ENGAGING THE CFOs IN SHARED SERVICE DECISIONS

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The first stage in the *SSA Collaborative Journey Map* is Collaborative Leadership.

It is rather obvious that a collaboration that is not supported by the leadership of an organisation, will not get very far when it falls into difficult areas of activity.

However, being able to engage the leadership at the beginning of the journey can prove difficult.

Often leaders have initiated the process by asking for recommendations on collaborative working activity. However through a lack of experience, they find it difficult to make a decision on whether to share the services presented back to them.

In addition many leaders find moving from from hierarchical, 100% control over services in their organisation, to the diluted control of participatory leadership of the same services (e.g. 50% control for two partners, 33% for three, 25% for four, etc.), can be daunting.

For example having to formally ask other Chief Fire Officers (CFOs) if you can make significant changes to services within your own organisation can feel uncomfortable.
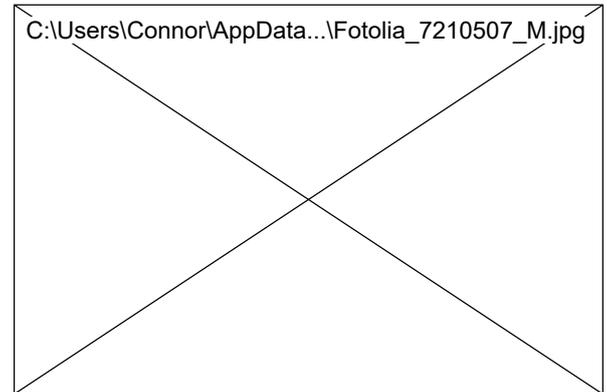
It is only when leaders see a clear advantage in sharing, that will ease their personal path in delivering their organisation's strategic purpose, that they happily enter into participatory leadership mode.

It is this journey that we have been on in the East Midlands.

Five Go Adventuring

In 2015, the five Fire & Rescue Services (FRS) within the East Midlands identified that there might be some benefit from collaborating in the provision of operational training.

This opinion was formed at a senior level (Chief Fire Officer or CEO) as collaboration was something they wanted to embrace, or be seen to be embracing, and each service had expressed support for working together in their areas of expertise.

For some, this may have been premised on thinking that *"…because we are good at (insert service here), the others will come to us".*

As a consequence they appointed a project manager (PM) at a senior level from Leicestershire FRS and seconded him to a time limited exploration of share service activity.

This article is a short description of what happened next and how the SSA toolkit and insights from me as a recognised practitioner (SSPrac) helped guide the project.

Aligning the ambitions of each partner

It was apparent that the brief for the project was initially too broad and required clarification.

As a consequence the project manager met each CFO individually, using a template question and answer on what they wanted to share, or not share.

The aim was to clarify vision and objectives. In addition there was a need to consider the collaborative appetite and try and obtain a shared understanding of what each CFO meant by collaboration.

The SSA training and guidance stresses the importance of understanding what the decision making leaders are trying to achieve.

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The discussions with the CFOs, suggested that in this case the outcome didn't feel like collaboration (e.g. better together).

It sounded more like some form of joint procurement. It was suggested that a further exploratory meeting with CFOs was required, to tease our exactly where to start and what to focus on.

But, in order to test, and bring positive challenge to, the thinking of the CFOs, it was agreed that the project manager should use the Trust & Vision Tools 3.02 and 3.04 to engage a number of the service managers.

It could bring more confidence to CEOs if a group of their senior managers were suggesting shared services between the five partners that were most likely to succeed, as a good place to start.

T&V3.02[1]: *Testing The Ripeness of Services For Sharing,* requires the participants to agree a set of criteria that test if a service is more appropriate for collaboration than others.

For example, chosen criteria could be: *The service requires high spend on new technology and potentially the cost could be shared with partners.* Or, *the service can no longer be sustained effectively by an individual organisation.*

Using a paired analysis approach each services (ICT, HR, Driver Training, Transport Maintenance, etc,) is then tested against the criteria. If it matches the criteria it is given a score of '1'. If it does not match it attracts a score of '0'.

When the exercise is complete, the services with the highest scores (the most '1's) can be selected as starting points.

T&V3.03[2] *The Quality-Cost-Vacuum Matrix*, approaches the choice of sharing services from a more opportunistic view.

For example, a current Head of Service has just retired so that could lead to a shared head of service. Or the department is due for a restructure anyway, and that could take the form of sharing the staff with another organisation.

Again reflecting on SSA's advice the CFOs were invited to use this 'opportunistic' approach with guidance on changes in regulations that would also make collaboration attractive.

Applying the tools, the leadership came to a view on shared driver-training and requested further work (in this area only) using self-assessment (in each service) and the national subject matter expert that we have in region.

This was to show a tangible example of how we can all work collaboratively together in a mutually beneficial way.

To date the work using some SSA tools has helped gain an understanding of the complexities of joint working.

The next steps are yet to be determined.

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[1] *From the SSA Trust & Shared Vision Toolkit, included in the SSA Online Toolkits*

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