COLLABORATIVE GAIN RESEARCH STUDY

Report for the Improvement Service

AMEY

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In May 2008, the Improvement Service commissioned Amey to undertake an 'action research' study that aimed to examine and further develop the concept of 'Collaborative Gain' in community planning (and other) partnerships. Three Councils (Aberdeen City, Inverclyde and West Lothian) agreed to participate in the study, with a variety of partnerships, programmes or projects in each area offered as examples. In addition to the case studies, a literature review was undertaken, examining what was being written about 'collaborative gain' and drawing upon best practice within the public and private sectors.

Together, the two approaches allowed for the identification of a number of general principles exemplified in the design and implementation of a successful Collaborative Gain method. This included drawing out the specific and unique drivers of success, whilst also highlighting the main impediments to an approach of this type.

Defining Collaborative Gain

The Improvement Service has defined Collaborative Gain as:-

> **"a situation where partnership working brings about 'added value' benefits, which would not have been achieved by the individual partner organisations operating on their own *('More than the sum of the parts')*. These benefits might include, for example, enhanced outcomes for service users / communities or efficiency gains for the partners themselves."**

Such collaboration may be a one-off event, time limited, task-limited, or continuing. It may include sharing information and knowledge, preparing plans and strategies, co-ordinating operational activity, solving problems or developing opportunities.

In contrast, if all that is achieved by partnership working is simply to aggregate what would have been achieved via the individual partners' activities, then there is no Collaborative Gain. Indeed, in such situations, there is actually likely to be negative value, due to the costs involved in collaboration. *(e.g. the opportunity cost of staff time tied up in partner meetings, which might otherwise have been directed to service delivery).*

Collaborative Gain is evidenced when a suitable mechanism for agency collaboration can support an identified and agreed objective. As noted, dependent on the objective, this may be a one-off alliance of effort which is either time limited or task limited or a continuing programme of action.

Typically, Collaborative Gain working:-

- Emphasises a specific achievable task, rather than covering generic partnership mission statements;
- Promotes a high trust, positive task-focused environment, supported by strong communication and high quality working relationships;
- Identifies and engages with the most relevant stakeholders as key contributors, often to the exclusion of secondary organisations who, within a more traditional partnership model, might remain as passive agents;
- Accesses the resources required in order that the task can be achieved;
- Ensures the integration and validity of the task as an intrinsic part of the stakeholders' strategic and operational interests (achieving synergy through interdependence and self interest);
- Develops a strong leadership, direction and governance structure;
- Develops a clear and accountable system of performance managements;
- Expires when its original purpose is achieved (or is no longer relevant); and

- Is clear where no gain through collaboration occurs.

Benefits Deriving from a 'Collaborative Gain' Approach

Collaborative Gain focuses on partnership working that delivers 'added value' for a specified stakeholder(s) in accordance with an agreed partnership objective. Put simply, it facilitates a common focus, encourages flexibility and innovation and can support greater progress towards common objectives.

Examples of where 'added value' can occur via collaborative working might include some or all of the following:-

- 'economy of scale' benefits;
- 'critical mass' being achieved via a greater scale of operation *(e.g. providing services otherwise unviable through existing structures)* – for example, with a view to increasing accessibility / market penetration;
- the achievement of enhanced outcomes for service users / communities (qualitative and/or quantitative);
- improved measures of quality and effectiveness; and
- enhanced partnership communication and improved inter-organisational understanding.
- other efficiency gains;

Much of this is necessarily premised upon 'de-cluttering of the partnership landscape' and by clarifying what partners will deliver, both separately and collectively.

Case Study Key Features

All of the case studies reviewed in the study were able to provide examples of partnership working that involved collaborative activities. Most asserted collaborative benefits in terms of greater/faster progress in realising objectives,

service enhancement and or efficiency, although in most instances the 'gain' itself was difficult to quantify or identify as a tangible asset.

Across the case study projects reviewed, we found successful collaborative gain projects to be based on the undernoted key characteristics:-

Clarity of Purpose

- A clear and agreed vision, directed through local, regional and national policy frameworks, reflecting public needs and expectations;
- Across the partnership, a strong awareness of remit, potential contribution, key personnel, decision makers, the policy context and the internal and external operational environment; and
- Clear and agreed terms of engagement and project objectives.

Clarity of Leadership, Governance and Performance Management:

- Strong, effective leadership, with clear lines of accountability/reporting - programmes/projects were clearly led / co-ordinated by one named individual/ organisation;
- Sound governance structures underpinned by the presence and influence of senior officers (elected members);
- Appropriate levels of representation present at programme/project meetings in order to aid effective and timely decision-making;
- Defined performance management arrangements at the outset (including clear targets and timescales – ideally, with potential efficiencies and business benefits identified at the outset.); and
- Ongoing review and refinement of structures to ensure they continued to be 'fit for purpose'.

Evidence-based and client-focused approach

- A clear understanding of the evidence base used to support actions; and
- Recognition of the importance in engaging with client groups around the quality and level of services to be provided.

Capacity to translate strategy into action

- A clear strategic vision, practically translated into effective action plans;
- A 'bias towards action' in delivering on partnership objectives;
- High levels of trust evident amongst partner organisations;
- Resource sharing within a programme/project inducing an increased sense of collective ownership to the overall partnership and the achievement of a 'critical mass'; and
- A flexibility of approach, supporting a timely response to changing client needs and expectations.

Literature Review Key Findings

The characteristics set out above and drawn from the cases studies, broadly reflect the key features of 'Collaborative Gain' that were identified in a review of the literature around the concept. The key themes identified in the literature review included:-

- The need for a clear vision, positive leadership and strong governance structures;
- The need to de-clutter the partnership landscape, clarifying partner contributions, including both those made individually and those made collectively;
- The exploitation of common objectives and high inter-agency trust, based upon good communication and mutual understanding;
- The management of risk and encouragement of 'prescriptive enablers' in partnership effort;
- The opportunities for creative solutions offered by this approach; and
- The most effective and efficient use of resources.

Measuring Collaborative Gain

Whilst partners in the case studies typically found it difficult to readily measure tangible Collaborative Gain in a quantifiable sense, all of them could identify processes, outputs and outcomes supporting their belief that gain has been realised via a partnership approach. In effect, partners had a broad sense of whether the partnership working they were involved in was worthwhile and 'adding value'.

The question is raised, however, as to how much effort ought to be applied in seeking to articulate / quantify the added value of partnership working. On the one hand, measuring the value added through a partnership approach ought to provide a useful focus both for ensuring and for demonstrating that the partnership approach is working and is worthwhile. On the other hand, in an era where there is a general desire to reduce reporting burdens, there is a concern that tying too much resource up

in seeking to measure partnership added value will detract from spending resources on actually enhancing service delivery.

From the case studies, it also became clear that there was a view that many of the collaborative gain benefits simply could not be readily quantified, partly because the benefits realised were sometimes seen to be largely qualitative in nature.

Clearly, there is a balance to be struck to ensure that assessment of partnership working is robust and open to scrutiny, whilst also being proportionate. This is an area where further development work is required. Undoubtedly, however, part of the solution to addressing this issue is likely to lie in the further development of partnership self-assessment techniques. These typically guide partners to critically review their working arrangements and to seek continuous improvement.

Critical Success Factors for Collaborative Gain

Progress in promoting the concept of Collaborative Gain will be assisted by a number of critical success factors identified through this review process. These are presented by way of study conclusions.

- **A solid partnership platform with commonly agreed aims and understanding has to be in place.** Case study participants perceive that, on some occasions, decisions are made to work 'in partnership' without ensuring that the conditions / environment are conducive to effective partnership working. Where this occurs, collaborative benefits will be hard to realise

- **The need to identify tangible progress outcomes at the earliest stage.** Many of the case study programmes/projects pre-date any widespread understanding of Collaborative Gain, so distinct quantifiable measures were not typically built in at the outset. Partners across the case studies found it easier to relate to the 'tangible' activities and outcomes as a means of seeking to illustrate the concept of Collaborative Gain.

