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Multi-Sectoral Collaboration and Economic Development: Lessons from England's Regional Development Agencies

By

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Multi-Sectoral Collaboration and Economic Development:
Lessons from England's Regional Development Agencies

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Abstract

The challenges of economic transformation are being felt around the world. Prospering in this shifting environment requires an approach to economic development that recognizes that this issue cannot be addressed by one organization or one sector acting independently; collaboration between the public, private, and non-profit sectors is required. The purpose of this paper is to explore multi-sectoral collaboration in economic development. It identifies 13 factors that impact multi-sectoral collaboration in economic development and describes how they come into play. The paper also explores the factors that have an impact on developing collaboration between local governments to create a regional approach to economic development; one that achieves the synergies and produces the momentum required for lasting economic change.

While England's regional development agencies (RDAs) were selected as the focus for this research into economic development, the purpose was to translate lessons learned to the British Columbia (BC) context. Established in 1998 by the UK Government, RDAs were given a mandate to transform England's regional economies. The research draws on England's 11-year experience with regional economic development to identify implications and considerations for BC.

Keywords:

Economic development, regional development, regional development agencies, collaboration, multi-sectoral collaboration, England, United Kingdom, British Columbia

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, communities, businesses, social sector organizations, families, and individuals are grappling with the challenges of economic transformation. In these difficult times, increasingly the question many leaders and ordinary citizens are asking themselves is “What do we need to do to prosper in this shifting economic environment?”

British Columbia (BC), with its traditional reliance on resource extraction, primarily forestry and mining, to generate provincial revenue and family incomes, has been particularly impacted by the challenges of economic development and transformation. Despite periodic upswings, the general trend over the last 20 years has been downward. To illustrate, in 1990, there were 26,300 people working in forestry and logging. By 2008, that number had declined by one-third to 17,400. The industry’s GDP fell 13% during the same period (Government of BC, 2010a). Mining, tied as it is to global commodity prices, has been more volatile. In 2008, the industry’s share of GDP had declined relative to 1990; however employment was up by over 10% (Government of BC, 2010b).

In response to these trends, the Government of BC urged communities to capitalize on the province’s natural beauty by developing plans to encourage tourism. These efforts, however, have been severely impacted by the devastation caused by the Mountain Pine Beetle and the Spruce Bud Worm, as well as the slow-down in international travel due to the global recession.

In the early 1990s, regions and communities across England faced similar challenges. Their commodities, particularly coal, were no longer in demand and their manufacturing sector could no longer compete with Asian factories. In many communities, derelict and abandoned production facilities and factories stood as ongoing reminders of a prosperous past and a bleak economic future. In 1993, the unemployment rate in England rose to 10.7%, the highest level since 1984 when the rate reached 11.9%. Across the country labour strife exacerbated the situation. Economic development, which was then within the purview of local authorities (municipal governments), had failed to achieve the synergies and critical mass required to revitalize the economy.

Grappling with the challenges of economic development and transformation requires simultaneous consideration of several factors, including business development, environmental sustainability, education and skills training, land use, technology infrastructure, housing, social services, and government policy. It is not an issue that can be addressed by one organization or one sector acting independently; collaboration, between sectors and organizations, is required (DETR, 1997; Cheever, 2006; Ring and Van de Ven, 1992; ODPM, 2005a; ODPM, 2005b; Oliver, 1990).

So, how does collaboration in economic development work? What happens when you bring people and organizations together to work on an issue that is too large for any one of them to deal with alone? More specifically, what happens when that group includes people from all three sectors: public, private, and non-profit? The common view is that these sectors are very different

in terms of their cultures, values, language, and operational styles. What factors help overcome these differences?

Furthermore, what happens when economic development moves from the local to the regional arena? The common view is that local governments will compete fiercely with neighbouring communities for any advantage or investment opportunity and resist collaboration unless they emerge with a clear advantage. This, despite the fact that local economic development is widely known to be much less effective than a regional approach to development, especially in creating the critical mass and momentum to achieve sustainable economic growth. Are there collaborative approaches to economic development that can overcome this positioning? What factors help break down barriers to collaboration?

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the understanding of multi-sectoral collaboration in the area of economic development. It will identify the factors that have an impact on multi-sectoral collaboration in regional development and explore how they come into play. The case for better understanding is clear; the challenges of economic development and transformation are having an impact at all levels: local, regional, provincial, national, and international.

Communities, businesses, social sector organizations, families, and individuals must adopt new ways of doing things in order to prosper.

RESEARCH CONTEXT: ENGLAND'S REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES

England's regional development agencies (RDAs) were selected as the focus for this research into multi-sectoral collaboration in economic development. RDAs were established by the UK Government in 1998 and given a mandate to transform England's regional economies (RDA Act, 1998). At that time, England's economy was underperforming, with many regions experiencing the impact of a decline in traditional manufacturing and resource extraction industries. RDAs were charged with bringing together organizations and individuals from the business, government, and the non-profit sectors to develop and implement a Regional Economic Strategy (RES) that would result in economic growth. The RDAs were given budgets and staff to achieve this mandate.

The RDAs are governed by 15-member Boards of Directors. The majority of members, nine people, are from the private sector; government, specifically local government, holds four seats; and the non-profit sector, specifically the voluntary and community sector, holds two seats. Within this composition, the Board must also include a rural representative. In planning and implementation, RDAs are expected to work with other local bodies and be committed to a partnership approach. Thus, in composition and mandate, RDAs are involved in multi-sectoral collaboration (RDA Act, 1998; HOC Library Paper, 1998a).

