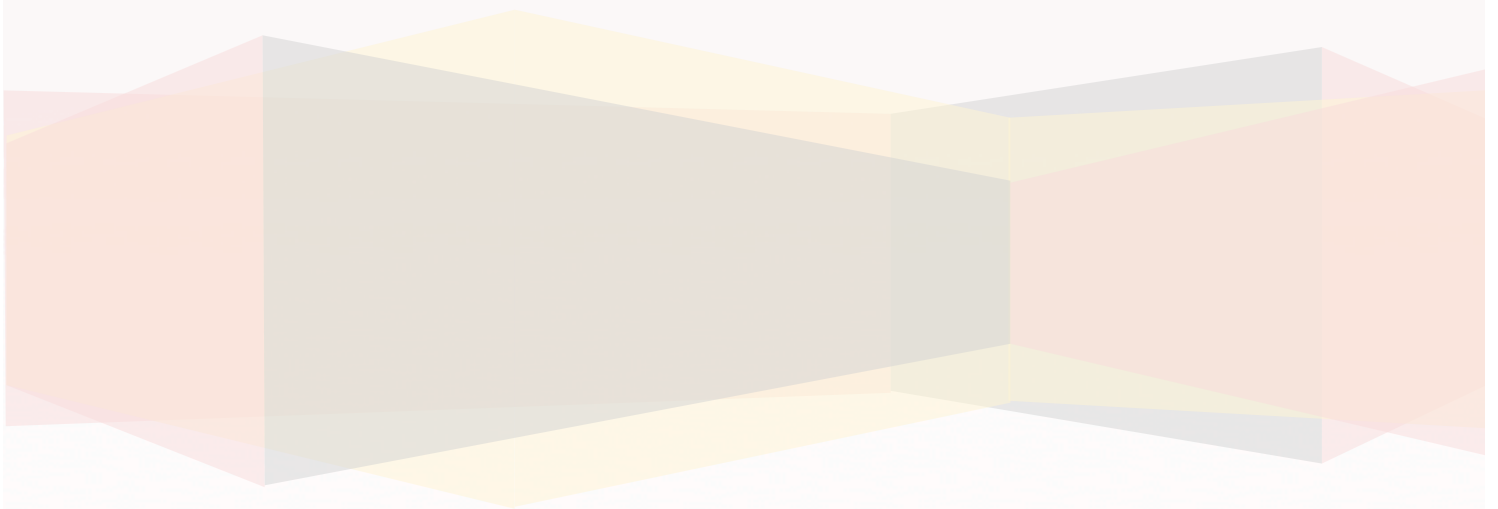


A Rubric for Building Effective Collaboration

Creating and Sustaining Multi Service Partnerships to Improve Outcomes for Clients
– Concepts Paper

Michael White and Gail Winkworth



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For access to the FULL COLLABORATION RUBRIC please contact the authors

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A COLLABORATION RUBRIC FOR CREATING AND SUSTAINING MULTI SERVICE PARTNERSHIPS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CLIENTS¹

WHAT IS A COLLABORATION RUBRIC?

'Rubric' is a term that for more than a thousand years referred to a heading, hand written in red (Griffin, 2009) on old manuscripts. More recently it has become popular as a tool that lists the criteria for evaluating what counts in a good piece of work (Goodrich, 1996:14).

Rubrics are particularly useful in helping people become more thoughtful about the quality of their own work. When rubrics are used to guide self and peer assessment, people are increasingly able to solve problems themselves and together with peers. Using what is essentially a strengths based and local approach, Rubrics have been described as

“The best of our collective and professional judgment at this point in time in our small spot on the planet” (Griffin, 2009:13)

The concept of the Rubric is a good one for building collaboration in local areas because it encourages continuous reflection and improvement as groups work together to solve problems that affect their clients.

Through working with many organisations and sectors we have developed a developmental model of collaboration and a practical tool (“the Collaboration Rubric”), which enables individual organisations and networks to analyse their existing collaborative efforts and to plan for future success. These have included projects with Centrelink (Australia’s Social Security system) and with

¹ The material referred to in this section is discussed in more detail in the following publications:
White, M., & Winkworth, G., (2012) *Improving child and family outcomes through a collaborative service model* in Noller, P & Karantzas, G.C. (eds) *The Wiley--Blackwell Handbook of Couples and Family Relationships*, First Edition, Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Winkworth, G. & White, M. (2011) *Report to the ACT Human Rights Commission on Structures and Organisational Arrangements to Support Reform in ACT Youth Justice*, ACT Government

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White, M. (2011) *Improving Outcomes for Children: Opportunities for Interdepartmental Collaboration*, Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Victorian Department of Human Services.

