

# **The values created by successful collaboration**

**An MMM Guide**

A large, stylized graphic of the letters 'MM' in a vibrant, multi-colored gradient. The 'M' on the left transitions from pink to purple, while the 'M' on the right transitions from green to blue. The letters are thick and have a slightly irregular, hand-drawn appearance.

## The values created by successful collaboration

**“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”**

**Antoine de Saint-Exupery**

Drawing on learning from MMM’s 2008-2010 Collaborative Working Pilots<sup>1</sup> and including extracts from interviews with participants, this short document shares insights into the different kinds of value created by successful collaboration.

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<sup>1</sup> The Collaborative Working Pilots was one of a series of strands that formed MMM’s fourth cycle of work which ran from 2008-2010

## The values created by successful collaboration

Improved organisational effectiveness, reduced duplication, better use of resources and more value for money tend to be the most frequently cited reasons for considering collaboration in the not for profit sector, and the goals that are of most interest to public and private funders. At the time of writing<sup>2</sup>, austerity measures brought in by the UK's new Coalition Government are prioritising the need to cut costs above all else and talk of collaboration and mergers is gathering strength as a solution to the drastic reductions in public sector financing, not only of arts and culture but across the public sector and civil society.

Yet the MMM pilots offer insight into a much broader spectrum of values being created by collaborative working, ones that accrue both to the individual and the larger systems of which they are part. They are the values that illuminate the often forgotten fact that learning is a social experience – humans learn best when in relationship with others who share a common practice. According to Margaret Wheatley, *“these ‘communities of practice’ demonstrate that as people find each other and exchange ideas, good relationships develop and a community forms. This community becomes a rich market place where knowledge and experience are shared. It also becomes an incubator where new knowledge, skills and competencies develop.”*<sup>3</sup>

The pilot participants found these other values emerging, creating the ‘compost’ for successful collaboration to take root and offering many more positive outcomes over and above the organisational and financial efficiencies generally prioritised:

### Re-affirmation of vision and mission

*“the whole MMM process articulated and re-grounded us in the things that we collectively care about and reminded us how everything else has to take its place besides that.”*

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<sup>2</sup> July 2010

<sup>3</sup> Wheatley, M.J. (2002) Supporting Pioneering Leaders as Communities of Practice: How to Rapidly Develop New Leaders in Great Numbers ( <http://www.margaretwheatley.com/articles/supportingpioneerleaders.html>)

## Release of new energy

*“New conversations are emerging within organisations, because of the involvement of the middle management level of all the organisations. And there are interesting conversations through the continuing working groups that were reshaped and increased through the MMM pilot project: it has got people thinking about other areas.”*

## Opportunity to learn

*“It will have brought the companies all up to a comparable level of knowledge and expertise... developing new awareness.”*

*“It is valuable to have the time for reflection and ideas – things that we don’t get the opportunity for as an organisation”*

*“There is quite extensive experience of collaboration among individual members of the group on a one to one basis. What the MMM project has done is to move that to another level... a much wider collaboration across all the membership where, in order to play a meaningful part, people have had to be open, transparent and compromise in order to move to where we are now.”*

## Opportunity to innovate

*“The project has allowed us to be flexible and to explore areas that as a company we might not have, and routes we might not have gone down. That has been for me the most interesting aspect to it... It may well open up an additional way into the organisation that we have never really had the opportunity of exploring before.”*

*“It is producing a range of results that you could only produce by having a group of organisations involved... In that sense it is innovative – you could not produce these kinds of results by individual people going after their own goals.”*

*“The collaborative group is very like an innovation company – like an R&D company.”*

*“There is actually quite a lot of innovation already – like the whole customer relationship management system discussion. Certainly one or two of us are considering using that system... interesting conversations about working with a wider group of partners and European investment money, in terms of how we think about this.*

*“Everybody seems to accept that the integration of innovation across all functions would not have happened without the collaboration”*

*“I think the value of collaborative working has been established unquestionably... the value of respect and of listening... the value of key areas like innovation you know – ideas of how you achieve not just genuine ambitions, but how you define yourself competitively, which is very important to us.”*

## **Generating and enhancing influence**

*“The group has demonstrated that it is able to act collectively and to represent itself collectively. That has turned out to be a more important card than everybody might think, because there is so much chaos and disorganisation around.”*

*“The conversations we have been having with stakeholders are ones that we would not have had before. People who never returned my calls before are wanting to talk to us now in the way that they didn’t bother before. That is very significant.”*

*“Quite frankly I think we probably have more chance of success in applying our ideas because of the group’s strength.”*

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