- **Recognition that 'Collaborative Gain' is not always explicitly measurable.** In reality, the notion is easier to conceptualise than it is to measure. To quantify Collaborative Gain, it is almost necessary to specify a target to be delivered when working in isolation, then a further, extended, target to be delivered when working together. This process typically did not happen, and it is questionable whether such practices would be practical. It may, for example, be more likely that the concept of Collaborative Gain would be used to design specific collaborative activities, and that monitoring would focus on fulfilment of those collaborative activities and the benefits/impact that have accrued. Gain might then be measured in terms of further or faster progress in attaining objectives against the pre-partnership performance trends. Overall, however, further development work in seeking to develop useful collaborative gain indicators and assessment methodologies is likely to be useful.

- **Ongoing monitoring, proactive refinement and partnership improvement must be informed by quality data.** There are two 'places' within a partnership where Collaborative Gain needs to be monitored. Firstly, at the *strategic level* within each partnership, looking at a high level at additional impact and the effectiveness of/compliance with the collaborative activities designed to support that impact. Secondly, at the programme or project level, with the key messages about the effectiveness of collaborative working on that programme/project being monitored and used to re-emphasise or - if necessary - refine the collaborative activities. In an era where there is a significant shift underway to focus on outcomes achieved by the public sector, it would be reasonable to expect that collaborative gain should focus on enhancing outcomes for service users / communities. Equally, it would seem reasonable that any proportionate measurement of collaborative gain should focus principally on what difference partnership working is making to outcomes.

- **'Buy-in' to the principles of Collaborative Gain must be at both the managerial and operational levels.** Where collaboration is seen to fail, it is typically seen to be through a lack of strategic direction from senior officers and the development of agreed aims and objectives for the partnership. This can occur

despite willingness from all partners at the operational level to work together. Equally, operational level collaboration can be frustrated by lack of senior level, strategic buy-in.

- **There are obvious opportunities to pursue the Collaborative Gain concept**. The principles of 'Collaborative Gain' rest at the heart of the community planning process. Community Planning in Scotland has recently been given added impetus with the focus on Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs). It is becoming apparent that a number of Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) are viewing the SOAs as a catalyst for taking partnership working to a higher level. It is likely that a number of factors will be required in seeking to optimise the partnership added value of SOAs. Key to this is likely to be clarity of vision and leadership in realising the potential of partnership working. Early CPP discussions will undoubtedly be helpful in understanding where partnership approaches might have the greatest impact or where, for example, long-standing challenges within particular areas might be better tackled via a range of partners working together to generate creative solutions, rather than via a traditional, single agency approach.

  In addition to the increased interest in collaborative working brought about by the SOAs, it is understood that Audit Scotland is considering an increased emphasis being given to partnership working through 'Best Value 2' (BV2) *(due for consultation / publication in early 2009)*. Again, should partnership working feature in the final version of the BV2 guidance, it is likely that this too will serve to further promote interest in collaborative gain within CPPs.

- **The need to develop further guidance and related measures of encouragement supporting the adoption of a Collaborative Gain method, where appropriate.** The Concordat between the Scottish Government and CoSLA sets out the terms of a new relationship between Scotland's local authorities and the Scottish Government. Central to this is the development of the Single Outcome Agreements, referred to above. The Concordat and SOA approach present an opportunity to rethink many of the structural patterns which have dominated approaches to local community planning. The shift also places

greater emphasis on the role of councils and other public agencies in interpreting local demand, determining local priorities and designing services accordingly. As indicated, there is scope to examine the key messages in this report about how Collaborative Gain can be realised and build these into the refined SOAs and the structural arrangements that drive and manage their delivery. This, of course, should not rely on any additional resources; rather it should be viewed as an opportunity to make existing resources work more effectively.

INTRODUCTION

The Improvement Service (IS) commissioned this review as an 'action research' study that aimed to examine and further develop the concept of 'Collaborative Gain' in Community Planning (and other) partnerships.

In its project brief, The Improvement Service set out the rationale for this project being commissioned:

> *"The broad context for this study includes a general increase in inter-agency partnership working, which has been taking place for many years across the public sector. In particular, the recent advent of Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) – which will apply to all Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) from 2009/10 onwards – is providing further impetus for increased levels of partnership working. It is intended that the outputs of this study will be of practical assistance to Councils and their partners in seeking to optimise the 'added value' outcomes that can accrue to the beneficiaries of public services as a result of effective partnership working.*

Three Councils agreed to participate in the project, each offering areas for review including formal partnerships established around community safety, employability, community health and care; semi-structured partnerships relating to tackling the effects of alcohol abuse and shared accommodation; and informal arrangements for performance management across a community planning partnership. There was some degree of overlap in the areas examined in each of the three participating councils.

Areas were selected to help determine whether Collaborative Gain was greater in more formal arrangements, whether the extent of Collaborative Gain varied in similar types of partnership between different geographical areas, and whether the principles and practice of Collaborative Gain were delivered across different types of projects and programmes.

This report sets out the findings from both a review of existing literature on Collaborative Gain and the case studies. The key messages from the individual case studies are attached in the appendix, grouped together for each of the three participating councils.

CONTEXT

Single Outcome Agreements and Community Planning

The Concordat between the Scottish Government and CoSLA sets out the terms of a new relationship between Scotland's local authorities and the Scottish Government. Central to this is the development of a Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) for each Council (*and for each Community Planning Partnership by 2009/10*). Each SOA will set out how Council/CPPs will deliver a series of local outcomes, having considered local priorities within the context of the Scottish Government's 15 key national outcomes.

The Concordat and SOA approach present an opportunity to rethink many of the structural patterns which have dominated approaches to local Community Planning. While strengthening local autonomy and accountability, the SOAs also place greater emphasis on the role of councils and other public agencies in interpreting local demand, determining local priorities and designing services accordingly.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that Community Planning often focuses upon establishing and maintaining structures and processes, rather than driving and supporting progress towards shared *outcomes*. Concerns have been expressed about the effectiveness and efficiency of partnership working within some CPPs. In other quarters, there is uncertainty as to whether the benefits that have been accrued as a result of working together in partnership have offset the direct and indirect costs of managing partnership bureaucracy. Concerns have also been expressed about accountability and ownership. Furthermore, the role of the service beneficiary (or end user) may benefit from greater consideration within a more efficient structure. This is noted as an underdeveloped aspect of Community Planning in the current structures (Audit Scotland 2006).

There is increasingly recognised to be an intrinsic value in engaging with the community sector to influence the design of services. This is the end user who has the final say whether these services are suitable. Maguire and Trustcott (2006) argue that finding some way to build this into a Collaborative Gain approach may introduce

an additional layer of quality and influence, leading to the further refinement and improvement of services.

Collaborative Gain and General Partnership Working

It is not our intention to look exhaustively at the notion of partnership working in general. However, the literature does point to some important partnership issues of relevance in understanding why the use of Collaborative Gain may have been limited to date; and how it might be improved in the future.

In the public sector, partnership working has become almost an instinctive management reaction to a given issue, where co-operative effort is assumed to offer superior insight, service efficacy and efficiency. In some instances, partnering may be driven by a 'need to be seen to partner' rather than by a firm business case. This is backed up by much of the academic literature on partnership working. Miller and Ahmed (2000) point out that that partnership is often expressed as a requirement, irrespective of whether the necessary support measures are in place to allow the partnership to function effectively in delivering its aims and objectives. In many cases, the organisation of staff and resources are designed around the partnership principle, with the structures that these support assumed capable of addressing the full spectrum of operational and managerial issues generated. Here there is a temptation to build structures in anticipation of issues, wait for these to arise and then deal with them. The structures governing these partnerships are often developed as abstract models, which aspire to ideals unattainable in a real operational setting. Consequently, participation in such models can be a frustrating and dissatisfying experience.

In such scenarios, partnerships are often formed in response to external drivers and the *potential* contribution that they might make, rather than through a clearly identified and agreed need; collecting partners together in the hope their combined core services can produce solutions. Experience suggests that organising, co-ordinating and supporting such partnership structures can, on occasion, become the main focus of the work programme, with the intended benefit of integrated service becoming secondary. The partnership begins to focus in its own dynamic; where the

sustainment of the partnership becomes an end in itself, draining the resources and enthusiasm of its members.

