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Multiparty Collaboration for Public Benefit

Discussion Paper 1— Contextualising collaboration

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1. Contextualising collaboration

Introduction

This is the first of four discussion papers prepared for the Executive Workshop—*Multiparty Collaboration for Public Benefit*. Their purpose is to assist in the distillation and framing of preliminary observations drawn from 25 in-depth individual and group interviews involving 65 individuals. This paper summarises the origins of the project, the research approach taken, and the methods used to gather and analyse the data. It also describes and attempts to contextualise the cases, and presents our understandings about how, and under what circumstances collaborative strategies are employed to respond to complex problems in social policy. In essence, our purpose in these papers and in the workshop is to *beta test* and validate our observations with an informed audience.

It is important to point out that although these are not ‘scholarly’ or ‘academic’ papers they *are* derived from the evidence offered by the many intelligent, engaged and knowledgeable people from the public and NFP sectors who agreed to share their insights, experiences and wisdom in the interviews.

Project overview

This research project grew out of a one-day workshop held at the Australian National University in 2015. Entitled *Cross Sector Working for Complex Problems: Beyond the Rhetoric* the workshop was jointly sponsored by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government and the Curtin Not-for-profit Initiative and its aim was to promote understanding of cross-sector approaches to complex policy problems at a practice level.

The workshop brought together policy practitioners in the public and not-for-profit sectors and academic researchers to elucidate the promise and challenges of collaboration across sector boundaries and resulted in the book [*The Three Sector Solution: Delivering public policy in collaboration with not-for-profits and business*](#).

A clear message from the workshop was that collaboration is ‘easier said than done’ —a conclusion emphatically supported by the research literature—and the conveners considered that there might be value in identifying the core elements of good collaborative practice. It also became clear that a project to identify the elements of effective collaboration would, ideally, need to be grounded in actual practice.

As a result, it was decided that the *Curtin Not-for-profit Initiative* would to apply for an ANZSOG Research Grant to undertake case studies of recent and on-going policy and/or service delivery initiatives that rely upon multi-agency coordination/cooperation. That application was successful and the research project commenced in late 2016, auspiced by the John Curtin Institute of Public Policy, at Curtin University.

It is hoped that the research will provide an evidential base to inform the adaptations required of public officials, and executives of not-for-profits and their boards of management. Importantly, our research will engage with, and add empirical weight to, an emerging scholarly literature on collaboration for public purpose in the Australian context (Alford 2009; Alford and O’Flynn 2012; Keast 2016).

Approach

The research employed a collective case study approach. Five cases were selected according to seven criteria:

- 1) operate across institutional, organisational and policy domain boundaries;
- 2) focus on addressing ‘wicked’ problems and ‘hard to reach’ target groups;
- 3) reflect variety in terms of policy domain, scale, size and reach, organisational mission, jurisdiction and geography;
- 4) incorporate elements of co-design and/or co-production;
- 5) reflect structural and/or governance failures within the public sector as an obstacle to cross-sector collaboration;
- 6) exhibit a degree of shared governance between policy leads, commissioning agencies, service providers and service users; and
- 7) have in one way or another challenged the status quo and led to genuine and sustainable innovations in thinking and practice.

Method

The collective case study is the predominant empirical approach for the contextual investigation of decision-making in relation to public policy or public administration because it affords the researcher an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under study and enables the identification of features that are uniform and generalisable, as well as those that appear to be unique (Bailey 1994; Yin 2009; McNabb 2010b).

Case studies in relation to public administration should, ideally, generate observations of relevance for both practitioners and academics (Bailey 1994) especially if the selection of cases exhibit the attributes ‘balance’ and ‘variety’ — factors that greatly enhance the potential to learn from the cases (Stake 1995). As with all good case studies, we have sought to substantiate observations drawn from interviews by triangulating with other data sources (Bonoma 1985; McNabb 2010a).

Data collection occurred principally through semi-structured interviews with key actors involved in the inception, design and implementation of the collaborative initiatives under study. Individual and group interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed and subject to qualitative analysis using NVivo software.

Case selection

In July 2016, a call went out via a number of platforms for recommendations about cases that might be considered for inclusion in the study. These included *inter alia* an ANZSOG Leadership forum comprised of executive-level representatives of state/territory public sector agencies and not-for-profit organisations and the *Power to Persuade* network.

