

WORKING WELL TOGETHER

GUIDEPOSTS FOR COLLABORATION IN INTER-AGENCY GROUPS

by
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HOFD (Nin)

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CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| PREFACE | 3 |
| CHAPTER 1 Issues in collaboration | 4 |
| CHAPTER 2 Facilitation of a collaborative group | 9 |
| CHAPTER 3 Leadership | 16 |
| CHAPTER 4 Problems of collaborative groups | 19 |
| CONCLUSION | 23 |
| ACTION CHECKLIST FOR COLLABORATIVE GROUPS | 24 |
| FURTHER READING | 25 |

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PREFACE

In 1979, Tess Nind, on behalf of the London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC), wrote to the Personal Social Services Committee (PSSC) in response to the discussion document "Collaboration in Community Care", pointing out that the document focused almost entirely on the professional role in community care and that the roles of relatives, neighbours, friends, community groups, churches and voluntary organisations were ignored. As a result, LVSC was asked to join with the PSSC and the Central Health Services Council in developing a more genuinely collaborative approach to community care.

The initial outcome of this collaboration was a programme of action research which focused on elderly mentally infirm people. Tim Dartington's "Limits to Altruism" sets out what was learnt about collaborative working and makes a number of recommendations, particularly relating to collaborative training. This work and report were funded and published by the Kings Fund.

In 1985, the Mental Health Foundation gave a grant for a further training and development programme which incorporated and extended the earlier action research work, and focused primarily on people with long term mental health problems. The Guideposts, which form the bulk of this report, have been written as a result of this work.

The Mental Health Foundation funded the project "to improve working relations between voluntary and statutory agencies in the field of community care". It is hoped that this paper will stimulate readers to find creative solutions to the inevitable difficulties of collaborative working.

Tess Nind, initially as Head of the London Voluntary Work Development Centre at LVSC and subsequently Director of ADVANCE a London training organisation, was responsible for the overall management of the project. Tim Dartington was research consultant. As a collaborative programme itself, the work owes much to others including Vega Roberts, Fabian Davis and Barry Palmer and the many who shared their experiences of collaborative working in various training events. This paper is a small attempt to redress the lack thought about training for collaborative working.

As different attitudes and values are so significant in this area, joint training of workers could offer a broader base for integrated community services. However, a Voluntary Organisation Personal Social Services (VOPSS) paper on training issues related to community care showed that restrictions on local authority and health service expenditure have meant a reduction in in-service training and in the secondment of unqualified staff for professional training. Few voluntary organisations have resources to carry out their own training. Even if there was the demand, very little appropriate multi-agency, community-based training is available, as trainers and those responsible for training themselves lack experience of what is involved in working together in the community.

The paper is laid out as a series of chapters covering aspects of collaborative work. Each is followed by a section of guideposts, or principles, which are probably best studied by individuals. The principal questions are collected in an action checklist at the end of this paper, so that they can be used by collaborative groups to discuss the issues raised in this paper. We hope that collaborative groups will find their work enhanced through consideration of the ideas and guidelines presented below.

References:

- Dartington T., *The limits of altruism: elderly, mentally infirm people as a test case for collaboration*, King's Fund, 1986.
- Joint Projects: Patterns of Management* Community Care Project, NCVO, and Voluntary Organisations Personal Social Services Group, 1989.

CHAPTER 1

ISSUES IN COLLABORATION

The implications of the delivery of joint services and multi-disciplinary management of community services for staff, managers, volunteers, carers and the organisations to which they are accountable, are immense. Issues that inevitably arise in collaborative work are:

- who should be involved in creating a vision of what should be achieved?
- who should be responsible for developing a strategy for implementing the vision?
- who will be responsible for carrying it out?
- who owns the proposals?
- what is the nature of the investment of the individual and the organisations involved in the programme?

Services are not just changing in relation to the closure of the large psychiatric institutions, most mental health services are now to be provided in a person's home, with the professional supporting the carer rather than directly caring themselves. Services will have to change, be flexible, meet the needs of individuals in the context of the family and the neighbourhood, with all this may involve in terms of differences in power, expertise and expectations. Staff from different agencies with a variety of professional training and work experience have to consult and work together, if users and their families are to have a comprehensive and coordinated service. The potential for mistrust and breakdown in communication is enormous, requiring sensitive exploration of issues of responsibility and accountability.

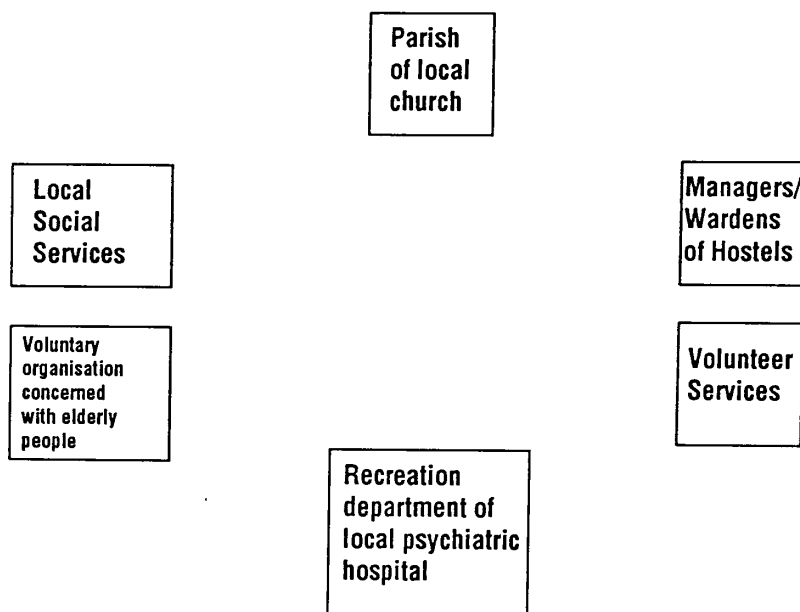
In joint agency work, issues of authority and power are a further potential hazard. Participants face differences in languages, values and the problems of dual accountability to both an employing body or discipline and a multi-agency, collaborative group. Informal activity across the boundaries of organisations and disciplines can be the greatest catalyst for new and creative initiatives. We are no longer surprised at the 'deviant' behaviour of those who collaborate. Those involved need to be able to take risks. However, without an understanding management system which is willing to support work on the boundaries of the organisations, many potentially valuable initiatives are doomed to failure.

