Collaboration within the public sector

presented by
SenateSHJ

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“We literally knocked the wall down between the two of us and that massively changed things. Our staff are doing what they’ve always done, but they’re also constantly thinking about how collaboration could change the way that the entire agency works.”
## Contents

Purpose of this research .......................................................................................................................... 4
Research approach ................................................................................................................................. 5
Question line ........................................................................................................................................... 6
Analysis methodology ............................................................................................................................. 7
Notes on findings ................................................................................................................................... 8
Key qualitative themes .............................................................................................................................. 10
Secondary findings ................................................................................................................................. 18
Summary of quantitative findings ........................................................................................................... 19
Collaboration initiative subset .................................................................................................................. 21
Degrees of collaboration .......................................................................................................................... 22-30
Embedding and extending change ......................................................................................................... 31-33
Purpose of this research

The State Services Commission asked SenateSHJ to complete a stocktake of collaborative initiatives underway within the public sector.

The stocktake grew out of an earlier desktop review by the State Services Commission, the *Snapshot of activity back-office functions*. This looked at planned and reported collaborative initiatives in the back-office functions of the core public sector.

Our research aimed to establish:

- How many collaborative initiatives have been undertaken in the core public sector over the past 18 months?
- Where are agencies collaborating, either with other agencies or non-government organisations, in the areas of service, support or delivery?
- How many agencies or NGOs are involved in each initiative?
- Why were the initiatives undertaken?
- Has internal consolidation within agencies made collaboration easier?
Research approach

- SenateSHJ met with the authors of the original research to understand their methodology and findings, the limitations of their research, and their suggestions for this project.
- State Services Commission analysts identified representatives of each of the core public sector agencies to be interviewed.
- SenateSHJ contacted interviewees, advised them of the general nature of the research, and asked them to take part.
- SenateSHJ conducted 25 semi-structured interviews (either by phone or face-to-face) between 7 November and 29 November, 2013.
- SenateSHJ took notes during the interviews and used those conversations to draw conclusions and reach findings.
Question line

The semi-structured interviews followed a set question line:

• What collaborative initiatives in the service, support or delivery functions of your agency have been undertaken in the past 18 months?
• Why were each of these initiatives undertaken?
• What other agencies or NGOs were involved?
• Has internal consolidation within your agency made collaboration easier?

Following each question, the interviewer prompted for more detailed responses.
Analysis methodology

We used a ‘general inductive approach’ to analyse the data, as described in Thomas, David R. 2003. *A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis*. *School of Population Health, University of Auckland Press*.

The purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data. It allows the researcher to: “condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format; establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data; and to develop a model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the text.”

The researchers read the transcripts several times to identify themes and categories, and to develop a coding frame. The researchers code the transcripts, allowing them to develop categories and broad themes.
Notes on findings

Respondents were generally tier 2 or 3 managers within their agencies

Where respondents reported that their agency usually collaborated, respondents were asked to identify initiatives where there was a new approach caused by BPS, rather than a continuation of an existing approach.

Only one person was interviewed per agency, limiting how comprehensive the stocktake could be.
Summary of qualitative findings
Key qualitative themes

BPS is changing how the public sector thinks ...
... but we are not yet seeing system change.
There are many drivers of collaboration,
and shared responsibility and integrated funding are key.
Collaboration varies with size and function,
and significant challenges remain.
There are significant opportunities at middle management.
BPS is changing how the public sector thinks

- A majority of respondents indicated that the BPS programme and reforms have changed the strategic thinking and direction of their agencies so that they regularly look for collaborative opportunities.

- Most agencies identified that BPS had required a new mindset of taking collaborative approaches to service delivery in order to achieve BPS targets.

“When our SLT talks about strategy, collaboration is dominant in their thinking. We talk about how we can add value, and I think that shows a real shift.”

“The BPS results have certainly focused our attention on the need to hit our targets. They have strengthened the authorising environment to make things happen and forced us to be a bit more innovative.”

“We are very much now of the mindset that working with other agencies and outsourcing certain functions to them makes life easier.”

“There is no doubt that an overt requirement from the state sector makes collaboration easier, and with BPS, the state sector is finally talking the same language in terms of outcomes.”
We are not yet seeing system change

• Collaborative initiatives are most common when agencies are working together on specific and time-limited projects, deliberately formed to be operated collaboratively.

• While almost all agencies are looking for collaborative approaches, most agencies still think of BPS collaboration being different and other than their business as usual approach to their work.

• Collaboration is seen more as an approach to projects than as a way of life for each agency.

“A new project is a blank piece of paper, you have total opportunity to shape and drive it. Business as usual is embedded and there isn’t that flexibility.”

“A lot of it is around cultural change rather than the function. We’ve had autonomy for so long, that we need a lot of different skill sets to manage this new way of doing business.”

“We still think differently about the BAU collaboration that we are used to doing, and the deliberate strategies to work with our state sector colleagues that come out of BPS. They’re different to us.”
There are many drivers of collaboration

• Many respondents noted that their collaborative initiatives were the result of necessity (i.e. the Canterbury earthquakes, or cost savings).

