

BREAKING THE SILOS

Do people in your organisation still complain about silos?

Judging by the leaders we talk to, silos remain a common frustration, whatever the rhetoric about joined-up working and whole systems. We can all be complicit. It is human nature to focus on immediate and familiar tasks when the pressure is on, and to overlook the bigger prizes that can come from working with others.

One leader told us that change started with him. He reviewed where his time was going and accepted that cross-boundary working was often pushed out by the latest fire-fighting episode. He asked himself where his priorities should lie, recognising that better relationships with colleagues and stakeholders should result in fewer fires to be put out. He reorganised his teams and set internal and external collaboration as a key objective for everyone. He challenged wider governance arrangements that were stifling initiative.

Another leader said you mustn't lose heart if collaboration is not happening above you. There are always ways to build alliances with like-minded colleagues and to work together on the arguments or data that might convince your principals.

A third leader reflected on the incentives for a stakeholder to collaborate. She suggested off-the-record conversations to build trust, and to understand where the other person might be coming from. She looked for agreement on shared purpose and the outcomes that mattered to both parties. Her aim was for joint success to be more important than seeing each other or the system fail.

If you are frustrated by silos, you are not alone. You may be surrounded by others who feel the same. What we've learned is that:

- It's worth checking your own behaviours. Are you putting your time and effort where the organisation most needs it?
- You may need to be ready to take some risks in the interests of organisational or system success
- Evidence-driven analysis must underpin the case for collaboration, but won't be sufficient if you don't understand what others want and need
- In a world of complex systems, some silo problems are beyond your influence. Focus on the ones you can change.