternative options which might have been less politically risky.

In Auckland, the principals and their staff were likely to see the villains in Wellington not giving them sufficient resources to do a difficult job. Each of the principals had developed their own plan of what money they needed. Some of the Board people and the parents were sure the schools could do better and that it wasn't just a case of resources.

According to one board of trustees' chair, the Ministry of Education came along "on their white chargers to rescue the schools in Mangere and Otara". The consultants came in en masse with proposals about how they were going to do it. These proposals were rejected by the community and the schools. There was a meeting with the school and community people. There was money available and everyone and their dog, from the sports clubs to the churches, thought they could have a slice of the action. A crunch point came when one board chair pointed out that the group elected by the community and responsible for the schools – the boards of trustees – were being ignored and not being held to that core role and left the meeting.

Back in Wellington the Ministry of Education had for some time been noting a rise in the number of schools in extreme difficulties under the self-managing schools regime, and had been considering how best to approach this at the system policy level. It had formed a Schools at Risk Team which later became the Schools Monitoring and Improvement Team and developed some risk indicators. While the Ministry had some information to populate these risk indicators, they recognised that much of the softer information about risk resided at the local level. Some policy work had been done but thinking about how to intervene in failing schools in a way that might lead to sustainable improvement was in its infancy.

Previous attempts to improve the quality of the schools had been fruitless or short lived. The 'experts' in the Ministry of Education didn't have confidence that they understood the problem enough to design a solution alone. A key person in the Ministry heading up the schooling improvement work was linked into international research and practice in this area and was sure that part of the answer to sustainable school improvement lay in the schools themselves, their boards, principals, and teachers, and their immediate parent communities. The Ministry had also done some work with Treasury, and the Minister of Education, to get money

to enable them to intervene earlier and build capability in potentially failing schools. So when the ERO report on South Auckland schools emerged they had money to intervene, no detailed plans for how, but a broad general idea about building local involvement and capability, informed by research and overseas practice.

In Auckland it was also clear from meetings held in the schools that there were considerable differences in perspectives on the problem to be gained from other sources, such as the students themselves, their parents, the teaching professionals, the management and governing boards as well as facets of the community where these schools were located. Some said getting them to do a better job was just about giving the schools more resources. Others said there was more to it. The families and the communities felt let down by their schools and the government agencies. The schools felt blamed and misunderstood by their communities and the government agencies.

For the Otara schools, a very fractious meeting involving the boards, staff, students and other community interests in the schools was a turning point. Some key board members were convinced that the ownership of the problem and its solution had to be with the elected school boards who represented the parents of the students. They were the ones who felt most keenly that their children were not getting a good deal from the principals and teachers in their schools who they saw as having low expectations of what their children could achieve. The Ministry took the position that it didn't have the answers but would like to work with the boards and the schools.

The Ministry took the new and risky step of inviting the schools to contribute to the job descriptions for the project managers to look after the schooling improvement work in Mangere and Otara who were to be located not in Wellington but closer to the schools, in South Auckland. There were two departures from normal practice. Firstly, the Project managers were to be separated from the regional office and report straight to Wellington in formal terms, while in practice working very closely with the school boards and principals. Secondly, representatives from the schools also participated in the selection of these people which presented the Ministry with some HR minefields to navigate. Two experienced and high-performing Auckland principals were appointed to these roles, i.e. people who could walk the talk when it came to school performance and children's learning.

These first steps were the beginning of a new way of working both within the Ministry and between the Ministry and the schools. It sounds easy but there were constant tensions and hurdles as existing procedures were challenged. There was a big turnover of staff and some principals in the schools in those early years because there was now a focus on what they were doing and its effectiveness for children's learning. The two project managers were not very popular with the former colleague principals because they were seen as challenging principals to do better and siding with the boards and parents against them.

The schools were generally of the view that the Ministry should just hand over the money and let them get on with it. The Ministry however took the (hard and initially

very unpopular) line that there were things that schools should be doing with their existing resources that they weren't. The Ministry said it would provide additional money only when the existing resources were being applied to improving learning, and only in ways that would help the schools build capability to do more with their existing resources and contribute to improved learning. This eyeballing was possible because of the experience and local knowledge of the project managers and the credibility and relationships they built with the boards and the community. The commentary of the external researchers was also vital in this space because they provided an 'independent' assessment of what was and wasn't happening in the schools for children and their learning. The Ministry's ability to be close to the action, having the expertise to make good educational judgements and build strong relationships, and a determination to make learning outcomes for children the focus, were vital elements during the first two years.

In Otago the school boards began to work together and with the Ministry of Education through the project manager and formed the Otago Boards Forum that continues to work together today. In those early days, in 1996, the boards were not effective, and the principals usually dominated the boards. The Otago Boards Forum (OBF) saw their vision as supporting individual boards to do their job. Parents had said we want better education for our kids and that has been our job, to help train and support the boards to ask the hard questions when principals and teachers are not doing their job well enough and children's learning is suffering. It was one board chair, who was the one who had left one of the earlier meetings with the Ministry because he didn't feel listened to, who was so much behind the idea of the OBF. So what was so special about that Board chair? He has a passion for kids in his school and community and their right to learn and succeed and is willing to do battle but also listen to anyone willing to join him in that take.