• Many respondents reported relationships as critical to enabling (or causing) collaboration. These include relationships between sector leaders, or through sector leadership forums.

• Many smaller agencies reported having always worked collaboratively with other small agencies or Crown Entities in order to achieve their business goals.

“As a small agency, collaboration has always been a part of our BAU, we can’t get anything done without it.”

“Where did the idea come from? I’m not sure. It sounds like the two CIOs were talking and that’s where it came from, a solution was offered, and it was trialled, and now it’s taking off.”

“We’re not in control of all of the factors that will influence achieving our BPS goals. So we know that we need strong relationships to achieve them.”
Shared responsibility and integrated funding are key

- All agencies in sectors with shared responsibility for achieving BPS targets identified shared responsibility as a key driver for achieving their targets.

- A lack of integrated funding makes collaboration outside of result areas more challenging.

- BPS result targets, customer-centric service design, CEO forums, sector working groups, and integrated funding were the most commonly reported drivers of collaboration.

“The move to customer centric design has really pushed us into the collaborative space.”

“The old model said if you don’t have the money you don’t have the control. What has to matter now is the accountability. You all have to hold each other responsible for achieving your targets.”

“There is a unique tension between needing a cross sector lead, and not allowing parties to say, “I’m not in the lead, it’s not my responsibility’. Taking the lead is needed mechanically, but it’s not how you operationalise it.”

“No one gives you money in your budget that says “this is for collaboration.” When collaboration comes to you, but isn’t within your budget already, you don’t have any incentive.”
Collaboration varies with size and function

• Most smaller agencies with non-policy functions reported having always relied on collaboration to fulfil their roles. Those with policy functions identified difficulties with finding collaborative opportunities, but were aware of the need to do so.

• The largest agencies, especially those that have recently been consolidated, are identified, and self-identify, as being slower to collaborate than other agencies.

• Small agencies often expressed concern that larger agencies looked to them to provide services and support, without being willing or able to do the same.

  “As a recently consolidated agency, we’re still finding out how we work internally, which limits how much we can think about how we work with everyone else.”

  “You have to look to the scale of the bigger agencies to support the smaller ones, but need to see it from a crown perspective rather than at an agency level. That has to be mandated.”

  “We’re a parasite on the other departments. If you want to call relying on their support to survive collaboration, then sure.”
Significant challenges remain

• Providing services to other agencies and sharing resources may be having a negative impact on core business outputs, which may impact on future willingness to collaborate.

• Collaboration is not a priority for senior managers looking for promotion, or those driven by personal ambition.

“We have reprioritised internally to share resources across government, but at the expense of our traditional core services. When we are being forced to stay within the same caps and baselines, eventually we will be forced to return our focus to our core business at the cost of collaboration.”

“There are reservations from some agencies who view themselves as having an advocacy role. They feel that from time to time they need to have an independent view, and see collaboration as the beginning of a process that will water that down.”

“When you collaborate you share in the glory and that’s a lot harder to crow about.”
There are significant opportunities at middle management

• The view from most organisations is that collaboration is driven by leadership or frontline need.

• Many respondents reported that change was harder to achieve at the middle management level.

• One agency reported that their middle management, often recruited from the frontline of their sector, were supportive of collaboration and change

“Happens at the top and bottom more than in the middle – at the top there is a smaller group that can get together, and rationalise at a strategic level on the need for collaboration. At the frontline, you’ve got collaboration happening on a day to day basis, leveraging off each other’s good work.”

“Once you get to the level of the people actually doing the work, they have collaborated in the past, they’re collaborating now, and they’ll keep doing it in the future. It is the middle management who are stuck between being told to control their areas without being high enough to see the whole picture.”

“We don’t see the same mid-level bottlenecks that other agencies talk about. A lot of our people have come from the sector. And that cross-pollination brings the frontline into our middle management thinking.”
Secondary findings

Collaboration isn’t new: “BPS for us has really been about the way that we already worked coming into line with how the Ministry thinks about us.”

Seeing success is important: “You’re starting to see the actual results of projects coming to life. And it’s not until you get out there and you can see that the bits have joined up and made it work. We’re starting to see that, and people are heartened by that.”

Comparison can drive uptake: “While we are very focused on achieving our targets, and we know about those in our sector, we don’t really know what is happening with the other result areas. Why hasn't there been a report card or a review?”

The value of collaboration isn’t always visible: “If you could point to something and say, there, that is the dollar value of collaboration, that would make it a lot easier for collaboration to prove itself.”

The centre needs to keep up with the frontline: “There is a growing desire for collaboration, and, if anything, the centre dragging its heels in making the decisions that need to be made is putting that at risk.”
Summary of quantitative findings
Collaboration initiative subsets

The quantitative findings are organised according to five subsets of collaboration initiatives:

1. **Support initiatives**
   Where agencies are providing or sharing back-office support services with other agencies.

2. **Service initiatives**
   Where agencies are providing their services to other agencies, or all-of-government, or are collaborating to provide a service to each other.