The RDAs receive their authority and budget from the Government of the United Kingdom, which closely monitors and reports on RDA performance. While the legislation governing RDAs has not changed since it was proclaimed in 1998, the operational roles and responsibilities of England's RDAs have evolved significantly (RDA Act, 1998). In fact, with each budget

allocation RDAs were given increased funding, responsibility, flexibility, and accountability.

When they were first established, RDAs were responsible for delivering a number of national government programs, each with its own program specifications and budget envelope.

Significantly, by 2002/03, the RDAs were funded through a Single Pot budget; upon which there were no restrictions except that the RDAs were expected to deliver on an agreed upon set of short and long-term performance targets. The broad target areas include employment opportunities, business performance, education and skills, private sector investment, and brownfield land use (HOC Library Paper, 1998a; HOC Library Paper 2002). Please see Appendix 1 for details on the growth and evolution of RDAs.

There are nine RDAs in England, as described by the map in Appendix 2; four of which participated in this research: Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA), North East Regional Development Agency (One NorthEast), South East England Regional Development Agency (SEEDA), and Yorkshire and the Humber Regional Development Agency (Yorkshire Forward). Please see Appendix 3 for profiles of the participating RDAs.

The primary research for this paper was conducted through a series of 21 interviews with RDA board members and senior staff. The interviewees included 13 board members: five from the private sector, four from the public sector, and four from the non-profit sector. In addition, interviews were conducted with eight senior RDA staff members Please see Appendix 4 for the interview guide.

The research also included 10 key informant interviews with individuals who have experience with multi-sectoral collaborative initiatives related to community and regional development in BC. These interviews were conducted to gain a better understanding of the challenges and issues related to multi-sectoral collaboration in community and regional development in BC. Their input was used to design the primary research so that the findings would be useful and meaningful in the BC context. The research also included a literature review.

FACTORS THAT IMPACT MULTI-SECTORAL COLLABORATION IN REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The research identified a total of 13 factors as having an impact on multi-sectoral collaboration in regional economic development. These emerged through the primary and key informant interviews and were supported by the results of the literature review. They are presented with a brief description below:

1. **Context and motivation:** refers to the reasons that organizations engage in collaborative initiatives and the context in which such relationships are formed (Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Huxham and Eden, 2001; Oliver, 1990; Van de Ven and Walker, 1984; Alter and Hage, 1993 in Cheever, 2006).
2. **Leadership:** is defined as the approach and process of social influence that is used in collaborative initiatives to enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Chrislip and Larson, 1994; Gray, 1989; Ruddle, 2007 b; Grint, 2007).
3. **Structure:** is defined as the formal and informal frameworks and settings that facilitate the work of a collaborative initiative (Gray, 1989; Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Mattessich, 2001).
4. **Resources:** refers to the funding and staffing available to support the collaborative initiative (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Thomson and Perry, 2006; Gray, 1989; Huxham and Eden; 2001; Cheever, 2006).
5. **Governance:** refers to the structure and practices in place to deal with issues of power and control in a collaborative initiative (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Chrislip and Larson, 1994).
6. **Trust:** in inter-organizational relationships, trust is defined as having confidence that other organizations and individuals will take decisions that are in the best interests of the

collaborative initiative, rather than taking decisions in self-interest (Ring and Van de Ven, 1992; Van de Ven and Walker, 1984; Huxham and Vangen, 2000).

7. Risk: in inter-organizational relationships, risk refers to the chance or possibility of loss or negative consequences emerging from loss of autonomy and capacity for unilateral action (Ring and Van de Ven, 1992; Van de Ven and Walker, 1984; Huxham and Vangen, 2000).
8. Collaborative capacity: is defined as the experience and knowledge of collaboration that is resident within individual organizations involved in a collaborative initiative (Gray, 1989; Huxham, 1993; Simonin, 1997; Cheever, 2006).
9. Empowerment: refers to the authority and power to affect change, which for some researchers is a pre-condition to successful collaboration (Guffy, 2006), and for others an outcome of the collaborative process (Chrislip and Larson, 1994).
10. Information and evidence: refers to the body of knowledge and data upon which the collaborative initiative bases its discussions, planning and decisions; importantly this knowledge and data must be seen as credible by all stakeholders (Gray, 1989; Morris, 2010).
11. Monitoring: refers to the framework and process put into place to track progress on achieving the goals and objectives of the collaborative initiative (Morris, 2010).
12. Organizational capacity: refers to the ability of organizations to participate in the collaborative initiative, focusing particularly on having sufficient resources, expertise and experience (Morris, 2010).
13. Common understanding: refers to shared meaning and understanding developed among the members of the collaborative initiative (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Kikoski and Kikoski, 2004).

While some of the 13 factors clearly have more impact than others, the relationships identified between them suggest that none can be removed without creating a gap in the overall framework.

