“Distributed Work” - a View from the Margins

A Discussion of the HMHR Collaboration
For the African-American Healthy Marriages Initiatives Conference
- North Carolina -
By
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Presentation Objectives

1. To describe the form of the HMHR collaboration
2. To outline some critical practices and lessons learned
3. To offer some comments about sustainability
Macro Organizational Structure

- Healthy Marriages
  Grand Rapids
  Collaborative
  Facilitators

- Federal Admin. For Children & Families (Major Funder)
- RTI/ Urban Associates/ Lewin Group - National Evaluators
- Other Evaluators
- State DHS (Contract Administrator)
- Grand Rapids Comm. Foundation

Formal connections
Informal connections

HMHR - Distributed Work, a View from the Margins
Local Organizational Structure

- The Other Way Ministries
- Clancy Street Ministries
- Coit Community Church
- Steepletown Ministries
- Healthy Marriages Grand Rapids
- City Vision
- United Methodist Community House
- Restorers
- Streams of Hope

HMHR - Distributed Work, a View from the Margins
Distributed work might be described as follows:

“Meaningful work done by several organizations that is planned, organized, and delivered outside the control of any one organization’s Board of Directors or Executive Director.”
**HMHR’s work is quite distributed. Here’s how:**

- All the participating organizations are **autonomous**!
- All the organizations **deeply share deep beliefs** about the high value of parenting and giving our best for our children!
- All the organizations are **linked** together by a contractual agreement!
- The contracts specify **exchanges** - performance and reward!
- That contract was **freely entered into** by all!

- The **leadership has little power** over the participating employees. Carol VanderWal is not my supervisor. I am not Sandra Hardy’s or Dick Bulkowski’s or Sharon Boyce’s or Steve Faas’ supervisor. We each have our own chains of command within our own organizations. Leadership is both **shared** (consider the Coordinators Meeting, Network Meetings, Planning Committee, access to the Federal evaluators, etc.) and **an agreed-to role** (Healthy Marriages Grand Rapids and City Vision)!

- The project is both **collective** (we share the HMHR identity and effort) and **individuated** (HMHR is a specific program offering in each organization’s program mix)!
Here are some critical contrasts between HMHR’s actual distributed work and if HMHR had been done by a mythical, single mega-organization able to serve 2,500 over five years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HMHR via Distributed Work</th>
<th>HMHR via a Mega Organization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Loose-tight</td>
<td>• Chain of command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Partnership and Freedom</td>
<td>• Ownership and Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grassroots - close to the participants</td>
<td>• Oriented to the macro, primarily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Most annual budgets under $400,000</td>
<td>• Annual budget $5,000,000 or more</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Emphasize relationships</td>
<td>• Emphasize caseload approach, probably with high</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>caseload sizes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Institutions of trust</td>
<td>• Institutions of efficient processing (hopefully)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Organizations have varying degrees of capacity</td>
<td>• Capacity to deliver is freed or bound by this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>organization’s limitations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Great capacity for learning</td>
<td>• Capacity for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High accountability and transparency</td>
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Some Challenges to Effective Distributed Work

- Most of the HMHR partner organizations reported they did not have positive experiences previously with collaborations or distributed work.

- Several of the partner organizations had little or negative experiences with government projects and expressed concerns about the government’s power to supersede their preferred identities.

- Churches not in the HMHR collaboration opted not to participate partly because 1) they saw HMHR as a program rather than a ministry, 2) HMHR did not fit their missional foci on worship, fellowship, and education, and 3) chose not to adapt to project accountability requirements.

- Most of the HMHR partner organizations have never worked together before.

- The partner organizations have diverse structures, capacities, and cultures.

- The HMHR leaders (Healthy Marriages Grand Rapids and City Vision) must lead with little actual power to 1) effectively link the program sites together and 2) weld our local project to an extremely diverse and challenging national healthy marriages initiative.
Some Practices –
Good & Otherwise

1. Recognize there is not much guidance available that lists “best practices” for working collaboratively with small or faith-based organizations. Make it up as you go along!

2. Small and faith-based organizations value mission and passion above all else. Link to that strongly!

3. Care personally for and about the leaders of small and faith-based partner organizations.

4. Diffuse power structures might serve best. Debunk power myths. (Do the Feds have all the power? Does City Vision’s Exec. Dir. tell us what to do?)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Works Well</th>
<th>Not Working So Well</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Network meetings</td>
<td>• Staff turnover</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coordinators meetings</td>
<td>• Budgetary limits</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Planning committee meetings</td>
<td>• Some Site Director-Coordinator connections</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Working with Facilitators</td>
<td>• Some inability to redesign curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recruitment</td>
<td>• Lack of sufficient guidance regarding following-up and retaining participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Freedom to do the work</td>
<td>• Site to site workshop linkages</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Working with organizations with varying capacities and cultures</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Faith-based groups can work with government effectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Operational and financial accountability</td>
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Some Final Thoughts

1. After nearly 5 years, the HMHR collaboration: served 3866 people with 2907 of them completing (over a 75% completion rate) (original target was 2,500 completions), of which 51% were African-American, 24% Hispanic, and about 20% were White, 18% speak at home a language other than English, 64% had a 12th grade or less education, and 67% earned less than $20,000 annually.

2. At one point, HMHR provided about 40% of the successful outputs in the Federal 1115 waiver project, which contained over 12 granted projects.

3. HMHR has made a difference in the lives of participants, partner organizations, and Grand Rapids. It is an exemplary justice and equity project!