Winkworth, G & White, M. (2010) *May Do, Should Do, Can Do: Collaboration Between Commonwealth and State Service Systems for Vulnerable Children*, *Communities, Children & Families, Australia*, Vol 5, No. 1

Winkworth, G. (2006) *Ordinary Officials Building Community Capacity Through Cross-Sectoral*

Collaboration - A Case Study, *Public Administration Today*, Issue 9, October- Dec, 2006

Winkworth, G (2005) *Public Officials and Collaboration: Centrelink and the creation of pathways to employment*, in M. Pawari (ed) *Capacity Building for Participation: Social Workers Thoughts and Reflections*, Community of Scholars, Charles Sturt University, October, 2005

Winkworth, G (2005) *Partnering the 800 pound gorilla: Centrelink working locally to create opportunities for participation* *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 64 (3)

the Employment, Family Relationships, Family Law, Education and the broader Child Protection and Family Support Sectors.

WHAT THE RUBRIC DOES

Research indicates that different forms of collaboration are necessary to achieve different goals; and that there are key factors, which enable collaboration to develop or which undermine it. The Rubric provides a road map for collaborative efforts which connects the different forms of collaboration with the actions that are necessary to support them.

The Rubric provides a simple way of assessing and charting how Networks are working over time, including offering a picture of problem areas that need attention. It provides a basis for a network owned approach to tackling barriers and for moving forward together. It guides organisations to the issues which are most important as they build partnerships with others. In this way, it assists:

- newly formed Networks to plan the development of their partnerships;
- established Networks to monitor how their partnerships are working and what areas need attention;
- networks experiencing difficulties to identify areas of conflict and agreement so that they can move forward;
- all Networks to agree on shared goals and outcomes.

The Rubric uses a matrix approach, which connects key types of partnership building (“communication”, “coordination”, “collaboration” and “creation”) with the three key drivers that enable partnerships to grow. These 3 drivers are:

- a shared commitment to collaboration;
- a common vision for what can be achieved through collaboration;
- the capacity to sustain collaboration.

Within these 3 drivers the Rubric identifies a total of 18 key factors which underpin the success of collaboration and which move networks of organisations from basic ‘communication’ to more advanced levels of ‘co-ordination’, ‘collaboration’ and finally to ‘creative partnerships’ which respond to clients needs.

Building collaborative partnerships requires continuing commitment and effort. In addition it requires a practical roadmap, which can guide the development of the collaboration and give the organisations involved real control over its direction. The Rubric provides CEOs, managers and staff a clear blueprint to underpin the creation of effective partnerships and a transparent way of planning their development.

CONCEPTS UNDERPINNING THE RUBRIC

FOCUS ON OUTCOMES FOR CLIENTS.

It is a truism in the human services field that that we need to provide holistic responses to clients. However, our service systems tend to be made up of diverse sets of organisations designed to respond to a particular aspect of people's needs (for example, their mental health, homelessness, family conflict) or designed to efficiently deliver the skills of a particular profession, (for example, nursing, psychology, social work). Inevitably this leads to a fragmentation of our response to our clients' needs.

The Rubric is based on the knowledge that the challenges faced by the people we serve are intrinsically multi-faceted and our responses need to be multidisciplinary. The Rubric assumes that each agency is but a single player in a constellation of services and that the needs of clients are not only multi faceted, they are central to how we develop our partnerships. For example there are many individuals who need little more than good information about where to go to meet their needs. Services can provide an effective service for them by ensuring that they can provide good information and referral services.

There are others who will not be able to meet their needs by themselves and will require integrated services in which there are active connections between services which take joint responsibility for meeting the needs of the individual.

So while collaboration between services is an important goal, it is not good in and of itself. The extent of collaborative efforts needs to be adjusted to the needs of the person, and their worth must be evaluated through their impact on the well being of clients.

A DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL

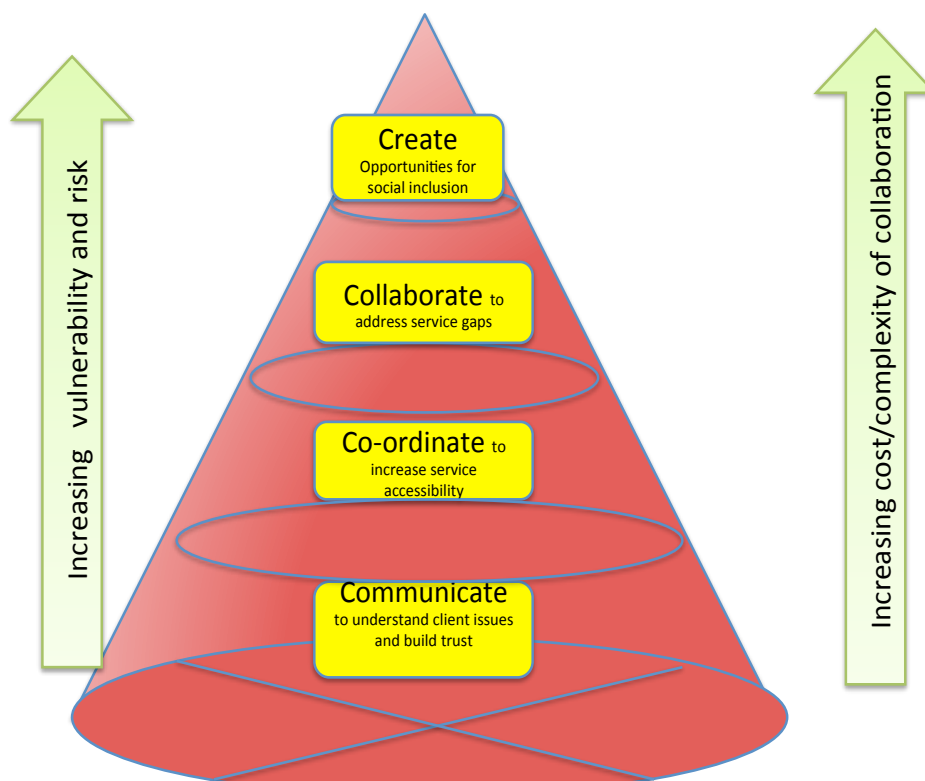
One way of increasing collaboration to achieve better outcomes is through the creation of formal networks or partnerships at the local level. The purpose of these networks is usually to build a foundation for partnership activities, which provide more targeted and integrated assistance to people in local communities. While networks often begin with a specific group of services, over time this may extend to other kinds of community and business partners that can open up new opportunities for people, and reduce their need for contact with the formal service system.

