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Multiparty Collaboration for Public Benefit

Discussion Paper 4— Towards a collaborative practice

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4. Towards a collaborative practice

Take home messages

A few take-home observations about collaboration:

- Number 1 Collaboration is not for the faint-hearted. As Bryson *et al* put it, 'it's not an easy answer to hard problems: it's a hard answer to hard problems' (Bryson et al 2009).
- Number 2 Don't underestimate the persistence or resistance of existing institutional, portfolio, programmatic, or disciplinary boundaries.
- Number 3 Collaboration cannot be mandated from the top, it needs to be led from the coalface.
- Number 4 Collaboration needs a kind of 'social licence': local buy-in and 'permission' from stakeholders is critical.
- Number 5 Manage expectations: effective collaboration requires long lead times to build trust, relationships, shared understandings and common language. Authorisers should not expect to see immediate tangible results in terms of impact. Be patient.
- Number 6 Those engaged in collaboration can only do so within an authorising environment that sanctions, supports and champions the collaboration. Executive buy-in, trust and support are crucial.
- Number 7 Collaboration often occurs informally without official sanction, and in this respect, collaboration is about finding practical workarounds for systems and structures that are demonstrably *not* working. Thus collaboration can happen at a small scale 'under the radar' and in ways that do not directly challenge the dominant institutional values and behaviours. When it happens 'on the radar' it can demonstrate local scale effects even without significantly altering the pre-existing program architecture.

The collaboration skill set

Everyone interviewed for this study was asked to nominate the essential skills or attributes necessary for effective collaboration. Although the responses varied somewhat in terms of expression, there was, overall, a high degree of consistency about the skills and attributes people considered important. Set out below is a list of personal attributes together with a list of hard and soft skills that should, ideally, be present in those charged with leading and participating in collaboration.

Personal qualities

Interviewees for each of the cases emphasised the importance of the character attributes of effective collaborators. These are not typically the qualities one might expect to see in a set of selection criteria or a duty statement:

- 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

Hard and soft skills

There is also a set of hard and soft skills that complement and enhance collaborative processes:

- 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

It should be noted that the levels of collaboration skills represented around the table are often uneven—it is a prime objective of the collaboration to raise the collaborative intelligence around the table, and this requires insightful, skilled leadership.

Collaboration and scale

One question that arose in several of the interviews was whether collaboration works better at some scales than others. Or whether it is indeed 'scalable'. Four of the five cases involved collaborations operating at a local community scale. Three of these involved 'sponsor organisations' (in this case government departments) providing the policy framework and executive authority for community level

collaboration to occur in a number of sites. Each of these—Who Stops, CBEM and the Children’s Teams—has adopted a different approach.

Who Stops

Who Stops, influenced by the *Collective Impact Framework (Kania and Kramer 2011)*, has sponsored two linked, but separate collaborative initiatives in two regional communities in Western Victoria, Portland and Hamilton. In both communities backbone groups have been established to encourage the formation of local networks and to devise feasible initiatives to target the root causes of childhood obesity. The backbone groups are comprised mainly of people drawn from local government and regional health authorities (with ad hoc involvement by community sector organisations). These local backbone groups are, in turn, overseen by a governance group constituted under the terms of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Geelong office of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Deakin University, and the Southern Grampians Glenelg Primary Care Partnership (PCP).

The PCP representative from the governance group also participates in meetings of the two backbone groups and acts as the principal conduit of information between the three. In addition, researchers from Deakin University have provided expert facilitation in each community to raise awareness about the contributors to childhood obesity and facilitate conversations about possible community-led responses.

Both the Portland and Hamilton backbone groups have established their own ‘identity’ and have looked to capitalise on community strengths. Both have sought to identify local ‘influencers’, ‘ambassadors’ and ‘champions’ to help gain legitimacy and ‘buy-in’. Neither appears to be conforming to a particular model or template for collaboration, although both have embraced a ‘systems’ model for community based approaches to chronic disease prevention (Allender *et al.* 2016; Nicholas *et al.* 2017).