A different scenario played out in Mangere. Some of the boards agreed to co-operate and share more, and there were clusters formed across the schools focused on literacy experts in the schools. The project manager worked with the literacy experts to focus on the actual results of the teaching interventions in the schools and their impact on children's learning. The focus in Mangere was on improving the effectiveness of teaching and using student achievement data to do this. The capability of the teachers to use student assessment tools as a means for improving teaching became a focus. External experts worked with the clusters to improve their ability to interpret and use student assessment information for improvement. The literacy expert teachers, who were later joined by numeracy expert teachers, became the instigators of a process in each school of working with classroom teachers to improve their practice, and also with principals to make the achievement results for the school their primary focus and to feed this information back to parents. The boards too were helped to understand assessment information and learned to ask for information about progress on student achievement.

What began as a shared state of only partial knowledge became the trigger for a process of learning across government, non-government and community organisations involved with these schools. Over time

this shared learning led to new understandings of the multidimensional nature of the issues, a shared commitment to the broad goal that the educational achievement of the children in these schools should be as good as elsewhere in the country, and first steps by everyone towards doing things differently. It was only then, and with a determined focus on monitoring the results of learning achievement this progress towards higher levels of achievement began to be made, and still continue.

The Ministry took some risky steps, but so did the boards, the teachers and the principals, all focused on their goal. That also doesn't mean that there were no false steps or dead ends. The process of learning also led to the understanding that no one agency or organisation had all the information or resources to address the issues. For the government agency it meant doing things differently and listening to others about their experiences and understanding of the issues. For the boards it meant holding their principals and staff accountable but also ensuring they better understood what was involved in making improvements. They too focussed on the achievement data and engaged their principals and staff on the key question of how learning might be supported and improved.

Improving the quality of the education outcomes for students in South Auckland schools required changes to be made in how the government's main agency did its business and worked with its various agents internally and externally. The Ministry of Education had resources to facilitate change but insufficient understanding of the complex issues that result in school failure to know exactly what should be done, and in what order, to bring about lasting improvement. What eventuated was a resourced and deliberate learning and capability-building process in the schools, the agencies and the community to better understand what would need to change if all the children in these Auckland schools were to experience successful learning. Both money resources and time were dedicated to this learning and capability-building process, with external researchers acting as critical friends to the project.

At the beginning of the schooling improvement project in South Auckland the community and the schools tended to take the view that it should just give them the resources and they would fix the problem. The agency for its part could not see that what was being proposed by the communities would bring about a more sustainable fix to the problem than had transpired in previous experiences.

What they did was use the resources to invest in deepening the shared understandings of the problem and bringing neutral researchers into the project to provide additional perspectives and critique. Agreement on the overall goal of all concerned being successful learning by the children enabled all activity to be focussed on this end goal. An environment was established in which it was possible to operate collaborative learning networks at the individual classroom and school level and use knowledge gained there to improve practice and policy. What was learned in this project began to inform both wider theory and practice around school improvement.

Figure 7: Learning Process Model for the Numeracy Development Project and the SEMO project in New Zealand

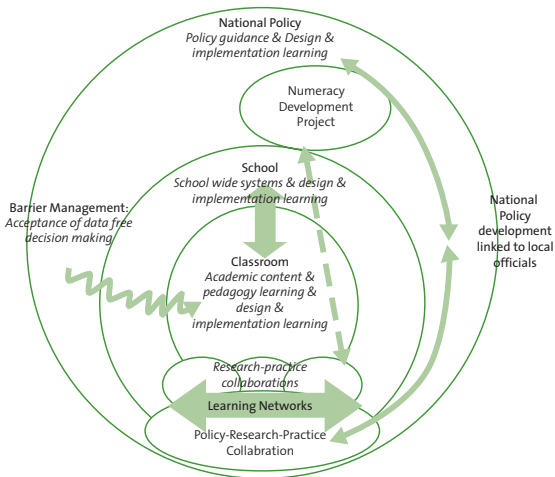


Diagram by Dr Brian Annan

The collaborative networks in the communities were gradually built and strengthened by the SEMO project interventions. To begin with, the people on the boards and in the different community groups like the early childhood facilities didn't know how to network. There were no linkages between the 30-odd early childhood centres and the schools. Now there is sharing, the Samoan group with the Tongan and so on, and a programme to support transition to school.

Sometimes the Ministry of Education doubted what the Otara Boards Forum saw as key tasks and there would be tensions. They said that when they were told something they were planning wasn't core business they would fight for it. For example they established a Parents Playing a Part Programme to support children's learning at home. They rejected the challenge and went ahead after gaining support from the CEO of the Ministry. Now there are parents in schools, who are themselves learning and they are supporting the kids to learn. Some of the parents are going on to formal teacher training and they are all learning that they can approach the schools. The learning of the kids on the programme goes ahead like a rocket because they are getting that one-to-one attention, and their behaviour improves because they are learning and getting individual attention.