The Rubric is underpinned by a client focused, developmental model of collaboration (figure 1) which provides a conceptual framework for partnering, over time.

The model has a strong foundational base in 'communication' for building understanding about clients and the agencies that support them. This increased understanding builds trust and the basis for more complex and goal directed partnerships. In time these partnerships lead to more coordinated service delivery, to collaborations that address service gaps and finally to creative initiatives which have the potential to fundamentally improve people's lives and reduce their need for contact with formal services.

The model is also informed by collaboration typologies in the literature (Himmelman, 1992; Huxham, 1996; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Horwath & Morrison, 2007). However a distinctive feature of this model is the recognition that partnerships are costly and that good public administration requires that scarce resources be used responsibly and to the maximum benefit of the population. A developmental model of collaboration is most cost effective if each stage of development is purposely defined and linked to the vulnerability and risk of client groups (figure 1) (Winkworth & White, 2011).

Figure 1: A developmental model of collaboration



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COMMUNICATING TO BETTER UNDERSTAND CLIENT ISSUES

The foundation of collaboration is effective communication, which has, at its core, the dual purpose of increasing understanding of the problems faced by mutual clients, and building the relationships needed to solve these problems.

Successful communicators use multiple communication channels and take proactive approaches to relationship building. Typically they:

- develop direct lines of personal contact with others (for instance, many successful communicators provide personal mobile numbers to colleagues from other agencies and favour this over the use of emails, especially for difficult issues);
- use face to face meetings to problem solve small organizational issues;
- invite others to their agency for information sessions and hospitality (usually including food and drink);
- wherever possible, show goodwill through sharing resources (for example, allowing other agencies to use meeting rooms and providing agency data that might increase understanding of client issues);
- train together;

- develop some degree of formality by meeting regularly to deepen knowledge of the issues confronting clients and the potential for collaborative responses.

COORDINATING TO INCREASE ACCESSIBILITY TO SERVICES

Coordination occurs when particular service agencies form partnerships to improve 'work flows' and streamline services for mutual clients.

It typically involves a small number of partners (one or two) who are working with the same group of clients. Coordination is achieved for example by:

- streamlining intake processes;
- facilitating referrals (warm referral, supported linking, etc);
- co-locating a worker from one service in the offices of another (particularly at 'first to know' agencies such as the school, the Housing Dept, at Centrelink, etc);
- 'outsourcing' clients in more accessible places (for example a refuge or shelter, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation facility);
- conducting joint outreach visits and client review meetings.

Coordination is considered particularly important from the point of view of potential service users who find formal systems difficult to navigate and who tend not to use services that are often specifically set up to assist them (Winkworth, McArthur, Layton & Thomson, 2010). In response, agencies which initially network to share information about programs may decide to take this a step further and change their program content and schedules to improve work flows and better serve their mutual clients.

COLLABORATING TO ADDRESS SERVICE GAPS

Collaboration occurs when multiple service agencies work together in complex ways to change the way the service system operates. Its purpose is to address emerging community issues and service gaps, and to provide more responsive ways of working, especially for highly vulnerable client groups. Collaboration typically involves multiple service partners in:

- developing new ways of working together within existing resources;
- developing joint initiatives such as funding submissions to increase the resource base;
- new structures to achieve 'no wrong door';
- multiple services delivered from the same venue;
- formal information sharing among multiple agencies;
- regular roundtables to address systems issues;
- common data systems;
- developing shared outcome frameworks.

CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

Although collaboration between services can produce significant improvements for children and families, on its own this kind of service-focused collaboration does not tend to produce long term ownership or to increase the sense of control that people and communities have over their own destinies (Huxham, 1996).

To begin to achieve this, partnerships are needed that go beyond the formal service sector to engage a much wider range of individuals and groups who want to respond to issues that affect their communities (Barraket, 2010). For example, the original research, which underpins this framework, identified many such creative partnerships in Centrelink, the Australian Government income support and service delivery agency. This research showed the capacity of government officials to engage in wide ranging and imaginative partnerships to increase the social inclusion of people who were otherwise excluded from participating in the social and economic lives of their communities (Winkworth, 2005).