By the end of August 2016, a dozen initiatives had been nominated of which eight indicated an in-principle willingness to participate in a comparative case study of multi-party collaboration. Further due diligence led to the exclusion of three of these because: 1) one initiative was not sufficiently advanced to offer significant insight into collaborative practice; 2) one initiative

withdrew; 3) one initiative was excluded when it became clear to the research team that its core activities were unlikely to align with the project's research criteria.

The five cases selected for study exhibit considerable diversity. They operate in different jurisdictions, involve different levels of government and operate at different geographical scales; they each have distinct institutional histories and span a number of policy domains; and they are governed with differing degrees of formality. Their aims and purposes include:

- 1) the development of a comprehensive national practice framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children;
- 2) facilitating community-led emergency management planning and resilience;
- 3) supporting the re-integration of offenders into the community upon release from a custodial sentence;
- 4) community-led strategies to reduce and prevent obesity; and
- 5) coordinating pre-emptive multi-disciplinary intervention for children at risk of formal notification.

Persons selected for interview each—in some significant way—played a part in the initiation, design and/or implementation of the collaborative initiative. Interviewees included senior executives, officials, front-line implementers, thought-leaders and the members of backbone/governance groups.

Case descriptions

Case—Change the Story

[Change the Story](#) is a national framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. *Change the Story* is the product of a partnership involving Our Watchⁱ, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) with funding and support from the Commonwealth and State/Territory Governments. The development of the framework was an action pursuant to the [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022](#).

The Framework was informed by extensive consultations undertaken around the country with researchers, practitioners and policy makers, from community and non-government organisations, services and networks, and government agencies at all levels. It brings together international research and nationwide experience to establish a shared understanding of the evidence and principles for the effective prevention of violence against women and their children.

Case—Community Based Emergency Management (CBEM)

The Victorian bushfires and heatwave in 2009 and the floods in 2010-11 provided the catalyst for comprehensive changes to emergency management arrangements in Victoria. These disasters resulted in the establishment of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and the Victorian Floods Review. These inquiries found that existing legislative, policy, governance, and operational arrangements for emergency management needed to be modified and upgraded in order to meet the challenges ahead.

A September 2011 *Green Paper: Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria* was followed by a December 2012 *White Paper: Victorian Emergency Management Reform*. These documents set the agenda for comprehensive reform of Victoria's emergency management arrangements at all levels of government.ⁱⁱ

In July 2014, the Victorian Government established Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) to lead an agenda of whole of government, multi-agency reform to achieve a safer and more resilient Victoria.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 2017 EMV released a discussion paper *Resilient Recovery* to canvass the future opportunities for change in Victoria's relief and recovery arrangements.^{iv} It proposes a *Resilient Recovery Model* that will create a relief and recovery system that empowers communities, government, agencies and business to plan for and achieve recovery outcomes.^v The model is community focused and driven, and it provides a pathway from recovery to resilience.^{vi} Community led recovery is premised on the view that communities are more likely to be resilient to future disasters if they are engaged in leading the development, design and management of their own local recovery programs.

The Community Based Emergency Management (CBEM) project was developed and piloted to guide collaborative planning and engagement processes at the local community level. CBEM enables local community members, including volunteers and staff from organisations, to strengthen connections and build relationships by working together to identify priorities and develop solutions.^{vii}

CBEM has been rolled out in a number of Victorian communities. Interviews for this study occurred in three communities: North Melbourne, Emerald and Anglesea.

Case—WHO STOPS: SeaChange / GenR8Change

The acronym [WHO STOPS](#) refers to the Whole of Systems Trial Of Prevention Strategies for childhood obesity. [WHO STOPS](#) is a community-based initiative that enables local community leaders and members to work together to address complex local drivers of childhood obesity.

WHO STOPS involves a facilitated community engagement process in which local leaders engage people with interest and influence bringing them together to:

- create an agreed systems map of childhood obesity causes for a community;
- identify intervention opportunities through leveraging the dynamic aspects of the system; and
- convert these understandings into community-built, systems-oriented action plans.

WHO STOPS is a partnership between the Global Obesity Centre at Deakin University, the Department of Health and Human Services—Western Division and Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs) and their partners including local councils and health services.