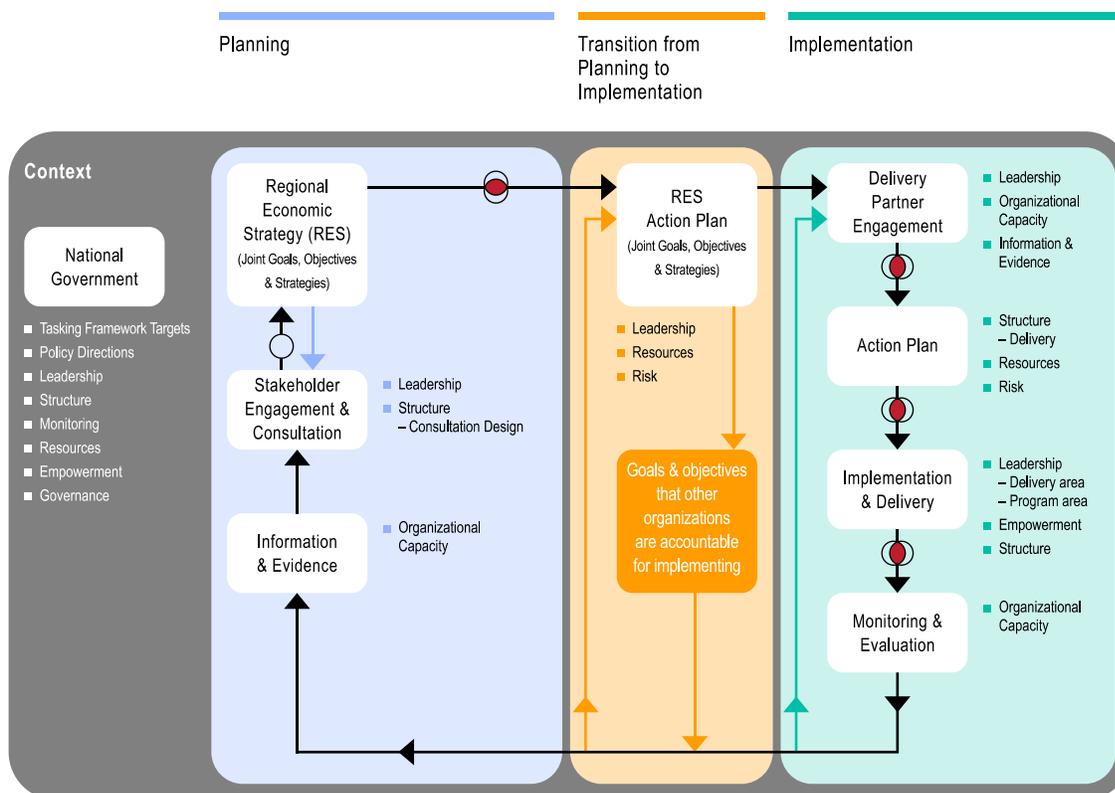
HOW THE FACTORS THAT IMPACT MULTI-SECTORAL COLLABORATION IN REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COME INTO PLAY

The primary research interviews conducted for this paper revealed how the factors identified in the previous section come into play in the work of RDAs. The findings from this research can best be understood through the use of a flowchart (Figure 1). The path of the flowchart illustrates the key outputs associated with the work of an RDA, the bullet points beside each output indicate the factors that have an influence on the output, and the circles that are associated with the transition between the outputs are the outcomes of the process.

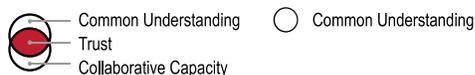
The work of the RDAs can be divided into four phases: Context, Planning, Transition from Planning to Implementation, and Implementation. Throughout the process, it is vital that continuity of purpose and direction be maintained. At the same time, there must be enough flexibility to accommodate ‘on-the-ground’ experience and innovation, particularly in the transition from planning to implementation.

Each phase is described and discussed in the following sections.

Figure 1: Work of the RDA and Factors that have an Impact



LEGEND



(Morris, 2010)

Context

The context for and motivation behind the work of the RDAs is framed by the UK Government.

Four elements in the contextual framework were identified as having particular importance:

geographic remit (structure), Board composition (governance), performance framework (tasking framework targets), and resource allocation (resources).

In establishing the RDAs, the UK Government was clear in its intent that the RDAs would have a regional mandate. This geographic remit was established in order to conduct and integrate economic planning and implementation at a level that would create the momentum necessary to deliver change on a national basis. This was a response to the failure of locally-focused economic development – the norm in England until that point – to achieve significant growth. The contextual framework also addressed governance, establishing RDA Boards that are multi-sectoral and business-led. Business involvement and leadership is intended to bring a business approach and discipline to economic development, around matters such as risk, clarity of purpose, implementation, and results. This approach signalled that the UK Government expected that the business sector, not government, would ultimately lead the way in economic transformation and revitalization. The intention behind the establishment of multi-sectoral Boards is to ensure that economic development plans and efforts are ‘joined up’ and that government, business, and the non-profit sector are all working toward the same objectives. The third critical element in the contextual framework is the performance framework. The UK Government works with RDAs to set targets in five defined areas, then measures performance and publishes results. This approach not only helps ensure that RDAs are on track, it establishes an expectation that RDAs will set, monitor, and publish performance measures for the programs and initiatives outlined in the region’s Regional Economic Strategy (RES) and RES Action Plan. The fourth element in the contextual framework is resources. The UK Government allocates significant financial resources to the RDAs and has empowered them with a high level of autonomy, authority, and flexibility. This allows RDAs to play a strategic and pivotal role in the region and to leverage commitment and investment from all three sectors.

Planning

The second phase, planning, is focused on the development of the RES. The RES identifies the sectors and industries in which the region has a strategic advantage; those that drive or have the potential to transform the regional economy. The RES sets out a blueprint for developing those sectors, including consideration of the infrastructure needed, for example workforce, transportation, utility, and investment required. In developing the RES, the RDA works with a wide range of regional partners, including business, local and national government, universities, and the community and voluntary sectors. Importantly, the RES must be signed-off by key public, private, and non-profit stakeholders in the region.

This phase begins with the development of a body of information and evidence on which planning will be based. The information and evidence collected encompasses a broad range of areas that have an impact on economic development, including business investment, start-ups, and longevity; workforce educational attainment and skill levels; cost of living, including housing and transportation; immigration and incidence of English as a Second Language; and transportation, land use, and other infrastructure considerations.

Information and evidence provides a common starting point for discussions with stakeholders; to enable them to understand the issues, opportunities, and decisions that the region must consider. Robust information can help establish priorities, broker cooperation, overcome vested interests, and foster ownership and buy-in to the RES. This is particularly important in helping local governments see the potential benefits in collaborating with each other to increase the impact of decisions and investments related to key areas such as transportation infrastructure, zoning,

housing, and workforce adjustments. Information and evidence can also help stakeholders understand the importance of factors such as housing, immigrant support and adjustment, and workforce training to economic development, which in turn leads to an appreciation of the key role that the non-profit sector can play in these areas.