Creating increased opportunities for participation and reduced reliance on the service system is achieved by:

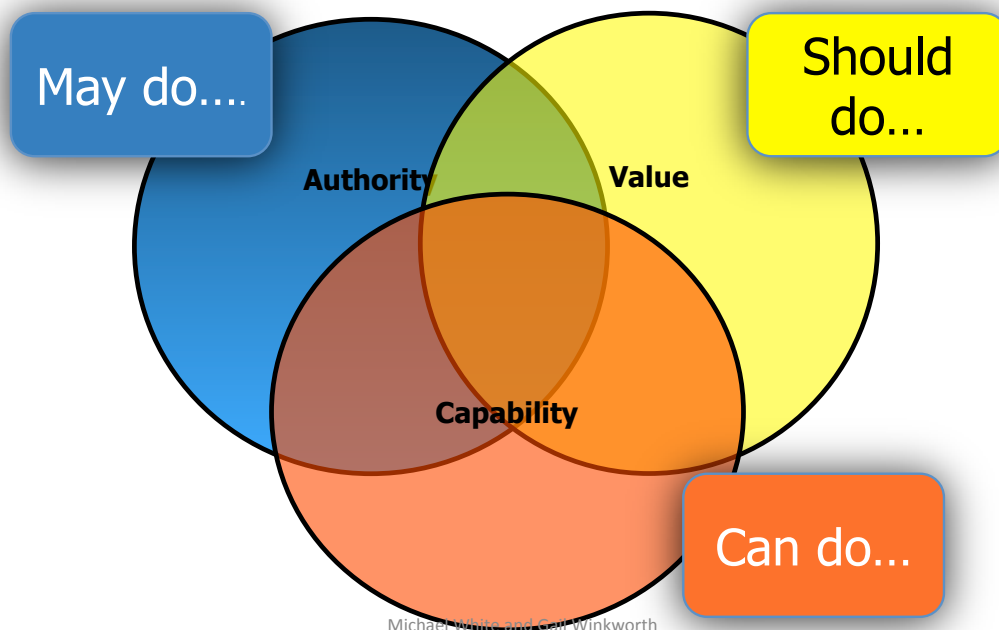
- a diverse mix of partners, for example, business and community organisations (eg sporting clubs, playgroups, TAFE) and philanthropic organisations;
- the use of non hierarchical participatory structures such as networks to develop new opportunities;
- mobilising a broader range of resources and resource sharing (not being confined by existing resources or by 'program specificity');
- participation in program design and evaluation by people affected;
- the focus of activities on increasing self efficacy, such as through improved literacy, expanded social relationships, educational attainment, employment experiences, and civic engagement (for example, through the development of a playgroup run by and for younger mothers or a 'Men's Shed' supported by the business sector to increase skills and expand social relationships).

IDENTIFYING STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Over the course of multiple evaluations three questions emerge as consistently helpful in identifying what is needed for successful, long lasting collaboration²:

1. firstly, whether the collaboration has legitimacy and support (also called an “authorising environment”);
2. secondly, the extent to which there is a shared understanding of the value to the public (vision) of such an enterprise; and
3. thirdly, whether the operational capacity exists to actually implement it. In essence, for any enterprise or strategy to be effective and sustainable, it has to be authorised, valuable and doable (White, 2006).

Figure 2 Enabling Factors for Collaboration



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² These questions are based on a synthesis of Mark Moore’s Public Value Framework (Moore, M. 1995. *Creating Public Value: Strategic Management in Government*. Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press) and the work of a number of researchers in collaboration (Horwath, J., & Morrison, T. (2007). *Collaboration, integration and change in children’s services: Critical issues and key challenges*. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 31, 55-69; Corbett, T., & Noyes, J. (2008). *Human Services Systems Integration: A Conceptual Framework*. Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison)

HAS THE COLLABORATION TRULY BEEN AUTHORISED BY ALL THE STAKEHOLDERS AFFECTED?

This question is based on the assumption that without an appropriate 'authorizing environment' the momentum for multidisciplinary and multiservice collaboration will be quickly lost and more traditional ways of doing things will emerge. This is particularly evident when practitioners across organisations are committed to working together but collaboration is not fully legitimized.

The elements of a strong legitimising or 'authorising environment' may include: a formal mandate through legislation; endorsement through public enquiries; policy documents; memoranda of understanding; information sharing protocols and endorsement by expert groups such as Institutes and Centres for Excellence.

Authorisation also requires the vision to be embraced by members of critical operational staff groups at all levels (senior executive, operational managers and front line staff). Most importantly, and probably most neglected, those who are affected by the collaboration should have a voice in the design and evaluation of collaborative initiatives. While this may sometimes seem challenging, without the involvement of people affected there is a tendency for agencies to remain focused on models that are in the best interests of service *providers* rather than being responsive to the changing circumstances and experiences of their clients.

IS THERE A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED BY THE COLLABORATION AND A VISION FOR WHAT CAN BE ACHIEVED?