The partnership is overseen by [Great South Coast Change](#), which is a regionally focussed backbone group based in Geelong. Two local initiatives operate under its umbrella—[SEAChange](#), based in Portland and [GenR8Change](#), based in Hamilton—each with their own backbone group, have been established to identify and encourage the adoption of localised strategies to improve childhood health and reduce overweight and obesity.

In each community, members of the local backbone group engage with a wide range of external stakeholders including health practitioners, primary health care providers, local government,

schools, clubs and local associations and local businesses to raise awareness about the causes and contributors to childhood obesity, and to stimulate community responses to the problem and encourage population level behaviour change. Interviews with members of local backbone groups occurred in both communities.

Case—Throughcare

The Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC), which opened officially in September 2008, is the Australian Capital Territory's prison for persons who are sentenced to full-time imprisonment and remand.^{viii}

In 2009 a coalition of community sector organisations initiated a dialogue with key officers in Corrections ACT and the Chief Minister's Department around a proposal to establish a coordinated and collaborative approach to the successful reintegration of offenders upon their release from prison by brokering access to housing, health services, income support, and basic life skills support.

Following an initial review of the AMC's operations in 2010, a Joint Government/Community Sector Working Group presented a set of options for a model of Extended Throughcare to the ACT Cabinet and, in the 2012-13 Budget, funding of \$1.2 million over two years was allocated to pilot the framework. It is important to understand that this occurred on the back of intensive behind-the-scenes consultation both within the community sector and government, including ministerial advisers. In the 2014-15 Budget, the ACT Minister for Corrections announced an increased investment of \$2.176m over two years to extend the program.

An Extended Throughcare Governance Group, co-chaired by the CEO of ACT Corrective Services and a representative of the ACT's community sector was established to oversee the implementation of the initiative.

The co-chairing model was intended to encourage the community sector to take a primary role as a partner and has had the effect of encouraging strong community buy-in as well as helping to make the program more responsive to the diverse needs of its client base ([SPRC 2016: 5-6](#)).

Case—Children's teams

In 2011 the New Zealand government issued a Green Paper probing community views about the adequacy of responses to the needs of vulnerable children and families. This was followed in 2012 with a White Paper which set out the government's commitment to establish local Children's Teams that would bring together professionals to assess the needs of vulnerable children using a common assessment approach and, where required, form a joined up intervention plan.

A *Children's Action Plan Directorate* was established in 2012 to coordinate the government's response and implement a Children's Action Plan with partner agencies in the public and not-for-profit sectors. A key element of the new strategy would be 'a single multi-agency plan for each vulnerable child, with someone taking responsibility for overseeing it and ensuring it is implemented' ([White Paper Vol. 1: 12](#)).

The Children's Action Plan aimed to address structural and systemic deficiencies identified by a 2015 Expert Panel: service delivery and purchase models that failed to provide a range of effective services and approaches or to be sufficiently child-centred; a siloed system with insufficient partnership and collaboration around children's needs; restrictive funding approaches that do not permit innovation or the creation of sustainable services to meet

changing needs; and diffuse accountabilities across various agencies. The Expert Panel concluded that a ‘negotiation and best efforts’ approach had failed, particularly with respect to government agencies ([Expert Panel Final Report: Investing in New Zealand’s Children and their Families](#): 64-65)

Oversight for each Children’s Team is provided by a Local Governance Group consisting of senior managers from the core Vulnerable Children’s Board service delivery government agencies and, where appropriate, other key partners such as non-government organisations, *Iwi* and local government representatives ([Lead Professional Supervision Policy](#): 12).

It is hoped that active collaboration will become ‘business as usual’, replacing modes of working based on parallel working and *ad hoc* communication.

Since 2013, 10 Children’s Teams have been established across New Zealand to give effect to the approach of bringing together professionals from health, education, welfare and social service agencies, *iwi*/Māori and non-government organisations to identify and support vulnerable children and their families. Interviews for this study considered on Children’s teams in three communities: Rotorua, Gisborne and Whangerei.

Observations

A number of broad observations might be made collectively about the cases. Other discussion papers in this series will focus in greater detail on important aspects of the collaborative process.

Collaboration and ‘policy windows’

Each of the cases can be contextualised via a *process streams* lens. Political scholar John W. Kingdon (1995) propounded ‘process streams’ as a heuristic device for understanding how particular issues and actions become elevated to the formal policy agenda. In Kingdon’s model, the convergence of three ‘process streams’—the *problem stream*, the *policy* (or ‘solution’) *stream*, and the *politics stream*—creates a ‘policy window’ which, when opened, presents a time-limited opportunity for ‘policy entrepreneurs’ to ‘couple’ preferred solutions with existing policy problems (Kingdon 1995:166-69;181-82).