Ideally, collaboration occurs among groups who share a common aim and who need each other in order to achieve that aim. The collaborative group is inter-dependent, both within itself and in its relations with the various home-agencies. Each home-agency must be prepared to give up something and delegate sufficient freedom of movement to its emissary in order to achieve the shared aim. Collaborative workers act as representatives of their home-agencies in the collaborative group — and as representatives of the collaborative group in their home-agencies. The shared objectives provide the 'glue' for sufficient cohesiveness within the collaborative group, while continued active membership within the home-agency keeps alive the differences among the collaborative group members — the very difference for which they were brought into the collaborative venture in the first place.

What is collaboration?

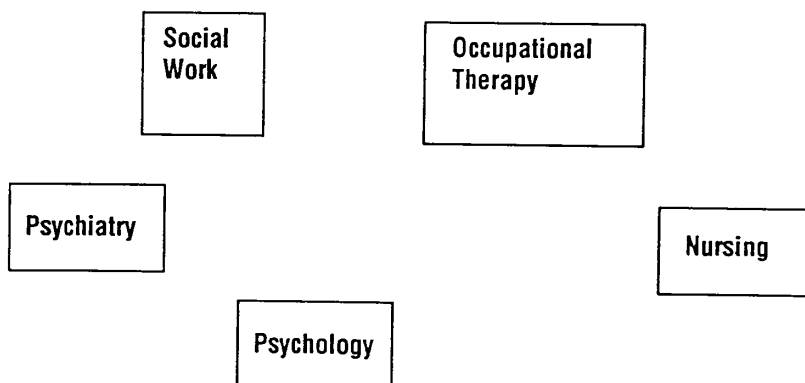
The word 'collaboration' is often used interchangeably with 'cooperation' or simply 'working together'. However, we have used it more specifically to refer to the work of groups whose members come together because of their membership of other groups or institutions (referred to as 'home-agencies') with some interest in, or contribution needed, for the work of the collaborative group.

For example, a group was formed to set up a new social club for elderly people with learning difficulties discharged from hospital and now living in various homes and hostels. The group included members from:

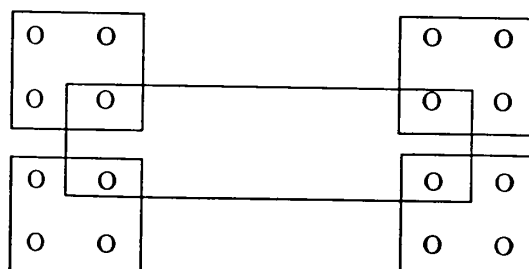


These groups or 'home-agencies' were involved on the basis of similarity, namely a shared interest in getting this club going and on the basis of difference, namely that each group had a particular contribution (funding, staffing, expert knowledge, close contact with potential users, influence) that as required for the project to be successful. No one group could have carried out the project alone.

In another example, a multi-disciplinary team was set up to provide an integrated community-based psychiatric treatment service. To operate effectively, the team needed input from various disciplines:

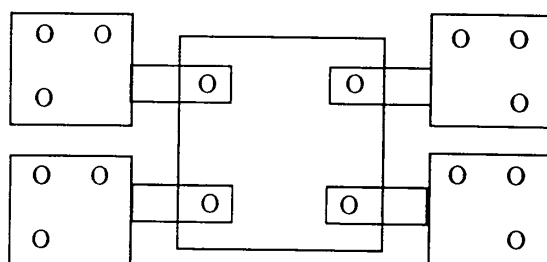


In both examples we could illustrate the new constellation — the collaborative group — schematically like this:

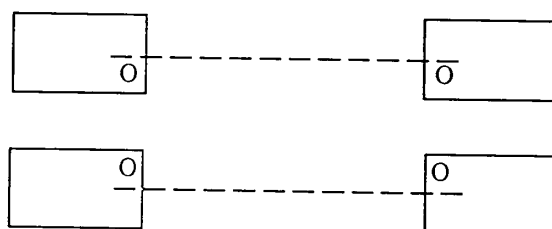


The four outer squares represent the original groups (institutions or disciplines) and the inner one the new collaborative group.

However, to the extent that the collaborative worker's participation in the collaborative work is outside or away from the main work of the home-agency, a more accurate representation of the situation might be like this:

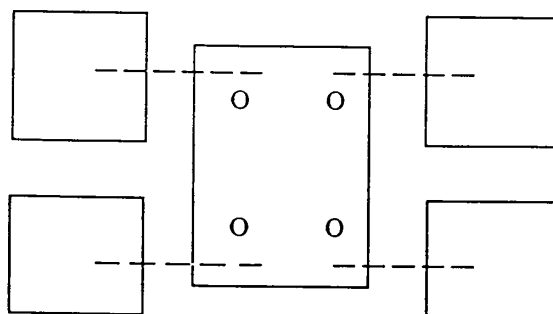


We can begin to see the emergence of a fundamental difficulty in collaborative work. If some, or all of the collaborative workers' identification with their home-agencies (commitment to their aims, needs, values) strongly outweighs their identification with the collaborative group (i.e. its aims, needs, values), then they are likely to act to further the home-agencies' interests at the expense of the aims of the collaborative group:



The result may be all too familiar, as the collaborative group fragments and its members compete for ownership, resources or power, rather than working together to achieve shared objectives.

On the other hand, if collaborative workers become more strongly committed to the collaborative enterprise than to their home-agencies, they may find themselves without support and resources from back home. Also, workers who fail to maintain sufficiently strong relationships with their home-agencies may find the collaborative group's proposals ignored when the time comes for implementation:



Home-agencies will continue to work and change over the period of the collaborative enterprise and - particularly if this period is long - the worker may 'return home' to find that she has been representing a group whose work is no longer seen as important, or is working within an outdated policy. Her efforts may be perceived as irrelevant, or even in conflict with the current position of the home-agency. The collaborative group has become quasi-autonomous, its members are no longer truly part of the institutions they originally came to represent. This feeling of having been betrayed or abandoned by the home-agencies may further strengthen the workers' identification with the collaborative group. The group may feel so threatened from

the outside that all differences inside the group become blurred with members lapsing into 'group-think' and no longer able to contribute from their special competencies. At this point, neither the group as a whole, nor the individuals in it, are able to be effective.

It is the difficulty in managing this inevitable tension between membership of two groups that leads to much of the stress experienced by collaborative workers and to the frequent collapse of collaborative ventures. Many of the Guideposts are concerned with how to bring about and maintain an effective balance.

How is collaboration different from other types of group work?

In every group, each member is simultaneously a member of other groups and institutions: family, social, religious, political. Where the aims or priorities of these groups conflict, the individual experiences role-conflict, for example, between parent and employee roles, or career ambitions and political convictions.