3. **Delivery initiatives**
   Where agencies are collaborating with other agencies or NGOs to deliver core outputs.

4. **Joint review, reporting or planning initiatives**
   Where agencies are collaborating in the review, reporting or planning process.

5. **Collaboration facilitating initiatives**
   Where agencies are creating internal structures or are working together to facilitate collaborative initiatives.
Degrees of collaboration

This report also analyses the depth of the collaboration initiatives. For the purpose of this report we have identified three degrees of collaboration:

1. Simple
   Taking place between two agencies or partners.

2. Complex
   Taking place between multiple agencies or partners.

3. Comprehensive
   Taking place across a designated sector, or all-of-government.
1. Collaborative support initiatives

Where agencies are sharing or providing support services to other agencies or NGOs.

This subset includes initiatives such as co-location, shared IT support services, and joint procurement programmes.

Across the public sector, the stocktake found 34 collaborative support initiatives:

**Collaborative support initiatives**

- Simple - 13
- Complex - 16
- Comprehensive - 5

Example:

The Ministry of Culture and Heritage providing financial and other support services to relevant sector Crown Entities.
2. Collaborative service initiatives

Where agencies are providing services to other agencies, or all-of-government, or are collaborating to provide services to each other.

This subset includes initiatives such as the Centres of Excellence, and provision of expert advice.

Across the public sector, the stocktake found 25 collaborative service initiatives:

**Collaborative service initiatives**

- Simple - 9
- Complex - 10
- Comprehensive - 6

Example:

LINZ’s Crown Land Centre of Expertise supports other agencies in land disposal.
3. Collaborative delivery initiatives

Where agencies are collaborating with other agencies or NGOs to deliver core outputs.

This subset includes initiatives such as the delivery of services to New Zealanders, or provision of financial forecasting.

Across the public sector, the stocktake found 66 collaborative delivery initiatives:

Example:
The WW1 100 project, a collaboration between the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand Defence Forces, and the Department of Internal Affairs.
4. Collaboration facilitating initiatives

Where agencies are facilitating collaboration, either internally, or with other agencies or organisations.

This subset includes initiatives such as Chief Executive forums, and local cross-sector working groups.

Across the public sector, the stocktake found 20 collaboration facilitating initiatives:

**Collaboration facilitating initiatives**

- Simple - 1
- Complex - 13
- Comprehensive - 6

Example:
The Ministry of Justice Sector Group – a cross-sector initiative to foster collaboration.
5. Collaborative review, reporting or planning initiatives

Where agencies are collaboratively reviewing, reporting or planning.

This subset includes initiatives such as joint staff engagement surveys, sector-wide four year plans, and joint reviews of reporting processes.

Across the public sector the stocktake found 21 collaborative review, reporting or planning initiatives:

**Collaborative review, reporting or planning initiatives**

- Simple - 1
- Complex - 8
- Comprehensive - 12

Example:
The Justice Sector Four Year Plan – a joint approach to sector planning.
BPS target driven initiatives

Where collaborative initiatives are reported as being driven by BPS targets. This is across all initiatives reported.

Across the public sector, the stocktake found 13 collaborative initiatives that were reported as being driven by BPS.

Example:
MPI working with MBIE to assess how its industry interacts with government electronically to assist BPS Area 9
Depth of initiatives across agencies

This graph compares the depth of initiatives as spread across the agencies interviewed.
Spread of initiatives across agencies

This graph demonstrates the spread of initiatives across the agencies interviewed.

Initiatives per agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of initiatives</th>
<th>Agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–15</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16–20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Embedding and extending change

High level insights drawn from SenateSHJ’s social change frameworks
Embedding change

Focus on behaviour change, not just attitude and knowledge

- Focus communications on the practice – not the theory – of collaboration
- Illustrate, document and share collaboration initiatives
- Make successes visible and replicable

Respond to audience needs and concerns – even the non-rational ones

- Acknowledge and work to overcome barriers to collaboration
- Create real incentives and be consistent in setting expectations and accountability

Create a norm (a long term reality, not a fad)

- Maintain messaging and conversation about collaboration consistently and over time
- Make it part of the every day management discourse

Source: SenateSHJ Social Marketing Framework: http://www.senateshj.co.nz/social-marketing
Extending change

Common cause
- Ensure all communications illustrate purpose and benefit of collaboration
- Connect benefit to citizen / NZ Inc outcomes

Coordinated campaign
- Be consistent and coordinated in communications about collaboration
- Create a long term programme to ensure ongoing information and engagement on the topic

Connection
- Recruit innovators and collaborators to be advocates for change
- Use these people to connect with others throughout the system
- Work with middle managers to create better connection amongst that group and to the concept of coordination

Conversation
- Create tools to support positive conversations about collaboration (for example, key messages, regular updates, “hot topics” or “breaking news” items)
- Make it part of the normal discourse

Catalyst
- Use powerful initiatives and significant events to initiate engagement on the topic

Source: SenateSHJ Social Movement Model: http://www.senateshj.co.nz/social-marketing