CBEM/Community Resilience Framework

Emergency Management Victoria is the key sponsor of the CBEM framework. The framework seeks, ostensibly, to promote community-led initiatives aimed at building community resilience by facilitating self-organising networks of individuals, groups and organisations within communities that can be mobilised to deal with disruption and dislocation caused by adverse events such as natural disasters or the loss of major employing industries. CBEM has fostered a number of local initiatives.

Our study interviewed participants in three initiatives: one in the inner city suburb of North Melbourne, another in the outer metropolitan community of Emerald and the last in the south coast community of Anglesea. Each of these initiatives has taken a ‘bespoke’ approach to collaboration that reflects participants’ perspectives on the nature of their risk environment and the character of their communities.

The North Melbourne initiative seeks to raise community awareness of the potential impacts upon community and society of severe climatic events such as climate change through the medium of arts-based events that bring together artists,

thinkers, first responders and cultural leaders. The initiative is auspiced by Arts House (City of Melbourne) and the collaboration includes artists, members of the community and first responders.

The initiative in Emerald, on the other hand, takes a more conventional approach. Its focus is on mobilising community assets to build ‘recovery readiness’, supporting vulnerable residents who are unable to adequately safeguard against the effects of extreme events, and a volunteer ‘Emergency Support Team’ to supplement formal emergency services. Auspiced by Echo Youth and Family Services, this collaboration reaches out to other established community groups, organisations and influencers.

In contrast the Anglesea Community Network (ACN) portrays itself as a ‘nudge group’ that seeks to facilitate connectedness by encouraging the sharing of skills, experience, knowledge and resources across community groups and organisations. The ACN is comprised of a small number of ‘influencers’ with links into and across the Anglesea community. Although the ACN has steadfastly resisted pressures to formalise its status as a committee or legal entity, it nevertheless works closely with EMV and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to identify issues and opportunities as well as capabilities and connections.

Children’s Teams

The Children’s Action Plan (CAP) is an initiative of the New Zealand Government to provide cross-disciplinary early intervention for vulnerable children and their families. The CAP called for the establishment of Children’s Teams in ten New Zealand communities. Our study interviewed participants in three regional communities in the North Island that were among the first to establish a Children’s Team: Rotorua, Gisborne and Whangarei.

Early on, the guiding principal for the establishment of Children’s Teams was that they would be ‘nationally supported and locally led’. However, a [2015 review](#) found that this proved difficult to manage at times. While accepting the Children’s Teams’ need to work in ways that suit local circumstances—in part to gain stakeholder support—the review also concluded that ‘a degree of national direction is also required to make sure the Children’s Team model is implemented consistently’, thus limiting the ‘amount of local autonomy possible’ (New Zealand Government 2015).

Each of the local Children’s Teams has worked hard to develop workable operational and practice models, and to establish credibility and legitimacy with stakeholders. Interviewees spoke of the tensions between local Children’s Teams, their respective governance groups (largely comprised of partner agencies in health, education, Justice, Police and social services) and the Ministry for Vulnerable Children/Oranga Tamariki in Wellington—between the desire for local autonomy to develop bespoke approaches and what Children’s Teams regard as the imposition of a rigid, prescriptive approach from Wellington. Persons interviewed for each of the Children’s Teams expressed a determination to develop ways of working that best reflect the needs of their communities.

What this suggests

The three cases outlined above underscore the reality that there are multiple pathways to, and organisational expressions of, collaboration. In the Who Stops case an overarching governance group exerting a ‘light touch’ has been effective in supporting local actors and influencers to explore approaches appropriate to their communities and form partnerships with a high degree of local ownership whilst still being able to provide comparable forms of assurance. The CBEM case differs again in that the two-person team responsible for facilitating community-led initiatives has shown a greater appetite for experimentation and innovation. The North Melbourne Arts House initiative with its emphasis on looking to artists to produce works that stimulate discussions about the meaning of disaster and resilience sits at one end of a spectrum that also includes more traditional approaches focusing on the mobilisation of essential community assets.

