
IVAR

Collaborative, practical, problem-solving

**Changing Landscapes
for the Third Sector
Inter-organisational relationships
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Context

- Collaborative working as a means to achieving efficiency
 - And to withstand the effects of the economic recession
 - Pressure (especially from funders) to work in 'partnerships'
 - Collaborative working as a means to achieving more and better benefits for beneficiaries
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Source material

Recession Watch

- Two year project funded by 6 foundations
 - Year one: interviews in 60 small social welfare organisations
 - Year two: facilitated conversations between funders and 50 small social welfare organisations
 - Questions:
 - What are you here for?
 - Where is the shoe pinching?
 - What does that look and feel like?
 - What could help (especially from trusts and foundations)?
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Source material

Collaboration Northern Ireland review

- 10 month project funded by Building Change Trust
 - 150 participants (voluntary and community organisations, public agencies, independent funders) through interviews, workshops and online survey)
 - Key questions:
 - Is collaboration an issue for you?
 - What does that look and feel like?
 - What gets in the way of it being a good experience?
 - What could help to make it easier and better?
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Source material

Building Health Partnerships

- Ongoing programme, entering its third year, partnership with SEUK and funded by NHS England
 - Intensive support in 16 local areas
 - Working with cross-sector groups of senior practitioners from health, local authorities and VCSE organisations
 - Key questions:
 - Why work together?
 - What is difficult about it and what can help?
 - Where do interests and assets intersect?
 - How can that translate into action?
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Questions

- Why does your organisation collaborate?
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Collaboration between funders

- Multiple reasons to collaborate
 - Success factors include:
 - Shared purpose and rationale
 - Delegated authority
 - Trust
 - Balance of similarity and difference
 - Challenges include:
 - Egos
 - Reaching consensus
 - Reconciling difference
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Collaboration between voluntary organisations

- Policy pressures and problematic assumptions
 - The difficulties of merger
 - Challenges arising from the drive towards competition
 - Enduring practical difficulties
 - The need for policy makers and funders to back off
 - The need for a wake-up call to VCOs about collaboration
 - The idea of “collaboration of the willing for a purpose”
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Cross sector collaboration

- History of public agencies being sceptical and stand-offish
 - Implementation gap between policy and practice
 - Conditions for it to work include:
 - Mutual understanding
 - Open communication channels
 - Shared goals
 - Locally appropriate arrangements
 - Critical success factors include:
 - Timing
 - Diverse involvement
 - High level of support
 - Dual focus on relationship building and joint action
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Question

- What is most difficult about working across organisational and sectoral boundaries?
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The problems and challenges of collaborative working in practice

- Developing a shared understanding of the purpose of the collaboration
 - Dealing with difference
 - Protecting organisational identity and niche
 - Balancing individual and collective interests
 - Developing appropriate leadership
 - Developing appropriate governance structures
 - Securing resources and organisational capacity for the collaboration
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Question

- How can you overcome some of the difficulties of working across organisational or sectoral boundaries?
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Strategies to overcome challenges

- Shared vision
 - Collaboration champions
 - Collaboration management
 - Recognising emotions
 - Organisational outlook and mindset
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Useful concepts for practitioners

- Exchange
 - Superordinate goals
 - Emotional work
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Implications for future research and support

- Focusing on “collaboration” itself as a phenomenon
 - Seeing collaboration as a state of mind as well as a skill
 - Developing models to enable deeper collaboration
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Concluding reflections

For formal, structured collaboration:

- Vision first, structure second; form follows function
 - Needs to be treated with some care and caution as it can be disruptive, risky, unsettling
 - An inexact science, requires a leap of faith
 - So, burden of proof needs to be on the prize and the offer of things being better
 - Despite reservations, can be seen not just as unavoidable but also desirable, responsible and necessary
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