



RSA

Action and Research Centre

**Transforming
Together: Leading
for People and
Place**

Executive Summary

*by Joan Munro,
Ian Burbidge and
Jack Robson*

September 2017

With austerity we realised if we wanted to press on with regeneration and transforming the borough we could only do that by working in partnership with everyone else.

Council Leader

We all know we are going to be really pushed for resources so we must all work more collaboratively

Vice chancellor, University

We don't really have a lot of options. Services need to be delivered dramatically differently in the future for them to be affordable.

Joint health and social care leader

It is harder to do things with no money - but innovation is more vital than ever.

Chief executive, voluntary organisation

Introduction

In many areas public services are exploring how they might develop more significant innovations together, to improve their local places, and to tackle the key wicked issues that span many agencies operating in the context of severely reduced budgets.

We talked to Councils and their partners in six of these places to discover what the councils' senior managers were doing that appeared to be helping to achieve more significant cross public sector innovations.

The report details the core leadership actions that we found helped such coalitions achieve clear outcomes for their populations.

What is innovation?

There is no single agreed academic definition of innovation. Academics generally agree that an innovation is something that is both new and relevant: a fresh idea that works in practice. Goller and Bessant provide a working definition of innovation as being ‘the process of creating value from ideas’, noting this can be economic or social value.

The biggest challenge in innovating is usually not having the idea in the first place, but in successfully implementing it, creating economic and social value.

Key Findings

The public sector partnerships that were successfully innovating shared a number of characteristics. Their work was underpinned by a desire to help make their places better for their citizens, and was characterised by a focus on each organisation's role in the wider systems within which they were operating, as well as on the change they wanted to achieve.

The **Transforming Together Framework** captures the most important actions the leaders in councils were taking with their partners to achieve significant collaborative innovations.





Convene around places

Actively make the time and capacity to engage with partners

1. Focus on local citizens and places
2. Develop honest, committed relationships

This was supported by a range of actions across three broad areas: taking a system-wide perspective to their work, building a shared ethos and developing an entrepreneurial edge. Collectively, these characteristics maximised the likelihood of successful partnership working.



Take a system focus

Develop a strategic, outcomes-focused approach

3. Think and act systemically
4. Agree a clear purpose, outcomes and priorities
5. Encourage long-term political support



Develop an entrepreneurial edge

Take a transformational approach

6. Be optimistic, courageous and creative
7. Be passionate, persuasive and persistent
8. Track, reflect, learn and adapt



Build a shared ethos

Effectively engage others across the system

9. Empower middle managers and engage the frontline workforce
10. Actively involve service users and citizens
11. Devote time, energy and resources to the process

The challenges



Encouraging a system-wide focus

In some areas council leaders were frustrated because key partners did not share their concerns, or had other priorities. Others found that their partners were willing to co-operate, but wanted to move ahead more cautiously.

The most successful approach seemed to be building a coalition of willing partners and hoping that others would join in eventually.



Building a shared ethos across different organisational cultures

In many instances interviewees raised the problem of different partners thinking and behaving in different ways, as well as having different assumptions and norms. The most successful were making huge efforts to understand their partners' contexts and concerns.

This study strongly suggests that 'chemistry counts': strong relationships and trust between partners was one of the critical factors in achieving major partnership innovations.

It also appeared that individuals' personalities and motivations were vital to success. The findings suggest that it takes passionate, determined and focused individuals to come together to achieve major partnership innovations.

No matter how ambitious, enthusiastic and determined council managers were, there was a limit to how much they could achieve without the time to build relationships and do the work necessary to achieve significant innovations with their partners.



Being entrepreneurial despite capacity issues

Most major innovations require an upfront investment of resources. With so many potential public sector partners struggling to balance their books, securing sufficient investment was an issue in many instances.

Almost everywhere the issue of capacity to deliver was raised, as well as the impact of turnover in council senior managers. A few interviewees mentioned bureaucracy issues, and some partners felt that their councils operated too slowly.

What helps?

The focus of the research was on public sector partners, however nearly every successful partnership involved voluntary organisations as equal partners.