To do this, the information must be credible. To achieve credibility, some RDAs have stakeholders sign-off on the information and evidence base while others work with stakeholders to collect data. RDAs have found that ignoring this step can result in later arguments about the validity of the planning outcomes from organizations and local governments whose interests were not addressed. RDA staff involved in planning felt that this was an area where the agency needs to possess the organizational capacity to demonstrate leadership and expertise.

Stakeholder engagement and consultation plays a significant role in the development of the RES. The objective is to achieve broad ownership of and buy-in to the RES across the region, which is seen as the first step to securing stakeholder commitments to the RES Action Plan. All RDAs carry out several rounds of engagement and consultation before the RES is finalized.

Consultation strategies differ slightly between RDAs; for example, in the degree of public engagement and focus on 'blue-sky' future visioning. However, all RDAs place a great deal of emphasis on consultation with leaders from business, industry, the public sector, the community sector, and higher education. RDAs employ a wide range of consultation methodologies, including face-to-face engagement in settings such as open houses, focus groups, conferences, workshops, and sector meetings. Several RDAs also convene leader's tables, which are

structured using the Chatham House Rule¹, for the purpose of engaging in open and honest dialogue. The structure and process for stakeholder consultation are designed to be inclusive, involve people early on, and bring the right people together. These consultations recognize the need to create the space, time, and venues for stakeholders to have the necessary strategic conversations and think together. RDAs also use electronic methodologies for engagement, inviting input and feedback on matters under discussion through website forums, surveys, blogs, and email.

Leadership, particularly from the Board Chairman and Chief Executive, is important in stakeholder engagement and consultation to help build common understanding regarding the context in which the RDA operates, the information and evidence it is working with and the role played by each sector. Ideally their work begins to build trust and helps stakeholders see the advantages of working together. An open, inclusive, respectful leadership style; one that recognizes, values, and balances stakeholder perspectives has been found to be the most effective in this environment.

Through this work the RES emerges. It contains the high-level joint goals, objectives, and strategies for economic development in the region. Generally speaking, stakeholders from all sectors are happy to sign off on this high-level document, and in doing so demonstrate a significant degree of collaborative capacity, common understanding and trust.

¹ The Chatham House Rule reads as follows: “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed”. This rule may be invoked to encourage openness and the sharing of information. See <http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/about/chathamhouserule/>

Transition from Planning to Implementation

The third phase, transition from planning to implementation, is focused on the development of the RES Action Plan. While the RES focuses on high level strategies, the RES Action Plan describes specific programs and projects. In this phase, the RDA must work with stakeholders to obtain commitments of resources and action, and it is at this point that they often encounter resistance. For some stakeholders, particularly other government agencies and ministries, resistance is often linked to the need to achieve progress on their own goals and targets, which may not coincide with the RES goals and strategies. For local government, the resistance is often linked to an unwillingness to cede any advantage to other communities and concern around loss of decision-making autonomy. For other stakeholders, resistance emerges from concerns about committing resources and/or being accountable to an outside organization.

This is a phase of critical importance for RDAs because neither the goals and objectives in the RES or the performance targets can be achieved without the commitment of resources and action from others. To leverage these commitments, RDAs invest their own funds strategically, to overcome resistance and help broker collaboration and partnership between organizations. In most instances the RDAs are very clear that they will not commit their resources unless and until other stakeholders do the same. They have also been known to walk away from programs and projects if other commitments are not forthcoming. By going into the RES and the RES Action Plan planning process without a pre-determined funding plan, RDAs are able to direct their resources to where they are needed and where they will leverage the commitment of others to achieve strong outcomes. In this way the plan directs the investment strategy rather than having a pre-determined investment strategy direct the plan.

While this approach has enabled RDAs to broker collaboration on a range of fronts, it has been particularly effective in dealing with resistance from local authorities. Interestingly, several interviewees stated that, in the early years most local authorities were motivated to collaborate with one another simply to ensure that they obtained a portion of the RDA funding. Over time, however, as collaborative projects delivered successful results, collaboration became motivated by a track record of success.

During this phase leadership begins to become more dispersed among the key stakeholders; the result of the development of partnerships, shared investment, and collaboration between organizations from all three sectors in the region. Leadership from the RDA remains critically important and continues to focus on creating common understanding, trust, and commitment to collaboration.

Implementation

In the fourth phase, implementation, the high-level strategies and actions identified in the RES and RES Action Plan are translated into front-line program and project delivery. Significantly in this phase, the focus of collaborative activity shifts; from the Board and executive staff of the organizations involved to the senior managers and operational staff. As a result, the process must allow for and nurture the development of common understanding, collaborative capacity, and trust among these new participants. In this phase the concepts of collaboration and partnership shift from being values and principles associated with the RES to being day-to-day realities associated with program and project delivery.

In the initial stage of the implementation phase, the focus is on engaging the people who will be involved in program and project delivery to develop an action plan. Once again, information and evidence plays a key role in informing the discussions and decisions and helping the partners overcome vested interests. Organizational capacity enters into the discussion and is evaluated to ensure that the organizations having a role in delivery have the capacity to do so. Some of the key elements evaluated are operational leadership, governance, and administrative capacities.

The program and project action plans formalize the inputs, roles, responsibilities, relationships, deliverables, and timelines. The inputs; funding, and resource commitments made by the partners, are a key element of the action plan. The roles, responsibilities, and relationships combine to define the delivery structure for the initiative. The deliverables and timelines are also defined in the action plan and are included in the performance framework for the project, which is then monitored by the RDA. During this stage, issues related to organizational autonomy and hierarchy can creep back into the process, and in some cases may threaten to stall progress or derail or alter plans. In these instances strong collaborative leadership and persistence are required.

