

A14: Checklist of Actions for Improving Individual Cooperation Across Agencies

- Who is this tool for? This tool links to the individual dimension of the maturity matrix in the implementation toolbox. It is intended to support and examine the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of individuals across agencies who wish to coordinate on population targeting. It can be used to understand existing characteristics and relationships, as well identify possible actions to improve.
- How was it produced? The underlying framework for interpersonal collaboration and relationship building was described by the social scientist Mark L. Knapp. Additionally, a *Brainstorming Session* attended by members of the JLN Learning Collaborative on Population Targeting (LCPT) community co-produced the insights and recommendations at the end of this document.

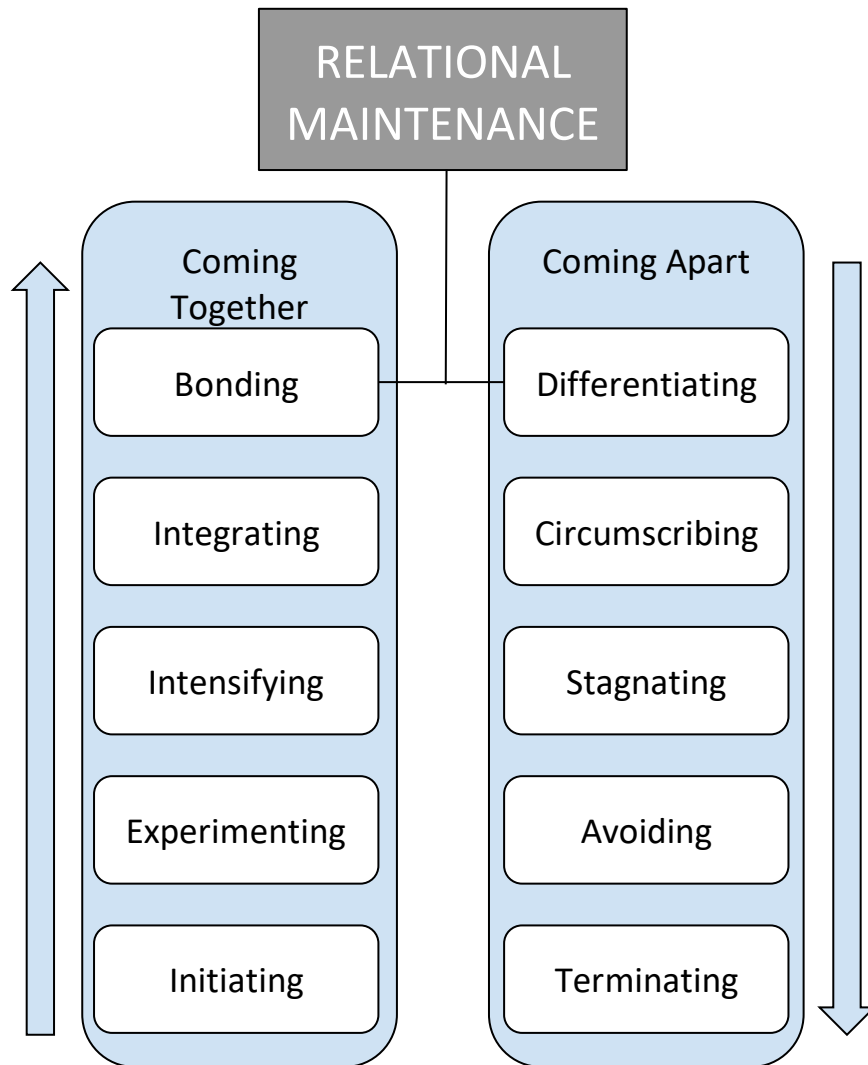
Introduction

Ensuring effective collaboration between agencies is no easy feat. For one, the task itself seems gigantic -- two (or more) entities within government each tasked with their own teams, structures, culture, priorities, goals, etc. -- finding an entry point may seem like a daunting task. However, there are several established models that explore how relationships are formed and how they can grow. After all, government agencies are composed of individuals like yourself!

When exploring the different models that exist for understanding and improving individual cooperation, one particular framework reflects the varying situations that participants in the JLN Learning Collaborative on Population Targeting find themselves in (in that some are early stage relationships with new institutions such as national health insurance agencies, and others are long-term, established ones that somehow aren't working). Knapp's relationship model was developed by pioneering communications studies scholar Mark L. Knapp, and suggests relationships can be cultivated a step at a time, progressing through two distinct stages ("Coming Together" and "Coming Apart"), connected by a third that is devoted entirely to relationship maintenance. Though the framework is prescriptive in nature, no two relationships are the same -- despite the components of the framework being achieved in a stepwise sequence, we do not always move between stages in a logical or conscientious fashion. Relationships are dynamic -- whether they be social or professional in nature.

This document uses the three stages of Knapp's relationship model, and the various components of each stage, to provide examples by health and social protection leaders on how to improve relationships between individuals in distinct agencies working together (or not) on population targeting. It is intended as a reflective tool that practitioners and officials can use to diagnose where interpersonal relationships across agencies could be improved, and some possible measures for doing so.

Knapp's Relationship Model



Adapted from Mark L. Knapp and Anita L. Vangelisti, *Interpersonal Communication and Human Relationships* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2009).

