

DON'T IGNORE YOUR LOCAL STRATEGIC ALLIANCE NETWORKS!



Henry Pavey CTArcs is MD, The Collaboration Man Ltd and is an SSA Tutor Associate

Making Devolution Work¹ is a practical guide for local leaders on the issues of Combined Authority/City Deal working - and one of its key findings could cause their failure.

I have spent many years in the collaboration space throughout a varied career covering local government, higher education, the army and running my own business.

Like all of us, I have experienced some fantastic examples of collaborative working and others that were a real shambles! As CTArcs™ and CTPracs™, we know that many collaborative initiatives start out full of energy focusing on the deal (what it is we are here to deliver) without taking the necessary time out to develop the critical trust and relationships between all those involved.

We also know that many collaborative initiatives fail, not because the deal was unachievable; but because relationships and trust breakdown - if it was ever there in the first place.

Increasingly, the Government is pushing for even greater collaborative working to improve the economic performance of cities and regions through initiatives such as City Deals and Combined Authorities.

The potential of these initiatives to create dynamic areas with strong economic performance leading to more jobs, more businesses, better skills and training, more homes, improved transport connectivity, etc is vast.

They can motivate and galvanise action to tackle complex and challenging issues; achieving great things that many (both within and outside of the alliance) would not believe possible. Traditional 'rigid and bureaucratic approaches' to solving complex economic issues are acknowledged as not being fit for purpose as the modern business world is fast, fluid and messy.

As such, we also need to be able to develop strategic alliances that work collaboratively in a fast, fluid and messy way! The question is whether public and private sector partners together can operate this way?

What if it all goes wrong?

I strongly believe that collaboration is the new competitive advantage as it leads to new markets, new relationships and new opportunities. It is a win/win process if done correctly.

We also know that if done incorrectly then enthusiasm and goodwill is lost, relationships breakdown, and it can take a long time to fix things and start again. Localities looking to improve their economic performance do not have the luxury or time to get it wrong – the livelihoods and neighbourhoods of so many people in their areas are at stake now!

So to improve economic performance, many areas (quite rightly) go down the route of creating an economic board or partnership - a strategic alliance. You know the sort of thing, the great and good sitting around the table making things happen. A traditional 'hub & spoke' model is created.

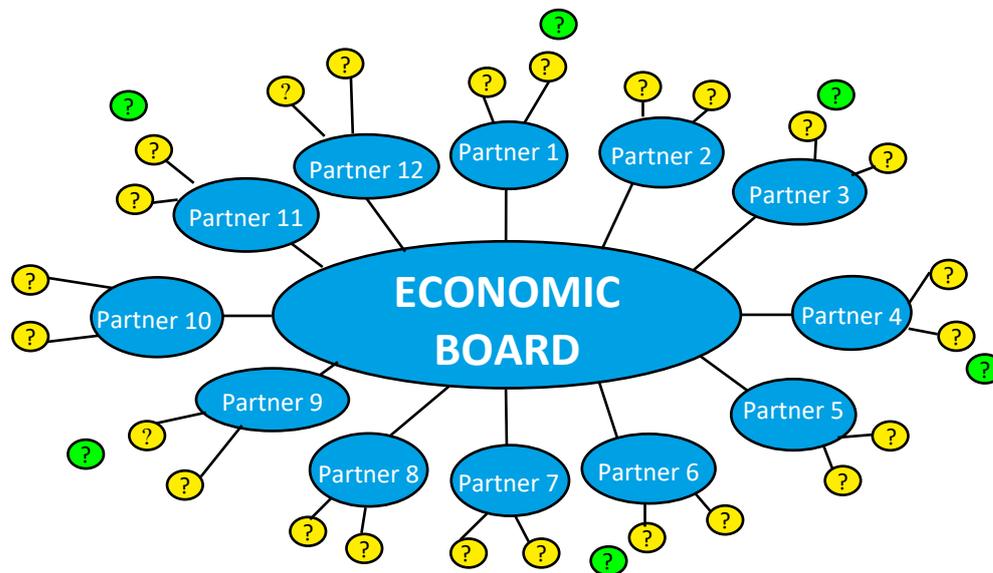
The hub & spoke model has its merits in that it does give the economic board / partnership access to information from the partners; provides brokerage; and a way to facilitate breakthrough actions from those around the table.

The danger with it though, is that the discussions and potential solutions focus on those around the table (the hub and spokes) and what they can do, rather than understanding the wider **Strategic Alliance Network** (expertise, capacity, resource, knowledge, etc). This is captured in *Making Devolution Work* as, '...buy-in is often weaker for other key partners such as CCGs, universities, housing associations, the voluntary sector and wider business community'.

Localities looking to improve their economic performance do not have the luxury, or time, to get it wrong - improving the livelihoods and neighbourhoods of so many people in their towns and cities are at stake now!

¹ Grant Thornton/Localis (Oct 2015)

A hub & spoke model (in blue) will have various sub groups, task & finish groups or peripheral influencing organisations (some known represented by yellow and some unknown represented by green) that could potentially be called upon to increase the strategic network advantage



So what is strategic network advantage?

In a nutshell, securing strategic network advantage means mapping and understanding who is out there and who can be called upon to play their part in improving economic performance.

By mapping their strategic alliance network, and by focusing on securing the network advantages of timely information, deeper co-operation and influential power, economic boards or partnerships will be able to make smarter prioritisation and decision making.

To make a major difference in improving the economic performance of their area Combined Authorities, City Deals, etc, will need to map who is out there that can help them – whether they be key opinion-formers, organisations and networks?

The diagram above illustrates that organisations within a hub & spoke model (in blue) will have various sub groups, task & finish groups or peripheral influencing organisations (some known represented by yellow, and some unknown represented by green) that could potentially be called upon to increase the strategic network advantage – but if they do not map them, how will they know they are there?

This leads to targeted and results driven delivery. Which, in turn, leads to increased brand awareness and visibility of the economic board or partnership; which leads to even more timely information, deeper co-operation, and influential power, which leads to...etc, etc. It creates momentum and success.

And, what about other groups / networks / organisations that are out there but are not connected to any of the organisations within the hub & spoke model?

I always find it amazing when I work with various partnerships how many have never fully mapped their strategic alliance network! I liken it to being a chief executive and not knowing your own organisation's structure.

There is usually a considerable amount of untapped expertise, capacity, resource, knowledge that the economic board / partnership could and should tap into. By identifying the untapped, they can then become the tapped! Unfortunately many boards and partnerships do not fully consider the totality of the system around them!

To make a major difference in improving the economic performance of their area Combined Authorities, City Deals, etc, will need to map who is out there that need to gain strong buy-in to the activities. These are often the small, highly effective organisations on the frontline of business incubation, NEET work and areas of deprivation and employment.

They rarely provide the resource to get to grips with understanding, discovering and unlocking the hidden potential of their strategic alliances and securing the advantages it offers of:

If this step is not taken, the devolution experiment will fail to secure the real benefits that effective collaboration can bring to the livelihoods and neighbourhoods of so many people in their towns and cities.

- Timely information
- Deeper co-operation
- Influential power

You can contact Henry on:
henry@thecollaborationman.com