The Children’s Team case, on the other hand, illustrates the problematic nature of expecting community-led collaboration to exhibit organisational and operational consistency. In large part, the tension between the original desire for community-led approaches and top-down pressures for consistency were driven by political impatience for results and the desire to realise impacts on a larger geographical scale. This was neatly summarised by a former CAP official:

... we became locked into more of a managerial approach because we’d got past that first excitement and passion and we were getting into the hard yards of, “So the minister wants to see this rolled out across the country. We need to get to more sites. The only way we can get to more sites in the time span that the minister is specifying is to make things more consistent and to be more stipulative. Because if we give everyone the time to evolve their own local version of this, we won’t get there in time.” So those very practical drivers. Big change always takes longer than people want it to take.

Clearly, collaboration can operate at different organisational and geographical scales. However, collaboration frameworks cannot necessarily be transplanted from one location to another nor is it feasible to replicate a standardised collaboration framework with little regard to local circumstances and local aspirations. A major strength of collaborative approaches is the capacity to allow for the crafting of bespoke local solutions addressing local priorities with local stewardship.

Scaling up place-based collaborations requires an acceptance of diversity in coalface arrangements, whereas bureaucracies tend to favour more uniform approaches that are subject to consistent and comparable impact metrics.

Resourcing collaboration

Collaboration is sometimes described as a pretext for doing more with the same quantum of resources. And, indeed, improved coordination and cooperation represent important staging posts on the collaboration continuum. Whilst additional investment in service delivery does not necessarily flow from collaboration, and it is generally assumed that collaboration will unleash unrealised service potential, the

activities and processes associated with the design, implementation and sustaining of collaborative practice often do have resourcing implications.

WhoStops, Throughcare and the Children's Teams were each built on an expectation that collaborative approaches would drive a more effective and equitable configuration of resources. There has been little in the way of new recurrent investment in any of these cases, and there are mixed views about whether it is indeed possible to make existing resources go further via improved collaboration. In all cases, workers at the coalface would prefer to see increased recurrent investment in services. This does not, however, diminish their enthusiasm for greater collaboration.

Interviewees generally agree that the collaboration process itself requires secure, dedicated resourcing. Leading and participating in a collaborative process required significant investments of time and emotional energy. And in each of these cases, dedicated leaders and/or backbone groups have been created to drive the change. This requires participating organisations to release staff from some portion of their substantive duties.

Importantly, some interviewees pointed out that declarations of collaborative intent are not necessarily accompanied by the reallocation of existing resources. To the extent that resource allocation is often a function of programmatic rules formulated in primary operating spaces, authorisers might be constrained in their ability—or willingness—to exercise discretion about how those resources are deployed. It is one thing for governments and senior executives to give rhetorical support for collaborative working, but if that rhetorical support is not matched with appropriate authorisation and resources, it becomes meaningless and worse, dispiriting.

Sustaining collaboration

A major weakness of collaboration is the difficulty of sustaining the founding purpose and maintaining the levels of personal commitment and sense of mission that saw the collaboration get off the ground in the first place. Collaborations are not generally self-sustaining: collaboration partners need executive sanction to participate in decision-making forums, engage with stakeholders, contribute to communication strategies and devote time to governance and assurance activities. These functions need to be formally recognised and appropriately resourced.

Corporate memory and knowledge is a tremendous asset in the collaboration space. Owing to the dynamic, volatile nature of collaborations, collective memory is often not recorded or accorded its true value. Changes in personnel and administrative structures can result in a loss of corporate memory and the substitution of operational orthodoxy in place of the collaborative ethos. There can also be an inherent fragility to executive level support for collaboration owing to mobility and changing personnel, or changes in the political or operating environment.