However, in most cases these various memberships are coincidental: a particular teacher 'happens' to also be a mother, a trade union leader and chairperson of a local voluntary group, but she was not hired as a teacher because of her membership in these other groups. The collaborative worker, in contrast, usually becomes part of the collaborative group through membership of her home-agency or discipline, either because the collaborative groups needs or wants that agency's support and involvement, or because the home-agency needs or wants to be involved (or to be seen to be involved) in the collaborative project.

Often both are true, though the collaborative group's reasons and the home-agencies' reasons for seeking the involvement may not be the same, and may even conflict. It is when the reasons are congruent that the choice of representative and the support provided for her (time, resources, authority, commitment to implementation) are likely to contribute most effectively to a successful outcome of the collaborative enterprise.

GETTING A COLLABORATIVE GROUP TOGETHER — OR "MARKETING" COLLABORATION

The person initiating the collaboration needs to consider:

Why do I want to collaborate?

There are a number of different reasons why collaboration might be considered:

- a range of skills and experience are necessary for the task in hand;
- a range of agencies are required for a task, for example, in order to offer an integrated service to clients;
- a range of individuals or agencies may increase the likelihood of getting funding or achieving implementation of a task;
- mutual support;
- window-dressing;
- there may be no choice: policies or circumstances require collaboration, as, for example, with a multi-disciplinary team;
- personal belief in the value of collaboration.

Who should be involved?

This will be determined by the answer to the first question; individuals may be selected on the basis of:

- needed skills;
- information;
- power;
- investment;
- personal attributes;
- representation of groups that will be affected;
- existing collaborators.

What is known about the local history of collaboration?

- Are there some useful hints and tips to be gained from people involved in previous efforts?
- What issues have there been in the past that might colour potential participants' view of this new project?
- It is worth remembering that previous historical issues may emerge again at any time; however, a new venture can represent a new opportunity to negotiate on these issues.

What is known about the organisations of the people who might be invited?

A range of possibilities might include:

- knowledge of management structure;
- where organisations stand in relation to major issues thrown up by the proposed collaboration;
- what might be in it for them as 'stakeholders';
- what is their likely or required pay-off?;
- what marketing strategy will they find acceptable?;
- what style of innovation they adopt — top down or bottom up? It can help to act according to their rules in the marketing phase.

How should potential participants be invited?

The form of the invitation will depend on the issues raised in the previous questions, but could be:

- personal contact;
- letter;
- message from mutual contact;
- or a combination of all three.

What should be fixed beforehand?

Issues for prior consideration include:

- the agenda;
- the task itself;
- the working methods.

The group will want to consider these issues in time, but clarity in this pre-contract stage will help ensure a smooth beginning to the collaborative process. The person initiating the collaboration also needs to give some prior thought to issues of leadership. Much of what follows needs to be discussed within the group, however, it will help the group originator (who initially will probably be seen as the informal leader) to have considered these issues beforehand.

CHAPTER 2

FACILITATION OF A COLLABORATIVE GROUP

Two discussion groups at ADVANCE came together to explore collaboration. This chapter draws together ideas and discussions from the two groups around the topic of facilitation of a collaborative group. Examples are used in this chapter which describe where collaboration did work, and sometimes where it didn't. Some examples are drawn from the groups themselves which, as groups of mixed professionals, were working examples of collaboration. One of the outcomes of this venture was the 'Guideposts' - lessons or principles which make the process of collaboration easier. These Guideposts can be used to help facilitate a collaborative group.

Facilitation of the task

Most of the collaborative experiences reported to the ADVANCE discussion groups were around a task - setting up a new service, providing a package of care to a client, producing a set of recommendations. The fulfilment of these tasks raised various issues.

Size and membership of group

Collaboration can happen between any number of people, from two upwards. In practice, both discussion groups felt that groups of about 12 to 14 is 'about right' but if everyone is to feel involved there may be a need to break up into smaller groups for detailed discussions. This was borne out by one of the members' research analysis of collaborative meetings, where little sharing of ideas and information took place in full committee meetings; much more sharing took place in sub-committee meetings or workshops where people were in smaller groups. One of the discussion groups tried breaking itself up into smaller groups in order to get the final writing task done, and this worked very well; (this suggestion arose out of group work or training methods of working, rather than committee procedure).

What clearly emerged out of discussions was the importance of including the right people in the collaborative group; either those who had the information required, or more particularly the power to implement decisions. In a group set up to plan a preventative mental health project, it was decided not to involve senior managers, as it was felt unlikely that they would want to be involved. In retrospect, this was thought to be a mistake and hampered the group's ability to get plans implemented. On the other hand, groups with a wide disparity in the seniority of members can find difficulties when it comes to the sharing of ideas. An example was of a group chaired by a local councillor who also chaired the social services committee- useful for mobilising resources, and getting decisions through quickly, but difficult in that he often did not attend meetings or was too busy to allow adequate time for discussions.

Time

Setting up projects always takes longer than anticipated. This was demonstrated by the example of a project set up to deal with client complaint procedures and to provide the necessary training for staff. Several months of development were required before the training workshops could begin. This was seen as a 'delay' by the funding agency, which did not at first understand the need for initial development work. One participant calculated that creating

the vision of a group, clarifying the understanding of everyone involved (no mean task, when everyone is from different disciplines) and agreeing the task can take 75% of the allocated preparation and planning time. Anxiety over time and pressure to complete the task can mean moving too quickly through these stages and leaving people behind. On the other hand, a limited time-scale can encourage the group to work within a clear time framework.

It is interesting to note that the two discussion groups in the ADVANCE project took a different approach to keeping to time. In one group, it was up to the convenor; the other group had a group member (other than the convenor) to remind the group of the time appointed to end one task and when to move to another. However, the time-keeper felt uncomfortable with his role and eventually dropped out of it.

Establishing the Aims and Task

There was much discussion around this topic, not least within the ADVANCE discussion groups themselves, clarifying their own task and the outcome of their deliberations. As already mentioned, getting everyone to share a task and aim that will override individual differences can be time-consuming and difficult. One of the groups suggested that establishing a common vision might be a more creative approach than simply establishing limited aims, and there was some discussion of the role of 'visionaries' — people with the clearest picture of what might be possible within the group. Other examples highlighted the problems of failing to establish common aims; for example, an inter-agency rehabilitation team with a consultant in the chair can lead to conflict in the team approach to working with users. If one approach is imposed without proper discussion, this can leave some members of the group feeling manipulated. The problem is compounded when individual members hold back from contributing to meetings and do not state their personal agendas.

Obtaining Resources

Several examples were cited of people being unwilling to commit any of their scarce resources to the collaborative project. As already noted, having members with the power to commit their organisations' resources is, in some cases, vital to the success of the project. However, people should not be asked to commit resources before the ground work of establishing a common aim or vision, or establishing commitment to the group has been carried out.