During implementation and delivery, leadership, empowerment, and structure all play a role. The quality of leadership at the operational level was found to be a key determinant of program and project success. In addition to having the required project- or program-related skills and expertise, operational leaders must have integrity, enthusiasm, energy, credibility with stakeholders, strong communications skills, and the ability to work in a collaborative environment. They must also be able to engender trust. Empowerment, having the authority and

power to affect change at the program level, is closely related to trust. Some RDAs indicated having difficulty with empowerment, either in granting too much authority and power without proper checks and balances or in granting too little, thus reducing the effectiveness of the program or project. Structure at this stage refers to the establishment of opportunities for program and project delivery staff to come together to share information about successful practices, discuss challenges and approaches to overcoming problems, and develop plans for the future.

The factor most important in ensuring implementation is monitoring. Interviewees commented that developing a performance framework and holding organizations and people accountable for deliverables, timelines, and budgets is the best way to ensure the successful transition from planning through implementation. Both the RDA Board and executive staff monitor performance on a regular and ongoing basis. On all programs and projects, monitoring information is fed back to the delivery partners. If deliverables, timelines or budgets are off-plan, questions will be asked and explanations expected. Monitoring information is also integrated into the information and evidence base that informs the next round of planning. Importantly, RDAs publish monitoring reports and disseminate them widely; to media, government, and other stakeholders.

Interviewees noted that this very public approach to accountability was very powerful and effective in motivating the organizations involved in program and project delivery to stay focused and on target. RDAs also have the ability to withhold funding, but interviewees did not suggest that this happens very often.

With regard to the outcomes associated with the work of the RDA, the synthesis of the research findings clearly illustrate how common understanding, collaborative capacity, and trust are inter-related and are built slowly over time as the stakeholders and delivery partners work together. Even when faced with difficult circumstances and choices, such as those that emerge when a program or project is focused on securing efficiencies that result in job losses, these outcomes can be achieved through transparency and fairness in all dealings.

Regional Development Agency Outcomes

RDA performance is closely monitored and reported by the UK Government, and focuses on two outcomes: the achievement of performance targets and the successful delivery of programs and projects.

As indicated earlier, each RDA works with the central government to set performance targets in five broad areas: employment opportunities, business performance, education and skills, private sector investment, and brownfield land use. The aggregate achievement against the aggregate target for all RDAs for the period 2002/03-2006/07 is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: RDA Aggregate Targets and Achievements: 2002/03-2006/07

Target Area	Aggregate Target	Aggregate Achievement	Number of times target was met
Jobs created or safeguarded	381,041	502,174	42 out of 45
Businesses created	39,852	56,785	42 out of 45
People assisted in skills development	757,584	1,270,406	44 out of 45
Funding leverage (£m)	3,970	5,711	34 out of 36
Brownfield land use (ha)	4,781	5,657	43 out of 45

Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2009

Examples of specific programs and projects that illustrate the outcome of successful collaboration are numerous, and many are profiled on the RDA website. Most involved at least two of the sectors: private, public, and non-profit, and many involve all three.

The Scarborough Urban Renaissance in Yorkshire is an example of a regeneration project that revitalized a town economically, socially, and environmentally. Scarborough was Britain's first seaside resort and, until the 1970s, thrived on tourism and fishing. In that decade, the advent of inexpensive foreign holidays and the introduction of fishing quotas led to a decline in those sectors, which had a devastating impact on the local economy. Working together, Yorkshire Forward, the local authority, tourism developers, the non-profit and for-profit cultural sector, business, and the citizens of Scarborough created and implemented a vision to revitalize the town based on investment in the cultural sector, small and medium sized enterprise, and tourism. The £22.5 million investment by government leveraged more than £200 million from the private sector. In 2009, Scarborough was voted the Most Enterprising Place in Europe.

MediaCityUK in Manchester came about after the BBC announced that it wanted to establish a new northern centre and relocate five of its departments. Working together, Northwest Regional Development Agency, Central Salford Urban Regeneration Company, Salford City Council, and Peel Development Corporation put together a proposal for a new media district that would attract like-minded businesses. MediaCityUK proved to be a magnet for businesses in the digital and creative industries, which in turn inspired the growth of media-related educational programs that allowed people in North West England to develop skills to participate in this new and growing

field. MediaCityUK provides workspace for 1,100 creative businesses and will deliver £1.0 billion in additional value to the North West economy over five years.

In the North East of England, One NorthEast brought together the public, non-profit, and private sectors to develop an integrated approach to moving people from worklessness to full employment in a way that met the needs of both employers and individuals. The initiative involved employers, educational institutions, voluntary organizations, and government. The involvement of business ensured that the program was preparing people for 'real' jobs; the educational sector focused on delivering job-related skills training; the voluntary sector provided individuals with the support needed to make the lifestyle and aspirational adjustments required to ensure that they were able to keep a job; and the government agencies involved coordinated and streamlined their funding. The success of this program was based on the fact that each of the sectors brought a necessary and unique attribute to the collaborative partnership; one that was valued by the others.

CONCLUSION

From the research on England's RDAs, eight factors were identified as having the broadest impact on their work as a multi-sectoral collaborative initiative:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Leadership | 5. Structure |
| 2. Information and Evidence | 6. Common Understanding |
| 3. Context and Motivation | 7. Collaborative Capacity |
| 4. Resources | 8. Trust |

These factors and their impacts are discussed below.

