News Collaborations

“Collaboration” has become such a sexy term in the journalism world that centers and [sites](http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/collaborationcentral) are being built around it. As I noted in my previous post, content sharing, resource sharing, and even joint reporting is not new. What excites those of us looking to the future of journalism is what I have called networked collaboration.

In a networked collaboration, a number of different outlets work together to produce original reporting around a particular topic. In vertical networks, that reporting is designed and supervised by one outlet; in horizontal networks, the work is co-operatively created, managed by a backbone organization with no editorial skin in the game.

Why create complex collaborative networks at all, especially when such networks require more resources to sustain than simple partnerships? [Josh Stearns wrote](http://www.pbs.org/mediashift/2012/04/catalysts-of-collaboration-what-motivates-new-journalism-partnerships111) to this point in April 2012 when he argued that technology has made these collaborations possible and economic factors have made them necessary, but that they have flourished because collaborations often lead to better journalism.

Most of the daily news is straightforward: a what, when, who, or where. As journalists dig into the how and the why, however, stories become complex. In the contemporary media economy, very few organizations have the breadth or depth to follow a complex story to its conclusion.

The reasons are legion: The demise of regional dailies has strained newsrooms that previously could rely on local reporting to fill out a broader picture. The growth of surveillance technology, and with it big data, have created the need for journalists who specialize not only in data mining, but also who can storytell with data. A changing culture has led to the positive emphasis on understanding how diverse communities experience and respond to national issues. And as the world becomes increasingly interconnected, journalists come under new (and beneficial) pressure to explore relationships that previously would have come under the purview of separate departments, or even separate publications.

To follow these complex stories, journalists increasingly find that they must work together, drawing on their different areas of expertise. [examples]

In short, journalists often can produce higher quality journalism around complex stories when they collaborate.

Fortunately, a social media environment that puts the consumer in the driver seat provides an additional incentive for collaboration. Consumer-driven social media emphasizes content over brand, meaning that consumers care less about which outlet breaks a story and more about how easy the story is to find. Reach—a traditional measure of value in journalism—increases when multiple outlets promote the same story, often leading to a viral effect that lifts all analytics. Collaboration, in short, is good for business, good for mission. The more journalists on a project, the more viewers /readers/ listeners the content will have.

Journalists enter the field—suffering through low pay, long days, and a pretty brutal lifestyle—because they believe deeply that a democracy only flourishes with an informed and engaged citizenry. Journalism’s essence could be drawn from a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote to Richard Price in January 8, 1789: "Whenever the people are well informed, they can be trusted with their own government; that whenever things get so far wrong as to attract their notice, they may be relied on to set them to rights."

The aim of journalism is to educate the public so that they will become engaged and act upon that information. The word we use to describe that movement from education to action is *impact*. The best journalism is impact journalism.

Strive, both the organization and the process it helps facilitate, is an example of *collective impact*, the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. Collaboration is nothing new. The social sector is filled with examples of partnerships, networks, and other types of joint efforts. But collective impact initiatives are distinctly different. Unlike most collaborations, collective impact initiatives involve a centralized infrastructure, a dedicated staff, and a structured process that leads to a common agenda, shared measurement, continuous communication, and mutually reinforcing activities among all participants. …. that large-scale social change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations. <http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact>

***Common Agenda***--Collective impact requires all participants to have a shared vision for change, one that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

***Shared Measurement Systems***

***Mutually Reinforcing Activities***

***Continuous Communication***

***Backbone Support Organizations***The expectation that collaboration can occur without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails.

Three conditions must be in place before launching a collective impact initiative: an influential champion, adequate financial resources, and a sense of urgency for change. Together, these preconditions create the opportunity and motivation necessary to bring people who have never before worked together into a collective impact initiative and hold them in place until the initiative’s own momentum takes over. <http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/channeling_change_making_collective_impact_work?cpgn=WP%20DL%20-%20Channeling%20Change>

Collective impact works differently. The process and results of collective impact are emergent rather than predetermined, the necessary resources and innovations often already exist but have not yet been recognized, learning is continuous, and adoption happens simultaneously among many different organizations.

In other words, collective impact is not merely a new process that supports the same social sector solutions but an entirely different model of social progress. The power of collective impact lies in the heightened vigilance that comes from multiple organizations looking for resources and innovations through the same lens, the rapid learning that comes from continuous feedback loops, and the immediacy of action that comes from a unified and simultaneous response among all participants.

<http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/embracing_emergence_how_collective_impact_addresses_complexity?utm_source=Enews&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ten_gifts>

In fact, developing a common agenda is not about creating solutions at all, but about achieving a common understanding of the problem, agreeing to joint goals to address the problem, and arriving at common indicators to which the collective set of involved actors will hold themselves accountable in making progress. It is the process that comes after the development of the common agenda in which solutions and resources are uncovered, agreed upon, and collectively taken up. Those solutions and resources are quite often not known in advance.

<http://www.ssireview.org/blog/entry/embracing_emergence_how_collective_impact_addresses_complexity?utm_source=Enews&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ten_gifts>