Housekeeping for the Group

The tasks required in servicing a collaborative group include ensuring equipment is available and working, e.g. tape recorder, that notes are written up and distributed, and non-attenders are contacted. The approach to take with non-attenders should be jointly agreed. Ensuring an effective channel of communication to and from non-attenders is also important. Without this a group can wait around indecisively before starting and waste valuable time. It is important to attend to these points as they can have a harmful effect on the effectiveness of the group and negatively affect the feeling of commitment of members.

Facilitation of Process

The reasons why collaborative groups do or do not work are complex. The building of strong enough boundaries around the collaborative enterprise emerged as a central factor in successful collaboration. This

was attained partly through establishing good working relationships; but also by having a clear sense of where fellow collaborators stood in relation to their own agencies.

Failure to understand the demands and structure of other group members' home-agencies also emerged in the groups' discussions of 'what gets in the way of collaboration'. Building up the trust needed to feel safe in expressing risky feelings and opinions was the subject of a piece of 'action research' by one of the ADVANCE groups. This group was conscious in their first meeting of the inhibition felt by individual members in voicing their personal views and the resultant lack of energy in the discussions. A large part of the next meeting was devoted to each member giving a fuller presentation (five to ten minutes) of their home-agency and their interest in collaboration. This seemed to pay off and discussions became much more lively thereafter.

The value of honouring individual differences emerged in the groups, as did the importance of acknowledging those individuals who do make a contribution or take a risk. Too often people feel implicitly or explicitly put down or criticised for what they are (an academic, therapist, volunteer worker) and hide what they do have to offer from their discipline, by emphasising sameness and blurring differences.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING AND NEGOTIATION ONCE THE GROUP IS FORMED

Once the members of the collaborative group have been chosen, have agreed to participate and have discussed issues of leadership, then the group needs to pay attention to getting to know each other, defining its task(s) and working out how the group will achieve its aims.

What am I here for? What are you here for?

- * It is important to make space to look at this, even if it proves difficult to think and talk about, otherwise crucial issues fail to surface early on.
- * The reasons for each person's involvement need not be just about individual pay-offs. It may be that a member's particular background enables them to offer a distinctive contribution, or that their agency ought to be involved in the matter at hand. The more these reasons can be shared, the more likely the group is to develop enough trust to work together and to move to the next question:

What are we here for?

- * Having established people's individual reasons the group needs to move on to evolving a shared purpose.

Do I know where my colleagues are coming from?

It is useful for each participant to have some idea about the perspective of other participants:

- * at a personal level (values);
- * relative to their home-agency (power/position/discretion);
- * and some sense of how the others' home-agencies function.

What assumptions am I coming with and can I check these out?

This includes assumptions about:

- * the status of the group — is it executive, advisory, consultative, a 'think tank'?
- * task definition, methods to be used, ownership of the outcome.

Has the task been clearly enough defined?

- * This may already have been done at the time of the invitation but even so, the group needs to spend some time coming to a shared picture of what their work together is to be about.
- * Sometimes the task gets redefined as the work evolves; is there sanction for this or will it lead to the group feeling/being seen as deviant?

How is the group going to make decisions?

- * Majority vote; consensus; whoever is most powerful?
- * What if members cannot agree?
- * What happens if a certain proportion of the group or key individuals are absent?

How is the work going to be shared out and reported back on?

- * People need to be realistic about how much they can take on; there is no point pressurising people to take on more than they can manage.
- * Who is best able to take on particular tasks, that is, who has the needed skills/information/clerical resources.

Is the group clear about how often and how long it will meet?

- * The starting time is known, but sometimes not the ending time, this can lead to different people leaving at different stages.
- * Time implications may be different if people are meeting during or outside their normal working hours.

Are members negotiating sufficiently with their own employing agency?

- * How central or peripheral to members' roles do employers see this task?
- * How much time and resources are home-agencies committing to this project?
- * What support will members get from them?
- * Are members here to represent their home-agency's views?
- * How much scope for discretion do members have to make decisions, commit resources, alter the original aim, and so on?
- * What do home-agencies expect to get out of this?
- * What commitment, if any, have home-agencies made to pay attention to what the group decides or recommends?
- * Whom do members tell what is going on, and how often? It is usually more useful to communicate briefly and often, to keep lines of communication open and managers up-to-date.
- * Do home-agencies see what they will get out of it?
- * What are home-agency's views/values regarding the issues at hand - what if they are different from members?
- * How much delegated power do members have - is it enough for the job they are being expected to do?

What historical issues may be being played out here?

- * For those who have previously worked together, changed relationships may have to be negotiated.
- * For those who have not worked together before, new relationships will have to be worked out from scratch.

Have the boundaries of confidentiality been sorted out?

- * Are there participants who, for various reasons, may be happy to offer ideas, information, but not wish to be attributed?
- * Is confidentiality restricted to the collaborative group or is a wider network required?
- * Who is involved, both essentially and on a "need to know" basis?

Has enough space been made for all this preliminary work?

- * Clarifying and negotiating all the above issues may take a long time. It helps if everyone sees it as crucial and part of the 'real' work.

- * This preliminary part of the process has to be seen to be valued and recognised as essential before moving on.

GETTING DOWN TO IT AND KEEPING THE GROUP GOING

Is the group making time to review its work?

- * Where have we got to?
- * How are we working, individually and as a group?
- * What is helping or hindering the work and are we dealing with problems as they arise?
- * Is the frequency of meetings still right?
- * Is there timely and sufficient reporting back from any sub-groups?

Is membership being attended to?

- * When individual participants leave the project, are they replaced by other representatives of their agencies?
- * Attendance: can the work proceed if certain participants are absent; are absences followed up; do people feel their attendance matters?
- * Does the membership continue to match the current aim/tasks of the group? Is there scope for changing the membership as the needs of the group change? (It can be wrongly assumed that the same individuals need to be involved at every stage)
- * Is the size of the group right for the job? Is the group large enough to provide the range of skills and diversity needed and small enough to allow the kind of ongoing review and negotiation that is needed?

Sometimes the initial planning group may need to be quite large to include all parties concerned, but the working groups could be smaller and thereby more cohesive and effective.

What are relationships between participants like at present?