Agency collaboration around a central outcome (not a structure) will help define and focus specific agency actions, complementing and balancing related effort. Here a clear action focus is identified, and grounded through a negotiated agreement, producing a tight operational focus built on a strong platform of professional expertise, individual trust and inter-agency co-operation. This might entail partners adapting working practices, re-assigning resources, acting as a lead agent, conceding control, sharing power, testing organisational boundaries and manipulating resources to reflect the characteristics of the outcome to be delivered.

Much of the literature suggests that collaborative working is a valuable and realistic alternative to a more traditional partnership approach; where a more nimble, flexible, collegial agency structure combines in recognition of the complex causes of enduring issues. The outcomes from such approaches will produce more than any combination of individual agency effort; adding value but also developing efficiencies, working relationships, institutional understanding and innovative practice.

Key to the success of this is in identifying where this may be best applied (it will not be suitable for all situations) and ensuring that the key drivers of sound governance, agency motivation and performance direction are established, understood and agreed by all. These issues are explored in some further detail in the study literature review (appendix 1).

Main Features

The following section outlines some of the main features of Collaborative Gain identified and suggests how this principle can be adopted within emerging partnership structures and developed within a performance management framework. Drawing on the key messages from the literature, Figure 1 (below) models how Collaborative Gain contributes to outcomes as part of an outcome-focused planning approach (using a logic modeling framework). The model aims to mirror the thinking behind the

development of outcome agreements, with inputs, activities and outputs leading to short, medium and long term outcomes.

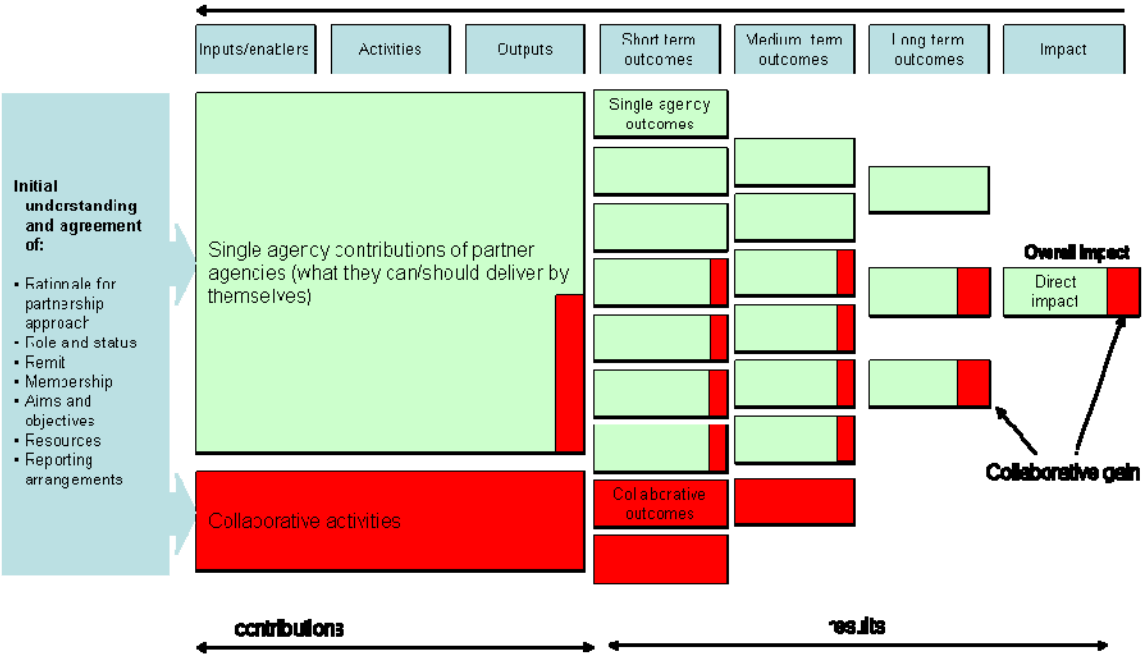
At the highest level, the notion is that the delivery of outcomes will be dependent on contributions (inputs, activities and/or outputs) from a range of partner agencies. The model illustrates these contributions on the left hand-side; showing the short term (interim), medium term (intermediate) and longer term (ultimate) outcomes on the right hand side. Note that the far left hand-side box simply illustrates the initial understanding and agreement of the focus and status of the partnership as a whole.

Looking at the left hand side first, each partner will make a contribution in their own right (shown in the green box). This reflects what partners would contribute if working in isolation from each other. The red box represents the collaborative activities undertaken in the partnership context. Note that these collaborative activities also impact to an extent on the direct contributions of each partner (through wider perspectives, additional intelligence, additional resources and complementary/ supplementary activities).

The right hand side of the diagram illustrates the single agency contribution (in green), and the Collaborative Gain that results from working together (in red). There will be some outcomes where collaborative working will have little or no direct impact (those where there is solely a green box). Similarly, there will be some collaborative activities that have collaborative outcomes (such as more effective partner liaison, enhanced mutual awareness/ understanding, and increased trust (those where there is solely a red box), where the tangible impact on wider outcomes will be difficult to measure.

In essence, the dual red/green boxes illustrate that collaborative working will allow more to be achieved than would have been the case if each partner was working in isolation. This can be measured as the Collaborative Gain. In the immediate term, this may include better targeting of key groups, higher levels of service uptake, increased frequency of services, or increased depth of provision. The intermediate and ultimate outcomes reflect the accruing benefit of these immediate outcomes.

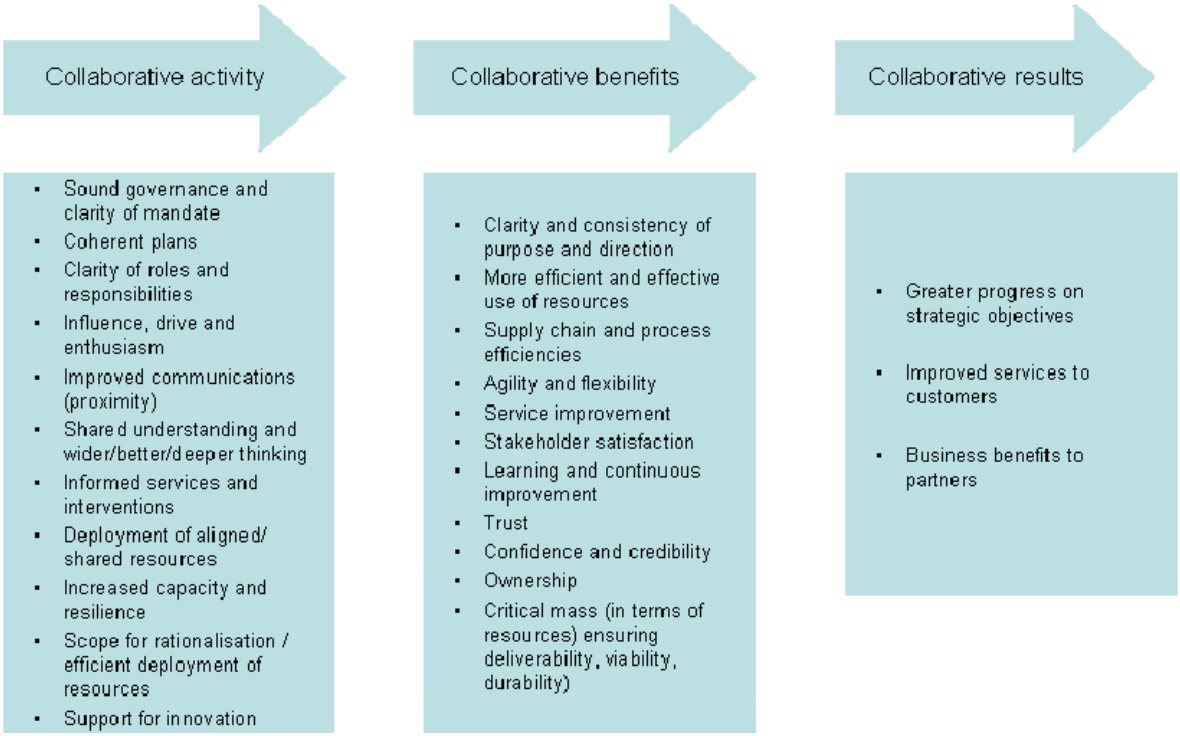
Figure 1: Illustrating Collaborative Gain in an outcome model



A key issue for any partnership is whether it can make greater progress in achieving the desired outcomes by investing in collaborative working, rather than through additional investment in individual partner agency services. Put simply, allocating expenditure to joint diagnosis, joint marketing and promotion, or integrated planning of interventions may achieve more than employing additional front-line staff to reinforce single agency delivery.