Leadership

The role of leadership in the collaborative work of the RDA is to create common ground on which people can talk and work together. It does so by listening, translating meaning across sectors, and building common understanding with respect to the information, evidence, and decisions under consideration. It also keeps people focused on strategic purposes and outcomes, which helps to overcome vested interests. A leadership style that is open, inclusive, and respectful helps build trust and inspire collaboration. While leadership was most often attributed to the Chairman, the Chief Executive was also recognized for his leadership role. It was interesting to note that the same leadership qualities were identified as being important for members of the executive team and staff who have responsibility for implementing programs and projects.

This description of leadership is very consistent with the description of successful collaborative leadership found in the literature. Bryson and Crosby, and Chrislip and Larson assert that the leadership style required for collaborative situations is very different than that associated with in-charge organizational models. Leadership in collaborative environments is achieved through inspiring and motivating commitment and action; leading by example as a peer problem solver, rather than through command and control; building broad-based involvement and participation; and sustaining hope, participation, and commitment (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Chrislip and Larson, 1994).

Information and Evidence

Information and evidence creates a common starting point for discussions and decisions, and keeps people focused on issues rather than interests. Good information can help broker cooperation and make choices clear. Information and evidence must be seen by stakeholders as credible. If it is not, arguments about the validity of planning outcomes may result, led by organizations whose interests were not addressed.

References to the role of information and evidence were found in the research by Gray. These references speak to the importance of reaching agreement on the facts that support the definition of a problem and the proposed solutions. Gray goes on to say that, when stakeholders base their positions and actions on different sets of facts, a great deal of time can be spent arguing about whose facts are right (Gray, 1989).

Context and Motivation

Context and motivation brings clarity to the purpose and operation of the RDAs. Established by the UK Government, the context lays out Board composition, accountability, scope of authority, funding allocation, and the performance framework and targets. The context, particularly the performance framework and targets, provides a basis for decisions around RES strategies and objectives, as well as program and project development. It also helps provide the rationale and explanation for these decisions.

UK Government monitoring and progress reports highlight the importance of the performance frameworks and targets. These expectations establish a multi-dimensional approach to economic development and bring coherence to RDA strategies, programs, and projects (HOC Library Paper, 2002). With respect to setting the collaborative context for RDA work, several researchers have concluded that in many cases collaboration would not have occurred without government intervention. In some sectors, the motivation and incentives from government include access to funding and new program areas, which makes the directive to participate virtually mandatory (Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Huxham and Eden, 2001; Oliver, 1990).

Resources

Resources play an important role in the work of the RDA to overcome resistance to involvement and collaboration. RDAs must have access to resources sufficient enough to be seen as the leading player in regional economic development. Using its funding strategically, the RDA can bring stakeholders and delivery partners to the table, enlist their collaboration, and leverage a commitment of funding and action. When stakeholders are reluctant to collaborate, invest or take

action, the ‘carrot’ of RDA funding is the most powerful and most reliable motivator, and will, in most cases, bring reluctant participants and organizations around.

It is interesting to note that the RDA experience is in keeping with observations about resources made by Bryson and Crosby. They assert that once a collaborative initiative begins adopting and implementing plans, access to financial resources for operations, capital, outside consultants, and programs is required (Bryson and Crosby, 1992). Interestingly, they also suggest that financial resources be identified in order to provide incentives to facilitate the participation of organizations in the initiative (Bryson and Crosby, 1992).

Structure

Structure is defined as the formal or informal frameworks and settings that facilitate the work of the RDA. The design of the structure is dictated by the circumstance. For example, in stakeholder engagement and consultation ‘structure’ refers to the consultation design; in developing program and project action plans, it refers to the delivery structure developed; and in implementation it refers to the performance evaluation structure that is established to monitor progress. Importantly, the structures that RDAs have developed enable the organizations and individuals involved to view issues systemically; which allows them to identify the complex web of factors and underlying causes that have an impact on development. As they begin to understand and grapple with issues in this fashion, the unique and valuable role of each sector, public, private, and non-profit, becomes clear, resulting in more equitable and balanced relationships among the partners.

References to structure made by RDA interviewees were consistent with the findings of the literature review, where the term ‘structure’ was used to describe a wide range of formal and informal frameworks and settings that facilitated and furthered the work of the collaborative group (Gray, 1989; Bryson and Crosby, 1992).

Common Understanding, Collaborative Capacity and Trust

In RDA collaborative processes, common understanding, collaborative capacity, and trust are inter-related and must, therefore, be discussed together. Common understanding, collaborative capacity, and trust emerge as people talk and work together. From the description of the roles of leadership, information and evidence, and structure, it can be concluded that the environment to create and enhance these factors must be intentionally and carefully nurtured. The research interviews suggest that the conditions for the emergence of common understanding, collaborative capacity, and trust are not limited to ‘good news’ processes; they can also be created through transparency and fairness in difficult situations. The research also suggests that there is a need to be cautious about assuming that establishing these factors with one group or at one level in a collaborative initiative automatically means that they will be transferred to all groups and levels involved in the initiative. Care must be taken to establish the environment that will nurture these at all levels and among all working groups. Given that a positive experience with a collaborative undertaking is the best predictor of whether an organization will engage in subsequent collaborative initiatives, RDAs have taken a long-term and strategic approach to building common understanding, collaborative capacity, and trust among sectors and stakeholders, allowing time and space for these to develop. As a result, after more than ten years of operation,

collaboration has become easier and organizations are more willing to engage because they understand the process and have seen the benefits that emerge.