- * Is there enough space to explore disagreements or do these have to remain covert?
- * Is there sufficient opportunity for informal contact between meetings? These can strengthen relationships and provide a chance to check things out, hopefully encouraging the expression of concerns in the meetings. It can be very useful for participants to know how to contact each other between meetings (telephone numbers, addresses).
- * Is enough account taken of different communication and learning styles or are the less articulate participants getting lost? Some people respond more to drawings, models or concrete examples, rather than talking in abstraction.
- * Are members' distinctive skills being used to best advantage? Is it safe to identify who is best at what, or is group cohesiveness being maintained by behaving as if everyone is the same?

Is there a sense of continuity?

- * Are records or minutes being kept?
- * Are minutes or other reports circulated between meetings?
- * Are decisions communicated to absent participants?
- * When people miss meetings, is their return facilitated?
- * When new people join the group, is sufficient time spent taking them on board and filling them in on what's been going on?

It is useful to get the endings of each meeting and each phase of the work right. Summarising achievements, reviewing working process, planning further action, allocating further work and acknowledging people's individual contributions, all help to bridge the gap between meetings and help people keep the whole picture

in mind.

Is there enough time for ongoing renegotiation within the group....

- * ..about the nature and definition of the task?
- * ..about the leader's role?
- * ..about allocation of work?
- * ..about commitment?
- * ..about ownership?
- * ..about power?
- * ..about hidden disagreements?

Negotiation is never done once and for all, though it can easily be assumed that this is so.

Are members engaging in ongoing renegotiation and communication with their home-agencies?

- * It is crucial that participants of the collaborative group don't lose touch with their home-agency, or it is unlikely the agency will sufficiently support the outcome. A cohesive collaborative group can become quasi-autonomous, but may then have difficulties in the implementation stage.
- * Again, it is risky to assume that the early (preliminary) negotiation about support, resources and commitment will remain in the memory of the home-agency until the end of the collaborative venture.
- * There is a particular need for renegotiation if the aims or working methods or other significant aspects of the collaborative group change over the course of the project.

Is the group staying sufficiently in touch with the outside world?

- * This refers particularly to projects that extend over long periods of time, during which there may be changes in policy, law the political/social climate and consumer needs.

Do members feel sufficiently free to say what they think?

Constraints may evolve from:

- * group processes;
- * negotiation and representation problems with home agency;
- * outside working relationship with other participants;
- * role conflicts.

How does the group actually make decisions?

- * It is important for someone to summarise and pull together the discussion before decisions are made.

Before making a final decision ask.....

- * Have we had enough time to explore the merits and faults of the various options?

PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER AND DELIVERING THE GOODS

What did the group set out to do?

Reviewing the original ideas will help.

Have we done what we set out to do?

If the original aim was changed did this happen:

- * intentionally;
or
- * by misadventure?

Have we checked out that this moment in time is an ending or another beginning?

Some collaborative projects end with:

- * writing a report;
 - * selling the product;
 - * going on to deliver some sort of service.
- which is it in this case?

Are people leaving with some idea of what will happen next?

- * Who owns what the group has produced (a report, recommendations, proposal)?
- * Who is responsible for any follow-up that is needed, eg. for implementation of recommendations?
- * Will former participants be informed of any further action stemming from their work and if so will new participants be required?
(START OVER AGAIN!)

What can we say to our employers or home-agency about this experience?

- * What have we learned from the experience?
- * Are any other issues raised as a result of the collaborative project?
- * Are there any changes that would help in the future if such an opportunity comes up again?
- * Are there any changes in our jobs as a result of the collaborative recommendations or report?

Was it necessary to collaborate?

- * What did we get out of doing it this way as opposed to going it alone?
- * How useful was it? What would we do differently if there is a next time?

How are we managing the actual ending process?

Endings are often neglected (even of each meeting in a series) so that a project fizzles out rather than concluding:

- * If possible, end on a positive note - some people may have to work together again.
- * Thank people individually as well as collectively, once again acknowledging particular contributions.
- * Review achievements, difficulties, what was not done, what needs to be done in the future.
- * If possible, end with everyone in the same room rather than letting things tail off.

Do people know how to contact each other, they may wish to do so later for networking purposes?

CHAPTER 3

LEADERSHIP

Some groups clearly chose to be 'leaderless groups'. One example was a collaborative steering group for a women's health centre. Other groups had opted for a 'rotating chair' - sharing the leadership around different members of the group. While this could be seen as a good practice in collaboration, it had, in one case, led to losing the thread of the task from meeting to meeting.

An example was given of a group that had selected the consultant as chair in a group of mixed professionals, in order to give the group legitimacy; but this person was not the right individual to create a necessary sense of belonging and shared ownership of the task amongst other members. Committee procedures and a formally-elected chair are not always the best way of handling the complex problems that can arise in collaborative groups. There are advantages in inviting an outsider to facilitate a group, particularly where existing relationships are a problem, to help improve collaboration and break down the barriers between people.

The two ADVANCE groups had 'facilitators' - two members in each group who volunteered to be convenors and then had additional opportunities to discuss their role and the process of the groups by meeting together with a consultant. These discussions, and the relationship between the convenors and the rest of the group, also elicited interesting material about leadership and facilitation of a collaborative group. For example, one group expected their convenors to take a 'leadership role' in establishing informal contacts between members outside group meetings, in facilitating the return of members to the group after an absence and in acknowledging members who made contributions to the group. One of the groups challenged the convenors' attempt to bring the group back to the initial task as it had been identified - that is, establishing guidelines and producing something in writing. Convenors themselves were sometimes unclear of what sanction they had in their role.

LEADING A COLLABORATIVE GROUP

Leadership is essential to all working groups, but it can mean many different things. Leadership is necessary to manage:

- * the task in hand;
- * the people involved;
- * to make sense of the interplay between the people and the task, so that working progress can be reviewed.

What leadership functions need to be specified?

The functions that need to be specified are:

- * chairing;
- * timekeeping;
- * keeping the group on the task;
- * keeping to the boundaries, eg. who joins an existing group and how;
- * interaction with the outside world, eg. seeing reports are written.

What sort of leadership.....

- * ..is best suited to the kind of task?
- * ..is possible, given external constraints?
- * ..is best at different stages of the collaboration?
- * ..is best if there will be sub-groups of the collaborative group?

Who will carry out these leadership functions?

One or more people might need to be involved in different aspects.

- * Can/should one person take them all on?
- * Can/should they be shared out among two or more people?
- * Should the leader(s) come from within the membership of the collaborative group or would bringing in a consultant or facilitator be most useful?

These choices may need to be based on:

- * political forces in operation;
- * personal attributes of the membership;
- * traditions;
- * the nature of the task.

What sanctions does the leader have?

Leader authority may be determined by:

- * the collaborative group;
- * forces outside the group;
- * from other agencies represented in the group;
- * the leader's paymaster;

Is this authority commensurate with the responsibilities accorded to the leader? This needs to be checked out at each of the levels above.