Geography is also a challenge. Building and sustaining collaborative approaches in regional areas where distance, terrain and embedded community identities can create multiple barriers, requires significant investments of time and energy.

Sustaining collaborative working requires constant attention and vigilance. As 'disrupters' are replaced by 'sustainers', the reformist zeal that accompanied their creation is dissipated. Above all, collaboration embodies a change agenda that needs time and on-going reinforcement to successfully embed. Because the underlying normative institutional values and behaviours continue to dominate, the collaborative impulse can wane and be re-assimilated into the dominant pre-existing organisational culture unless it has on-going executive support and vigilance.

A lot of attention is given in the collaboration literature to the need to devise and navigate new ways of working: to overturn 'business as usual' (BAU) and establish a 'new normal'. However, collaboration is built on an implicit assumption that the environment is complex and dynamic and, therefore, in a state of continual flux. The informal, or semi formal nature of collaboration suggests impermanence. Although collaborative approaches should aim to reframe BAU, there is a risk that the new ways of working become rigid and codified and just as maladaptive as the ones they replaced.

Reconciling the literature with observations

Despite the prominence of 'collaboration' as a core organising theme in the policy and organisational rhetoric of the public and not-for-profit sectors, clear examples of genuinely collaborative practice proved to be surprisingly hard to find. Although the research team worked through extensive academic, public service and not-for-profit sector networks to identify candidate initiatives for the study, the search yielded relatively few concrete recommendations. In part, this appears to reflect a tendency both in the literature and practice to refer loosely to *all* networks as 'collaborations' (Mandell *et al.* 2017: 3-4).^{xi} Thus, it would seem that extolling the value of 'collaboration' does not necessarily or readily translate into practice.

Collaboration most often occurs in dynamic environments in which multiple logics are in play—environments that reward sociality and impose costs on asociality. And, although effective collaborations have similar features, all collaborations are in some respects unique. This is because a collaborative endeavour is not primarily an entity or an organisational structure—it is a set of interpersonal relationships mediated by the chemistry existing between individuals rather than between organisations or institutions.

Our data collection to date leads us to offer a number of preliminary observations that, in broad terms accord with the characteristics of successful collaborations as drawn from the case literature (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1—Characteristics of successful collaborations

They involve the coming together of institutional and organisational actors that have prior structural relationships (Jupp 2000; Bryson *et al.* 2009a; Leat 2009; Corwin *et al.* 2012; Daymond 2015).

They are framed around a clear objectives and general agreement about the problem to be solved (Jupp 2000: 8; Bryson *et al.* 2009a; Leat 2009; Corwin *et al.* 2012; Daymond 2015).

They are made up of partners with a shared commitment to the objectives of the collaboration and have a clear understanding of both common goals and the possible benefits that flow to each partner (Jupp 2000: 8; Corwin *et al.* 2012).

They have powerful sponsors who provide the formal authority for the collaboration; a champion group capable of using informal authority to engage others in the collaboration; and a skilled, committed leadership within the collaboration itself (Bryson *et al.* 2009a; Corwin *et al.* 2012; Daymond 2015).

They are formed in a supportive authorising environment in which it is possible for the collaboration to forge strong relationships with key constituencies through a mix of formal and informal networks (Jupp 2000: 8; Bryson *et al.* 2009a).

They are founded on mutual understanding, respect and trust (accepting that there might be differing levels of trust between collaborators at the outset); and employ explicit strategies for the purpose of building trust and alignment between collaboration partners and stakeholder constituencies—strategies might include participatory design processes and/or specialist partnership brokers (Jupp 2000; Bryson *et al.* 2009a; Leat 2009; Corwin *et al.* 2012; Daymond 2015).

