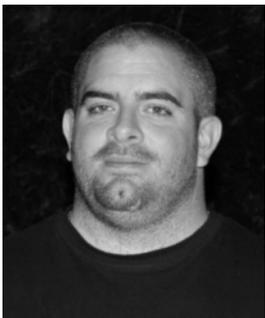


# THE SHARED SERVICE PYRAMID

## FIVE THINGS WE HAVE LEARNED ABOUT COLLABORATIVE WORKING



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In Sutton, we are proud of our legacy of collaborative working. From a unique community safety partnership with the Metropolitan Police (8 years old and counting...) to the launch last year of a shared ICT service with the Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames and a shared legal service with three London boroughs<sup>1</sup>, we feel we are getting better at delivering projects of this nature.

At the beginning of 2014, Sutton, Kingston, Richmond and Merton Councils were awarded £485,000 for further shared services work under the Transition Challenge Award, so we must be doing something right.

That is not to say we are perfect by any means. However, with shared arrangements of different types moving into double figures and two more in the pipeline, we felt it was time to take stock and review some of the lessons we have learnt. Below are five key concepts that might help you:

### 1. Beware the Tower of Babel

Share a language. A shared service means different things to different people<sup>2</sup>. Organisationally, we found it helpful to map out the shared arrangements we have in place and to categorise them. This is set out in the Resource vs Speed Pyramid on the next page.

This exercise was more of an art than a science, however it has helped clarity of thinking when embarking on initial discussions.

I would recommend doing a similar exercise with potential partners in the early stages of a collaborative project and to be prepared to negotiate on terminology as your partners may have different views.

<sup>1</sup> London Borough of Merton, Royal Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames, London Borough of Richmond-upon-Thames

<sup>2</sup> Leadership Foundation For Higher Education (2011) "...those engaged in the collaborative initiative will need to create coherence through building a new shared understanding and shared commitment."

The value comes from a shared language for the project as it helps discussions and the formulation of a vision.

### 2. It's a change programme Jim, but not as we know it

It is easy to treat collaborative projects as change programmes; they share a number of similarities. However the biggest difference is that you are dealing with multiple organisational cultures – and usually political aspirations<sup>3</sup>.

This adds a complexity unlike an internal transformation programme and it should be recognised, managed and, crucially, seen for what it is, a risk if left unchecked but an opportunity for delivering better outcomes if that diversity is channelled and ideas are genuinely shared.

### 3. Use PRINUCE<sup>4</sup>

A project management approach is essential, however collaborative working occurs in a less controllable environment.

We have found that dedicated project management and project support helps ensure success. These posts do not need to be externally sourced but they do need to be committed to the project.

We also suggest having a minimum of a project sponsor chairing an executive board for strategic decisions (and elected member engagement), along with a project board with clear project assurance from the respective partners.