Each of the cases reflects a set of circumstances in which a convergence of agreed problems, available solutions and political will have combined to create a window of opportunity to depart from normal operating procedure to create new ways of working. Table 1 frames each of the cases in terms of: 1) the emergence of a consensus about the nature of a problem requiring a solution; 2) the promotion within policy communities of feasible solutions; 3) the emergence of a receptive political climate; and 4) the nature of the ‘policy window’ that enabled a collaborative approach.

Table 1.1 — Process Streams and Policy Windows

Case	Problem Stream	Policy Stream	Politics Stream	Policy Window
Change the Story	In Australia there has been a broad societal and institutional acknowledgement of violence against women and their children as a pernicious and corrosive social problem. It is also acknowledged that the existing service architecture is fragmented and ineffectual.	Policy communities within academia, civil society and government acknowledge the seriousness of the problem, although it is also an area in which there are multiple discourses and framings of the problem and potential solutions. It is accepted that responses to violence against women and their children spans jurisdictional, organisational, sectoral and clinical/practitioner boundaries. It is also accepted that articulating a national preventative framework requires that different sectional interests be brought to the table.	Australian governments accept the complex, multi-sectoral nature of the problem and the need for boundary spanning solutions. Accordingly, the Commonwealth and State-Territory governments agreed to address the matter via COAG as an issue of national importance.	The COAG Advisory Panel on Reducing Violence against Women and their Children called for a sustained, nationally consistent approach to primary prevention and Australian governments agree in 2013 to establish <i>Our Watch</i> as a national primary prevention organisation. Accordingly, <i>Our Watch</i> had high-level political authorisation to engage with a wide range of stakeholders in the formulation of a national preventative framework.
CBEM	Over recent years Victoria has experienced a number of natural disasters and other events resulting in significant loss of life, loss of infrastructure, adverse health impacts, as well as social and economic dislocation. The experience of mobilising disaster recovery efforts in affected Victorian communities provided a catalyst for a more formalised approach to ensuring the readiness of formal and informal assets to deal with emergencies.	The concept of Community based disaster management (CBDM) has been applied for over two decades in a variety of regional and national contexts. CBDM focuses on providing avenues for the mobilisation of latent community capabilities in response to adverse events, thus enabling people to participate alongside officials and experts as direct stakeholders (Jahangiri <i>et al.</i> 2011).	The scale and frequency of natural disasters catalysed the Victorian and local governments, and the community to focus on strategies to build and reinforce the resilience of local communities.	A 2011 <i>Green Paper: Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria</i> and a 2012 <i>White Paper: Victorian Emergency Management Reform</i> set the agenda for comprehensive reform of Victoria’s emergency management arrangements. In 2014, Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) was created to lead a multi-agency reform agenda.