Figure 2 (below) sets out our interpretation of how tangible collaborative activities will help to generate collaborative benefits; and how these, in turn, result in measurable collaborative results. The activities and benefits are relatively self-explanatory. Many are mutually reinforcing/self-perpetuating. Note that each one encompasses the notion of joint working (e.g. the reference to sound governance under activities implies sound governance *across* a shared agenda and a breadth of partner contributions, rather than solely sound governance by each individual partner of their own particular responsibilities).

Figure 2: Designing and delivering Collaborative Gain



The collaborative results are three fold:-

- First, collaboration should allow the partnership to make greater progress in achieving its strategic objectives;
- Second, it should further improve the services being delivered to the end user;
- Finally, it should free-up resources for re-investment in activities/services or for re-allocation elsewhere within the Partnership.

Collaborative Gain in the Context of Regeneration

The concept of Collaborative Gain applies especially well to the context of regeneration where the complexity, depth and range of organisational action can often make it difficult to see how all of this combines towards collective achievement. This has been a criticism of several past major initiatives where:

- Integrated working has happened in an ad hoc manner;
- Mainstreaming of effective practice has been made difficult by a complex operational, funding and political environment;
- Small numerous partnerships distract, overlap, conflict and duplicate effort;
- Additional effect and practice improvement has been weak;
- Sustainability has been underdeveloped;
- Transfer of learning is weak;
- Instability of service is common; and
- Short-termism prevails.

  (NRU 2002)

In Scotland, this is reported as a confusing complexity of different community-based activities, producing significant inefficiencies (Audit Scotland 2006). The proliferation of area-based initiatives and the potential to integrate these within a stronger planning framework presents an opportunity to introduce a Collaborative Gain approach.

Hemphill *et al.* (2006) point to the use of such a model in urban regeneration, suggesting its features to be ideally suited to addressing complex, localised problems. Its ability to build capacity at the strategic, operational, governance, practice and community levels provides a direct mechanism for service delivery, as well as assisting the development of collaborative working cultures based on mutual interest and supported by strong personal and professional relationships (Apostolakis 2004).

COLLABORATIVE GAIN IN ACTION

The case study experiences, alongside the analysis of current literature, identified a number of essential preconditions that provide a framework for the analysis of the programmes/projects covered in each of the case studies.

They include:

- **Clarity of purpose for the partnership;**
- **Clarity of leadership, governance and performance management;**
- **An evidence-based and client-focused approach; and**
- **Translating the strategy into action.**

This framework allows us clearly to identify where there are practical examples of Collaborative Gain and how this has been achieved (or otherwise).

Clarity of Purpose for the Partnership

Ensuring agreement on shared objectives is viewed as a fundamental building block in enabling partnerships to realise Collaborative Gain. Having clear and agreed terms of engagement and project objectives was seen to be of critical importance. Successful partnerships typically had a clear and agreed vision, directed through local, regional and national policy frameworks, and reflecting public needs and expectations. In short, this aspect emphasised the importance of partnerships assessing the internal and external operational environment. Thus, in each of the case studies, a good understanding of the partnerships (and programmes/projects) that were in place required a sound appreciation of each partner organisation, the client group to whom services are being delivered, and/or the particular issue being addressed.

From the outset, to create the right conditions for Collaborative Gain, each partner should be aware of:

- the remit of each organisation (in its own right);

- the breadth of resources (staff, time, budget) that each organisation was *able/ willing* to input to the partnership;
- the breadth of resources that each organisation was *unable/ unwilling* to deliver to the programme/project;
- the personnel in each organisation who are the main contacts for the programme/project and the scope of their delegated decision-making powers within their respective organisations; and
- the policy context – including the breadth of *key* challenges and opportunities - internally and externally, locally and nationally.

Appreciation of these issues led to improved communications amongst partners at various levels through formal opportunities for joint working (information sharing, joint diagnosis, and integrated planning, promotion, delivery and performance management). There was also a greater clarity of purpose, mutual understanding, and inter-dependency in contribution across partnerships. Better communications led to closer operational working on programmes/projects and ongoing responsibilities – supported by good information sharing, more integrated planning, monitoring and evaluation, stronger mutual awareness/ understanding, and shared learning.

Programme/project objectives were agreed by all partners – this typically developed as a result of existing firm partnership commitments, high profile, nationally driven agendas - example (a) or common pressures on a number of partners at a local level - example (b):

a) In the development of a working group established to address the 'More Choices, More Chances' agenda, nationally agreed objectives (and funding*) allowed partners the flexibility to adapt their input to more effectively address the needs and expectations of the client group. Furthermore, partners were of the opinion that being able to deliver services in an integrated manner to clients is perceived to be far more effective than each partner working in isolation, thus leading to a more coherent and coordinated approach. (*It is recognised that additional

funding can be a useful pump-primer to facilitate partnership working. However, it is equally recognised that committed partners ought to be able to find scope for collaborative gain without the need for this. Indeed, if collaborative activity is solely dependent upon additional funding, it offers a fairly limited model of sustainable working.

b) The development and construction of a new civic centre by three main partners; Council, Police and Scottish Courts, acknowledged each partner organisation's need to construct new office accommodation and led to a shared objective of co-location, with the aim of developing closer working relationships; thereby realising direct and tangible business (financial) benefits to all partners and potential benefits to service users via streamlined integration of services.

Clarity of Leadership, Governance and Performance Management

Our analysis of the case studies and the literature review highlighted the importance of leadership, governance and performance management.

- Drive and enthusiasm within partnerships is aided by ***strong leadership***, clarity on roles and responsibilities and the comprehensive involvement of key partners from the outset. The drive is harnessed and channelled through the integrated strategies and plans, and perpetuated/enhanced by the 'influence' described below. Enthusiasm is more easily maintained by reduced fragmentation in planning and delivery, by the streamlining of associated bureaucracy, and by perceptions/reality of progress and impact.

- ***There were clear lines of reporting and governance***. As a key collaborative activity, this was evident through the use of existing reporting mechanisms, either through the Council or Community Planning structures, as well as through 'steering' groups established to develop and drive a specific programme or project. In essence, these arrangements aimed to ensure comprehensiveness and cohesiveness of perspective,

inputs and performance management. They also aimed to ensure coherent and informed deployment of finite resources in delivering the agreed outcomes for a particular programme/project.

- ***Sound governance structures were underpinned by the presence (and influence) of senior officers and elected members who were able to set the overall strategic direction of the Partnership***. This adds credibility and profile, and facilitates and develops a culture of collaborative working that has been fed down to programme/project specific groups. To work effectively, consistency and continuity in representation are clearly crucial, with mutual understanding and trust developing as the partnership moves forward. The collaborative approach also helps to ensure appropriate repetition of messages and interventions, embedding understanding and behaviours. In addition, influence can typically be exerted horizontally and vertically to a wider range of stakeholders than can be reached through a single agency approach.