This question refers to whether the 'public value' of the collaboration can be clearly demonstrated. Behind it lies a series of others that identify the extent to which there is an agreed narrative about the purpose of the collaboration; one that is sufficiently compelling and clear that it engages all key stakeholders. These questions also examine whether there is a set of agreed outcomes. Part of being able to convince stakeholders in an enduring way is to be very clear about what will be achieved and be able to show that it has been achieved. Collaboration is resource intensive so it will only continue to be funded if it is seen to produce desirable outcomes. Shared planning and other shared governance mechanisms are essential because these provide the vehicle for resolving language and conceptual problems, and for articulating a shared understanding of goals and measures of success.

IS THERE OPERATIONAL CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT THE COLLABORATION?

Collaborative efforts between agencies and individuals need to be appropriately resourced. Many efforts in this area have failed due to the lack of resources to build collaboration at all levels of the pyramid (figure 1) or lack of skill on the part of those who are seeking to collaborate. Some of the important elements of operational capacity include: shared practice frameworks (jointly developed principles, domains of practice, mechanisms for information sharing), and shared training.

The evaluations that underpin this framework indicate the critical role played by dedicated staff who play "boundary crossing" roles, transferring knowledge between agencies and systems and consistently nurturing the collaboration. Good examples are the roles of community based child protection workers, and Family Law Pathways Network coordinators. Co-location of staff in other agencies is also another way of increasing the capacity of agencies to collaborate. Roundtables to address complex issues faced by particular clients have consistently been identified as important

facilitators of collaboration. The focus on individual issues invariably leads to the identification of service and system wide problems and collaborative approaches to resolving these problems.

TURNING THE CONCEPTS INTO A RUBRIC

Often rubrics are laid out in chart form which allows, firstly for the importance of chosen criteria to be explained and secondly, shows how the criteria can be met in a progressive or developmental way. In this case we have chosen to show progression to full implementation of the criteria in four columns. As concisely as possible, these columns describe varying degrees of quality and complexity in meeting the criteria. These columns effectively explain an increasingly “good piece of work” (Goodrich, 1996:14).

In our Collaboration Rubric we connect key types of partnership building (“communication”, “coordination”, “collaboration” and “creation”) with the three key drivers that enable partnerships to grow (Support and Authority, Shared Vision and Outcomes and Capability). Within these 3 drivers the Rubric identifies a total of 18 key factors which underpin the success of collaboration and which move networks of organisations from basic ‘communication’ to more advanced levels of ‘co-ordination’, ‘collaboration’ and finally to ‘creative partnerships’.

Figure 3 shows the relationship between the three drivers and increasingly complex types of partnerships.

Figure 3: Main components of the Collaboration Rubric



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In the following section we identify each of the factors within these three drivers that are chosen as critical criteria for success.

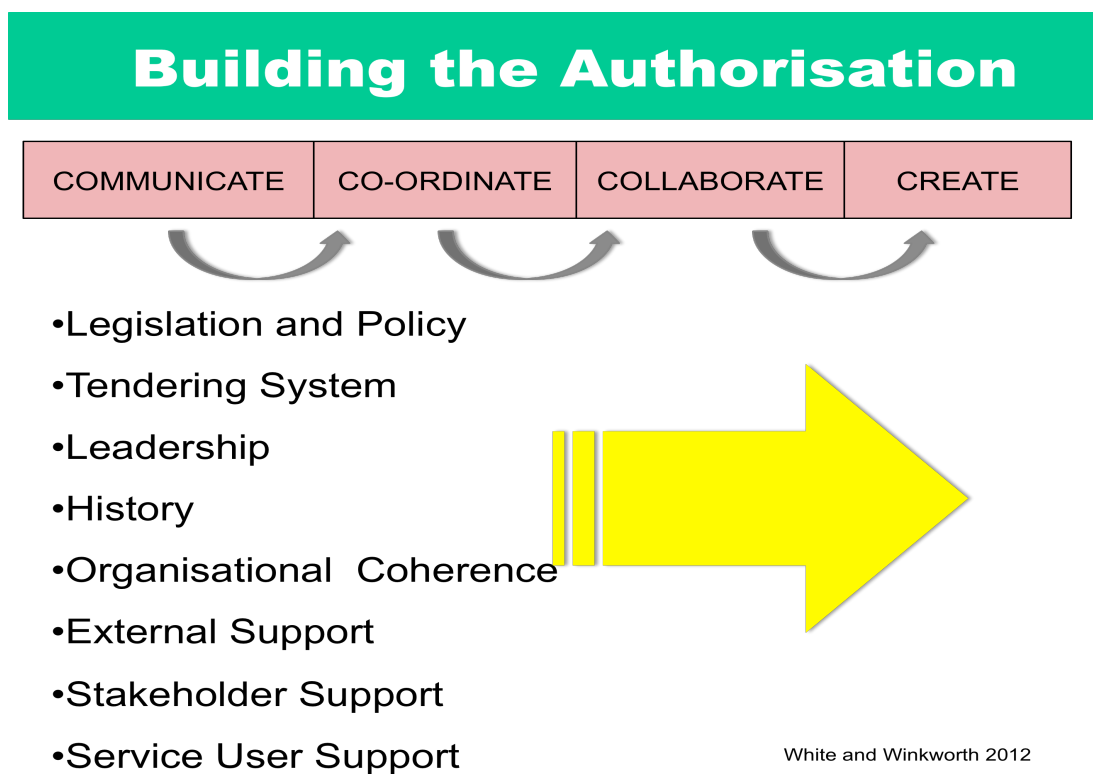
SUPPORT AND AUTHORITY – THE EXISTENCE OF A STRONG AUTHORISING ENVIRONMENT

Collaboration will only succeed if it:

- ❖ is endorsed by those who fund agencies and set the policy frameworks which guide the actions of the funded organisations;
- ❖ is lead and supported within the organisations; and
- ❖ is supported by influential stakeholders outside the organisations who are seeking to collaborate.

We have identified 8 criteria that lead to a strong authorising environment (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Building the Authorising Environment



LEGISLATION AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Effective collaboration needs to be supported by legislation and policies that encourage organisations to work together. Legislation and policies must also be consistent so that organisations are seeking to achieve compatible goals.

TENDERING SYSTEMS

Government tendering systems can undermine collaboration by encouraging competition between agencies rather than promoting efforts to work together.

LEADERSHIP

Effective collaboration needs to be led and endorsed by those who have formal authority within the organisations.

HISTORY

Effective collaboration will be easier to achieve if organisations are able to build from the trust built by previous histories of productive collaboration.

ORGANISATIONAL COHERENCE

Effective collaboration needs to be supported by all parts of the organisation.

EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Effective collaboration needs to become an explicit part of the professional and organisational development programs of funded agencies.

STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT

Collaboration between organisations needs to be endorsed by influential external stakeholders such as professional associations, unions and funding bodies.

SERVICE USER SUPPORT

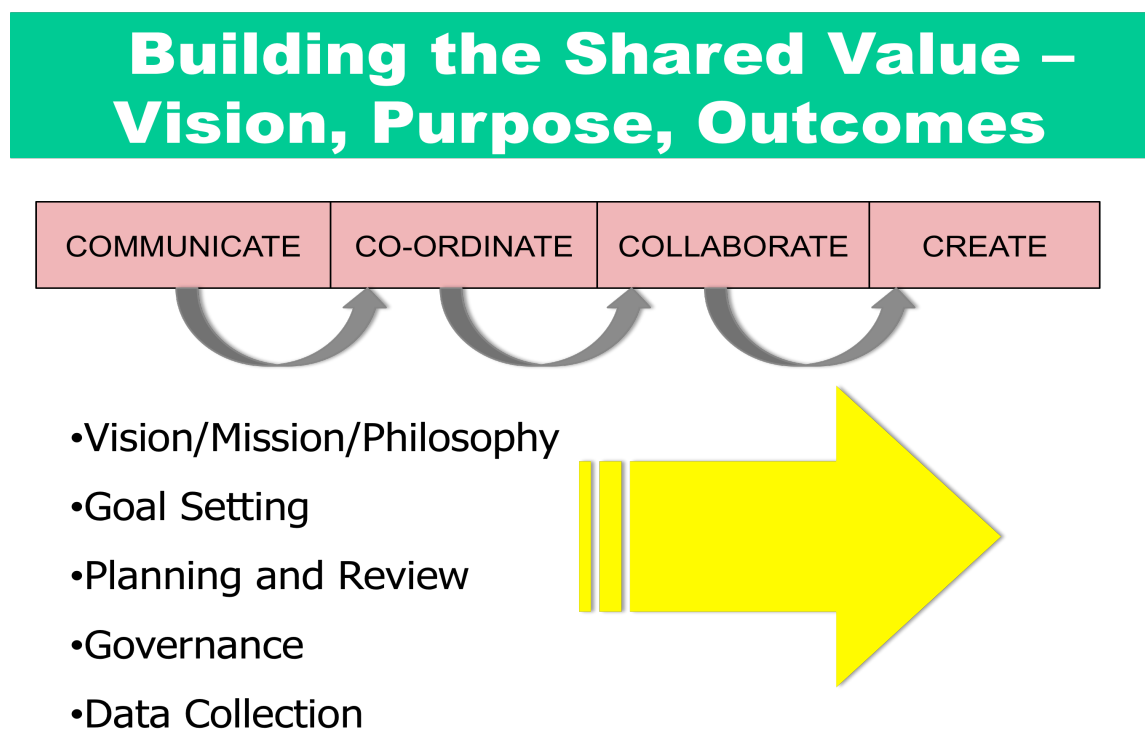
The goal of collaboration is to improve the outcomes for service users. It is important to engage service users to ensure that efforts to develop collaboration between organisations are in fact delivering better outcomes for those using the services.

VALUE - SHARED VISION, PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES

Effective collaboration depends on organisations having a shared sense of the value of the collaboration for their clients. They need to share goals for their clients, share the planning for how they will achieve these goals and agree how they will measure their success.

We have identified 5 key criteria that lead to a shared understanding of the value of the collaboration (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Building the Value of the Collaboration



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VISION/PHILOSOPHY

Effective collaboration between agencies is underpinned by a shared sense of purpose.