Elements of the literature review speak to the creation of this three-in-one outcome:

- ***Talking together*** to develop common understanding: creating shared meaning and appreciation about the collaborative entity and the participating organizations (Bryson and Crosby, 1992; Kikoski and Kikoski, 2004).
- ***Working together*** to develop collaborative capacity: developing experience and skills in joint decision-making, sharing power and compromise (Simonin, 1997).
- ***Building trust together*** through respecting and honouring other collaborators and partners in all dealings, thus creating a ‘virtuous cycle’ that leads to more and larger joint projects (Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Van de Ven and Walker, 1984).

The conclusions from the primary research findings identified eight factors that have the broadest scope of influence on the work of RDAs. Five of these, leadership, information and evidence, context and motivation, resources, and structure, can be considered input factors. The research strongly suggests that these five factors have the potential to play a highly significant role in economic development initiatives by creating the environment and context for collaborative interaction. The other three, common understanding, collaborative capacity, and trust, can be considered outcome factors. Together these can lead to enhanced decision-making and generate increased opportunities for collaboration which can in turn lead to more economic development and growth.

IMPLICATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

The research for this paper identified a number of factors that have been critical to the success of economic development and transformation in England. The results achieved by England's RDAs suggest that British Columbia could benefit from considering these factors as they apply to economic development and transformation in the province.

Geographic Remit

Currently in BC, most economic development activity is carried out at the local level. As a result, BC faces challenges similar to those faced in England in the 1990s; specifically the need to create the momentum required to deliver significant economic change. While it may be tempting to simply use BC's regional district boundaries, the RDA experience suggests that these may still be too small. Undoubtedly there will be challenges and resistance, particularly from local and regional governments, to establishing different boundaries; however, the experiences of RDAs suggest that this would be the preferred way to proceed.

Context and Accountability for Economic Development

In England, the UK Government has developed a national RDA tasking framework that includes a set of integrated and synergistic performance targets. Each RDA works with central government to determine its own targets, and is then accountable for delivering and reporting on its progress. The single context creates clarity of purpose for the RDAs.

Economic development in BC would benefit from such clarity of purpose and from a set of well-thought-out and synergistic targets. Currently economic development in the province is subject

to multiple program guidelines, which lack synergy and have little potential for building momentum. Because both the provincial and federal governments are involved in economic development, establishing a context for BC that is similar to that found in England would require collaboration and agreement between the two levels of government. While these discussions may be difficult, this approach has the potential to significantly increase the impact of government funding.

Governance of Economic Development

Economic development cannot be addressed by any one organization or sector acting independently. It follows then that the governance of economic development should include representatives from all three sectors. It is important that those involved have credibility and influence in their sector, but equally, they must be willing to work for the greater benefit of the region. The RDA experience suggests that including local government, regional government, major employers, key traditional business sectors, new and emerging business sectors, health authorities, social entrepreneurs, non-profit social services, arts and culture groups, the agricultural sector, and particularly the post-secondary sector should be contemplated. In addition, it is important to consider geographic representation in the composition of the governing group.

Structure for Economic Development

In BC, at levels below the provincial and federal government, economic development leadership is dispersed and in some cases contested. As a result, economic development expertise and capacity is also dispersed. Those involved may include local governments, chambers of

commerce, community futures organizations, innovation councils, and tourism councils among others. At best, this indicates that communities and regions are not realizing the full potential of their capacity. At worst, the expertise and capacity in one organization is pitted against that in others.

With respect to economic development, there are many parallels between the situation in BC now and the situation in England in the mid-1990s. In England, introducing dedicated and well-funded structures made a significant difference to its regional and national economies. RDAs are empowered with significant measures of authority, flexibility, and funding, which makes them credible and impactful in their work.

Introducing a dedicated and well-resourced structure for economic development in each region of BC would not be welcomed by all parties; however, regional cooperation and collaboration are essential if the economy is to deliver prosperity to the province. At a minimum, communities should be encouraged to work together voluntarily to develop an integrated regional economic strategy, plan, and budget. Ideally this work would: involve key business, government, and social sector representatives; establish a set of integrated development targets; and secure commitments of funding, leadership, and action from all sectors. Such an undertaking could be made attractive by linking completion of the strategy, plan, and budget to significant government funding.

Learning from the Experience of Other Jurisdictions

Opportunities to exchange information, explore challenges and learn from the experience of other jurisdictions should be pursued, and involve leaders from all three sectors. Learning

opportunities and options could include organizing conferences and workshops in BC or arranging study tours to other jurisdictions. Creating opportunities for people in BC who are involved in economic development to explore different approaches could result in significant gains for British Columbians.

APPENDIX 1

Growth and Evolution of Regional Development Agencies

The following table provides a summary of the growth and evolution of England's regional development agencies.

Year	RDA Roles and Responsibilities	Budget
1999/2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery of pre-existing programs, each with its own program specifications and budget 	£875 million
2001/2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to transfer up to 20% out of any program budget with no limit on the amount that could be transferred into any program. • Establishment of the Strategic Program with accompanying budget to support innovation and regional priorities. 	£1.35 billion
2002/2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of the Single Pot budget, allowing RDAs to direct funding entirely in accordance with RES priorities. • Establishment of a set of indicators to enable RDAs and the UK Government to evaluate their performance and that of the region's economy. 	£1.49 billion
2004/2005/2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased responsibility for decisions about housing, planning, tourism, and transport. • Indicators evolve from being a way to track and evaluate performance to being performance targets. 	£2.0 billion
2007/2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced role in supporting university-business collaboration. • Responsible for the development of Regional Skills Partnerships and Business Link Services. • Assumed responsibility for the social and economic work of the Countryside Agency. 	£2.3 billion

Sources: HOC Library Paper, 2002; ODPM, 2005b; DTI, 2005

APPENDIX 2

England's Regional Development Agencies and their Geographic Remit



Scale: not to scale

Source: Communities and Local Government (2008a)

APPENDIX 3

Profiles of the RDAs Participating in the Research

Northwest Regional Development Agency

The region served by the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA) is economically, geographically and demographically diverse, with an area of just over 14,000 square kilometres, a population of 6.8 million, and 247,000 businesses (Communities, 2008 b; NWDA, 2008 b).

