Interpersonal Barriers in Cross-Sector Collaboration

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**Objective**

Identify the interpersonal coordination costs associated with collaborative work

**Scope**

In-depth exploration of several interpersonal processes:
- Coordinating between & within groups
- Addressing issues of diversity
- Managing uneven power dynamics
- Managing emotions in interpersonal encounters

**Participation**

Waves of interviews with Promise Zone coordinators and select partners over the course of three months (Nov ’20 - Jan ’21)

**Anticipated Outcomes**

This project was designed to help leaders identify:
- Interpersonal risk factors contributing to burnout in the organization
- Challenges associated with cross-sector collaboration
- Differential interpersonal obstacles across individuals, organizational types, and social groups
Key Findings

1. Building and maintaining relationships involved emotional labor to manage peers, partners, and personal feelings

2. High turnover demands increased emotional effort

3. Formal and informal social support buffers against emotional exhaustion

4. Women and employees of color describe techniques to manage relationships in significantly more detail
“I’m convinced that my job requires a great deal of emotional effort and it can be a lot. It’s a whole job all together. In an environment where people don’t know each other as much any more, I have to step in to create space for people to talk through things and get comfortable.”

“You're trying to get people to come outside of their house and play well with others and share that community collaboration across the board. That is a daunting task each and every day, because you never know really what people's different ticks are.”
“When new leadership personnel arrive they may have different ways of interacting or they might choose to either engage in a project program differently, or they might make a decision to remove their organization from a project program or initiative.”

“In collaborative work, one of the things that does cause a frustration for a lot of people is having to kind of be tasked with going back to the beginning of things and all the information and background on the initiative or project.”
“We do a check-in, asking folks to share how they are showing up that day or feeling during the first part of the meeting or at the end of the meeting. It's an environment where it is encouraged to share their emotional truth.”

“I would imagine if, you know, we were in person had, you know, those moments before or after the meeting, people would probably be sharing more about their emotions or things that they're dealing with with their friends or family, etc.”
“Growing up I think having that personal connection to the work has been a tremendous help. I think there’s a shared language.”

“There is added comfort when I'm in spaces that are with people who look like me or I'm already familiar with. I think it is definitely something that's present for probably every [racial/ethnic minority group] person, but because [code switching] is something you've done your entire life, you don't really recognize it or pay attention to it as much.”
1. Promise Zone work is saturated with emotional labor, which means there is an opportunity to build emotional skills and competence among backbone staff & vistas.

2. Instituting mechanisms for more authentic emotional connection between peers can help alleviate some of the emotional exhaustion inherent in collaborative work.

3. Talented women and employees of color are already engaging in sophisticated and culturally sensitive relationship building/management, skills that should be celebrated, compensated, and further
“When you do have money, and I guess that's the downside, then you wind up having a lot more people show up. They're incentivized to show up, but they may not have the same level of commitment to the collaborative process.”

“We've had people just break down and say, ‘I don't know where I go from here, I don't know what's going to happen.’ It rips your heart to hear them say that, and I wish I could say, ‘I can help you get this money,’ but our hands are tied, and things are slow.”
Questions & Comments

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