They are led by individuals offering catalytic, facilitative and integrated leadership that instils trust and supports the contributions of stakeholders to the collaborative process. Leaders bring a range of capabilities to the table, including ‘bridging’ skills (linking to external resources), ‘mobilizing’ skills (making best use of existing assets and strengths), ‘persuasive’ skills (selling and marketing the benefits and strategic opportunities), and ‘adaptive’ skills (capacity to deal with changing contexts and challenges) (Head 2008: 739-41; Leat 2009: 28-29; Ansell and Gash 2012: 18; Sloan and Oliver 2013: 1860; Forrer *et al.* 2014: 234).

They have effective governance mechanisms, processes and structures that enable the objectives of all parties entering into the collaboration to be known and considered; and those governance structures have final authority in terms of decision-making (Bryson *et al.* 2009a; Daymond 2015).

They have a detailed implementation plan that sets out the competencies, abilities, technologies or processes required to give effect to the partnership (Bryson *et al.* 2009a; Corwin *et al.* 2012).

They have a built-in accountability system and evaluation processes that tracks inputs, processes, and outcomes—including the achievement of common goals and the benefits flowing to each partner (Jupp 2000: 8; Bryson *et al.* 2009a).

They have accepted norms of operation; explicit agreed rules of operation; a clear sense of boundaries and structures; and a clear understanding about the roles of key actors (Bryson

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et al. 2009a; Leat 2009; Corwin *et al.* 2012; Daymond 2015).

They utilise inclusive processes and linking mechanisms to ensure that the objectives of all parties are known and considered and address issues emerging at institutional/organisational/policy boundaries (Bryson *et al.* 2009a; Daymond 2015).

They utilise bespoke processes where necessary and appropriate to reflect the unique and emergent needs of an operating environment characterised by fluidity and hybridity (Selsky and Parker 2005; Koppenjan and Koliba 2013; Daymond 2015).

They are visible and have a public profile; and celebrate and publicise their accomplishments (Bryson *et al.* 2009a; Corwin *et al.* 2012).

Field interviews conducted with members of ‘backbone’ organisations for the five cases under investigation strongly suggest that the factors set out in Table 4.2 are of particular importance to the effective functioning of collaborative endeavours.

Table 4.2—Collaborations for public purposes - Working in multiparty relationships

Leadership	The interpersonal and communication skills, personality, style, approach and values presented by collaboration leaders are critical in instilling trust and encouraging engagement amongst collaboration partners. Effective leaders utilise informal and formal mechanisms, encourage risk-taking, share responsibility, and are receptive to alternative ideas and approaches.
Backbone group ^{xii}	In order to earn trust and ‘permission’ to act the ‘backbone’ group needs to embody and reinforce qualities such as: professionalism, commitment, diversity, creativity, approachability, responsiveness, openness, and accountability. It is important for backbone groups to model the behaviours implied by collaborative initiatives.
Personalities	The values, passion and integrity exhibited by members of the backbone group exert powerful influences on the collaboration. Collaboration is all about relationships, and to win the confidence or stakeholders, participants need to have insight into the ways in which attitudes and conduct are shaped by organisational history, pre-existing networks, traditions, habits and learned behaviours.
Engagement	Genuine engagement is about ‘doing with’—not ‘doing for’. Engagement can have formal and informal dimensions. Informal forms of engagement through which the backbone group reaches out to business and community groups (e.g. schools, clubs, sporting clubs and churches) can drive transformative change. It is important to enlist ‘influencers’—people who ‘make things happen’—in the change agenda.
Skills	Collaboration partners—members of backbone groups—need a particular skill set such as: the ability to engage, instil trust, respond