GOAL SETTING

Effective collaboration is built on having shared goals for clients that recognise that different agencies have a contribution to these goals.

GOVERNANCE

Shared goals and purposes need to be supported by governance arrangements in which collaborating organisations give formal recognition to their partnerships.

PLANNING FOR SHARED GOALS

When organisations share goals they need effective mechanisms to jointly plan how these will be achieved and for reviewing progress towards these goals.

DATA COLLECTION

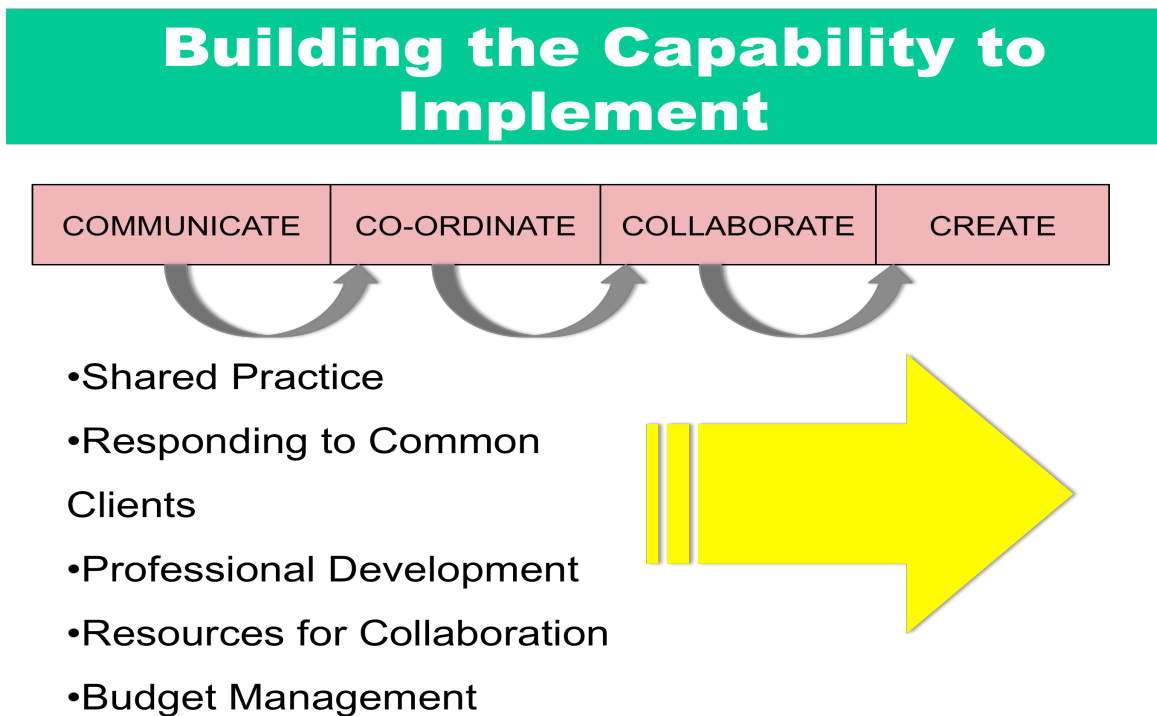
Collaboration to improve outcomes for clients needs to be supported by the sharing of data about the activities of each agency and what they are achieving. The success of effective collaboration must be measured by agreed outcome measures for clients of the organisations.

BUILDING THE CAPABILITY TO IMPLEMENT COLLABORATION

Effective collaboration to improve outcomes for clients depends on organisations' willingness to develop shared ways of working. This includes a willingness to share information about individual clients (with their permission). In addition staff in collaborating organisations need to undertake shared training and organisations and funding bodies must provide the resources necessary to support the collaboration.

We have identified 5 key criteria essential to building the capability for collaboration (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Building the capability to implement



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SHARED PRACTICE

Effective collaboration depends on professional staff in partnering organisations developing shared ways of working which cross the boundaries between professionals' practice.

RESPONDING TO COMMON CLIENTS

Collaborations which aim to improve outcomes for clients need to develop ways of sharing information about their clients needs. These must respect the rights of the clients at the same time as recognising that many clients may require well-informed multi-service responses.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Joint professional development for staff in collaborating organisations will promote shared practice and develop trust and understanding between staff.

RESOURCES FOR COLLABORATION

Effective collaboration depends on the availability of resources, which create positions to support the collaboration or provide staff with the time to participate in collaborative activities.

BUDGET MANAGEMENT

Effective collaboration requires the development of shared or pooled approaches to the allocation of budgets, particularly where these support a local area plan or a specific joint activity between organisations

USING THE RUBRIC

THE DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH IN PRACTICE

It is a fundamental principle of the Rubric that collaboration and the construction of partnerships is a process that takes time and experience; and that organizations will develop greater capacity to do this as they engage with each other over time.

Therefore each of the 18 factors outlined above is described in 4 different levels of complexity. This allows organizations to review the current status of their readiness to work with others and enables them to assess their progress over time.

