Can birds of different feathers fly together?

IMPROVING COLLABORATION FOR RESEARCH IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

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Collaborations for effective research in NRM

Collaboration is vital for natural resource management (NRM) in Australia. We don’t have all the skills and expertise in one place.

Different agencies, institutes and communities offer complementary (sometimes competitive) expertise and experience.

Australia is a world leader in collaborative NRM, with many case studies analysed in the literature.

However, few have explicitly explored barriers to communication and collaboration between researchers, government agencies and communities in NRM, or investigated ways to address these barriers.
An exploratory study

Research objective
To identify perceived barriers to communication for establishing and maintaining effective research collaborations in regional Australia.

Methodology
• Used social constructivist **grounded theory methodology** (GTM, see Charmaz, 2014) to gather and analyse interviews. Details in [Ward and Vanderzee (2019)](https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470748998.ch1).
• Interviews digitally recorded in 2018 and 2019.
• Interviews transcribed using *Dragon* software; transcripts edited then verified by interviewees.
• Transcripts analysed using GTM and *NVivo* software.
• Research project approved by the CSU Human Research Ethics Committee.
The interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation name</th>
<th>Base location</th>
<th>Organisation type</th>
<th>No. of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institute for Land, Water and Society *</td>
<td>Albury, NSW</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>North East Catchment Management Authority *</td>
<td>Wodonga, VIC</td>
<td>Government agency</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Agricultural Production &amp; Reconciliation Ecology Centre (NAPREC) **</td>
<td>Deniliquin, NSW</td>
<td>Farmer-based not-for-profit</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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* In Ward and Vanderzee (2019)
** Preliminary analysis
Perceived barriers to collaboration between organisations

1. Lack of commonality
2. Poor communication
3. Competition and tensions
4. External drivers and pressures
5. Personal traits
Lack of commonality

- Differing legal and institutional boundaries and constraints
- Differing organisational cultures and situations
- Lack of common, shared goals
- Lack of mutual understanding
- Negative past experiences and relationships

✓ Also emphasised in interviews with NAPREC interviewees
Communication

- Poor communication between organisations
- Inflexible collaborators with poor or outdated understanding of the other
- Unknown expertise available in partner organisations
- Little regard for past experiences and history
- Few long-term, established relationships
Competition and tensions

- Groups competing for limited funds and resources
- Tensions between collaborators
- Internal tension and competition within organisations
External drivers and pressures

• Government policies affect project resources and timing

✓ • Insufficient time to develop relationships and trust between staff, organisations and communities

✓ • Short-term projects lead to high staff turnover
Personal traits

- Lack of mutual professional respect
- Conflicting leadership styles
- Professional egos and personal self-interest
Issues that can be addressed …

1. Shared, ongoing understanding
2. Support time to maintain relations
3. Collaborative organisational culture
4. Common goals and objectives
5. Joint research strategy

✓ TRUST
Some initial actions

1. Key findings presented to managers and staff

2. Find opportunities to start a small project together: e.g., write an academic paper together, or get out and dirty with prospective collaborators

3. ‘Speed dating’ events to develop shared understandings and contacts, and to identify barriers and how to address these

4. Incorporate results of ‘speed dating’ events into inter-organisational agreements
Some questions for you

1. How can your organisation (e.g., ILWS) build and sustain better collaboration?
2. How can we work together better under the current political, funding and pandemic climate?
3. How can we talk and actively listen better together? How can we get on the same page?
References


Thank you

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