Every partnership achieving a major innovation had been working on it for many years. They had all started small, and gradually worked together to develop their innovation, as well as their confidence in what they might achieve together, and their trust in each other.

The leaders of the successful partnership innovations all had the immense tenacity necessary to overcome the many barriers and constraints.

The report also suggests that leaders should:

- Be determined, invest effort, commit for the long term.
- Tackle organisational immune-responses.
- Don't wait until they have everyone on board.
- Focus beyond organisation-friendly innovation.
- Embrace diverse disciplines and perspectives.

National bodies could do more to support local partnership innovations

The actions and initiatives of governments and their departments, and other key national bodies, such as NHS England and regulators, appear to play a major role in either incentivising or discouraging successful local partnership innovations.

The study suggests that national bodies could do much more to enable and encourage more successful local partnership innovations.

For example, they could:

- Work together across systems to create a coherent national context for local partnerships.
- Set performance indicators which support working across systems, rather than ones that focus narrowly on organisations.
- Regulate systems rather than individual organisations.
- Maintain their commitment to particular directions, rather than regularly introducing new initiatives or changing legislation and guidance.
- Agree the same geographical boundaries for different initiatives, so that public service leaders do not have to build so many relationships with different sets of people.
- Offer non-prescriptive guidance that inspires partnerships in a particular direction, but leaves them free to implement the ideas in a way that is appropriate locally.
- Continue to invest for the long term in transformation funds that support achieving innovations through public services partnerships.
- Continue to devolve power to local regions.

Overall recommendations

For political and managerial leaders in councils

- Use the factors in the ‘Transforming Together Framework’ to review whether there are areas that might need more attention in your key transformational partnerships.
- Ensure your key leaders have the skills and attitudes necessary to lead major transformations with other public sector leaders.
- Recruit and retain key managers and staff for their attitudes and actions as much as for their qualifications and experience.

For public services partnerships

- Use the factors in the ‘Transforming Together Framework’ as a review tool in your partnership, to see if there are areas that might need more attention.
- Consider how you might further develop your key leaders’ skills to support them in transforming systems together.

For the governments and other national organisations

- Work across government departments to develop a coherent approach to the whole public sector.
- Join up with other key national partners to create an integrated national environment that local areas can mirror.
- Consider individually, and across systems, how you might encourage and enhance the achievement of more public service partnership innovations in local areas.
- Use the same local geographic boundaries for different partnership initiatives across the whole public sector.

Taking this work forward

In earlier work the RSA has explored the concept of social capital in which the networks, norms and values that bind people can be strengthened or weakened depending on the activities or events taking place in any given community at any point in time. By viewing a multi-agency partnership as a community drawn around a system – such as criminal justice, education or mental health - we are interested to explore the idea that this sense of ‘capital’ can be applied to a partnership setting.

This work has confirmed many of the building blocks on which successful partnerships are based. Codifying these in a concept of partnership capital could help local partnerships and collaborative working arrangements think through the conditions in which it can be created or destroyed and apply this learning framework in their own context.

We think that actively taking a system focus, building a shared ethos and developing an entrepreneurial edge will lead to the creation of partnership capital. We are keen to work further with areas to explore whether partnership capital translates, ultimately, into better programmes of work and better outcomes.

The areas involved

This study was conducted with councils and their public sector and voluntary organization partners in Brighton and Hove, Cheshire East, Monmouthshire, South Tyneside, Surrey and Wigan.

The areas were selected because of their reputation for achieving cross public sector innovations, whilst being mindful of the need to have a mix between council type, political leadership and geographical location. In some areas just one major partnership was studied, in others two or more. Some partnerships involved one or two main partners, and others many more.

The authors would like to thank all the organisations and interviewees who contributed to this study.

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes that everyone should have the freedom and power to turn their ideas into reality – we call this the Power to Create. Through our ideas, research and 28,000-strong Fellowship, we seek to realise a society where creative power is distributed, where concentrations of power are confronted, and where creative values are nurtured.



8 John Adam Street
London WC2N 6EZ
+44 (0)20 7930 5115

Registered as a charity
in England and Wales
no. 212424

Copyright © RSA 2017

www.thersa.org