Is the leader of the collaborative group.....

- * ..here as an expert?
- * ..here to be impartial?
- * Is there a clear contract or brief for the leadership function?

What assumptions are there about leadership in the collaborative group?

All participants need to ask themselves these questions and especially anyone who takes up a leadership role.

- * Should one person do all the leading?
- * Is the group working like a traditional committee or is it anti-traditional eg. the consultant must/must not lead?
- * What did members expect before joining about how the group would be managed/led?
- * Are members just following tradition or are they prepared to start afresh in this new situation with its new task?

However, once the type of leadership has been decided upon, the group needs to monitor what type of leadership is actually appearing to be desired by the group, despite their decision.

Once leadership has been decided, the participants and especially the designated leader(s) will need to consider the pattern and style of leadership throughout the collaborative process. In terms of a leader's role these questions might be:

How am I attending to the requirements of the task?

- * Am I ensuring continuity of decisions (recording them, remembering, implementing)?
- * Have I ensured continuity of representative membership eg. messages from absentees, replacing those who leave?
- * Am I time-keeping?
- * Am I summarising achievements and decisions - 'how far have we got?', 'where next'?
- * Am I attending to people's needs in terms of the physical environment?

- * Am I checking out agreement?
- * Am I noticing gaps (eg. skills/personal information/ permission/ negotiation)?
- * Am I attending to blocks to progress?
- * Am I delegating appropriately?
- * Am I allocating tasks realistically in the available time?

Am I attending to the needs of the people in the group?

- * Am I personalising, eg. using names/acknowledging/attributing input to avoid the discussion falling flat?
- * Am I recognising that individuals need to feel they matter and are being heard?
- * Do I facilitate members' return after absence?
- * Is there informal contact between meetings?
- * Is formal contact attended to properly, eg. circulating notes/ minutes/reports/decisions/time of meetings?
- * Do I ease and explore disagreements or hold them in mind until later (timing)?
- * Do I accept/encourage different points of view and skills (avoiding "The group thinks..")?
- * Do I model willingness to change in the light of what comes up?
- * Do I enable quieter participants to speak up?
- * Do I monitor stereotyping/silencing of potential contributions?
- * Am I making sure there is space for individuality in the pace of pressure to conform/blur differences?
- * Am I attending to why I am the leader of this group/what sanctions do I have/need? Is my leadership style appropriate to the task?
- * Am I exploring issues of cohesion and levels of commitment?
- * Am I helping the group to explore differences safely?
- * Am I reflecting the group's growing sense of purpose?

CHAPTER 4

PROBLEMS OF FACILITATION

Collaboration as a task has particular features which can create problems within groups set up for collaboration, these include:

- * **Mixed membership of the group:** People from different professional groups or different organisations have very different values, or may use similar terms in different ways. In addition, some participants may be voluntary, others attending as part of their work. An example was brought of a mental health project, where membership by psychiatric and social workers had to become voluntary as funding was no longer available.
- * **Members may have little time to give to the activity:** Their primary responsibility is to their main employers. The two discussion groups were to suffer from variable attendance at meetings (sometimes only four of the fourteen members turned up) and one group wondered whether it was those who were in least-powerful positions in their agencies who were able to turn up most regularly.
- * **Members bring to the groups the philosophical differences of their agencies and professions:** An example was given of the differing perceptions of behaviour of African Caribbean patients in a mental health project. Medical practitioners saw certain behaviours as symptoms of psychiatric disorders and treated these with psychotropic medicines; others saw such behaviour as appropriate expressions of personal distress at living in a stressful environment.
- * **Members can bring into the group rivalries and tensions that exist in the wider environment:** An example was given of an inter-agency rehabilitation team in which members were reluctant to open up, or commit resources. All members knew each other in other contexts, sometimes very well, and it was felt that this was an inhibiting factor, as they had to continue their other relationships outside the groups. If outside issues revolve around power and access to limited resources, then collaboration can become more of a battlefield than an exercise in joint working. Some group members took the line, particularly from their experience in joint planning, that collaboration was always a battle for power.
- * **Confidentiality can be a problem:** An example was brought of one agency using information from another, gained during joint working, to the detriment of a client (one agency represented a child, the other the mother, where custody was in question). Confidentiality of information arose as an issue within the discussion groups themselves.

All these problems have implications for facilitation: there is a great need in collaborative groups to identify a broader loyalty, that can override or encompass the individual differences. An example of this was of a volunteer co-ordinators' group, where co-ordinators from different agencies could override their agency differences because of a common loyalty to a geographical area and its inhabitants — many of whom were

their joint clients.

It is essential to build up cohesion and commitment in the group which will counteract divisive tensions and differences within it; this means considerable attention needs to be paid not only to the task of the group, but also to the group processes.

Paying attention to the task means establishing an aim and ensuring movement towards its fulfilment. Facilitation of process means paying attention to the needs of the people in the group, the communication between them and the quality of the group activities — is there trust and cohesion in the group, or can no progress be made because of tensions and conflicts or non-communication?

In some collaborative groups, the process is the task. For example, the volunteer co-ordinators provided one another with mutual support and shared information, but never got any mutual project established, apart from their own meetings. Too much attention to process and the group can become too cosy and never achieve a task — this danger was noted by some group members. On the other hand, pushing towards a task without sufficient attention to process can override valuable opportunities to share information or build up mutual expertise. For example, a group meeting to plan services for carers failed to spend the time pooling their general experience of what carers needed in a more relaxed way, before pushing ahead with plans. The emphasis on the task meant that members did not gain a sense of mutual support which may have had spin-offs for other areas of their work.

The last meeting of one of the discussion groups decided to stick with a fruitful discussion of difficulties that had arisen within the group, rather than pushing ahead with the task of writing up guidelines - and in doing so, generated some useful material.

GETTING INTO TROUBLE

Is the group is getting stuck?

- * Are explanations being offered or just dogma?
- * Are participants' positions being presented in some fixed and "ideal" light, so preventing negotiation from taking place?
- * Are some unresolved historical differences being kept in the background which are interfering with the achievement of the task? This can be particularly true of differences which are assumed to be too difficult to resolve.
- * Is the group looking at issues that go beyond the scope of the task which participants do not have the authority to resolve?
- * Is the question of resource limits being used to preclude possible outcomes before the ideas themselves have even been given an airing in principle?

Is the way the group communicates becoming repetitive around each issue that comes up?