The Ministry of Education used the researchers working alongside the project to evaluate its outcomes as a way of learning from and critiquing its own processes. Over time this research has played a role in helping the organisation think differently about its focus and how it intervenes to get improved learning outcomes. Making this happen

took leadership and challenges from the CEO and other senior managers and the breaking down of some barriers inside the organisation. How this occurred is another whole story in itself. The CEO and the Group Manager also played important supporting roles throughout the project. They were challengers, sceptics and critics, but they were also defenders and risk managers. They ensured that the Minister remained informed and supportive. The Wellington senior manager also worked with a reference group representing all the key sector interest groups. They were key contributors to the development and support of the different approach and therefore also part of the risk management.

The individual actors in this story are unique, as is the context in which the story takes place and therefore the exact details of the story are also unique.

What is not unique, and therefore is replicable, are the elements of the processes which are evident throughout the story:

- Actors focussed on outcomes but not on particular solutions
- These actors taking time to learn from each other's perspectives and being willing to try new things
- Learning while doing and learning from doing so that dead ends and ineffective steps are quickly identified and changed and what works can be used more widely
- Building on the shared passions of a number of actors for a worthy and challenging goal
- Building capability in all the actors to better understand the issues and therefore create even smarter and more effective ways of doing
- Careful monitoring of results by all the actors so that learning and action continues and is refined as you go
- Agencies learning to sometimes get out of the way and letting the people on the ground (with the detail understanding) take a lead and try new things
- A respectful tension and challenge between local experiential knowledge and theoretical and expert educational practice knowledge, so each can play a part e.g. around teaching, learning and assessment
- Front-line action and dialogue supported by head office dialogue, analysis, risk identification, and risk management
- Head office learning from listening and internalising the lessons
- Wicked problems require ongoing focus.

3 The Mayors' Taskforce for Jobs

The idea of establishing a Mayors Taskforce for Jobs came from a speaker at a community governance conference and was taken up as a challenge by one Mayor who saw an issue which he believed needed urgent attention and could benefit from the influence that could be brought to it from the official status of the office of Mayor.

"I'm a public entrepreneur and basically I see economic development as a tool to empower people. I had worked in community economic development following the economic adjustments of the 1980s and I see collaboration as the only way to go. The idea of the Mayors' Taskforce for Jobs came from a personal challenge to me to do something about the waste of human potential represented by youth unemployment."

"I brought together a group of seven mayors to begin with (young, old, men, women, rural, Maori, pakeha) from different types of communities and with different political backgrounds but they shared a compassion for their communities and we began to bat the ideas around. We talked the issue around and began to agree on what could be done. We then went around trying to sign other mayors up and opening political doors and getting other partners from private and public sector."

Mayors' goal vs. govt goal

"We did some things that a government department can't but we also worked with the government departments."

"I don't see myself owning the project. I work to get others involved and owning the idea, and working on achieving the goals. When that is well underway I feel I can move on to new issues."

For the government agencies (initially MED, DOL, and MSD) and Ministers in Wellington, the idea of the Mayors' taskforce and a shared goal around youth unemployment was not initially welcomed with open arms. The initial approach to one of the agencies was rebuffed with the CEO being "too busy" to see the mayors.

A change of government and a change of Ministers opened the door a little and regular meetings began to take place involving the Mayors, the agencies and sometimes Ministers.

Getting to meet face-to-face was step one. However that didn't mean all was now sweetness and light. The Mayors had formulated a goal among themselves that focused on the area they thought important. Government had already developed an Employment Strategy and an Employment Taskforce. So there was a lot of fraught negotiation over what was finally agreed to as a joint goal.

Reaching the agreement about the joint goal did not result in the beginning of collaborative working. Officials remember those early meetings between the Mayors and the agencies being like a prodding machine. The Mayors would always come armed with an issue about what wasn't happening that they thought should be. So the initial meetings were us vs. them and seen as quite adversarial by some of the participants, but some also think they were a good step because they reflected all

the things that were wrong about how the players were working together at that time. One said that at that time the national-local government partnership didn't mean more than a means for local government to prod the various arms of central government to direct their people on the ground to behave in 'X' way. The Mayors were saying this is the problem we see on the ground, you, central government, do something about it under the rubric of this partnership. So although there was a shared goal, there wasn't a shared view of the problem, or of what each of the partners could do.

One central government agency participant saw it as both parties having a partial view and neither seeing what the other saw and therefore initially a lot of defensive/offensive talking past each other. The notion that they each had something to offer and they needed to work together was slower dawning on central government than the Mayors and local government.

The signing of a formal memorandum of agreement between the Mayors and Ministers and an agreement to provide some central government funding for the Mayors' contribution brought more differences in perspective and practice between the two parties to the surface. The central government agencies tended to approach the funding agreement as a tight purchase contract for specific services whereas the Mayors saw the contract as a more relational one in which both parties took responsibility for certain actions but both were accountable for the results. The contracting was also made more difficult because there were three central agencies involved, all requiring specific clauses and this tended to frustrate the Mayors.

