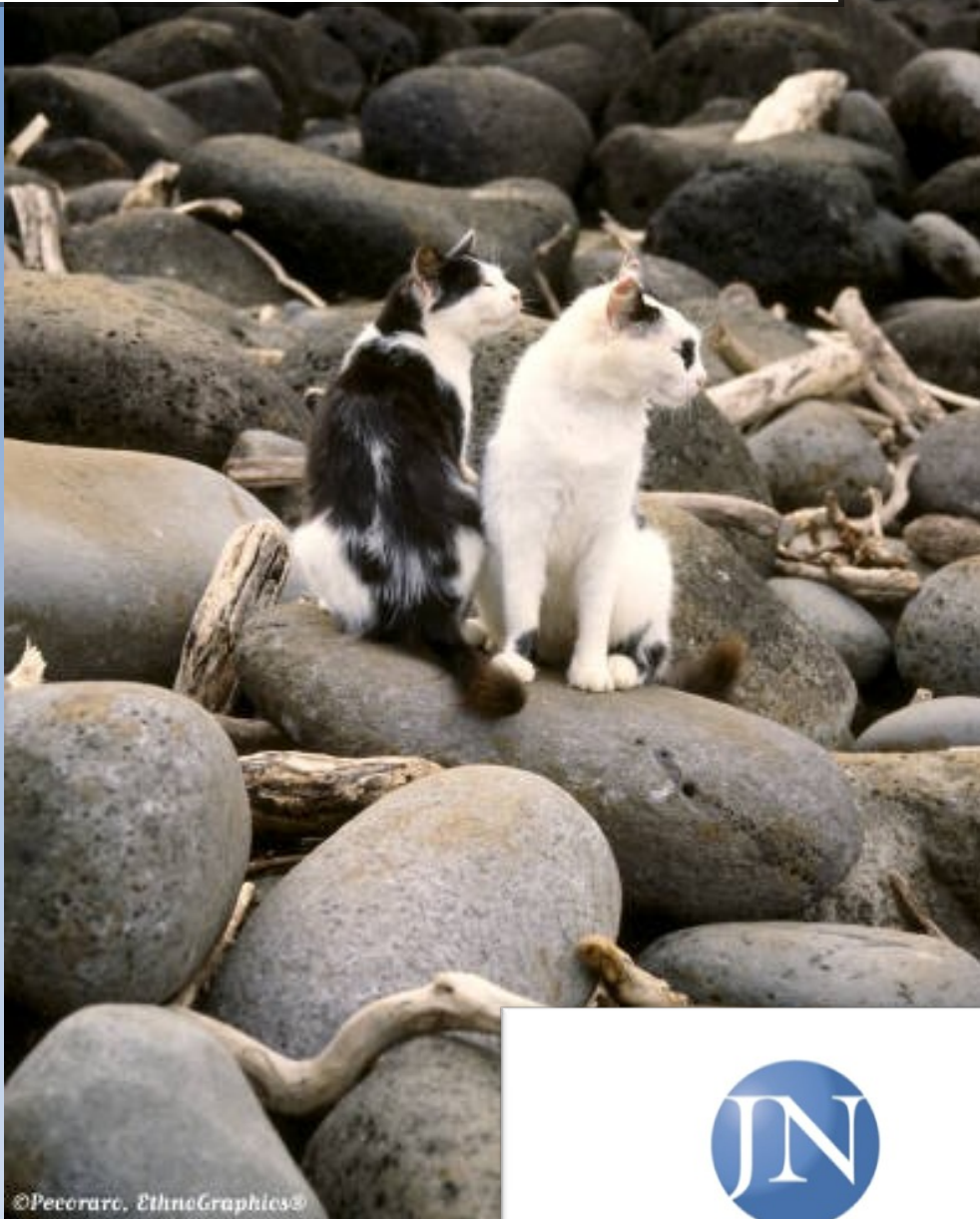


Shared Services: A Beginner's Guide to Cat-Herding



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Let's face it, there are easier things to do than sharing services...

Everyone has their own view on how things should be done and how services can best be delivered. There are “particular circumstances” that apply to *your* organisation that do not apply to your partners. Joint working can be seen as an erosion of control, accountability and, potentially, people's jobs.

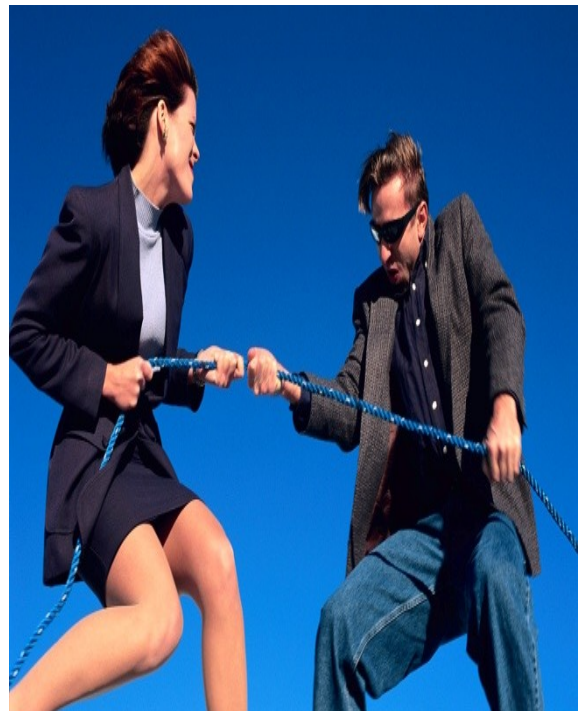
However, with increasing pressures on finances and resources and no sign of the concept disappearing from the Government's agenda, public sector organisations need to consider working collaboratively.