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	constructively to resistance or suspicion and defuse tensions; to generate buy-in, reassure, persuade, upwardly manage, negotiate compromises, and adapt to changing circumstances. Leaders must be able to groom succession, exhibit cultural competence, have a deep understanding of their operating environment, exhibit empathy and value diversity, be adaptive and nimble in their approach, and lead with subtlety and tact.
Empowerment	Let the community lead; invite ideas and encourage contributions; confer ownership on stakeholders and recruit local ‘influencers’ to leverage legitimacy and trust; work to create an emotional connection with the mission.
Language	Collaboration best proceeds on the basis of a common language or set of understandings. This does not mean consensus on all matters, but at the very least, broad agreement around a core set of issues based on shared understandings about the ‘meaning’ of those issues and an appreciation of differences in perspective.
Authorisation	Effective collaborations encourage multiple opinions and provide safe spaces to air differences. The authority for collaboration partners to act comes both from above (executive/board) <i>and</i> below (stakeholders, communities). Collaboration champions/ambassadors/allies can help to secure the authority needed for backbone groups to take and accept risks. It is essential that the authorising environment accept ‘failures’ as a source of learning and not a trigger for punishment.
Governance	Formal governance is essential to on-going authorisation of collaborative working, however, it is interpersonal relationships and the trust generated by personal integrity, openness and willingness to share in decision-making that allows collaborations to flourish. Formal governance alone will not suffice.
Evidence	Collaborations are sustained by evidence of impact. Evidence is an essential element of accountability. The assurance and reassurance provided by an evidence base is essential to build confidence with executives/boards as well as stakeholders/communities.
Identity	‘Brand identity’ is a source of both strength and weakness in any collaboration. Collaborations and backbone groups can have a distinct brand or identity that can be a source of trust and public confidence and stakeholder ownership. However, a strong attachment to organisational identity can also fuel territoriality, reinforce boundaries and barriers, and accentuate perceptions of threat.
Celebrate success	Affirmations of positive actions, good news stories and celebrating success are powerful reinforcers of collaborative action and important sources of internal and external legitimacy. Backbone groups need to be adept at utilising local media, social media and smart device applications. It is also important to adopt a

community-development lens (as opposed to a programmatic lens).

Resources Collaboration is labour-intensive and time consuming. Dedicated resourcing for activities that sustain the collaboration is essential. One object of collaboration should be to optimise existing resources by more effectively aligning existing capabilities. Collaboration should not be seen through a ‘program’ or ‘project’ lens. Rather, it should be about enduring behavioural change. Behaviour change resulting from collaboration is more likely to be sustainable if it is not dependent upon continuation of special allocations.

Patience Collaborations don’t necessarily deliver results in controllable or predictable ways; collaboration requires tolerance of ambiguity, acceptance (and embrace) of difference; and acceptance of uncertainty; collaboration might require long lead-times to enable partners and stakeholders to consolidate shared understandings and obtain internal and external legitimacy. Sometimes an external facilitator can help by encouraging collaboration partners to interrogate accepted ideas and norms.

Control The lead organisation in a collaborative initiative need not always be the one with the most formal authority or resources. The size of a collaboration partner’s ‘stake’ does not necessarily equate to formal authority or financial investment: reputation and legitimacy, as well as social and political capital might also be at stake. Collaboration implies shared risk and shared accountability for risk-taking. It also implies that more ‘powerful’ collaboration partners exhibit a willingness to step back in favour of less powerful partners. Flexibility and adaptability are critical, as is a preparedness to ‘re-set’, delegate authority, confer ‘ownership’ and let others ‘shine’.

Final thoughts

Interest in collaboration reflects a growing appreciation that many difficult problems in public policy are multifactorial in nature, and cannot be satisfactorily addressed by any single organisation or sector working on their own. There is also a growing recognition that the traditional bureaucratic model of public administration, with its hierarchical command cultures organised according to portfolio, organisational, and programmatic silos, is not up to the task of addressing complex social problems.

A recurring theme in the literature is that collaboration most often occurs as a response to ‘sector failure’—in other words when single efforts to resolve a problem have demonstrably failed (Selsky and Parker 2005). And sector failure leads policy makers to focus on hybrid approaches to address complex problems. However, initiating, engaging in, and sustaining collaborative effort requires the generation of a capacity for joint action that in most cases didn’t exist before.