Central government agencies' realisation of the potential of the partnerships evolved slowly. As the partnership developed the agencies could see value from the Mayors middle-level perspective that was not national and was bigger than local communities where specific projects were talking place. For example, it began to be recognised that the Department of Labour's focus on sectoral and regional labour market development as part of the overall national economic development strategy could benefit from that middle-level information available through local government. The same was true in the case of the governments focus on Youth Transitions or what became known as Realising Youth Potential, and now Jobs Plus. So over time the partnership was not just about local action but also about collaboration at the national policy development level.

Officials see the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs demonstrating the potential of how the interactions and relationships between central and local government should and could work. The Regional Commissioners in MSD have come to realise that the Mayors can get into places and achieve things they couldn't themselves, and most have come to realise that they couldn't do it on their own.

As researchers we drew some lessons about forming and performing collaborations from the experiences of those involved in the Mayors Taskforce for Jobs:

- Sometimes some of the people, with some of the resources, and some of the information, don't want to collaborate. They just want to keep doing that they are already doing and offers of collaboration are seen as diversions and are not viewed as having much if anything to offer
- Symbolic steps such as agreeing on a shared goal and recording the agreement in a memorandum are not sufficient to bring about collaborative working
- For government agencies, the realisation that they can't do it on their own and collaboration with local government opens new doors and new possibilities for solving difficult issues which are part of their core business.

4 Autism

Parents of children with autism need to go through a complex process of joining up government in order to get support for their children's unique needs. Although autism is a common disability, it is a complex problem as it does not fit into a traditional disability box. There is a huge spectrum of autism disorders, involving a wide range of social, behavioural, physical, language, and/or learning difficulties. Moreover, parents themselves may experience difficulties as a result of high levels of stress caused by exhaustion, violent behaviour, or time and energy needed to fight for the needs of their child, for instance.

A typical journey for parents in getting their child diagnosed with autism is that the child is born quite normal. A few months later however, the child starts to display symptoms, such as a lack of eye contact with adults, a lack of babble, no interest in other people and their toys, violent behaviour, difficult sleeping habits, and night fears. Some parents may have access to a GP who identifies autism as the cause for the child's difficulties; however GPs are not always aware of the autism spectrum and related symptoms, leading to large regional variations in detecting autism. When a GP is aware, the child is referred to District Health Board funded child services. Autism also may be detected through a teacher at school or a play centre supervisor. In those cases, the child is referred to an educational psychologist, who is supported by the Group Special Education of the Ministry of Education.

From a government point of view, the complex problem of autism is depending for instance on the uniqueness of the individual's needs, the age and family circumstances of the individual, and the location where the autism disorder label has been received. Autism support is divided over a range of government-funded services including Needs Assessment and Service Co-ordination (NASC), Group Special Education (GSE) of the Ministry of Education, teacher aids and Resource Teachers of Learning and Behaviour, Work and Income, social workers from District Health Boards, GPs and paediatricians, social service agencies, and sometimes Child Protection. A child who has been diagnosed with autism disorder under the health system needs to go through an annual NASC process in order for the child's parents to get a limited,

capped budget for supporting what can be interpreted as an "ordinary home life". Individuals can apply for NASC support until they are 65.

If the child has received an autism disorder label under the education system, a different model of capped, special education funding applies. For instance, in the compulsory education sector, parents can get c1% of so-called ORRS (Ongoing and Reviewable Receiving Schemes) funding which they can spend on a teacher aid for a few hours per week. GSE undertake an annual assessment process, which is different from the NASC process. From 21 years of age on, after support under the compulsory education system, an individual may be eligible for support under the tertiary education system, independent living, and/or supported employment.

As there are no relationships between various assessment processes or even government service organisations, it is not uncommon that a parent needs to tell her personal story to a large variety of government representatives (e.g. a case was presented to us where a parent needed to tell her story to 28 different people). However, some front line staff members (e.g. a teacher aide) do not stay within the procedures and culture of their own vertical organisation and define their roles differently. Instead of working to role, these staff members work to find win-win solutions in perceiving individuals with autism as unique human beings who can be enabled, rather than cases that need management. They broker services even if it is not their role. Usually they go the extra mile spending a huge amount of time and energy in helping individuals and their families. For example, a teacher aide first connects with a child with autism. She does not see a disabled child with difficulties, but a person with specific, unique capabilities. Focusing on the strengths of the child, she identifies the needs of the child and connects those up with services available across and outside the system. Building relationships across and outside the system, she makes things happen for the child, such as for example going to an eight day Outward Bound camp. Often, these innovative front line staff members are supported by managers in the system, such as a School Principal in the case of the teacher aide, who provided a safe space to support creative, effective solutions for autistic children.

