Multiparty Collaboration for Public Benefit

Curtin Corner 31 August

Contextualising collaboration

- Project overview:

  - 2015 workshop *Cross Sector Working for Complex Problems*

  - collaboration easier said than done

  - need for applied research

  - generate findings that support practicable actions

Approach & method

- Collective case study:
  - sought cases meeting predefined criteria
  - applied due diligence to shortlisted cases
  - selected 5 cases to study
- Semi-structured interviews:
  - 25 individual & group interviews
  - analysis using NVivo
  - triangulation with documentary evidence

Cases

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

2. Community Based Emergency Management (Emergency Management Victoria)

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

4. Throughcare (ACT Corrections, ACT Community Sector)

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

Broad observations

- Collaboration as a response to crisis and complexity

- A dual operating system

- Counter-cultural, not counter-intuitive

Focused observations

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

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

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

- Formal and informal governance – both are important; formal governance linked to authority; informal governance linked to legitimacy

Characterising collaboration

- Collaboration takes a variety of forms:

  - occurs at the intersection of competing interests

  - highly visible & intensely scrutinised

  - operates against a backdrop of policy failure

- Two things interest us in particular:

  - the essence of collaborative practice

  - features of authorising environments that support collaboration

Not an end in itself

- Collaboration can be encouraged and supported by partner organisations

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

- Requires reciprocal flows of:

  - authority from the executives of partner organisations

  - legitimacy from internal and external stakeholders at the coalface

Collaborative intelligence (CQ)

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

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

- Proposition:

  - organisations that do not incentivise CQ do not value relationships, stakeholder trust, or legitimacy

Transforming BAU

- Collaboration often involves the violation of accepted conventions, norms, rules and boundaries

- About transforming 'business as usual'

- Occurs in secondary operating spaces

- Exists in dynamic tension with the dominant culture of the primary operating spaces

Authorising environment

- Siloed behaviour represents a barrier to collaboration

- The authorising environment is critical to the success of collaboration

- Needs to be clear unambiguous authority to collaborate together with acceptance of associated risk

- Reciprocal flows of authority from the executive, and assurance from collaboration leads and partners

Leadership

- Creative rule breakers

- Superior relationship skills

- Strong understanding of systems

- Great political instincts

- Persuasive, inspiring, charismatic and confident, but able to step out of the spotlight

- 'No surprises' – keeps executive in the loop

Governance

- A conduit for authority

  – not all collaboration partners are authorised to collaborate

- Champions and influencers

  – essential 'soft diplomacy' to shore up internal and external support for collaboration

- Locus of decision-making

  – governance group or backbone group needs to have a clear understanding about the limits of its authority and influence

Building relationships and trust

- Engaging with internal & external stakeholders
    - it's all about relationships
    - middle management resistance
    - expert facilitation
- Establishing trust and legitimacy
    - authenticity critical
    - lead entity need not be organisation with biggest investment
- Obtaining social licence
    - especially pertinent when indigenous communities are affected

Bottom-up or top-down?

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

- Can also be about 'control' and appetite for risk

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

Managing expectations

- Long lead times typical

    – intensive, complex process of relationship building

- Impatience to see 'results'

    – relationship building not counted as a 'result'

    – insistence on orthodox indicators

- Almost by definition collaborations operate in policy spaces marked by a history of policy failure

Demonstrating impact

- Not easy to demonstrate impact, especially in early stages

- Big up-front investment in building relationships, trust, shared understandings & new ways of doing things

- Authorisers underestimate investment of time, effort & emotional energy required

- No established measures for effective collaboration

  - absence of clear indicators of impact need not mean collaboration is failing (at least over the near term)

A collaborative practice

- Not for the faint-hearted

- Don't underestimate resistance of legacy systems

- Cannot be mandated from the top

- Needs buy-in from stakeholders

- Need to manage expectations

- Collaboration needs an enabling authorising environment

- About finding practical workarounds for systems that are demonstrably *not* working

Qualities of effective collaborators

- Maturity and judgement (life experience)

- Commitment and passion

- Honesty and integrity

- Interpersonal skills

- Charisma and capacity to inspire

- Consistency and follow-through

- Openness and humility

- Willingness to share power and credit

- Generosity, patience and compassion (empathy)

- Problem solver and self-starter Courage and emotional resilience

- Flexibility and adaptability

- Creativity, lateral thinking and reflectiveness

A mix of hard and soft skills

- Connectedness (within communities and communities of interest)

- Corporate memory and knowledge

- Systems knowledge and capacity to cultivate networks

- Negotiation, facilitation and conflict resolution

- Stakeholder relations

- Governance and assurance and risk management

- Interpersonal communication and relationship-based practice

- Change management

- Outcomes-focus and understanding of impact measurement

Is collaboration 'scalable'?

- Collaboration can operate at different organisational and geographical scales

- However, collaboration cannot necessarily be transplanted from one location to another

- Nor is it feasible to mandate a standardised collaboration framework

- The strength of collaborative approaches is the capacity to allow for the crafting of bespoke local solutions with local stewardship

- Scaling up place-based collaborations requires an acceptance of diversity in coalface arrangements

Resourcing collaboration

- Assumes more effective configuration of existing resources

- Resource flows often constrained by programmatic rules

- Activities that support collaboration have a cost

Sustaining collaboration

- Informal or semi-formal nature of collaboration suggests impermanence

- Formalising collaboration can undermine its dynamism and sense of collective purpose

- Corporate memory is a highly perishable resource

- Little evidence (yet) that collaboration results in enduring organisational transformation in primary operating spaces

In closing...

- Article submitted to *Policy Design & Practice*

- Book manuscript in preparation for ANU Press

- Related articles:

  - http://www.powertopersuade.org.au/blog/cracking-the-collaboration-code/ 21/8/2018

  - https://www.anzsog.edu.au/resource-library/news-media/research-team-collaboration

  - https://probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2017/11/high-cq-collaborative-intelligence-needed/