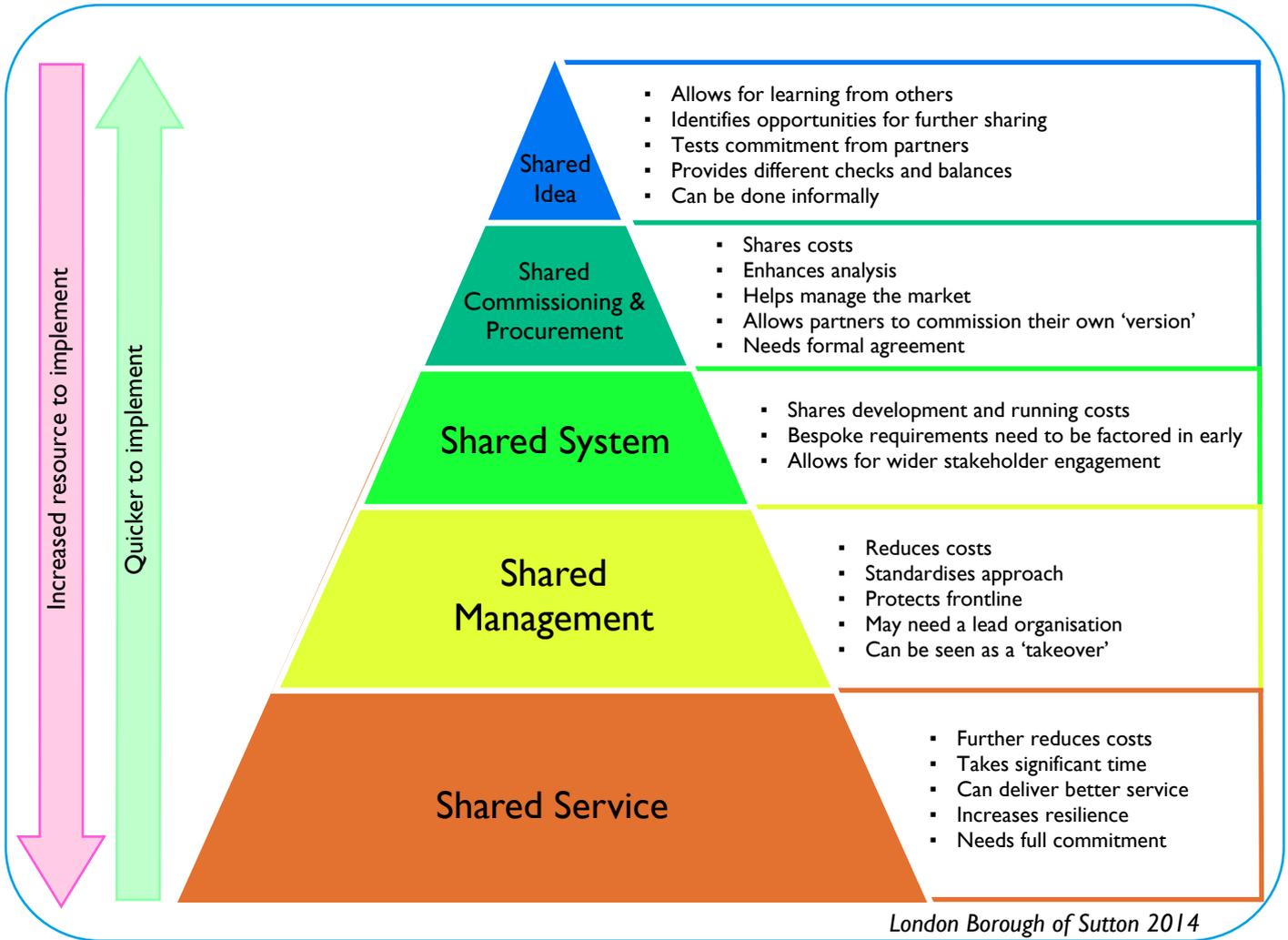
Having workstreams for (at least) communications, workforce development and finance are also no-brainers and you will need to think about ongoing governance of the service from the beginning.

<sup>3</sup> Bekkers, V. (2007) 'The Governance Of Back-office Integration',

<sup>4</sup> I have included the 'U' to indicate the uncontrolled environments in which partnerships can operate

Organisationally, we found it helpful to map out the shared arrangements we have in place and to categorise them. This is set out in the Resource vs Speed Pyramid on the next page.

The Resource vs Speed Collaborative Working Pyramid



*Above all, be comfortable with the fact that all shared services work moves you into an uncontrolled environment and that this offers opportunities.*

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**4. If it ain't broke, it still might need fixing and it might have been broke all along**

Don't be precious about your existing organisational practice.

Learn from others and use these projects as chances to take stock and see what is happening elsewhere.

The way you do things now might be fine but everyone can improve and this is a perfect time to consider how. Furthermore, be proud of what you do well and share it – with humility!

**Communication works for those who work at it!**

Everyone talks about the importance of communicating during projects, particularly where they involve organisational change but who can say they have done it really well?

Too often this is the part of a project that has the best of intentions behind it at the outset but loses focus as work progresses.

Good communications need expertise, planning, resource and senior management commitment. For a shared services project, all publicity is rarely good publicity!

<sup>1</sup> John Powell, film score composer and conductor