5 Recognised Seasonal Employers (RSE)

The horticulture and viticulture industries suffer from a perennial problem of attracting enough seasonal labour to pick, pack and prune the crops each year. Harvests were ‘miraculously’ picked each year. As the labour market tightened and traditional sources of kiwi labour dried up, the industry increasingly turned to transitory backpackers and illegal foreign workers in New Zealand to meet the high seasonal labour needs. The industry was characterised by informality, tax evasion, double dipping on benefits, illegal foreign workers, breaches of minimum wage and other employment conditions and poor safety practices. In addition there are indirect effects which were more diffuse but possibly more important – for instance underpayment of wages leading to theft, significant tax avoidance, sub-standard housing and poor health status.

A standard top-down policy development process run out of Wellington would have involved a literature search, limited discussion with industry ‘rounding up the usual suspects’, ‘search for the guilty and punishment of the innocent’, and the Mexican standoff of position-based bargaining between the regulators and those in the industry with shady practices would have continued.

The development of the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme was different – initially it was ‘bottom up and outside in’ and not ‘top down’ or national office driven. In the early phases this was based on primary research of what practice is on the ground. The team held a series of workshops in industry training space in Hastings, not in the Department’s Wellington head office where policy is usually made. These workshops involved practice-making by engaging the various regulators and all the elements of the industry – apple growers, contractors, quality controllers – to share knowledge about what happens on the ground and co-design the changes that industry needed to make, and the support for those changes by immigration and employment environment required to transform the apple industry. “Moved from blame, finger pointing, and ‘them and us’ to shared understanding, a sense of common purpose.” The subsequent detailed design and implementation phases were more top down. Without the primary research and understanding having been completed, it would not have been possible to respond quickly when the top down window of opportunity popped open.

The process required exposing participants to multiple and conflicting perspectives, building an understanding of how the system actually works in practice rather than theory, and then reframing that understanding to build a new approach that worked better for everyone. The key was a process that took the time to develop a shared understanding that things looked very different in practice depending upon whether you were a low paid and poorly treated worker, the legitimate orchardist who was at a cost disadvantage compared to the shady operator, or the regulator worried about illegal and overstaying temporary workers, occupational health and safety issues, tax compliance and poor social assistance and housing issues. Building on the shared understanding of each other’s perspectives, they came to see the harvest not as ‘a miracle’ but as ‘an annual disaster’.

Indeed the breakthrough came from a quality controller field worker, who identified the disconnects between pickers rewarded on quantity, growers who were rewarded on quality and a casualised, informal workforce; employers had no incentive to invest in productivity with a system that worked in that way. The key insight was that “the moment value is added or destroyed is the moment of choice by the individual picker.” To maximise value needs a sustainable workforce based on the skills of repeat workers.

As well as the officials from Department of Labour (national office policy, regional staff, front line managers of immigration and occupational safety), the process involved IRD and MSD regional staff, specialist evaluators and facilitators (WEB research), FORST who funded a project on good small business regulation out of the Cross Departmental Research Pool, regional staff of Horticulture NZ and a range of growers, contractors and sorters.

While the approach was based on primary research about practice making and co-design, there were a number of other elements that contributed to the project’s success. One was an earmarked “pool of protected funding that could not be touched or cut back.” The second was the added value of evaluation expertise to keep the researchers on track and the use of outside specialist researchers and facilitators providing research design skills, and a degree of independence and credibility to the process. By contrast the project “would have been killed dead in its tracks” by a rigorous formal evaluation based on intervention logic that was well specified in advance. The other key element that contributed to the success of the project was a policy entrepreneur who at some risk and cost to career, kept the project moving forward within the department despite a revolving door of senior managers.

Even with these supporting elements, however, success was far from guaranteed. On a number of occasions the project could have fallen over but for some good fortune, persistence, and plain luck.

In this case the project was at high risk of stalling; there was a political outburst about seasonal labour shortages. In response the key Minister called a meeting of relevant ministers and viticulture and horticulture industry leaders to consider how to respond. The Strategy Group that was formed as a result of the meeting drew upon the trusting relationships and shared understandings that had build up and enabled them to move quickly from rehearsing positions to developing shared solutions.

The other piece of serendipity was that two papers were going forward on the same Cabinet agenda – one on the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme that came out of the strategy group process and a related proposal for Pacific Labour Mobility. As a result of being prepared for the same Cabinet meeting, the focus on the Pacific was sharpened and made explicit in the Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme, which an enhanced the scheme and increased its political support. One participant suggested “The project would have sunk without trace without the Pacific Seasonal Workers scheme” but not all respondents shared this view.

What this example clearly identifies is that the key participants required a mindset change. For policy makers it required a move from 'I am from Wellington and I am here to help you' to a much humbler starting point. The point of departure is that no one person has the answer but that I am here to work with you to jointly develop the solution, based on a shared understanding of practice on the ground. For the industry players it involved recognising that everyone had a shared interest in good outcomes from the industry (e.g. better quality workers, reduced illegality and tax evasion) and if these interests were not met, the industry's practices would continually come under scrutiny.