Multiparty Collaboration for Public Benefit — Discussion Paper 1

WHO STOPS	<p>Obesity—and childhood obesity in particular—has become a key public health issue in Australia. Twenty-eight per cent of Australian children are overweight or obese and overweight youth have a 70% chance of becoming obese adults. Obesity is implicated in the incidence of Type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, and cancer, making the case for prevention compelling (Allender <i>et al.</i> 2016). It is also recognised that the contributors to obesity are multifactorial and that primary health care responses are alone insufficient to reduce the incidence of obesity.</p>	<p>Policy communities within academia, public health and government broadly agree that preventive health approaches are necessary to achieve behaviour changes leading to population level effects on the incidence of obesity. Researchers from the Global Obesity Centre at Deakin University lead an NMHRC-funded study to test the proposal that reductions in childhood obesity can be achieved through a facilitated community engagement process.</p>	<p>Public health authorities, concerned about the \$21 billion annual cost of obesity to the Australian health system, are receptive to options to tackle obesity. In the face of reluctance to use regulation of the food industry as a policy lever, measures to encourage behaviour change are politically feasible. In 2010 The Obesity Policy Coalition—a group of Victorian public health agencies—called for urgent action on obesity. In 2015 VicHealth convened a citizens jury to come up with actions to address obesity.</p>	<p>The Global Obesity Centre (GOC) study provided the opportunity for Deakin University to formally partner with Primary Care Partnerships (PCPs), local councils and health services. The GOC provides the evidential basis for efforts to foster community-level understanding of the contributors to childhood obesity and actions available to citizens and other local stakeholders to encourage behaviour change. The approach was trialled first in Portland, and was followed with another trial site in Hamilton.</p>
Throughcare	<p>The reintegration of offenders upon release from a custodial sentence gained policy salience in community sector discourses in 2008 when the ACT government opened the AMC—the territory’s first prison. Previously, offenders from the ACT served custodial sentences in NSW prisons with post release support provided by probation officers from ACT Corrective Services. It has been recognised for some time that policy and programmatic silos in the ACT present major barriers to the successful re-integration of released offenders.</p>	<p>Throughcare models of integrated post-release support for offenders have existed since the mid-1990s. All states and territories have initiated programs to assist the transition of offenders (and/or specific offender sub-populations) back into the community. The model is supported by an extensive international literature and the 2009 conference of the ‘The Reintegration Puzzle’^{ix} provided a catalyst for policy dialogue in the ACT.</p>	<p>The Stanhope Labor government in the ACT (2001-11) had a strong human rights focus and the AMC was designed to be a ‘human rights compliant’ prison. The Gallagher Labor Government (2011-14) continued a focus on social justice. From 2012 Greens cross-bench MLA Shane Rattenbury served as ACT Minister for Corrections in the Gallagher Labor government. Against this backdrop an alliance of community sector leaders and officials had an unprecedented opportunity to win Cabinet support to fund and trial a throughcare model in the ACT.</p>	<p>In 2012 a joint government-community sector working group won Cabinet support for a local version of the Throughcare model based on the principle of joining-up existing services using a client-centred case management approach. Accordingly, the ACT Government allocated \$1.2 million over two years in the 2012-13 Budget to pilot Throughcare. In the 2014-15 Budget, the Minister for Corrections announced an increased investment of \$2.176m over two years to extend the program.</p>

Children's teams	<p>Extensive public consultations convened in 2011 by the New Zealand government generated broad societal and institutional consensus about an unacceptable—and preventable—incidence of violence, neglect, physical/ sexual/ emotional abuse of children, and a high number of New Zealand children in out-of-home state care. It was also broadly acknowledged that Māori are disproportionately represented amongst 'at risk' families. It also became clear that at risk families found the existing fragmented, siloed service systems to be confusing and unresponsive.</p>	<p>Broad agreement emerged in policy communities within research institutions, the state sector and civil society—as well as amongst Māori/Iwi—that the inability to provide timely and effective intervention for children at risk was exacerbated by the siloed nature of New Zealand's service delivery architecture. A consensus emerged that a 'child-centred' practice approach built upon joined-up services, improved cross-sector and interagency co-operation and with case co-ordination by a lead agency or professional would be better suited to addressing the wider social and economic causes of vulnerability.</p>	<p>Public submissions on a 2011 <i>Green Paper</i> led to a 2012 <i>White Paper</i> in which the government enunciated a new legislative and operational measures designed to better align professionals from health, education, welfare and social service agencies, iwi/Māori and non-government organisations under a new cross-agency practice framework focused on identifying and supporting vulnerable children and their families. The government also published a <i>Children's Action Plan</i> that set out a five-year program of practical actions.</p>	<p>The convergence of public, professional and political opinion around the need to fundamentally transform the service delivery architecture for children and families at risk of formal notification to child protection authorities enabled government to establish a Children's Action Plan (CAP) Directorate to lead the change process. Since 2013 multi-agency Children's Teams have been established in ten communities. From 2017 carriage of the CAP and Children's Teams resides with the newly established Oranga Tamariki—Ministry for Children.</p>
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Policy entrepreneurs and influencers

We also observe in each of the cases that 'policy entrepreneurs' have at various stages, and in various ways, played an important role in winning and maintaining executive-level support for collaboration (hence, authorisation) and working with internal and external stakeholders to establish the legitimacy of a collaborative approach. A number of interviewees for this study referred to the important roles played by 'creative rule breakers' who, unlike managers who, in Kotter's words, 'are loathe to take chances without permission' and 'cling to their habits and fear loss of power and stature' (Kotter 2012: 5) are adept at—and relish—risk taking and bring a high level of emotional intelligence to collective problem-solving.

