

Key Management Issues

Our cross-country analysis of the dozen cases included in our research project led us to identify four critical success factors that transcend national boundaries: leadership, trust, risk management, and communication. These elements of project management were crucial in ensuring a smooth development and successful implementation of the collaboration projects. Comparative essays that draw on specific examples from the cases illustrate the importance of these key management issues.

Four Comparative Essays

Leadership

All of the innovative projects we studied were initiated by public sector leaders who shared a vision of better government. The leaders in each project were committed to developing working relationships within government and between government and private and nonprofit organizations. Commitment of top political leaders at all levels of government proved critical to sustain the initial effort and achieve a successful partnership and service delivery. Leadership also emerged within project teams who believed in enabling a government that is available to everyone at anytime; a government that provides quality services and meets top standards of performance.

Trust

All of the cases in the New Models of Collaboration study involved the development and exercise of trust. Two kinds of trust relationships were critical to the successful implementation of these projects: (1) public trust or the degree to which citizens and other groups in society believe the project or service program can be trusted to treat them fairly; and (2) professional trust or the degree to which people and organizations charged with developing and delivering a service believe they can rely on the motives and predict the performance of other participants. In the cases studied, tools that trigger three types of trust (calculus-based trust, identity-based trust, and institution-based trust) were used to resolve problematic issues and move the partnerships forward.

Risk management

Collaboration within government or between the public and private sectors for the delivery of public services involves partners from different organizations pursuing different, sometimes conflicting, objectives. The participating organizations are usually engaged in large-scale projects that address very visible problems, making significant use of new processes and technologies. All these components are potential sources of risk. Fortunately, most risks can be managed if they are identified and understood early in the process. In this essay, we offer a typology of risks and risk management approaches associated with the delivery of public services by multiple partners. We distinguish external risks that come mainly from the socio-economic, political, and technological environments from internal risks that stem from the nature of the project, the participants, and their relationships.

Communication and Coordination

High levels of information sharing, good communication and well-orchestrated coordination help a collaboration project succeed. The likelihood of success depends on how well managers can leverage technology, organizational, and human resources in coordination with collaborating partners. These collaborations require that employees of all of the partners work in a highly coordinated fashion and require the partnering organizations to provide the motive, opportunity and structure for this to happen. Through our case studies, we found that public organizations are taking several approaches to ensure a high-level of communication and coordination among the employees of the collaborating partners in order to deal with critical challenges in meeting the project goals. These include clear governance, both formal and informal structures, and innovative problem solving mechanisms such as "war rooms."