By working together in building a shared understanding, the players were able to co-design a regime that moved from a low-level solution (the annual disaster of the harvest) towards a win-win solution which involved

higher value and more productive workers. But this journey took time, it took commitment and dedication, it took resources (money and facilitation) and it took a share of serendipity and plain good luck. The Recognised Seasonal Employer scheme has been running for one year. There have been a number of significant problems that have had to be addressed, and are being addressed. The design of the scheme anticipated that these would occur, and there has been sufficient resource allocated to enable responses to occur. While it is too early to declare the scheme a success, the groundwork of shared understanding and trust means the scheme has a greater chance of persisting and ultimately succeeding. Working together is hard and success is not guaranteed. Sometimes however, one plus one can equal five.

6 The Government Urban and Economic Development Office (GUEDO)

GUEDO is an example of interagency co-operation driven from the top down. GUEDO is still work in progress as 'the office has been built but the foundations are still settling down'. GUEDO is both an office – a joined up Auckland based presence for a number of agencies and a network that is led by the Chief Executives of the member agencies. A key theme that emerged was the tension between vertical accountability for outputs owed to the home organisation and horizontal responsibility for shared outcomes owed to colleagues in other agencies in the same office.

GUEDO began as the co-location in a shared office space of four agencies in Auckland in July 2005, led by the Chief Executive of the Ministry of Economic Development (MED). The office was established to create a 'shared policy presence in Auckland in order to achieve greater alignment of priorities and effort by central government in sustainable economic and urban development in the Auckland Region. Initially GUEDO office members were engaged in individual departmental work but co-located to share information and knowledge about Auckland related work. As such, formal accountabilities for staff and their work remained with individual departments. Over time, however, the scope for joint work increased, creating a tension between individual departmental outputs, which are part of a national programme, and a growing agenda of shared work on the Auckland agenda.

Sustainable development in Auckland was seen as the key to achieving better economic performance because of the sheer size of Auckland relative to the rest of the NZ economy. A key challenge was getting buy-in to the notion that the office existed for more than co-location and that it had a mandate across individual departments' responsibilities. This required a different way of working and some individuals and agencies brought into this more readily than others.

External events acted to speed growth of the mandate and role of the office. The first was that towards the end of 2005 MED was tasked with leading one of the Government's three strategic themes concerned with

Economic Transformation. This lifted the purpose of the office from a shared policy presence to leading work on how to achieve a 'world class Auckland' as part of Economic Transformation. The other was the concerted drive from the local authorities to develop the "one plan" to respond to the challenges faced by the region. The Office assumed an increasingly important stakeholder management role with the development of the one plan.

These factors meant that greater collaboration was needed. The formal mandate and governance were reviewed and extended. A deliberate decision was made to build a horizontal cross-agency collaborative model instead of a lead agency vertical model. The revised mandate, approved by Cabinet, involved a move from a one-stop-shop shared office facility to a network charged with the development and delivery of a strategy and management of project and stakeholders. GUEDO is both an office – a joined up Auckland based presence for a number of agencies and a network that is led by the Chief Executives of the member agencies. This allows it to connect government departments in Wellington with local government and business in Auckland. It is an example of interagency co-operation driven from the top down where the governance arrangements have evolved to ensure that the joint work programme is owned collectively by CEOs in Wellington.

With the revised mandate came revised processes including cross-agency input into the position description and hiring process for the new Director. That Director, while remaining an MED appointment, in turn had input into position description and performance reviews of individual staff in the office. The success of the office has triggered a number of responses. Four more delivery agencies have joined the office in Auckland and the three central agencies came on to the Governance Board for the office. In addition, a range of social sector agencies have moved to create a social hub in the same building on a similar model.

This linear account of the growing role, mandate and credibility of the office however does not capture the

complex dynamics of working together. As one source noted “you can work around the structure and the mandate if you need to, what was difficult was the dynamics of getting the people working together”. A particular challenge was that in the economic agencies involved, vertical accountability was hard-wired and it was difficult to get to a collective understanding of common

outcomes. What GUEDO demonstrates is that top down mandate and external imperatives, while helpful, are not enough on their own. Building collaboration takes time, skilled leadership and passion and it requires support and guidance.

7 National Maritime Co-ordination

The creation of the National Maritime Coordination Centre (NMCC) is the story of creating a win-win for the agencies involved where the whole was significantly greater than the sum of the parts. Creation of the NMCC resulted in a ‘whole of government’ shared maritime picture which was significantly more powerful than the partial view of each of the individual agencies involved. This shared picture also provided a common platform to enable greater leverage of scarce assets and resources. This required a mindset change – from these are ‘our assets’ to these are ‘government assets’ available for meeting government needs.

This is a story of countervailing power – of a lead agency which was not the dominant player but had the credibility to lead the interagency group. It is also a story of top-down meets bottom-up. While the formal mandate came down from Cabinet, the success of the NMCC reflects the commitment, skill and good will of the staff that made the concept work on the ground. It also illustrates a case where collaboration can generate significant gains for the agencies involved without engaging the direct client or user of the service in co-design.

New Zealand has one of the largest Exclusive Economic Zones in the world and it is also one of the most remote, with relatively little regular maritime traffic. The setting before the advent of the NMCC was like the old tale of the blind men and the elephant – everyone had a piece of the elephant but the elephant was large and varied so no-one could see the big picture and each had a blinkered and quite different view of what an elephant was.