A number of interviewees pointed out that traditional public sector recruitment and personnel management practices neither select for, nor incentivise the kinds of personal attributes that are most conducive to collaboration, preferring to focus instead on 'content'—domain knowledge, formal qualifications, technical skills and a track record of working in like organisations. As one interviewee remarked:

This is going to sound really horrible, but it's the entrepreneurship I think that we don't look for enough: people who are going to push boundaries and challenge. We can all be great public servants and stick to all the rules and stuff. We've got to find some rule

breakers and get them into leadership roles. Then we'll really start to see some change I believe.

Interviewees also emphasised the importance for collaboration of 'influencers'—people with charisma, influence and standing who can be enlisted to persuade, reassure and encourage internal and external stakeholders and so reinforce the credibility and legitimacy of collaborative approaches. Influencers might, or might not be formally attached to the collaboration: they might be influential members of the community—change makers—who, once 'onside' become important informal ambassadors for the collaboration and its aims. These are the community-facing individuals the collaboration leadership needs to cultivate because they are a gateway to acceptance within stakeholder communities. One interviewee described the role played by influencers as follows:

We have what we call our champions within their community, and very much this is about champions. They very much influence people that they're connected to. We don't have, in a sense, a lot of power and control—and we shouldn't—over what and how information is disseminated. But the champions do because they're out in the community and they're respected by the community and they're seen to be doing things that others would like to follow.

Influencers might also be organisation-facing and play a more formal—but nonetheless critical—role as an internal champion or advocate for the collaboration. These might be senior executives—or even ministers—who are intellectually, professionally and emotionally invested in the collaboration and who occupy a position in the organisation from which they can defend it and build internal support for it.

Collaboration as a response to crisis and complexity

As observed by John Bryson and his colleagues at The Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, 'collaboration is not an easy answer to hard problems but a hard answer to hard problems' (Bryson *et al.* 2009). Collaboration, it appears, is almost always a solution of last resort. Collaborative approaches come into play when problems are acknowledged to be complex and 'wicked'. Collaboration is posited as a remedy for the jurisdictional, organisational, programmatic and sectoral siloing that creates and reinforces the fragmentation of service delivery. And for these reasons, collaborative approaches are most often applied to problems that are long standing and have already proved resistant to past attempts at resolution.

Thus, in a real sense, the task of remedying the ineffectiveness of existing interventions becomes an important focus of collaboration. As one interviewee said:

... we didn't need to be told it wasn't working; we'd known for many years it wasn't working. I worked with a workforce that worked their fingers to the bone and it still wasn't working. So the desperation to give effect to things that were more effective for whanau, that had to change.

Collaborations can also coalesce around informal initiatives or 'pilots' that have achieved local salience or prominence. That said, it is also clear from the interviews that there is a palpable weariness with pilot schemes which tend to be time-limited; have finite resourcing; are tightly bounded in operational terms; and unable to gain traction or demonstrate sustainability.

A consistent organising theme across each of the cases is the need for a ‘new BAU’—or business as usual. Implicit in the call for a new BAU is that pre-existing arrangements—often as not based on programmatic funding; highly specified contracts; and multiple eligibility requirements, triage systems, and authorising environments—aren’t working. Collaborative approaches are sometimes represented as ‘transformational’, however, any such claims must be treated carefully and likely fall into the realm of ‘wishful thinking’. Indeed, many of the people interviewed for this study have made such claims. Others, however, have offered a contrary view, suggesting that the impact of collaborative approaches upon the dominant operating culture of organisations is slight and of short duration.

Our observations suggest that the spaces within which collaborations occur are in some sense informal, and somewhat ephemeral operational artefacts that co-exist in dynamic tension with—and at the discretion of—dominant, traditional organisational cultures. We might think of the pre-existing operating culture as a ‘primary operating space’ in which long established systems, norms and rules govern what can and cannot be done.

It sometimes seems that people and organisations turn to collaborative approaches almost as a last resort when conventional approaches have demonstrably failed. Collaboration can struggle in such circumstances because of cynicism ("everything else has been tried, why should this work?"), impatience ("we have been waiting a long time for signs of change—we want results now"), disbelief ("collaboration is all talk and no follow through"), and the mounting costs of failures to address the problem ("this is getting urgent, do something quick").

