Sustainability & Transformation Partnerships (STP) Challenges

Collaboration

Introduction

The first blog in this series set out the top five challenges faced by the 44 Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STP) in England; Coherence, Clarity, Consistency, Collaboration and Control. This fifth blog in the series provides some insight as to how to approach the fourth of these challenges – Collaboration.

How do you create an environment in which people can collaborate, cooperate and trust each other so that you leverage the capability and expertise across the partnership giving your plans the greatest chance of success?

Having developed a coherent set of plans, clear line of sight from your objectives to how they will be achieved and by who, and a consistent approach to delivery, the next challenge is to ensure effective collaboration across the dispersed set of organisations and a diverse range of stakeholders in your partnership.

Collaboration

Having developed an agreed set of Objectives and Results that you plan to achieve, it is important that these are shared across your STP. You need to work together across your partnership to reach consensus rather than compromise and create an environment within which you can take shared responsibility for collective decision making.

I have already talked about the importance of defining an agreed set of measurable Objectives that are shared across the STP. For effective collaboration, the focus is on making sure that relevant stakeholders have directly participated in the setting of these Objectives and they must believe in both the Objectives and the partnership enough to agree to take 'cabinet responsibility' for their achievement. This means that they must publicly support all the STP decisions made for the benefit of the STP. It is critical that the right people turn up, participate in finding the optimum solutions to the challenges being faced and helping the partnership reach a consensus on the way ahead. Unfortunately, the agreed solutions might not always align fully with our personal preferences - however, when a consensus is reached the direction is set and should be followed by everyone.

The best way - possibly the only way - to achieve the requisite level of collaboration is to, at least initially, work together, face to face, to agree the Objectives. Once agreed, capture them in a single repository where all can share access to them and update them with progress being made along with useful notes that add additional intelligence as their accomplishment progresses.

In the spirit of complete transparency, all stakeholders across the partnership must have visibility of the portfolio of programmes and projects that will deliver the required health and care system transformation and understand how this delivers the agreed plans and Objectives. All stakeholders across the STP must be clear on:

- Why they are doing what they are doing,
- The interdependencies between their work and the work of others, and

- How it contributes overall to the Objectives of the STP.

This is one area in which being risk averse pays dividends. Take no chances. Know who is accountable for what, know the interdependencies between different activities and different results, actively manage them, record and report against them so that all interested parties know what part they must play.

You must design your portfolio of programmes and projects so that there is an easy logic between what you do, what you measure and how those measures realise the targeted Objectives. 'Keep it simple' is the rule to follow here, as any un-necessary complexity will add both cost and confusion.

It is important that you are prepared and able to share knowledge, expertise and best practice and leverage this across the whole STP for the best outcome for all.

Just like when travelling in a thick fog, it is extremely difficult to drive forward with confidence if you cannot see clearly where the other vehicles on the road are. You need to be able to see what work your colleagues are assigned to, what they are actively doing, whether your trajectories remain aligned or whether you are now working at crossed purposes. In circumstances where this information is not clear, and teams revert to working in silos, time is either wasted because they are moving more slowly whilst trying to avoid collisions, or when time pressures are exerted, the risk is overlooked, and the team presses on regardless trying to optimise what they are doing locally, just hoping it will all work out in the end. The negative impacts arising from both sets of actions are often discovered late in the delivery process when the cost of recovery (if recovery is even possible) is usually much greater.

Don't put off understanding and establishing the joined-up nature of the whole and sharing that knowledge with all participants. The return on the investment you make will pay dividends across the whole portfolio and the partnership for years to come. Be as open as is possible with your information because great ideas can come from anywhere and the more people understand the whole solution, the more likely you are to achieve it. If your plans depend on the performance across multiple local delivery teams, make sure you are centrally capturing intelligence on what each team is doing and whether it is working well or not. Actively share your experiences and when you find something that works well, share it both locally and across other STPs that could benefit from it.

Conclusion

Collaboration isn't just about working together but about co-operating to achieve the best results for the STP as efficiently and effectively as possible. It is about taking cabinet responsibility for accomplishing your shared STP Objectives and understanding how what you are doing relates to what others are doing to achieve the desired outcomes. This maximises productivity and quality and enables your partnership to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible to take full advantage of the return on your investment and deliver you shared STP Objectives.