An essential tool to improve services and outcomes

Networks, alliances and other forms of collaborative working play a significant role in how we improve services and outcomes for people who use services and their families.

They deliver collaborative advantage. That is something is achieved that could not have been achieved without the collaboration.

This paper is aimed at all those who take part in, run or fund networks to bring about positive change for people with health and social care needs.

It focuses on the design of networks, based on what we found that successful networks are currently doing in practice. The information was gained from 40 semi-structured interviews, conducted during the Autumn of 2005 with a wide range of people, including service users, health and social care professionals, service managers, commissioners and researchers.

Design principles and assessment tool

Analysing people’s experiences and feedback on their use of networks, we have developed a set of guiding principles based on four common themes - structure, context, support infrastructure and delivery. Building on this, the paper also sets out an easy to use questionnaire to assess a network’s fitness for purpose to deliver real change.

Realising the potential of partnerships

Over the next 12 months, we will produce a range of papers to provide direction, share evidence and promote innovative practice in people and partnership working.

Future papers may cover issues such as:
- making a difference through Local Area Agreements, and
- indicators and outcomes of effective partnership working.

We hope you find this an interesting read. If there are other issues you would like to be covered, please get in touch, by phone 0113 254 5127 or email cassandra.mchugh@dh.gsi.gov.uk.

Prof Antony Sheehan
Director General of Health and Care Partnerships
Department of Health

Our definition

“Successful networking can be seen as a social pursuit with purpose. It happens when groups of people with common interests and passions come together to share and learn from each other.

“Productive relationships between individual members are a sustaining factor of good networks, which are also a helpful foundation to achieve collective goals. To work well, effective networks usually use a combination of face-to-face and virtual contact.”
Why collaborate?

Social networks and collaborative activities typically involve groups of people who share information, knowledge and experience for a collective purpose.

It is commonly accepted that networks represent a potentially powerful lever for change. (Pettigrew et al, 1992).

They create a channel for knowledge to cross boundaries created by workflow, functions, organisation, professional discipline, geography, and time. They provide the means to move local know-how to collective information and promote the uptake of beneficial practices across operations and regions.

Networks are most often founded on the collaborative hypothesis that by working together we can be more effective than working alone.

They deliver collaborative advantage. In other words, something is achieved that could not have been achieved without the collaboration.

This often includes:
- a better sense of belonging, ownership and understanding,
- improved outcomes that would not otherwise be attained, and
- improved performance and productivity.

The importance of working collaboratively in networks has been emphasised in numerous policy documents, reports and research findings. Effective collaboration improves the experience and outcome of care for people, and also benefits team members themselves and the organisation as a whole (Borrill et al. 2002; NCEPOD, 2002).

Networks and networking activity are a key practice for all care service stakeholders. Networks enable local, regional and national teams to coalesce around common issues and topics, and enable the sharing and dissemination of information and knowledge.

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 wider commissioning programmes.

The Network helps:
- to identify and share what works,
- to facilitate development work, 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.

For more information

- Lead officer: Nigel Walker
  nigel.walker@dh.gsi.gov.uk
- Website: www.cat.csip.org.uk/index.cfm?pid=7
- Enquiries: catcommmlin@eac.org.uk
- Discussion forum: www.cat.csip.org.uk/index.cfm?pid=20
Network success factors

Current research into the effectiveness of partnership working through networks emphasises a number of success factors including:

- 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 focussed, and
- willingness to celebrate success.

(Kilo, 2001; Øvretveit et al, 2002; Research into Practice, 2003)

A few words

‘Smart networks make it possible to organise the forms of government in very different ways, starting with needs, outcomes, or client groups and then working backwards to fit functions to them.’
(Mulgan 2004)

‘Innovation is a social, interactive process rather than one of individual creativity, and networks play a vital role.’
(Hargreaves 2004)

‘Reciprocity is key to the power of networks, exerting a governing logic over them - the alchemy of mutual give and take over time turning to a golden trust.’
(Henderson 2004)

National Leadership Network (N LN) for health and social care

This network led by the Department of Health is designed for system management and social care / local government.

The NLN was established as part of the DH Making Relationships Count Programme which aimed to:

- move key relationships on to a more strategic footing
- help the Department transact business with key stakeholders more consistently, efficiently and effectively

- earn the Department the reputation of an organisation that is ‘good to do business with’, and which supports others to deliver

The NLN is now fully established and being mainstreamed across DH business, with its own internal support team. Stakeholder participation is strong, with clear work programme evolving. It has received strong endorsement and engagement by the Secretary of State and the wider ministerial team.

For more information email national.leadership@dh.gsi.gov.uk or visit the website www.nationalleadershipnetwork.org (note that access is restricted to members of the NLN and the Emerging Leaders Network)

Case studies

Do you run, participate in or fund a network which is successfully bring about positive change for people with health and social care needs? If you would like to share your success story with others please get in touch by email partnershipworking@csip.org.uk

A few words

‘Smart networks make it possible to organise the forms of government in very different ways, starting with needs, outcomes, or client groups and then working backwards to fit functions to them.’

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(Henderson 2004)
Network design principles

The diagram below shows four network design principles. Successful networks satisfy key components across all principles. They are connected and mutually reinforcing. For each principle we identify key components and evidence.

- **Structure**
  - Membership, roles and responsibilities
  - Clear and realistic delivery timescales
  - Size
  - Relevance

- **Support infrastructure**
  - Accessible, user-friendly and joined up technologies
  - Members are supported
  - Members use technology appropriately

- **Context**
  - Fit for purpose
  - Realistic expectations
  - Clear picture of what success would look like

- **Delivery**
  - Good connections to people, organisations and other networks
  - Members perceive forward movement
  - Membership is stable
  - Delivers tangible products
  - Celebrates achievements

**Evidence:**
- **Structure**
  - planning documentation e.g., project plan, terms of reference

- **Support infrastructure**
  - partnership charter
  - good stories about the network

- **Context**
  - clear and regular communications
  - offline and online activities are complimentary
  - training

- **Delivery**
  - tangible products are created
  - demonstrable measurement of outcomes delivery
## Network assessment tool

We have used the design principles to develop the questionnaire below. Use this with your network colleagues to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the networks that you are involved in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The network has a clear purpose and direction</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The network has a realistic timetable for delivery</td>
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<tr>
<td>The network members understand and are committed to improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>The network is widely inclusive both in the range of disciplines involved and their seniority</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network members demonstrate trust, respect and mutual support</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Network members are supported by their host organisations</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members access and use technology appropriately to support their networking activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>There are clear channels of communication between team members</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network members share their learning with others</td>
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<tr>
<td>Network members ask each other for support and receive it</td>
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<tr>
<td>The network delivers success and demonstrates it</td>
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A few questions
Whatever the focus of your current activities, you’re likely to find it useful to think about the following questions:

• What do I know about networks?
• What don’t I know?
• What do I need to know in order to initiate and sustain effective change through networks?
• Where can I look for further information and help? For example, should I be thinking about people, existing networks, published resources?

References and useful reading
http://research.abs.aston.ac.uk/achsor/achsor.html


Authors
This paper has been written with contributions from Andy Nash, Ingrid Steele, Rowan Purdy, David Monk, David Todd and Alison Kerins.

It is the first in a series that aims to provide direction, share evidence and promote innovative practice in people and partnerships related issues.

Our work on positive practice in networking has been undertaken within the care services network project. This project aims to help achieve greater coherence and inclusion across the care services. It is a joint project between the Health and Care Partnerships Directorate and Care Services Improvement Partnership.

More information
www.csip.org.uk/csnp
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