It also seems that urgency, a history of policy failure, and vexed relationships between (e.g. complexity) are virtually pre-requisites for any recourse to collaboration. This adds lead to the saddle for collaboration leads and accentuates the risk of collaboration failure.

A dual operating system

Kotter (2012) points out that while traditional hierarchies and managerial processes do many things well, they are not sufficiently nimble to ‘address the challenges produced by mounting complexity and rapid change’ (Kotter 2012: 2). Kotter observes:

Hierarchies and standard managerial processes, even when minimally bureaucratic, are inherently risk-averse and resistant to change. Part of the problem is political: Managers are loath to take chances without permission from superiors. Part of the problem is cultural: People cling to their habits and fear loss of power and stature—two essential elements of hierarchies. And part of the problem is that all hierarchies, with their specialized units, rules, and optimized processes, crave stability and default to doing what they already know how to do (Kotter 2012: 5).

The solution, according to Kotter, is a ‘dual operating system’ comprised of a ‘management-driven hierarchy’ and a second operating system, ‘devoted to the design and implementation of strategy, that uses an agile, networklike [sic] structure and a very different set of processes’ (Kotter 2012: 2,6).

Although Kotter is in this instance referring to private sector enterprises, his observations also hold for the public sector, whose traditional *modus operandi* continues to be challenged by changing environmental conditions and political/societal expectations—in particular the expectation that organisations will work collaboratively for the public benefit. In many ways, traditional bureaucratic systems are inimical to working across programmatic, organisational or

sector boundaries—particularly where there are misalignments of priorities, outlook and norms. How then can spaces be created where collaboration can occur?

Our observation is that collaboration appears to occur within something much like Kotter's 'second operating space'. Importantly, this second operating space connects to the hierarchy through people who populate both spaces and, ideally, works to liberate information from 'silos and hierarchical layers' and enable it to flow with far greater freedom and speed (Kotter 2012: 8). Individual participants in collaborative forums typically transit back and forth between primary and secondary spaces: an experience that can be disorienting and conflicted.

Formal authorisation for collaboration occurs in 'primary operating spaces'—where the dominant, normative operating culture of partner organisations resides. It is essential, according to Kotter, that the second operating space—which he describes as a network that 'permits a level of individualism, creativity, and innovation that not even the least bureaucratic hierarchy can provide'—does not come to be viewed as a 'rogue operation' and is 'treated as a legitimate part of the organisation, or the hierarchy will crush it' (Kotter 2012: 8). As one interviewee told us

A typical bureaucratic behaviour is that once something starts to happen that you don't like, you divest yourself from the process and you start to brief upwards about the negative effects of it. If they get wind that somebody's going to come in to their patch and starting to change the way they do things and break down their happy little fiefdoms—that's just my language—you end up with an internal political problem.

Not counter-intuitive, but counter-cultural

In a recent presentation^x describing Canadian examples of cross-sector collaborative approaches to addressing difficult problems, Canadian thought-leader and associate of the [Tamarack Institute](#), [Mark Cabaj](#) said that while collaboration is not counter-intuitive, it *is* counter-cultural. The key challenge going forward, according to Cabaj, is to cultivate a set of policy and operational tools that will support the curating and convening of spaces for things that cannot otherwise occur in primary operating spaces. One interviewee told us that, ideally, collaboration is 'outward facing' and focussed on mediating and accommodating a range of perspectives and priorities, as opposed to being inward-facing and narrowly focused on fidelity to process. This is uncertain and challenging organisational terrain for those charged with the task of collaboration.

Focused observations

We will conclude this first discussion paper with a few focussed observations about some of the shared characteristics exhibited by the cases in our sample. Subsequent discussion papers will examine these and other observations in greater detail.

Consultation

Each of the collaborations in this study has commenced with a process of extensive consultation with a variety of internal and external stakeholders. Consultations have focussed on both the framing of the problem to be addressed as well as on the potential for a collaborative approach to address the problem. Consultation has occurred informally—for example, by providing ad hoc briefings for ministers, ministerial advisers and the executives of partner/affected organisations—and it has occurred formally in public forums with stakeholders and the wider community. To have a chance of success collaboration needs to be

built on acceptance and trust. And because collaboration usually involves a departure from BAU, it is essential to provide assurance to stakeholders—whether they are agency executives, frontline workers, interest organisations or end users. Consultation also affords opportunities to generate a ‘buy-in’ from stakeholders—a commitment to the aims of the collaboration and its *modus operandi*.