- ***Partner organisations were sufficiently and appropriately represented at programme/project meetings***. It is apparent that Collaborative Gain is more evident in programmes/projects where partners ensure that the right people attend the right meetings, allowing for better informed perspectives, streamlined decision-making, demonstrating commitment and trust. This may include those participating having appropriate delegated authority in terms of finance, other resource commitments and in their ability to make decisions regarding policy development / implementation. Programmes/projects are limited in their ability to deliver services where the officers who attend meetings do not have sufficient decision-making powers to enable the programme/project to proceed. This was highlighted through the following example:

> *"….the level of representation sent by each partner – i.e. the people coming to the sub-group meetings may not have sufficient knowledge, experience or indeed management responsibility to be able to make effective decisions and push the agenda forward…"*

- ***Ownership and accountability*** were acknowledged as being key to achieving Collaborative Gain. Feedback from across all case studies highlighted that where different organisations work together; there is a need for common culture and ownership of process(es) at the point of delivery, as well as at the strategic level. This helps to ensure that there is clarity of responsibility for driving effective joint working; dedicated resources are in place to deliver the programme/project, and that action plans are both deliverable and subsequently delivered. Partnerships should adapt to circumstances by continuing to review current structures / service delivery mechanisms to ensure their appropriateness in continuing to deliver specific programmes/projects.

- ***Programmes/projects were led / coordinated by one person / organisation, i.e. there are clear accountability mechanisms***. This level of accountability appears to improve the ability of the partnership to bring a degree of focus to a programme/project and allows partners to concentrate on what their contribution should be and when. It also facilitates improved reporting within existing governance structures by creating one point of contact. This is in contrast to programmes/projects where partners come together based on a notion of benefits of joint working, without any clarity of the specific benefits that can be accrued and who will lead or deliver each one.

- ***Resource sharing within a programme/project brought an increased sense of ownership to the overall partnership***. Where programmes/projects involved partners sharing resources, or contributing financially or otherwise (either through aligned

budgets or shared contributions to a particular initiative), analysis of feedback from the case studies identified that ownership and accountability increased, with both direct and knock-on collaborative benefits accruing as a result. Often, however, getting this resource sharing to actually happen in a mature and enlightened manner is one of the key challenges within partnership working.

- ***Collaborative Gain was also sustained where governance structures/arrangements adapted*** as programmes/projects moved from planning, through delivery, to completion. For example, the role played by groups (with a responsibility for governance / management of a project) evolved from providing strategic direction, decision making and financial governance to more of an evaluative role, with the nature and level of input also evolving accordingly. In essence, partners were able to make better use of their resources / time leading to a better and more efficient use of resources. This is exemplified through the following extract from the case study work.

> *"……..furthermore, as the project has developed, the Board's frequency of meetings has reduced, with meetings now every six months. This decision reflects the progress that the project has made and the need for the Board to now take more of an 'overseeing' type role rather than as a decision making body".*

- ***Performance management arrangements were defined at the outset (including clear targets and timescales)***. Partners are aware how the level and quality of service is monitored and evaluated, thus demonstrating the benefit to clients of collaborative working. This view was common across all the case studies. However in practice, only one of the programmes/projects could point to a comprehensive performance management framework that had been put in place at the *commencement* of the programme/project. Evidence from the literature review suggests that this is likely to be an important dimension in focusing collaborative effort.

- ***Potential efficiencies and 'business' benefits were identified at the outset***. In addition to performance monitoring and evaluation, programmes/projects benefit from being able to articulate and define potential areas for efficiency to each partner organisation. Crucially, this emphasises to partners the benefits accrued from greater collaborative working. The majority of contributors to the case studies were able to articulate what were the perceived benefits of collaborative working in a particular programme/project, but highlighted that this (Collaborative Gain) was hard to measure in financial / performance terms. Despite this general observation, there are instances where this can be realised as a tangible outcome evidencing benefit in financial terms:

> *"….there is evidence that this project (as anticipated) has actually delivered a quantifiable business benefit to partners. It is estimated that the three main partners (Council, Police and Courts), saved around £4.5m to £5m in construction costs by co-locating in the same building and not looking to develop 3 separate new buildings. …"*

- ***Partners continued to review existing structures to ensure they were 'fit for purpose'***. This is particularly evident in partnerships where learning has been fed back into the partnership forum, either as a result of a formal assessment of progress/performance or as a result of lessons having been learned from practice elsewhere. The following extract from the case study work exemplifies this:

> *"….this issue (realising the need to align partners' priorities), and its broader implications is recognised by Partnership managers and was also highlighted in the external review of Community Safety in February 2008. As a result, the Partnership has now appointed a Safe Officer Group to assist the Partnership and help to align the needs and expectations of all partner agencies to achieving the objectives for the Partnership. The review also highlighted other areas for improvement….."*

An Evidence-based and Client-Focused Approach

Successful partnership projects are typically seen to display a strong evidence-based approach, together with recognition of the beneficial role that meaningful community engagement can play in helping to shape expectations regarding the quality and level of services to be provided. Evidence from the case studies highlighted the following issues:

- ***There was a clear understanding of the evidence used to support programmes/projects***. This is the case across all types of programmes/projects, whether they be concerned with a particular client group (such as with 'More Choice, More Chances'), or with entire communities (such as Community Safety). The robustness of the evidence used was cited in each case study as a fundamental building block in developing the credibility of (or mandate for) a programme/project. Drawing upon a robust evidence base also helped to promote a shared understanding and facilitated wider / better / deeper thinking.

- ***Mandates were clear and partners acknowledged the rationale for having the programme/project in the first place***. This was more evident where the programme/project was focused on a specific client group (and their service needs / expectations) or a particularly tangible outcome. This may be an important finding in terms of its implications for the development of SOAs. In such instances, partners had a better understanding of the need to act, and were more able to develop tailored service interventions as a result. This was often the case in instances where programmes/projects were nationally, as well as locally driven, e.g. the development of Community Health Partnerships or the 'More Choices, More Chances' initiative. However, it also occurred where there was clarity and certainty of outcomes at a local level. This could indeed be seen to be a key factor in designing partnership working and in achieving collaborative gain. In essence, partnerships that are designed around the achievement of key outcomes for service users / communities may be more likely to result in genuine collaborative gain. The following example is taken from one of

the case study projects, focusing in on a CPP's response to Korsakoff Psychosis as a symptom of alcohol abuse.

> *"…… has the highest incidence of "Korsakoffs" in Europe, and this statistic has provided a clear mandate for those involved in the project to progress. This mandate has developed a shared understanding of the need to address the problem across all relevant agencies*
>
> *……at the outset, there was also a great deal of work done into research on Korsakoffs, where the services provided to clients have been seen to work. This research led people to look at work being done in Australia for areas of best practice, and there was agreement that the Smith-Hillman model of care was the paradigm that determined the overall approach. This ensured that agencies had a sound theoretical foundation on which to base their innovative service solution, highlighting where they need to work together, which, in turn, has led to a tailored service intervention for each client, based on sound information".*

- ***Collaborative working allows for a breadth of professional and theoretical perspectives*** on common challenges, wider sources and interpretation of evidence, and an increased capacity and resilience for policy planning and evaluation. Better informed service interventions can be tailored from this shared understanding and the enhanced thinking. These will be agreed and perpetuated through the joint governance arrangements and driven/supported by coherent plans. This is exemplified by the following case study example, which highlights how effective use of evidence also assists partners in identifying where their input would be most effective:

> *"….with regard to communications and information sharing, the CHCP's JPIAF Return states that 'a shared information system has been established for all client groups (Adults, Older People, Children and Families). The new system for children (C-Me) involving West Lothian Council, NHS Lothian, Lothian and Borders Police and the Scottish Children's Reporter Administration, is a good example of agencies working together to create a clear picture of a child's needs through sharing relevant background information and improving the delivery of services to children……".*

It is equally recognised, however, that tensions in partnership working may arise as a result of differing professional perspectives. This has indeed been evidenced in other

studies, although it did not particularly feature as an issue in the case studies reviewed for this work. Nevertheless, tensions in partnership working arising from differing professional perspectives may well be another factor that requires thoughtful consideration in designing and managing for collaborative gain.

- ***There was recognition of the importance in engaging with client groups around the quality and level of services to be provided***. This allows the partnership to foster a better understanding of client need (highlighted as a key collaborative activity in the 'background' section) and tailor/refine their response as a result. For example, in the CHCP at West Lothian, the work with the Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum – supplemented by feedback from stakeholder / user surveys in many areas - has allowed the CHCP (with its partners) to build on what they know (or think they know) about their clients and be able to tailor services accordingly. This also allows them to prioritise service delivery. Such an approach allowed partners to target resources and clearly define their service contributions, enhancing impact and efficiency. This is evident both at an area wide level and through local planning, e.g. area wide customer surveys as well as locality-based focus groups. Again, the point is made that having a clear focus on the needs of service users / communities, can be very helpful for clarifying collaborative gain potential.