Another common theme in the academic literature concerns the constraining effect of path dependence and, in particular, the constraining effects of legacy rules, systems and processes in public sector agencies (Heuer 2011). There is, however, substantial agreement in the literature about the essential elements of effective collaboration. As one might imagine, these are presented in myriad ways, but most broadly conform to the following:

- The first element is about designing the collaboration architecture—including the instruments that will give effect to the collaboration and the process for reaching agreement about the nature of the problem to be addressed; the means by which the problem will be addressed; the respective contributions of the parties; and the governance framework that will guide the collaboration (Alam *et al.* 2014; Wilson *et al.* 2016).
- A second element concerns building the collaboration leadership and ensuring that leaders have the necessary authority, discretion, skills and personal attributes to rally partners around agreed purposes and processes. Collaboration requires a particular style of ‘catalytic leadership’ capable of fostering shared values, shared expectations, and broadly agreed outcomes. A distinctive quality of collaborative leadership is that it is *facilitating* rather than *directive* and creates the conditions that support the contributions of stakeholders to the collaborative process (Ansell and Gash 2012). Leadership is also important because the participants in a collaboration tend to offer their loyalty to trusted leaders, not to ‘brands’ (Moran *et al.* 2016).
- A third element is about building external legitimacy with stakeholders and communities of interest—one might think of this as being akin to earning a ‘social licence to operate’ (Emerson *et al.* 2012; McInerney 2015).
- A fourth element concerns building trust, both within the collaboration amongst the collaboration partners, and between the ‘collaboration’ and external stakeholders (Bardach 1998; Edwards *et al.* 2012; Sloan and Oliver 2013).
- A fifth element is about managing conflict, because the potential for conflict is an ever-present risk in a multi-party collaboration owing in part to the probability that collaboration partners might bring fundamentally different institutional logics to the table (Crosby and Bryson 2010; Hamann and April 2013). Multi-sectoral partnerships of various kinds call for the union of different—and potentially incompatible—missions, goals, and values (Babiak and Thibault 2009). Also, perceived power imbalances can lead to feelings of ambiguity, resentment, uncertainty, and suspicion amongst collaboration partners (Babiak and Thibault 2009; Crosby and Bryson 2010).
- A sixth element is planning—in other words ensuring that the collaboration has the capability, capacity, and intention to carry out its mission (Bryson *et al.* 2009b).
- A seventh element is ‘knowledge’—in particular shared knowledge—which is the currency of collaboration (Pardo *et al.* 2006; Head 2008; Leat 2009).

It needs to be emphasised that collaboration cannot thrive without a supportive authorising environment that nurtures, supports and sanctions collaborative

practice. Above all, a ‘collaborative mindset’ is required, especially in public sector agencies that often have a history of rigid top-down steering (Aagaard 2012; O’Leary 2014). The appointment of ‘collaboration champions’ in participating agencies can serve an important role in this regard (Crosby and Bryson 2010). In addition, public sector managers do not need to take on the leading role in collaborative endeavours (Bowden and Ciesielska 2016). Rather they can use the technical capacity of the public sector to mobilise resources, leverage change, confer legitimacy and ensure sustainability—in other words exercise a kind of institutional entrepreneurship and stewardship (Heuer 2011).

Having the right authorising environment is important: an authorising environment that exhibits the qualities of ‘interagency collaborative capacity’ (Bardach 1998)—one that is capable of devolving authority to the leadership of a collaboration, and that allows time to build relationships of trust between collaboration partners and empowers stakeholders to establish a governance framework adapted to the specific needs of the collaboration.