Maritime Intelligence was just like this. As well as the New Zealand Defence Forces (NZDF), there were a number of civilian agencies with an interest in maritime issues. While a total of 18 Government agencies had an interest, the key players initially were the NZ Defence Forces (NZDF), Customs, and the Ministry of Fisheries. Almost all the agencies had access to information from multiple sources (some open, some classified) but it was not collected or reported on a compatible basis – to readily enable vessel identification for example. Information sharing was limited and informal and often based on personal relationships in the absence of a formal mechanism for creating a whole of government picture of potential risks.

Even when information sharing identified a risk, this left open the question of how to respond. NZDF had the major equipment (assets) that could be used for air and surface-based maritime patrol although Customs, Police, Fisheries and Conservation all had limited capability such as local police launches. All these assets could potentially

be used to patrol, monitor and respond to potential risk and unforeseen events. Historically, agencies protected their professional autonomy to deploy these assets as they saw fit.

The initial impetus for change came from an external event – a Cabinet commissioned review of New Zealand’s maritime patrol needs. This was part of a shift in philosophy toward greater emphasis on maritime patrol and less emphasis on the traditional ‘blue water’ navy. This review resulted in a pilot being approved by Cabinet to achieve greater co-ordination in maritime intelligence. This involved the creation of the Maritime Intelligence Co-ordination Committee (MICC) liaison staff from a number of agencies. This unit was based at the Defence Joint Forces Headquarters. This ‘walk before you can run’ approach, while useful in getting the processes established and the relationships built, only got so far.

The top-down mandate from Cabinet to a Chief Executives’ governance group helped keep the concept moving forward. But formal mandates do not guarantee that collaboration will emerge. When the key people from the agencies were brought together on how they could share intelligence that would help them all do their job better, people initially remained firmly locked into their own organisational perspectives.

And it probably would have stayed that way if one person had not acted as if the institutional boundaries were not there and done something a bit out of character. He shouted and thumped the table! The result was that through this more informal act which seemed to ignore inter-organisational niceties, he commenced the processes that have since seen the partial removal of the institutional mentalities and have a group of agencies working in a collaborative way to focus on their shared problem and shared results.

The success of the pilot led to the creation of the National Maritime Coordination Centre (NMCC). The centre had no direct operational responsibilities as each agency retained these, but in a co-ordinated context. The centre was tasked with co-ordinating the development of a whole of government picture of maritime interests and co-ordinating the assignment of assets in response to potential risks. In particular, it made real the whole of government notion that “the assets of the Government are available to meet New Zealand’s needs”. While operational co-ordination had existed on an informal day-to-day basis before, the processes enabled by the NMCC allowed the disciplined and co-ordinated preplanning of operations across maritime assets that had not been possible before. It also had spin-off benefits such

agencies co-ordinating on the targeting of incoming vessels and involvement including civilian (and dog handling) facilities into the design of naval vessels which had not occurred before.

The NMCC was based on a lead agency model – the manager was a Customs employee and the staff were seconded from their respective agencies. Initially the centre was based on a shared funding model so that each agency met some of the costs from their respective baselines. This method of funding was not very stable ('operation tin can – like running a chook raffle') and this moved to a lead agency basis where the full costs of the NMCC are met from an output in Vote Customs.

Customs were the designated lead agency so the NMCC co-ordinator was a trusted Customs employee and the CE of Customs had formal responsibility for the appropriation in Vote Customs to run the NMCC function. One interesting feature was that, although Customs was the lead agency; the facility was co-located with NZDF in the new Joint Force Headquarters. This location, based on practical considerations such as the secure environment and being able to achieve 24/7 coverage through shared

use of NZDF watch keeper. But it was also important symbolically and as a signal of the joined-up way of working. It proved very important in terms of the effect of rebalancing the power dynamic. NZDF had the most significant assets that could be deployed and significant access to military intelligence. Without their active support the concept would not have got off the ground.

What comes through this story is the importance of countervailing power – of a lead agency which was not the dominant player but had the credibility to lead the interagency group. On the face of it, this is a story of joining up led from the top-down "Without the Cabinet directive it would never have happened." But it is really the story of top-down meeting bottom-up. While the formal mandate came down from Cabinet, the success of the NMCC on the ground was crucially dependent on the success of a limited pilot – in walking before you run. It was greater trust, good will and commitment of the staff that made the concept work on the ground. This in turn took the right people skilled at relationship building, the right sort of leadership and skilful guidance to make sure that the whole really was greater than the sum of the parts.

Appendix 2: The Project On Better Connected Services For Kiwis

“Others have asked about what we did but no-one has asked before about why or how” - interview subject

This discussion document is a product of the project commissioned by public service Chief Executives and led by Victoria University of Wellington, focussing on three questions:

- What are the preconditions for more joined-up citizen-centred services?
- What are the characteristics of policy areas where more joined-up citizen-centred services are found in New Zealand?
- What helps and what hinders the diffusion of more joined-up approaches to citizen-centred services?