- ***Close working relationships with clients, developed at a neighbourhood / locality level, has allowed partners to develop a better understanding of the cultures and priorities*** of each others' organisation and their respective contribution to addressing local circumstances. This, in turn, assists in promoting trust, confidence and credibility within the Partnership and amongst target groups. For example, the development of 'joint intervention' groups in two case studies, which brought partners together to specifically deal with one particular client group. In the Korsakoff's project in Inverclyde, partners were selected who had the professional knowledge and expertise to address the needs of the particular client group. Similarly, the membership of the Community Safety pilot project in Armadale, West Lothian

was selected to ensure appropriate expertise was brought to the table in restricting off-sales to over 21s at the weekend.

- ***Programmes/projects were sufficiently flexible to be able to respond quickly to changing client needs and expectations, and changing methods of service delivery***. Looking back to the previous section (on shared objectives), this is more readily identifiable in those programmes/projects where there are robust governance structures that maintain clarity of purpose as contexts evolve. Feedback from the case studies identifies that partners work better together in such an environment, thus making them more able to adapt their service interventions to respond to changing client expectations or wider changes in the local context. It is also important to have flexibility to develop and/or embrace innovation. Where Collaborative Gain appeared to be realised, a more widely informed perspective on risk and innovation is provided through robust governance arrangements, confidence in project/programme mandate and remit, the testing of new interventions and improved knowledge sharing/transfer from closer strategic and operational working. In short, exploring the potential for collaborative gain is likely to require partners to 'do things differently', rather than simply deliver more of the same. This is exemplified by the following:

> *"…..the partnership is of the view that 'experimenting' with different methods of service delivery illustrates their ability to innovate and be flexible to changing circumstances, which may help in securing future funding. For example, establishing the 15-19 year old employability programme and issuing the standardised leaver's form…"*

Capacity to Translate Strategy into Action

It is evident that Collaborative Gain can be more readily identified in those programmes/projects where there is a clearly defined and agreed vision and where this vision has been effectively translated into action. Our analysis of the case studies

highlight the following as critical success factors in programmes/projects where there is perceived to be Collaborative Gain:

- ***Programmes/projects required a clear vision to be agreed, either by Government, through national policy initiatives, or locally to reflect public needs and expectations.*** In essence, feedback from the case studies illustrates that greater Collaborative Gain can be achieved where there is clarity and consistency of purpose and direction, defined through an agreed vision. This may be shaped by national or local policy drivers, or locally expressed demand. Where there is an agreed national vision and an articulation of a relatively well-defined role for local partnerships, there is greater contextual awareness about programme/project drivers. This provides partnerships with a basis for discussing what a particular agenda means in practice for them, and what needs to be achieved locally as a result. Furthermore, national guidance as to how policy agendas should be broadly implemented was seen to clearly shape specific partnership activities on the ground. This may, arguably, reflect a 'compliance culture', where it is often easier for partnerships to do something when told to do it by a higher authority, rather than local partners finding the drive to innovate for change themselves. In contrast, however, the case studies do highlight numerous instances where the local partners has demonstrated maturity of partnership, drive and ambition to achieve collaborative gain through their own volition.

- ***Where there is a national vision backed up by funding, partners were more likely to engage in partnership working.*** It is apparent from the analysis of the case studies that partners work together more effectively where there is initial finance / resources to 'pump-prime' a programme/project. This is not to say that partnerships / projects would not have otherwise been established, e.g. community safety but, rather, that initial national funding levered a greater degree of collaboration from the start. The post-Concordat situation means that nationally ring-fenced funding will be much less of a feature and this may itself pose a challenge for local partnerships. In essence,

they will require to be persuaded themselves of the benefits of collaboration without the sweetener of external funding to pum-prime any collaboration initiative. Feedback from the case studies indicated that this initial funding acted as an incentive for partners to work together, as opposed to trying to identify where resources to fund a particular programme/project would come from. However, sustained collaboration is also identified in those programmes/projects that recognise the need to attract mainstream funding from all partners (i.e. the deployment of aligned / shared resources). In essence, if a partnership is seen to deliver added value, it is more likely that it will be valued and will become the mainstream. The following extract from the case studies identified a project manager's view on this:

> *"…..whilst the partnership acknowledges that it benefited from external funding at the start of the process, it recognises that a future challenge will be around how to bring in mainstream funding. This is a challenge for all partners, which will go on beyond sharing of skills, expertise to shared / aligned financial resources. …"*

- ***Translating the Strategy into an Action Plan.*** Throughout the case study work, clarity around roles and responsibility led partners to more effectively engage and work together. This is evident where partners (responsible for delivery) are able to translate the strategic direction set for a particular programme/project into coherent plans that provide a focus for partners to work together. Other key drivers / enablers of Collaborative Gain include where joint working is underpinned by comprehensive and robust performance management arrangements that facilitate effective monitoring and evaluation of contributions, progress and outcomes.

- ***Trust was evident amongst partner organisations***, i.e. partners are able to work effectively together as there is a clear understanding of what is expected of each, illustrated by the following extract, adapted from the case studies

"…..the recently reported success of the pilot project in a particular town, where the sale of alcohol through off-sales was restricted to over-21s at weekends. In this pilot, the Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) worked closely with the Police to monitor and enforce the restrictions. From the outset, there was clarity around the contributions that each partner could make to this pilot, thus leading to better working relationships, developing into a level of trust between the partners, without the need for written protocols (or other associated documents)….."

- ***Partnerships benefited from developing a critical mass (in terms of resources)***. It is evident that where scope for Collaborative Gain is identified by participants in the case studies, it is in programmes/projects where sufficient 'critical mass' has developed to bring a greater degree of viability and durability to the partnership. Tautologically, this often occurs where partners have either contributed resource in terms of staff or expenditure or in physical assets. In some instances, this saw contributions from different partners for different purposes, rather than simply the pooling of resources. The example below highlights the variation in contributions from partners leading to Collaborative Gain :

"….in establishing this project, it was recognised that the service required a multi-disciplinary approach. Initial finance for the project was provided by 'Supporting People monies' and the expenditure for the main infrastructure (client accommodation), was provided by Communities Scotland. There were additional contributions from architects, the local housing association and the Mental Health Commission. This support allowed the project to shape the proposed design of the accommodation and specify the exact layout and fittings within the building to suit the needs of clients. The land for the building was provided by the Council, underlining the buy-in from elected members to ensuring the success of the project. There was also input from the Council's Planning function, which dealt with the issues around the change in use of the land / buildings. At the outset there was also engagement with the relevant local hospital with regard to the specific needs of clients to be catered for….."

Measuring Collaborative Gain

The case study research did not highlight any performance management systems that were specifically established/extended to appraise and evaluate the Collaborative Gain or 'added value' of a particular partnership in delivering a programme/project. In general, performance management frameworks sought to take a wider view of progress and performance, and focused principally on the overall impact of a programme/project. Indeed, it was apparent that partners were typically primarily concerned about having the mechanisms in place to facilitate effective partnership working and thus create an environment where Collaborative Gain could be achieved, rather than actually attempt to disentangle and measure the 'added value' element.

Our discussions with case study participants indicated that there was little appetite for introducing dedicated evaluation frameworks that attempt to disaggregate and quantify Collaborative Gain. However, partners were of the view that there could be better mechanisms in place to drive effective collaborative working within partnerships (with an *assumed* causal attribution between these activities and subsequent collaborative benefits).

Whilst partners in the case studies typically found it difficult to readily measure tangible Collaborative Gain in a quantifiable sense, all of them could identify processes, outputs and outcomes supporting their belief that gain has been realised via a partnership approach. In effect, partners had a broad sense of whether the partnership working they were involved in was worthwhile and 'adding value'.