Evidence base

The capacity to offer evidence in support of a collaborative approach is essential to win support for collaboration from partner organisations and from external stakeholders who might be concerned about any change to existing systems and processes (even where existing systems are not working). Each of the cases in this study has supported the case for a collaborative approach with evidence about the nature and scale of the problem, and about the degree to which existing systems and programs have failed to demonstrate impact. Each has also been keen to demonstrate that collaborative approaches are impactful. Whilst the former is crucial to winning institutional and community support for collaboration, the latter is essential to sustain the formal authorisation and social licence that enable collaboration to occur.

Expectations

Each of the cases investigated for this study has struggled at times to temper the expectations of authorisers and communities of interest. As discussed, collaborative approaches are often invoked when it has already been accepted that BAU isn’t working and there is no other choice but to try something different. What this also means is that stakeholders of all types are impatient for positive results. Collaboration is not a ‘quick fix’, however: it requires a significant up-front investment of time in building relationships and trust, as well as the establishment of shared expectations and procedural norms. Authorisers, however, are often impatient for ‘results’ and do not always appreciate that working collaboratively needs time and extensive groundwork, or that definitive ‘impact’ might not be immediately apparent.

Formal and informal governance

In each of the cases collaboration is subject to formal governance through a ‘backbone group’ and/or a governance group consisting of partner organisations and, in some cases, organisations representing principal stakeholder interests. The primary purpose of formal governance is to provide an avenue for authorisation to collaborate and assurance that collaboration is occurring. Although formal governance is indispensable, informal governance also serves important purposes. Whereas formal governance is usually exercised via agreed protocols or rules of engagement, and might be guided by terms of reference agreed amongst the parties and confirmed through an exchange of correspondence or a memorandum of understanding (MOU)—a description of objects and expectations rather than a legal framework—informal governance is more ‘relational’ than ‘procedural’. Informal governance is concerned more with maintaining communications, listening to concerns, modelling behaviours and creating legitimacy. In each of the five cases formal and informal governance was strongly in evidence.

Discussion points

1. Are there any questions or require clarification about the cases themselves, the case selection process or the persons selected for interview?

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2. How useful is the portrayal of collaboration as a response of ‘last resort’ to long-standing problems that have proved resistant to mainstream interventions? What might this suggest about the difficulty in operationalising collaborative approaches?
3. Is the depiction of collaboration as operating within a ‘secondary operating space’ accurate? And if so, what might this suggest about impediments to the ‘mainstreaming’ of collaboration as a core organisational strategy?
4. Is it possible to normalise and incentivise ‘entrepreneurial’ behaviour in large, operationally conservative organisations?

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Endnotes

ⁱ Originally The Foundation to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children, a charitable not-for-profit entity established in 2013 ‘to raise awareness and engage the community in action to prevent violence against women and their children’.

ⁱⁱ Source:

https://engage.vic.gov.au/application/files/3314/8661/3743/EMV_Resilient_Recovery_discussion_paper.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: <http://files.em.vic.gov.au/EMV-web/EMV-Year-in-Review-Web.pdf>

^{iv} Source: <https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/news/resilient-recovery-discussion-paper-released>

^v Source: <https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/about-us/current-projects/relief-and-recovery-reform-strategy>

^{vi} Source:

https://engage.vic.gov.au/application/files/3314/8661/3743/EMV_Resilient_Recovery_discussion_paper.pdf

^{vii} Sources: <https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/how-we-help/community/community-based-emergency-management> ; https://files-em.em.vic.gov.au/public/EMV-web/Community_Resilience%20_Framework.pdf ; <https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/publications/community-based-emergency-management-overview> ; <https://files-em.em.vic.gov.au/public/EMV-web/Community-Based-Emergency-Management-Overview.pdf>.

^{viii} Source: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2008-09-11/new-act-jail-awaits-inmates/507128>

^{ix} The Reintegration Puzzle, hosted by Deakin University, has since 2004 convened an annual conference that brings together researchers, policy makers, advocates and service providers from around Australia and New Zealand to share ideas increase opportunities for post release organisations to collaborate <http://www.reintegrationpuzzle.com.au/about-us/>

^x Mark Cabaj’s presentation on cross-sector social impact networking was held in Canberra on 26 April 2018, and was co-sponsored by the Commonwealth Departments of Social Services and Education and Training.