- * Does everyone immediately disagree in the form of many irreconcilable positions from which no sense of cohesion could possibly emerge?
- * Does the group immediately agree with the first suggestion that is made without even exploring different positions?
- * Is the group acting as if there is just one set of ideological principles that pertain to all and every issue without recognising inevitable contradictions or limitations?
- * Is the membership of the group breaking into fixed factions as if the outcome of a war were at stake?
- * Are the different competencies and levels of experience of the participants being taken into account, or is each participant having to act as if they were experienced or competent on each and every aspect of the task?
- * Is it necessary to toe the "party line" in order to belong, or can people be themselves in the group?

What strategies can be adopted to balance out these extreme group positions?

- * Some blurring of roles is necessary in any group for it to work, but if this goes too far, the creative differences and special competencies for which participants have been chosen can be lost.

How can the group be helped so that individuals dare to stand out?

Recognising and respecting the different positions and their usefulness to the process of reaching agreement may involve dealing with several connected issues:

- * power;
- * assertiveness;
- * outside relationships;
- * negotiation with home agencies;
- * ownership;
- * support for quieter participants;
- * membership;
- * authority;
- * pressure to conform;
- * differing levels of expertise.

What issues are particularly relevant to divided loyalties between the group and outside commitments?

The collaborative group needs to develop an identity of its own, but if this is too strong then:

- * links with home-agencies can become weak;
- * the group can become quasi-autonomous.

If the group is too weak then:

- * lack of commitment will emerge;
- * power struggles will develop;
- * battles for ownership will happen.

Collaboration requires some blurring of boundaries, but what will happen if participants lose touch with their home-agencies?

The task can suffer in various ways:

- * people outside the group will forget it;
- * what the group produces will be ignored;
- * the group will not be supported;
- * the group can come to feel or be seen as deviant.

What else can happen if the group becomes quasi-autonomous?

A very tight boundary around the group can lead to several processes that feel good (sometimes) to the group but ultimately do not further its purpose:

- * shared fantasies or myths can develop about the task, authority, power, rights and ownership.
- * the task can become a mission, but this can be doomed to failure without commensurate power to actually implement decisions.

How can members deal with their own divided loyalties?

There is a need to balance being:

- * a committed participant of the collaborative group; and
- * an agent of one's employer.

How can a collaborative group deal with issues of ownership of its effort, products, etc.

Individuals find this less of a problem when:

- * the group has worked towards mutually-conceived goals to which they feel committed;
- * group participants have recognised each individual's contribution, acknowledged it and attributed it in the group.

Does the collaborative group need to bear in mind ideas of ownership for home-agencies, even if the last question has been resolved?

YES; even if ownership issues are dealt with sensitively in the group, home - agencies may have different ideas of their own.

How can participants be encouraged to offer their contributions?

- * One can decide to offer or withhold a contribution, but once it is offered then it becomes part of a common pool and the author cannot necessarily determine what is done with it.
- * Producing a climate of respect, trust and loyalty will affect what participants decide to contribute.

Sometimes ownership can be a burden — what can be done?

Open expression of this feeling can be useful.

Ownership affects people in different ways:

- * some participants may want to shed their burden of responsibility;
- * some participants may value the anonymity the collaborative group offers;
- * some participants may not want their contribution to be anything but anonymous.

Any participant who feels like one or more of the above should express themselves if it feels right.

What other inhibiting factors contribute to getting into trouble around ownership?

Things to bear in mind might be:

- * it can be inhibiting, if not paralysing, if one feels a contribution may be interfering with someone else's agenda;
- * when participating on behalf of others there may be some issues that are personally difficult to raise, but are necessary nevertheless;
- * accountability and discretion need to be clarified early on in respect of the above.

What are some of the ways in which collaboration can be used (defensively) to actually avoid the issue it has been set up to deal with?

Collaboration can be used to protect participants or their home-agencies anticipated failure - "It's not my fault it didn't work". This can be seen as:

- * a diffusion of responsibility;
- * a diffusion of commitment;
- * a diffusion of risk

In a collaborative group that is working well, the boundary round the group can be used to cope with these fears.

Some participants in collaborative work can have multiple roles. What are some of the effects of this that the group can look out for?

- * Multiple roles can feel diffuse, confusing and conflicting and can lead individuals to overextend their commitments.

What problems can people with multiple roles experience in working in a collaborative group when several of their roles seem useful?

- * There can be a sense of needing to present oneself well as ownership can go to the most articulate, or to those who write the report.
- * It can be hard to keep a firm grasp on the script, eg. "What is required of me in this role?" However, too rigid adherence to the script can stifle creativity; there is a balance to be struck between clarity and flexibility in role.
- * There can be difficulties of keeping one's identity without getting stuck in the armour (ideal position) of one's professional role.
- * There can be embarrassment at meeting the same people when they or oneself are in different roles from the ones they usually meet in. Comments made in one situation can affect relationships in another context.
- * There can be disagreements about which role the group requires eg. "I thought that was your job", "Who's responsibility is it anyway?", "In what capacity am I here?".

What can participants with multiple roles do to help themselves with these issues?

- * Sort out priorities between the responsibilities of the various roles within their own minds. Clarify them with colleagues in the collaborative setting.

CONCLUSION

This has not been a full account of the discussions of the two ADVANCE groups, but just a drawing-together of some points and examples around the theme of facilitation. This is a complex process, particularly where collaborative groups have divisive elements within them. It involves attention being paid not only to the task, but also to the processes within the group. This may require sensitive work by whoever is leading or facilitating the group and indicates that committee procedures are not always the best way of ensuring everyone participates and feels involved.

ACTION CHECKLIST FOR COLLABORATIVE GROUPS

Questions for individuals planning a collaborative group

- * Why do I want to collaborate?
- * Who should be involved?
- * What is the local history of collaboration?
- * What is known about the organisations of the people who might be invited?
- * How should potential participants be invited?
- * What should be fixed beforehand?
- * What sort of leadership is needed?

Questions for groups

Getting Started

- * What are we here for?
- * What assumptions do we bring and can these be checked out?
- * Has the ask been clearly defined?
- * How is the group going to make decisions?
- * How is the work going to be shared out and reported?
- * How often will the group meet over what period?
- * Are members negotiating sufficiently with their own employing agency?
- * What historical relationships impinge on the group?
- * Have the boundaries of confidentiality been sorted out?
- * Has enough space been made for all this preliminary work?

Leadership

- * What leadership functions need to be specified?
- * What sort of leadership is needed?
- * Who will carry out these leadership functions?
- * What sanctions does the leader have?
- * What expectations do members of the group have about the leader?