For example, we have identified the following development in the “Leadership” factor as organizations work to enhance their partnerships.

LEADERSHIP			
Effective collaboration needs to be led and endorsed by those who have formal authority within the organisations.			
Individual service leaders communicate with each other regularly	Individual service leaders communicate with each other regularly and participate in a structured network of other agencies	System leaders communicate a compelling shared story about the need for the partnership Senior decision makers provide active leadership within their organisation to support collaboration	Individual service leaders share joint leadership of innovative or reform projects Service leaders have a common understanding of values and directions for their organisations

As another example we have seen that organizations which are developing collaborative practice work with shared clients move to more complex interactions as outlined below.

RESPONDING TO COMMON CLIENTS			
Collaborations aim to improve outcomes for clients need to develop ways of sharing information about their clients needs. These must respect the rights of the clients at the same time as recognising that many clients may require well informed multi-service responses.			
Organisations exchange information about broad client needs but not about individual clients	Organisations provide active referral services to each other and seek clients’ permission to share information with other professionals	Staff and managers in the partnership meet to develop a systemic response to the needs of particular individual clients or families	Organisations change service practice to ensure multiservice response to meet clients’ needs

A FOUR STAGED PROCESS REPEATED OVER MULTIPLE PLANNING CYCLES

The Rubric is effective if it is used as a four-staged process which is repeated over multiple planning cycles (for example, at 3 months, 6 months, and 12 months after initial partnership benchmarking).

The four stages are:

STAGE 1: PREPARATION

This includes all the necessary activities to prepare participants in the local area for use of the Rubric to ensure that Network leaders are fully committed to the process that will follow.

The facilitators should meet with network leaders separately and together, to fully understand the context of the Network and to achieve consistency of purpose in the use of the Rubric. These planning meetings will establish a schedule for the training, the online survey, reporting back and future planning workshops.

Interagency training in key concepts is an essential part of preparing for the use of the rubric.

STAGE 2: COMPLETING THE RUBRIC

All relevant staff of the networked agencies complete an online survey.

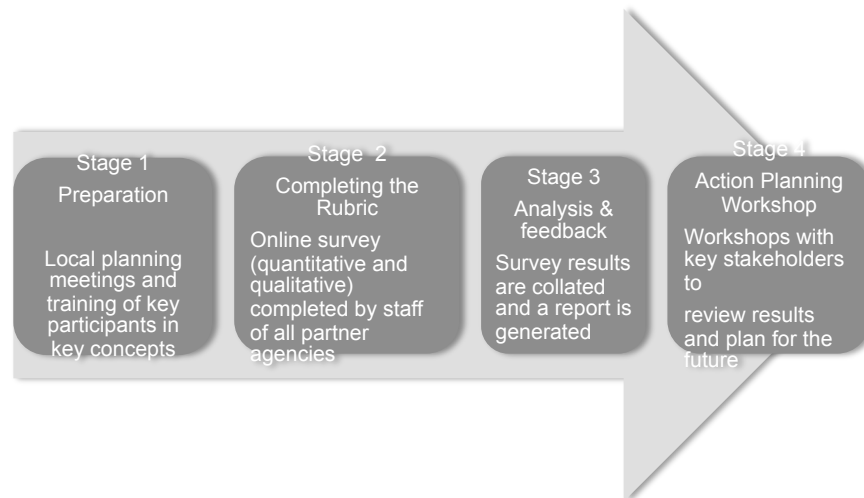
STAGE 3: ANALYSIS AND FEEDBACK

Survey results are collated and a report, including graphs, is generated, presented to Network leaders and (in consultation with Network leaders) disseminated more widely.

STAGE 4: ACTION PLANNING WORKSHOP

In conjunction with Network leaders a workshop is conducted with key stakeholders to review the survey results and plan for the future.

Figure 7: Implementing the Rubric – A Four Staged Process



At critical points we use a web-based survey, derived from the Rubric, to provide organisations with a clear understanding of the current status of their collaborations and what is possible to achieve in the future. The outcomes of the survey form the basis of a series of structured workshops, in which organisations review their aspirations and commitment to their partnerships and their capacity to deliver on these.

The structured workshops enable Networks to:

- identify their readiness to collaborate
- identify key areas in which they need to act to support their collaboration and avoid common pitfalls which undermine collaborative efforts
- engage all levels of their organisations in the development of effective partnerships

In this way the use of the rubric builds a comprehensive plan of action over the next 3 months, 6 months and 12 months, which will drive the development of productive partnerships.

Partners working at different levels within organisations can also complete the Rubric. For example it can be used by those at the highest level (executives or board members); at senior and middle management levels and by front line staff, who are making partnerships work in practice every day.

The Rubric provides an analysis of what is happening in the Network and also generates a series of graphs which will show clearly the strengths of the Network and the areas that need attention.

Collaboration does not just happen, no matter how committed organisations are to achieving it. Effective partnerships must be planned for and managed over time. Organisations need to know where they are going, how they will implement change and always be conscious of the impact they will have for their clients.

The Collaboration Rubric has been developed to provide organizations with a method for putting aspirations into practice

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