The following themes have emerged from the interviews undertaken for this study:

- Collaboration in complex and contested policy spaces needs time and dedicated resourcing.
- The trajectory of the work can be unpredictable and the scope of the work can expand despite best efforts at risk assessment.
- Dedication and personal commitment to the issues at hand is critical for maintaining focus and effective collegial relationships. It is also what sustains participants in the process when the going gets tough.
- One ought not underestimate the time and effort and emotional energy required to manage internal and external relationships; maintain the internal integrity of the process; and the external legitimacy of the collaboration.
- Collaboration partners not only need to maintain sustain the confidence and goodwill of people around the table, they need to provide appropriate assurance to their executive and board (and support the executive and board who might themselves be called upon to provide assurances to ministers or other constituencies). They also need to be outward looking and able to offer assurance to a range of external stakeholders—some of who might have perspectives that are not fully aligned with the organising themes of the collaboration.
- Formal terms of reference are useful as starting points, but might unduly fetter collaboration practice: collaboration has an organic quality and goalposts will change. Collaboration occurs in circumstances of complexity and uncertainty, at least in social policy spaces, and a capacity for nimbleness and adaptability is essential.

Collaboration ought not be regarded as an end in its own right or as a panacea capable of answering all problems. One of the reasons that examples of collaboration are difficult to find is that, according to the literature, collaboration is ‘hard to do’ and attempts at collaboration often fail (Jupp 2000). Indeed, there are

those who will contend that the *rhetoric* of collaboration and partnership far exceeds its reputed efficacy (Pell 2016). To the extent that collaboration has become a totemic word in public policy—a word to be included in grant applications as a prerequisite for government funding, or as a word that needs to be acquitted in reports to funders—it can attract cynicism (Pell 2016).

Finally, collaboration might not always be the most appropriate strategy in light of the time and resources required to establish collaborative structures; the difficulty of effecting the changes in participating organisations' operating culture necessary to meet the demands of multiple stakeholders; and the opportunity and reputational costs arising from a loss of autonomy and unique identity (Mandell and Keast 2008; Hartley *et al.* 2013). It is important, therefore, to examine the rationale behind any decision to collaborate; to identify the proposed benefits and likely barriers to collaboration; and consider the type of collaboration model to be used as well as the number and range of partners (O'Leary and Gerard 2013).

Discussion points

1. What have we 'missed'?
2. What have we got 'wrong'?
3. How can these findings be 'applied'?

Appendix 4.1

The concept of Social Licence to Operate (SLO) arose in the mining industry at about the same time that marketisation emerged as a key plank in the delivery of social programs, and is now well embedded as a means for managing social risk associated with resource extraction industries (Prno 2013; Boutilier 2014; Moffat and Zhang 2014; Syn 2014). SLO provides a mechanism for the on-going acceptance and approval of economic activities that might result in positive and/or negative externalities for affected communities (Prno 2013: 584-88; Moffat and Zhang 2014: 61).

SLO is about the transparency and accountability of an enterprise to the communities in which it operates and to the people most likely to feel the frontline effects of its commercial activities. In particular SLO is often invoked in circumstances in which industries are pursuing economic activities 'out of place' — often in a post colonialist context (Miller 2014; Parsons and Moffat 2014; Ruckstuhl *et al.* 2014; Moffat *et al.* 2016). SLO is also strongly associated with industries operating where indigenous peoples have a strong attachment to, and continuing presence in the land (Harvey and Bice 2014; Parsons and Moffat 2014; Ruckstuhl *et al.* 2014; Syn 2014).

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Endnotes

^{xi} It is commonplace for policy practitioners in both the public and not-for-profit sectors to use the term ‘collaboration’ in a generic sense to denote a range of practices such as cooperation, coordination, partnership, networking, co-design, co-production and information exchange. And while one might reasonably expect each of these practices to be present to some degree in any collaboration, they do not necessarily amount to collaboration in and of themselves.

^{xii} The term ‘backbone’ group or organisation is drawn from the ‘collective impact’ literature and refers to a grouping that exists to coordinate the various dimensions and collaborators involved in the initiative, and to maintain momentum and facilitate impact. It is important that backbone groups operate with the ‘permission’ of affected communities of interest (source: <http://www.collaborationforimpact.com/collective-impact/the-backbone-organisation/>)