Keeping the group going

- * Is the group making time to review its work?
- * What are relationships between participants like at present?
- * Is there a sense of continuity?
- * Is there enough time for on-going renegotiation within the group?
- * Are members engaged in on-going renegotiation and communication with their home agencies?
- * Is the group staying sufficiently in touch with the outside world?
- * Do members feel free to say what they think?
- * How does the group make decisions?

Getting into Trouble

- * Is the group getting stuck?
- * Does the group respond to issues in repetitive ways?
- * What strategies can be adopted to balance out these extreme group positions?
- * How can the group be helped so that individuals dare to stand out?
- * What issues are particularly relevant to divided loyalties between the groups and outside commitments?
- * What will happen if participants lose touch with their home agencies?
- * What else can happen if the group becomes quasi autonomous?
- * How can members deal with their own divided loyalties?

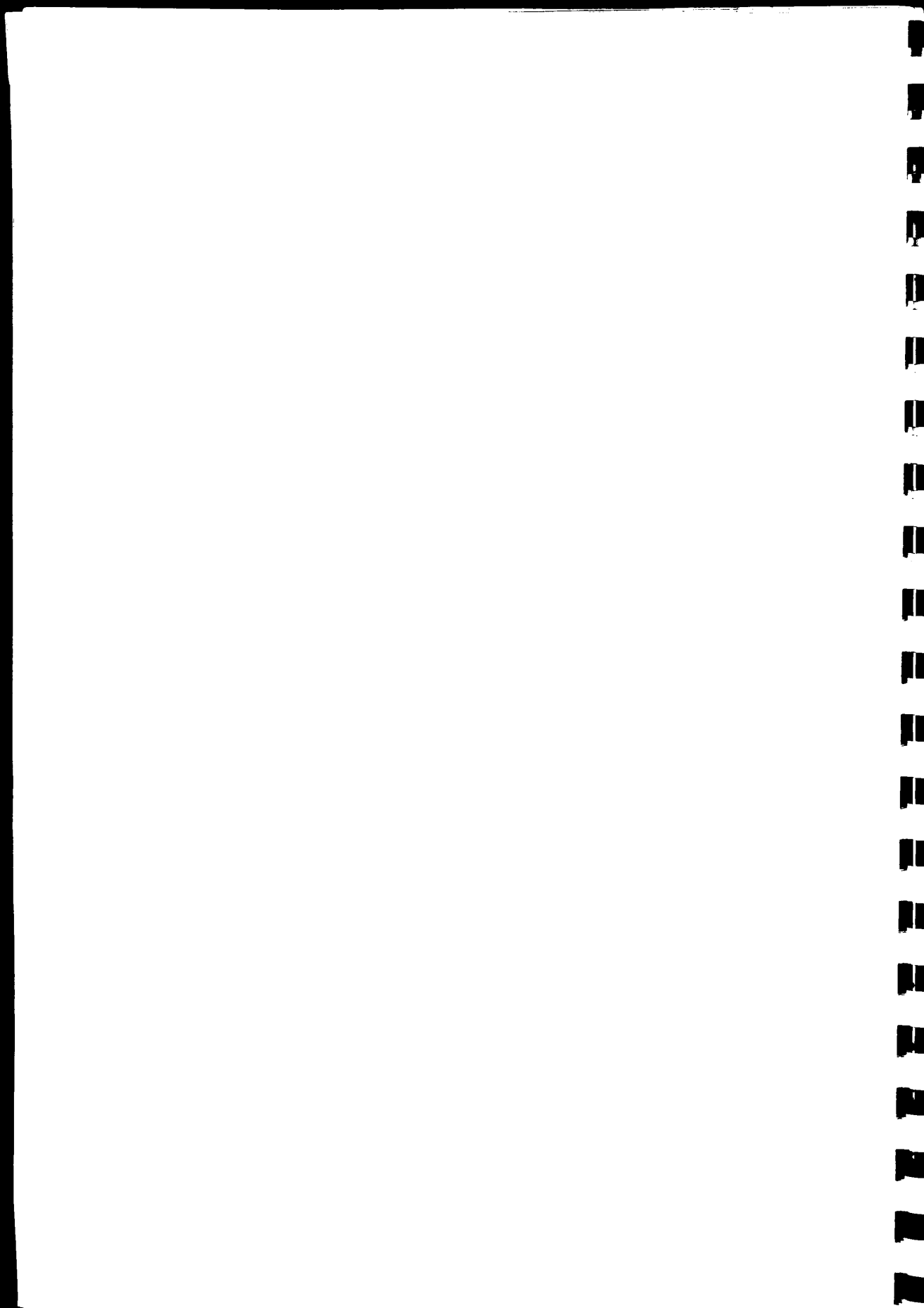
- * How can a collaborative group deal with issues of ownership of its efforts, products, etc?
- * Does the collaborative group need to bear in mind ideas of ownership for home agencies even if the last question has been resolved?
- * How can participants be encouraged to offer their contributions?
- * Sometimes ownership can be a burden - what can be done?
- * What other inhibiting factors contribute to getting into trouble around ownership?
- * What are some of the ways in which collaboration can be used to actually avoid the issue it has been set up to deal with?
- * Some participants in collaborative work can have multiple roles - what are some the effects of this that the group can look out for?
- * What problems can people with multiple roles experience in working in a collaborative group when several of their roles seem useful?
- * What can participants with multiple roles do to help themselves with these issues?

Pulling it all Together and Delivering the Goods

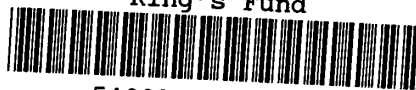
- * Have we done what we set out to do?
- * Is this moment in time an ending or another beginning?
- * Are people leaving with some idea of what will happen next?
- * What can we say to our employers or home agency about this experience?
- * Was it necessary to collaborate?
- * How are we managing the ending process?

FURTHER READING

- * Dartington T., *The limits of altruism: elderly, mentally infirm people as a test case for collaboration*, King's Fund, 1986.
A study of collaborative working between individuals and agencies to meet the needs of people at risk in the community.
- * *Joint Projects: Patterns of Management*, Community Care Project, NCVO, and Voluntary Organisations Personal Social Services Group, 1989.
Looks at a number of models of collaboration in service provision between statutory agencies and voluntary organisations. Each model is clearly laid out and the benefits and pitfalls explained.
- * Gawlinski, G., & Graessle, L., *Planning Together - the art of effective teamwork*, Bedford Square Press, 1988.
Not particularly concerned with collaborative work, but useful for thinking systematically about planning in teams.
- * Smith H., *Collaboration for change: partnership between service users, planners and managers of mental health services*, King's Fund, 1988.
A discussion of the benefits, methods and difficulties of collaborating with users in mental health care.



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