The question is raised, however, as to how much effort ought to be applied in seeking to articulate / quantify the added value of partnership working. On the one hand, measuring the value added through a partnership approach ought to provide a useful focus, both for ensuring and for demonstrating that the partnership approach is working and is worthwhile. On the other hand, in an era where there is a general desire to reduce reporting burdens, there is a concern that tying too much resource up in seeking to

measure partnership added value will detract from spending resources on actually enhancing service delivery.

From the case studies, it also became clear that there was a view that many of the collaborative gain benefits simply could not be readily quantified, partly because the benefits realised were sometimes seen to be largely qualitative in nature.

Clearly, there is a balance to be struck to ensure that assessment of partnership working is robust and open to scrutiny, whilst also being proportionate in terms of the resource deployed in measuring collaborative gain. This is an area where further development work is required. It is likely that part of the solution to addressing this issue is likely to lie in the further development of partnership self-assessment techniques. These can play a useful role in guiding partners to critically review their working arrangements, seek continuous improvement and ensuring focus on achieving collaborative gain.

The following section sets out some of the key messages derived from the study, which could be incorporated in partnership self-assessment to ensure that partnerships are likely to generate added value / collaborative gain.

KEY MESSAGES

This section builds on the analysis set out in the previous chapter, setting out the key messages that should form the basis of any partnership / project that aims to realise Collaborative Gain. Essentially, it sets out a list of key collaborative building blocks identified from the literature and case studies that aim to assist all partnerships in realising Collaborative Gain:

- Accountability and ownership stem from the adoption of an agreed vision for the partnership / project.

- The partnership mandate has to be defined at the outset, underpinned by strong governance structures thus ensuring coherent and informed deployment of finite resources in delivering the agreed outcomes for a particular programme/project.

- There is initial financial incentive / funding / resources to 'kick-start' the programme/project from either national or local sources (and from partners involved). However, sustained collaboration is also identified in those programmes/projects that recognise the need to attract mainstream funding from all partners (i.e. the deployment of aligned / shared resources).

- Client / target groups are clearly defined and partners have the flexibility to tailor interventions, depending on the requirements of individuals / specific client groups, i.e. the project / partnership clearly defines what service it is providing, to whom and the intended impact it should have.

- The focus is on the quality of what each partner can contribute, rather than the number of partners attending partnership meeting, thus bringing a degree of credibility and profile, and facilitating and developing a culture of collaborative working.

- The partnership effectively draws on the different sets of skills and experiences that each partner can bring.

- The benefits of the project/partnership can be articulated and/or measured. (Recognising that collaborative (business) benefit/efficiency may more easily measured where we are dealing with physical assets, such a buildings / office space, as in one of the case study examples).

- The programme/project is a focused intervention. It appears that Collaborative Gain is more readily identified in clearly defined, smaller-scale projects that address particular issues (rather than in wide ranging agendas, e.g. the concept of health improvement). Large scale programmes/projects should be broken down into manageable strands of work (with a lead responsibility) to bring a degree of ownership and accountability to the process.

- Service interventions need to be informed by robust evidence, based around qualitative and quantitative information. Quality information is seen a key to understanding the needs of the client base and the ability of the partnership to operate effectively.

- Partnerships in specific areas (such as co-location) can realise collaborative outcomes through supply chain and service delivery efficiencies.

- Monitoring and evaluation is built into the programme/project from the start rather than 'bolted on' at a later stage. This should be proportionate, not distract from overall purpose and offer the necessary evidence, without placing undue demands on management resources.

- The partnership can demonstrate critical mass as it develops, in terms of medium to long term resilience, viability and durability.

CONCLUSIONS

'Collaborative Gain' is still a relatively new concept in the public sector. Across all of the case studies, most participants had heard about it, but few had actively considered it when establishing a partnership or delivering a particular programme/project. Therefore, partnerships found it difficult to analyse what they do in this way.

All case studies were able to provide examples of partnership working that involved collaborative activities. Most asserted collaborative benefits in terms of greater/faster progress in realising objectives, service enhancement and or efficiency (backed up by performance measures against initial targets), although the 'gain' itself was typically difficult to quantify.

Our conclusions are as follows:

- Case study participants perceive that, on some occasions, decisions are made to work 'in partnership' without ensuring that the conditions / environment are conducive to effective partnership working. Where this occurs, collaborative benefits are likely to be difficult to realise.

- Many of the case study programmes/projects pre-date any widespread understanding of Collaborative Gain, so distinct quantifiable measures were not typically built in at the outset. Partners across the case studies found it easier to relate to the overall 'tangible' activities and outcomes set out in *fig. 2* than Collaborative Gain as a concept.

- The notion of Collaborative Gain was sometimes seen as being difficult to grasp. While partners could not readily measure tangible Collaborative Gain, they could

identify processes, outputs and outcomes that support their assertions that gain had been realised.

- In reality, the notion seems to be easier to conceptualise than it is to measure. To quantify Collaborative Gain, it is almost necessary to specify a target to be delivered when working in isolation, then a further and more stretching target to be delivered when working together. This has typically not happened, and it is questionable whether such discussions are practical. It is more likely that the concept of Collaborative Gain would be used to design specific collaborative activities, and that monitoring would focus on fulfilment of those collaborative activities and the benefits/impact accrued. Gain might then be measured in terms of further or faster progress in attaining objectives against the pre-partnership performance trends.

- In moving forward in a collaborative environment, the outcome performance measures will likely be broadly similar as those used currently to measure outcomes across the CPPs. The targets associated with measures would, however, be extended to reflect the collaborative benefits of partnership working. In addition, there could be a further set of bespoke measures within each partnership that reflect the specific commitments made to collaborative working on the ground. For example, if collaborative working is intended to provide wider access to target groups, or more efficient use of space, then it might be expected to see measures (at a programme/project level) that reflected these commitments.

- There are two 'places' within a partnership where Collaborative Gain needs to be carefully managed. Firstly, at the strategic level within each partnership, looking at a high level at additional impact and the effectiveness of/compliance with the collaborative activities designed to support that impact. Secondly, at the programme or project level, with the key messages about the effectiveness of collaborative working on that programme/project being monitored and used to re-emphasise or - if necessary - refine the collaborative activities.

- Where collaboration is seen to fail, it is often through a lack of strategic direction from senior officers and the development of agreed aims and objectives. This is despite a willingness from all partners to work together, i.e. in some cases this lack of strategic direction is not always readily apparent.

APPENDIX 1 SUMMARY LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an extensive portfolio of academic, public practitioner, and commercially-oriented literature on collaborative gain and collaborative advantage. Much of the public sector thinking around the topic emanates from Health, but has wider application across the public sector. This section offers a summary of the main issues identified in the literature; helping to complement and illustrate the observations from the case studies undertaken.

Collaborative Gain

A Collaborative Gain method brings more than added value. It produces solutions to identified issues, where the end outcome is of higher quality, greater sustainability, improved effectiveness, and influencing change in the organisation and management of future service delivery. It should suggest creative and improved ways of working and challenge existing institutional boundaries, operational restrictions and standing practices. The improvements it induces must be readily evident to the partners and end users:

> *"collaborative advantage will be achieved when something unusually creative is produced – perhaps an objective is met – that no organisation could have produced on its own and when each organisation, through the collaboration, is able to achieve its own objectives better than it could alone"*
>
> Huxham (1993)

There is a myriad of alternatives to direct single agency public service delivery, ranging from CPPs, joint ventures, community led initiatives, public private partnerships, voluntary sector compacts and strategic alliances. Huxham (2003) argues that the breadth of this partnership definition has produced a 'terminoligal slippage' where the meaning of partnership is diluted; becoming a process rather than a purpose. The origins

of such partnerships are often policy led, aspirational and organised around existing working practices and structures. Huxham argues that this inhibits flexibility, imagination and innovation and ultimately compromises effectiveness. Such approaches expect that a simple combination of existing service measures can account for the complexity and sophistication of community level issues stemming from multiple, cross-cutting, variable influences. In effect, they are constrained by pre-conceived understandings and static organisational structures.