According to the NWDA, the region's economy, which is valued at £111 billion (NWDA, 2008 b), includes strengths in media, based in Manchester; advanced manufacturing and chemicals, based in Lancashire and Cheshire; and tourism, led by Cumbria's Lake District National Park.

The region is also well-known for its university sector, which enrolls 230,000 students and graduates 50,000 students annually.

One NorthEast

The region served by One NorthEast is England's smallest, with an area of about 8,600 square kilometres, a population of 2.5 million and close to 50,000 businesses (Communities, 2008 b; NERIP, 2008). According to the Regional Economic Strategy (RES) the region's economy, which is valued at £39 billion, includes strengths in chemicals and pharmaceuticals, the automotive industry, defence and marine, food and drink manufacturing, energy, knowledge intensive business services, tourism and hospitality, commercial creative digital and new media industries, and health and social care. The public sector is also an important factor in the region's economy, accounting for 30% of the workforce, compared with 26% nationally (ONE, 2006 a).

South East England Development Agency

The region served by the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) is, along many measures, one of England's largest. According to SEEDA, the region's economy is valued at £180 billion and includes approximately 350,000 businesses (SEEDA, 2006 a). The region has an area of over 19,000 square kilometres, 80% of which is classified as rural. SEEDA has a population of 8.2 million, 74 local authorities, and 24 universities and higher education institutions (SEEDA, 2008, Overview, Communities, 2008 b).

Yorkshire Forward

The region served by Yorkshire Forward has an area of just over 15,000 square kilometres, a population of 5.0 million, and 270,000 businesses. According to Yorkshire Forward, the region's economy is valued at about £80 billion (Communities, 2008 b; YF, 2008 b), and includes strengths in advanced engineering and metals, bioscience, chemicals, digital industries, food and drink, healthcare technologies, and environmental technologies. According to the agency's website, the region is home to five of the world's top ten companies (YF, 2008 c) and nine top class universities (YF, 2006).

APPENDIX 4

Interview Guide for Regional Development Agency Interviews (Primary Research)

Introduction

- Describe the research purpose and project.
- Assure confidentiality and discuss the use of data

Questions

The questions below will be posed to each interviewee. In the responses, the interviewer will be listening for mention of the key factors that were identified through the literature review as having an impact on multi-sectoral collaborative change initiatives, plus any other factors that the interviewees reveal in their responses. The key factors identified in the literature review are:

- Context/Motivation
- Trust
- Risk
- Governance
- Leadership
- Structure
- Resources
- Empowerment
- Collaborative capacity

Opening

Personal questions:

- Tell me about your role in the organization?
- How long have you been at (name of RDA)?

Domain #1: Development of joint goals, objectives, and strategies

1. How did the RDA go about developing its joint goals, objectives, and strategies?
 - Probe to discover
 - How the interviewee was involved
 - How was the Board involved/Staff involved
 - How and where was the process and content discussed
 - How and where were issues discussed
 - What worked well and what did not

2. Thinking about goal/objective/strategy development, can you identify one or two things that the RDA did that you feel made a significant difference, either positive or negative, in this work?
 - Other probes:
 - Were there incentives, positive or negative, that motivated the process?
 - How was organizational and/or jurisdictional self-interest handled?

Domain #2: Transition from planning to implementation

3. What things did the RDA do to make sure that the goals, objectives, and strategies that you put into place were actually implemented?
 - Probe to discover:
 - How the interviewee was involved
 - How was the Board involved/Staff involved
 - How and where was the process and content discussed
 - How and where were issues discussed
 - What worked well and what did not

4. Thinking about the transition from planning to implementation, can you identify one or two things that the RDA did that you feel made a significant difference, either positive or negative, in this work?

- Other probes:
 - Were performance measures established and tracked?
 - Were expectations or performance measures established and tracked for outside organizations identified as delivery partners in the plan? How was this received?

Domain #3: Stakeholder engagement and consultation

5. Please describe how the RDA engaged and consulted with stakeholders, including the public, if that is something you do. In doing so, please feel free to consider stakeholder engagement as it applies to the broad scope of your work, for example during strategy development, strategy implementation, and strategy evaluation.
 - Probe to discover:
 - How the interviewee was involved
 - How was the Board involved/Staff involved
 - How and where was the process and content discussed
 - How and where were issues discussed
 - What worked well and what did not

6. Thinking about stakeholder engagement, can you identify one or two things that the RDA did that you feel made a significant difference, either positive or negative, in this work?
 - Other probes:
 - At what points in the process are stakeholders engaged?
 - How were stakeholders identified? Were they the right stakeholders?
 - How broad and deep was the involvement of staff in stakeholder organizations?
 - Is stakeholder consultation built into the structure of the organization (embedded in the culture)?

Domain #4: Development of common understanding

7. Please describe how the RDA developed common or shared understanding among the people involved. In doing so, please feel free to consider the broad scope of common understanding, for example how you arrived at a common or shared understanding about your work and your environment or how shared language and meaning emerged.
 - Probe to discover:
 - How the interviewee was involved
 - How was the Board involved/Staff involved
 - How and where did this emerge
 - How and where were issues discussed
 - What worked well and what did not

8. Thinking about the development of common understanding, can you identify one or two things that the RDA did that you feel made a significant difference, either positive or negative in this work?
 - Other probes:
 - At what points in the process did common understanding emerge?
 - Were stakeholders involved? How?
 - Is the development of common understanding built into the structure of the organization (embedded in the culture)?

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