There are plenty of positive aspects:

- Better cost-efficiency
- Strengthened resilience
- Access to scarce expertise
- Improved service quality

but most organisations still regard sharing services as a major step and one where – politically and culturally – there is a battle for hearts and minds to be won.

So how can we make things easier and the turn the concept of shared services - which most decision-makers and stakeholders support - into a reality?



Look at what's the same rather than what's different

Sharing services or even preparing to share is not all about comparing your current performance with that of your partner. True, you can probably learn from each other, but comparisons and benchmarking are more about what is possible from sharing best practice and pooling resources.

Commonalities are the name of the game – it can be common drivers, in the form of:

- Recruitment and retention issues
- The push for efficiency savings
- Similar objectives / priorities

It could also be that there are common platforms (technology or any existing joined-up working) that can be built on and developed or expanded.

But we'll admit that opening oneself up for others to see can be a daunting prospect and some may argue that organisations should sort themselves out before looking to work with others. We would disagree, since there are greater opportunities to look at new ways of service delivery if you do it together.

Even though the benefits and “prizes” of shared services are identified and sought at the beginning, time and time again, partnerships fail due to issues of politics and culture.



The most common obstacles to collaboration fall into two categories:

- Fears
- Level of involvement

What can organisations do to address these issues?

Fear factors and overcoming them...



Trust

- Get to know your partners (and where they're coming from)
- Be open-minded (and be open yourself)
- Agree what the objectives are (gain consensus)
- Regular communication

Ramifications

- Think about the future
- Develop a clear vision
- Look to set the agenda, but be flexible

The views of others

- Solicit / consult widely
- Build in views where appropriate
- Communicate your message to stakeholder groups

Reduced service quality

- Assess current standards and set new target ones
- Plan for service continuity
- Monitor your plans and services

Fair shares

- Ensure that information is as accurate and up to date as possible
- Validate the information, where possible
- Agree consistent and robust mechanisms and bases for sharing

Change for change's sake

- Identify the drivers for change, be sure they're valid and agree them
- Build on what is good already

The "New"

- Seek out best practice (where this has been done before)
- Seek external guidance and help

Risk

- Identify risks
- Develop measures to reduce / mitigate / eliminate risks
- Plan well and communicate your plans

Banishing fears...

Working with us can help you overcome these obstacles in the following ways:

Trust

- Facilitated workshops
- Communications strategy
- Regular team-building meetings and events

Ramifications

- Review the existing vision and long term strategy

Views of others

- Stakeholder engagement programme
- Workshops and interviews as appropriate

Reduced service quality

- Objective assessment of current standards across the partnership
- Assistance in setting realistic targets
- Service continuity built into the implementation plan
- Workshops to ensure “buy in”

Fair shares

- Validation of comparative information
- Objective development of apportionment bases (based on best practice)

Change for change's sake

- “Reality check” on drivers for change

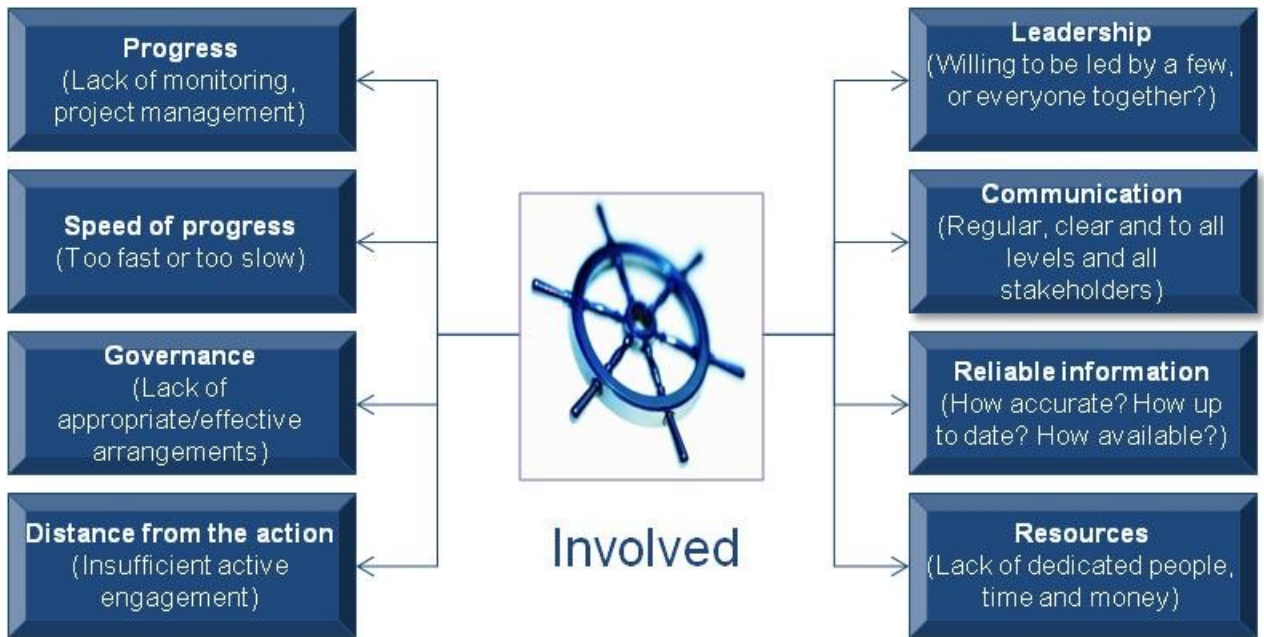
The “New”