Whilst not all partnerships are like this, many are. Accounting for the limitations observed here, Huxham argues for the need for alternative models to be examined (to harness shared strategic and operational interests in pursuit of common objectives) where traditional process-focussed partnership structures have failed to produce a significant improvement on what the partners alone could contribute individually. Exploiting interdependencies between stakeholders and organisations is one way of driving this forward.

A critical success factor within Collaborative Gain is the concept of its origins and design. At early stage design, if no tangible benefit from a collaborative benefit approach can be identified, it will be difficult to focus effort, stimulate motivation and concentrate resources. Where these ground conditions are not good, Collaborative Gain is unlikely to produce any significant benefit and an alternative approach to the issue should prevail.

The literature indicates that the key conditions for Collaborative Gain are:

- Getting the right people – those who understand the issue, want to be involved and have something to offer by way of expertise or resources.

- Getting the right number - a partnership should be tight and formed around an essential core. Groups or more than 10-12 may become unwieldy and difficult to manage.

- Understanding and agreeing the complexity of the issue presented.

- Analysing, clarifying and agreeing the causes of this.

- Developing this as a holistic concept - acknowledging interdependent cause and effect relationships.

- Assessing how partner actions can alter the dynamic drivers of the issue presented; remaining aware of the direct and indirect consequences of these.

- Agreeing the positive cumulative impact of these actions.

- Adopting this as the main target outcome.

- Delivering this within a robust governance structure directed by strong leadership.

Where these conditions are met, success will depend on having the right people available; those who possess the skills, contacts, knowledge, experience, commitment, authority, motivation and shared sense of purpose.

Enabling Conditions

The concept of Collaborative Gain has it origins within the private sector where, increasingly, the pursuit of efficiency and profitability was felt constrained by business organisation and structure. In this, efficiencies generated through established models of competition driven by strategies of cost reduction were seen to generate decreasing

business returns. New forms of competitive advantage were to be best developed through greater emphasis on consortia or special purpose vehicles (SPVs) and/or increased 'supply chain' integration, leading to better decision making, greater purchasing power, better use of resources, and process streamlining. This called for a new way of working; supporting innovation, business diversification and providing products and services more reflective of demand. In the private sector case, this has resulted in more connected thinking at the corporate level, leading to the development of more bespoke solutions driven by user demand.

For public service providers, the Collaborative Gain process provides an opportunity to support a more sensitive and relevant range of services driven by a sophisticated analysis of beneficiary needs. Whilst enhancing the end user experience of the service, Collaborative Gain will also support the development of internal and external business networks, improve business outcomes, improve performance and productivity and develop as a platform for future working (Hemphill *et al*. 2006).

Sullivan, Barnes and Matka (2006) see its value as not primarily focusing on the mechanics of partnership, as in more traditional models, but in profiting from the human and social relationships it supports, the understanding it developed and the collective interests it supports. In sensitive working environments, where effective community engagement can often accelerate enhance and reinforce regeneration efforts, the Collaborative Gain model may be especially useful (Maginn (2007) and Bailey (2003).

Collaborative Gain networks should ideally be built across agencies and individuals who already have some professional experience of working together and who share a common set of values and goals. Competing values undermine the validity of the partnership (Davies 2004; Hudson 2000).

However, before any of this happens, somebody has to lead the process. One of the partners has to initiate the process by identifying the core issue and clarifying how this might be best addressed. This must be undertaken in a supportive professional context, otherwise motivation and sense of purpose will be insufficiently developed.

The key stages towards this can be summarised as:

1. Clarifying the Purpose of the Partnership:

- Why have this and what added value will it bring?

2. Examining the Internal and External Operational Environment:

- What are the local needs and opportunities?
- What are the relevant policy developments and trends?
- What is the partnership able to deliver collectively and through its members?

3. Agreeing a Vision and Making Strategic Choices:

- What should the vision be?
- Whose vision should it be?
- What are the main routes for arriving at this?
- How will we know if we are going in the right direction?

4. Translating the Strategy into an Action Plan:

- Who will be responsible for planning?
- Who will be responsible for delivery?
- What targets and milestones will be set?

- Who will monitor and evaluate?
- What steps are individual organisations taking to build their capacity for partnership and joint working?

5. Squaring the Circle:

- What will the accountability mechanisms be?
- How will the partnership review its activities to inform its future policy?
- How will it review its partnership structures and mechanisms to ensure they remain appropriate?
- How will good practice lessons be disseminated?

(Russel 2001)

Establishing a sound foundation of a working partnership is the starting point for any collaborative venture. If this is not strongly developed, it will de-stabilise the work programme, jeopardise effectiveness and compromise success. Where this cannot be achieved, the collaborative venture should be abandoned in favour of an alternative approach. Even where a strong collective spirit is evident, this must be framed in a formal organisational structure, with clear operating terms, strong leadership and governance. Without this, confusion and poor communication will compromise overall effect.

Partners to any collaborative venture must:

- Contribute value by way of expertise or resources;
- Have a degree of enlightened self-interest in the aims of the partnership as a motivational driver;
- Be willing to learn from others;
- Guard against professional exclusivity and possessiveness;
- Respect the interest and priorities of others; and
- Work to maintain a momentum in progress – moving together collectively and avoiding the tensions in uneven development.

All of this requires strong leadership and direction, supported by a clear plan with focused outcomes. Without this, the prospect of collaborative inertia arises to question the validity and value of the overall approach. (Huxham and Vangen 2000)

In managing the performance of a collaborative project, a strong degree of autonomy can be justified where clear terms and objectives are set within a strong governance framework. Where the working group has a strong professional purpose and a developed institutional capacity able to cope with the issues likely to arise, the internal high trust relationship should be reflected externally at the organisational level and out to external partners. An added benefit of this model is its internal dynamic, which reduces professional isolation and builds additional institutional capacity as a product of its actions.

A further benefit of a Collaborative Gain model is its emphasis on learning and service improvement as a positive consequence of the actions undertaken. Here the role of evaluation is regarded a critical success factor. Facilitated reflection improves institutional understanding and communication and service improvement are all significant benefits of this approach. This is identified as a key feature of the Problem Solving Method - adopted by the London Restorative Justice Network (Lock, Shaftoe and Johnson 2005). In this, a problem description has been followed by a strategy development, leading to implementation. Within this design, the role of evaluation is significant as a clearly developed and agreed learning tool. Evaluation within Collaborative Gain should emphasise learning and facilitate reflection over audit and inspection.

Better Commissioning Learning and Improvement Network (LIN)

The Better Commissioning LIN brings together groups of senior staff within social care, health, housing and the independent sector interested in forging closer partnerships to improve commissioning that will facilitate improvements in social care delivery and practice. It works alongside other networks and links with commissioning programmes. This network helps to:

- Identify and share what works, including the adaptation of good practice to local settings
- To promote the development of a whole system and joined up approach to commissioning services
- To support a local plan including implementation and follow up to improve all aspects of commissioning.

DoH 2004

The success factors underpinning this network approach are summarised as:

- Organised for participation and inclusion;
- Trust respect, mutual support and teamwork
- Positive leadership;
- Culture and infrastructure which support learning and sharing;
- Strategic importance of the work of the network;
- Management support;

- Outcomes focused; and
- Willingness to celebrate success.

DoH (2004)

Promoting Collaborative Gain across organisations in the public sector may require an attitude shift, where risk averse behaviour is discouraged through an emphasis on 'prescriptive enablers' rather than 'descriptive barriers' when a problem or an issue is introduced (Donavan et al 2005). Perceptual, economic and institutional (internal conflict or conflict between partners) barriers can often present as major obstacles if interpreted as such. Support for the principle of Collaborative Gain will require senior buy-in and support if operational staff can be expected to work in this way.

Management Levers to Promote Collaboration

A series of preconditions are necessary before commencing on a process of Collaborative Gain. Management can assist in providing a support environment for such work through the buy-in to the principle of this approach; developing strong leadership values and goal setting conducive to a Collaborative Gain method, looking up from a myopic focus on immediate concerns and employing people who look for and provide help in the work setting. As important to these ground conditions is the release of organisational capacity.

Providing lateral support mechanisms which encourage corporate connections and the use of personal contacts can help harness the full human resource of an organisation and its partners (Hansen and Nohria 2006).

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