



Lessons from seven forces' collaborations

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The research study



- Research funded by NETIC in collaboration with N8 Policing Research Partnership.
- Conducted interviews with 17 participants.
- Every participant involved in some form of inter-force collaboration.
- Participants included police officers, police staff and PCC staff.
- Participants drawn from across seven forces in the North East region.



Inhibitors of collaboration

- Police organisational cultures
- Parochialism and protectionism
- Politics and risk-aversion
- Governance
- Practicalities and logistics



Police organisational cultures

- Internal force cultures and regional identities may act as blockers for new collaborative proposals.
- Force cultures may manifest themselves on an individual basis
 - Individual officers and staff resistant to change.
 - The “*we don’t do it that way here*” mentality.
- Cultural barriers notoriously difficult to overcome.
 - “*We change processes, we don’t change culture. The culture then covertly undermines that change and it’s a self-fulfilling prophecy.*”



Parochialism and protectionism

- Perceived imbalance of big force/small force collaborations.
- Big forces described as “*black holes*” for resources when collaborating with smaller forces.
 - “*You get sucked into it and you lose your local identity*”
- Whether true in practice or not, perception and reputation appears to undermine proposed collaborations.



Politics and risk-aversion

- For some PCCs and CCs, collaboration may be seen as *“turkeys voting for Christmas”*.
- Short-term re-election cycles of PCCs may clash with longer term exigencies of collaborative units.
- Senior leadership can – at times – act as a blocker for collaboration if benefits aren’t immediately clear or appear to be competing with local imperatives.



Governance

- Unclear governance mechanisms undermine collaborative units.
- Who should heads of collaborative units be accountable to?
 - And what are the implications here?
- Governance often cited as one of the last factors to be considered in designing a new collaboration, leading to problems.
 - *“You need to build the foundations of the house before you put the roof on.”*



Practicalities and logistics

- Range of practical obstacles repeatedly impede collaborative units.
- ICT and lack of inter-operability
 - *“A perennial problem with no end in sight”.*
- Variances in officers’ terms and conditions
 - *“Undermining collaborative teams from day one”.*
- Geography – an unavoidable problem or an example of realising limitations of collaboration?



Discussion

- Do you recognise the inhibitors identified here?
- How might these obstacles be overcome?
- Are some obstacles unavoidable?



Facilitators of collaboration



- Trust, confidence and credibility
- Brave and visionary leadership
- Time, pace and patience
- Beyond consultation, towards co-production
- Champions and brokers



Trust, confidence and credibility

- Building trust and confidence by celebrating existing successes.
 - The “*seeing is believing*” approach.
- Communicating successful collaborations more effectively.
- Narrative of success must change and success needs to be recognised when and where we see it.
 - So-called “*gold standard*” (however this is defined) is not the only measure of success.



Brave and visionary leadership

- Senior leadership can (and does) push through collaborative proposals and overcomes many of the obstacles discussed.
- But this necessitates vision and ‘bravery’.
 - Resilience against negative reactions and reticent staff.
- Leadership backing for collaboration must be present at every stage – design, funding, implementation, review, etc.
 - *“The message has got to come from the top to say that we are open and we are going to be working together”*

Time, pace and patience

- Collaborations take time to bear fruit.
 - Intended outcomes of collaborations may take months/years to emerge.
- Expecting immediate results can undermine the development of new units.
 - New collaborations are “*evolution, not revolution*”.
 - Forcing the pace can unravel valuable preparatory work.
- Appropriate time and patience must be afforded for new collaborations to evolve organically.



Beyond consultation, towards co-production

- Consulting with staff during the design stages of any transformative change is a fundamental process.
- But designing new collaborations can go further and should involve staff in co-production.
 - Speaking *with* staff, rather than *to* staff.
- Co-production engenders buy-in from the start.
 - Taps into wealth of knowledge, skills and experiences of officers and civilian staff.



Champions and brokers

- At the heart of successful collaborative units are champions/brokers who believe in the values of collaboration.
- Leading a collaborative unit is a challenging, demanding, complex endeavour.
 - A ‘one size fits all’ approach to appointing collaborative heads of units is not appropriate.
- A certain rank is not necessarily an indicator of suitability to lead a collaborative unit.
 - Recruitment needs to place greater emphasis on finding *“the right people for the right places”*.

Discussion

- Do you agree with the identified facilitators?
- Would these facilitators have helped to improve collaborations you have been involved with in the past?
- Are there other, more pressing, facilitators that haven't been mentioned?
- Can you identify practical ways in which to implement these enablers into your working practices?



Closing remarks

- When collaboration works, the value and benefits are widely acknowledged.
- Collaboration appears to be an unavoidable reality in contemporary socio-economic context of policing.
- But multiple obstacles limit the successes of collaborative units.
 - Can these be reduced or avoided altogether?
- How can we best maximise the facilitators to collaboration?



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