“Coming Together” Phase

The “Coming Together” Phase is made up of four components: **Initiating, Experimenting, Intensifying, and Integrating.**

- **Initiating:** The earliest form of communication, usually short. This is all about making an impression, and even though we are keen at making a positive impression, others’ impressions may not be completely accurate.
 - **Experimenting:** In this component, people are exploring and getting to know each other. In getting basic information from someone, a decision can be made about whether or not the maintenance of a personal relationship is warranted.
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- Intensifying: People will start revealing personal information, and the relationship becomes less formal. Interpersonal development can grow in the form of greater communication, for instance asking about themselves not in a professional context.
- Integrating: At this stage, individuals will start to make their relationship closer than before. It is known that mutual respect has been established, and relational maintenance can be initiated.

Is this category how you would classify your current interpersonal relationships between agencies working on population targeting? If so, consider some of the potential solutions to improve these relationships as suggested by health leaders and practitioners in the JLN LCPT:

- Map out the individuals who it is most important for your team to improve interpersonal relationships with (note that this shouldn't just be at the most senior levels), and prioritize those that will be most important
- Create opportunities to spend social time together, or hold meetings in less professional contexts like a park or coffee shop
- Create opportunities to spend extended time together, for example if you or your staff require training in a particular topic that may be relevant for your equivalents in other agencies, offer to do it together.
- Offer to send members of your team over to shadow their equivalents in other agencies. This will help to build understanding of each others' task and position
- Find an opportunity to ask someone about more than just what they do professionally. Remember what they say and bring it up at a later occasion, showing that you value the individual on a personal level
- Find an opportunity to compliment some aspect of the individual's work, demonstrating mutual respect.
- Create opportunities to spend time with key individuals in a way that builds interpersonal connection. Building trust with equals, superiors and subordinates can help facilitate and create a more conducive authorizing environment
- If building a group dynamic between multiple agencies is important, try to leverage some of the above ideas between two or three groups, rather than having a relationship with each individual agency.

“Relationship Maintenance” Phase

The “Relationship Maintenance” phase is the portion of the framework that straddles a relationship coming together, and a relationship coming apart. These are not inherently good or bad things, but rather a means of classifying relationships and exploring what can be done, wholly dependent on the goals of the relationship. There is no time frame for any of these steps; some can even be skipped during both the progression or deterioration of a relationship. The two components of the “Relationship Maintenance” phase include:

- Bonding: While technically the first portion of the framework is part of the Relationship Maintenance phase, bonding also represents the final stage of the “Coming Together” phase.
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This relationship is still considered indefinite and can only be broken through a formal notice or agreement.

- Differentiating: Differentiating is the process in which other external pressures will start causing an individual to begin thinking individually rather than with their partner. They may start doing some tasks more independently.

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- A key barrier to relationship maintenance can be if attendance at key meetings is inconsistent, and so an agency repeatedly sends different representatives who are not up to speed. In this instance, consider enforcing named nominated delegates, so that if a key representative cannot attend it will always be a specific deputy who stands in for them.
- Set an ambition in your diary or calendar to have regular individual catch ups with key individuals from the other agency, such as a standing coffee or lunch, in addition to any formally scheduled meetings.
- Hold an inter-agency “away day” to put colleagues in a new environment that will hopefully inspire new thinking and so help to ‘unstick’ issues that have been unresolved for some time.
- If standing meetings are always of the same length and feel pressed, consider an occasional longer meeting in which there can be more time to listen carefully
- If regular standing meetings are not currently a feature between your agencies, try to instigate them, but make sure they are on neutral territory and certainly not always in one agency’s offices.
- If staff are finding it hard to justify putting the time into improving interagency coordination, consider putting this as a KPI in their annual performance review. If an opposite number is doing particular well at coordinating with you, consider a letter of thanks or commendation to their superior.

“Coming Apart” Phase

As any relationship progresses, there will be conflicts and misunderstandings. Much like “Coming Together,” there are four stages in “Coming Apart.” Being able to identify these different characteristics can help in addressing such challenges before they become a potential problem for you, your team, or others.

- Circumscribing: Within the “Coming Apart” phase, individuals may begin to limit their conversations and set up boundaries to limit such conversation. Personal space and individual activities are more common.
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- Stagnation: If a relationship reaches this stage, it is on the decline. Communication becomes much more limited, and most relationships will not continue or improve.
- Avoidance: While the previous stage showed a relationship that still occupying the same space, the avoidance stage sees individuals seeking separate environments.
- Terminating: At this point, both individuals decide that they no longer want to engage in a relationship, ending their connection with one another. Communication at this stage is largely distant.

Is this category how you would classify your current interpersonal relationships between agencies working on population targeting? If so, consider some of the potential solutions to improve these relationships as suggested by health leaders and practitioners in the JLN LCPT:

- Bring in neutral arbiters or facilitators either from another agency, a more powerful body (e.g the President's or Vice President's office) or an independent person. They can help to moderate or adjudicate conflicts and help relationships to move forward.
- Consider making one or more key positions in the joint initiative a joint appointment - that way there may be less of a sense of different agencies' interests playing against one another
- Develop and stick to clear terms of reference to explain roles and expectations of each party - this will keep any disagreements bounded.
- Ask for the intervention of superiors on either side to more explicitly support their staff to work coordinate across agencies, so that this is a clearer expectation.
- If a group dynamic is breaking down, hold smaller side meetings with either those who are being most difficult to work with, or those who are easiest. This way some of the key decisions in meetings of the whole group can be pre-arranged or, to some extent, stage-managed.

Closing Thoughts

How have relationships been cultivated in your workplace? Where would you position yourself along the Knapp relational development framework when thinking about a colleague or team partner? What steps would you like to take to strengthen an existing relationship, or to create one in order to promote a particular project or task? Take a few minutes to brainstorm a few examples and ideas, where your interagency relationships need to improve and what steps you could take to move these relationships forward.