Answering these questions is important because there are a number of factors creating a demand for public services that are more customised and responsive to the needs of citizens:

- the more diverse political environment under MMP
- the involvement of more non-governmental organisations and community groups in the delivery of public services
- the nature of the social problems government agencies are having to address and
- the enabling capacity of ICT.

The project on Better Connected Services for Kiwis being led by Victoria University brings together academic and practitioner perspectives. It draws on the practical experience of front-line staff and managers in the New Zealand public sector, the experience of other administrations such as Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, and on the public policy literature. The project is informed by the research under way at Victoria University on governing through networks and by work on e-Government.

It also built on the Review of the Centre, which produced research on innovation, a practitioners' guide (Mosaics) and on-the-ground experiments with Circuit Breaker Teams, and on more recent work by the SSC on the State Sector Development Goals. All of these processes have put greater emphasis on accessible, networked and co-ordinated services.

There are several features about the research approach adopted in this project that require comment.

The first was that the research was based on what practitioners were actually doing on the ground rather than theoretical ex-ante speculations of system designers or derived from the ex-post concepts of

abstract or applied theorists. Primary research was therefore critical.

Moreover, one of us had previously led the production of a central agency guidance document on collaboration (Gill) and one of us (Eppel) undertook an extensive literature review at an early stage of the project. From these, we came to the view that little of what was 'already known' was 'wrong' but that something important was missing. One of us (Ryan) had previously published research suggesting that frontline practice conducted under the radar – which is where the key moments of collaboration actually occur – was the critical and fruitful place to look (understanding that there are several 'frontlines' in public sector work, in minister/official and regional/central interactions as much as official/client ones). The other (Lips) had researched similar phenomena in other jurisdictions.

Accordingly, we turned our attention to 'know-how', to 'practice', to the 'contextualised, purposive action' whereby officials interacted over time with each other and with their clients and their understandings of what they were doing, how, when where and why. We were particularly interested in the new ways of interacting being created and the intersubjective terms used to do so. In these respects, our research took a form consistent with grounded theorising and the older interpretivist approach.

It is also consistent what has been called action research but might, these days, be more commonly called organisational or practice learning and development. In that respect, this project is only one moment in a long-run process of learning how to do public management in the 21st century, one that tries to make meaningful ('sense-making') certain emergent forms of practice in order to keep developing it in new contexts. The intention was to get alongside those doing this work – often 'just getting on with it' without necessarily articulating what, why, how, where or when they did so – and to 'name' what they were doing.

Accordingly, we conducted an extensive literature review of national and international work on collaboration. We then used our networks to identify several case studies in the state sector that were regarded as outstanding examples of collaboration and collected a range of internal and published documents regarding them (some of which were published case studies). These were deliberately drawn from a range of locations and central government sectors including Integrated Case Management – Papakura, Recognised Seasonal Employers in the Pip Fruit Industry – Hawkes Bay, The Government Urban and Economic Development Office – Auckland, National Maritime Coordination Centre

– Trentham, Strengthening Education in Mangere and Otara – Manakau, Autism – national, Mayors’ Taskforce on Jobs – national. We then interviewed some of the key individuals (especially the ‘public entrepreneurs’ and ‘guardian angels’) involved. And conducted ‘collective interviews’ (a.k.a. ‘focus groups’) with a selection of participants in a range of collaborative projects; i.e. ‘fellow travellers’ in the case studies and/or participants in other cases of collaboration. The collective interviews were grouped as follows: national managers and central office staff; regional managers; front-line managers and staff from central and local government. Interviews were held in Auckland, Napier, Wellington and Christchurch. A second series of workshops was convened to test the propositions that are contained in this discussion document.

Regular and extensive meetings were held by the research team to compare interpretations and reach consensus on the conclusions to be drawn - in this respect, the insider status of two team members was critical in ensuring validity and reliability.

A final point should be made about the sample of case studies chosen.

Since the search was to figure out the nature of the ‘practice’ of collaboration (context, relationships, meanings, actions) and ‘emerging’ practice at that (conditions, mechanisms, resources), the case studies

were chosen on the basis of their value to practitioners in the field (significance, illustrative capacity, typicality) - not their supposed ‘representativeness’. There were reasons initially to suspect that the ‘new ways’ required for collaboration and shared outcomes might be more prevalent and meaningful in the social sector. Our initial sample contained social policy cases (most likely) and economic/infrastructural cases (less or least likely). As the analysis proceeded, it seemed that the similarities were greater than the differences. Accordingly, to broaden the range of cases contributing to the analysis and to optimise the degree of exploration of types, we encouraged the interview subjects to speak of the range of collaborations in which they had been engaged over the years and not just the particular case study that happened to be under discussion at the time.

While the number of formal case studies might appear small to readers who are more familiar with large n sample approaches to research, the search here was for the emergent conditions of meaningful action and the rules of action created and recreated by those involved. We are satisfied that the number, range and types of cases examined here is adequate in terms of our research questions.

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