- Draw on best practice (from partnership working in the public sector and beyond)
- We have wide (and deep) experience in this field

Risk

- Development of a robust risk register that is dynamic and easy to understand

How much involvement?



Progress

- Clear and agreed mechanisms for monitoring and reporting
- Agreed and identified milestones and deliverables
- Established “gateway” points to allow review and key decisions

Speed of progress

- Ensure that rate of progress is appropriate
- Prudent and robust approach must be weighed up against motivation and credibility to deliver

Distance from the action

- Ensure proper governance in place
- Regular communication and reporting
- Good specification of objectives and outcomes

Governance

- Flexible and as streamlined as possible
- Arrangements for both senior officers and elected members
- Look to virtual solutions to cope with geography (if necessary)

Leadership

- Championing the project
- Determine roles within the partnership

Communication

- Develop an overall Communications Plan
- Ensure that level and type of communication is appropriate for each audience
- Establish an appropriate frequency for communications (and stick to it)

Reliable information

- Agree on format, content and type of information to ensure consistency for comparisons
- Ensure availability, accuracy of information and that it is up to date

Resources

- Aim to provide dedicated staff as appropriate
- Establish clearly identifiable budget provision
- Try to make time – it is not an “add-on” to the day job

Involvement worries addressed...

We have tools, techniques and methodologies that can help you in all these areas:

Progress

- Use of effective project management, including reporting
- Development of performance/success measures for the partnership project

Speed of progress

- Use of tried and tested project management, focused on delivering milestones
- Consideration of incremental partnership models

Governance

- Use of best practice to evaluate and develop suitable arrangements
- Build platforms for any future joint working

Distance from the action

- Work to ensure active participation from all partners as appropriate
- Effective communications

Resources

- Provide advice on best use of dedicated resources
- Close liaison with any such resources
- Transfer of skills

Communication

- Production of a clear, dynamic communications plan
- Advice on best formats/channels for particular audiences

Reliable information

- Advice on ensuring consistent format and content
- Validation of information
- Benchmarking across the partnership (and beyond)

Leadership

- Development of models for leadership within options in business case
- Commentary on pros and cons of each model

Partnership principles...

Identify and accept the need for partnership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Develop clarity / realism of purpose	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Foster ownership and commitment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Develop and maintain trust	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Set realistic goals to be achieved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Create clear / robust partnership arrangements	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Evaluate - monitor, measure and learn	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

It may seem trite, but for a successful and effective partnership, practical experience has shown that all of the seven principles above are essential. The principles can also be used to evaluate the health of partnerships.

Therefore at the **start** of any new shared services arrangements, it is important to be sure that all the principles will be met. This means more than tacit agreement or paying lip service – there must be true commitment to working together.

We can carry out a tailored “health-assessment” of your partnership – at whatever stage it may be at – and help you to focus on areas where more work or refinement is needed.

So how much cat-herding have we done?

Our team has the experience of shared services arrangements that have worked - and learnt the lessons from those that haven't.

Many of the team worked with ODPM's **Strategic Partnering Taskforce** and have contributed to the current guidance on Strategic Service-Delivery Partnerships (SSPs) .



In our various roles over the last 10 years we have worked – providing advice, project support and developing business cases - with many partnerships , including:

- Liverpool & BT** - the first e-enabled integrated Service Centre in local government
- Partnering Adur & Worthing Services** – initially focused on waste and recycling services, but now considering a single workforce for the two councils
- Norfolk Partners Shared Services Study** – 10 public sector organisations across Norfolk looking at ways of collaborative working
- Oxfordshire County Council** – implementing their shared service centre

In terms of experience, both hands-on and in an advisory capacity, it's unlikely that you'll meet a team more qualified than us.

Contact us for a discussion...

Please feel free to contact us to see how we can help you and your partners, using any of the methods below:

Contact: Jonathan Nulty Management Consultancy

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