

What are the types of collaboration?

Who can I collaborate with?

The people with whom you collaborate can be internal and/or external to your organisation. We will discuss how to decide which type of collaboration to choose later one but for now, here's a brief description of each.

Internal Collaboration

If you have staff, they communicate and collaborate with each other every day and such teamwork is essential for your business. Collaboration and teamwork are defined as “developing and using collaborative relationships to facilitate the accomplishment of work goals”. As a concept, working together seems so straightforward. However, with gender, race, culture, and many other elements coming into play, it is sometimes far from easy. In a later section on critical success factors we will discuss ways to make it more successful.

External Collaboration

There are many potential sources of external collaboration resources and capabilities that small firms like yours could access to provide innovative stimulus and capacity such as:

- participating in networks and fostering partnership agreements between firms
- collaborating with universities and research agencies
- collaboration with other organisations, sometimes competitors.

What are the benefits of external collaboration in organisations? Think of a time you collaborated with another group – what were the most useful outcomes?



Collaboration might have led to reduced costs, brought complementary expertise to a project or more ideas from fresh viewpoints.

External collaboration can complement core competencies, reduce costs or bring complementary expertise to a project. It can also help to achieve a common goal – develop a new global product/service or make a bid to a major customer institute. It can yield research which can be exploited and brought to market and also allows a wide range of disciplines to be accessed to generate ideas for new products and services.

Research suggests that the future of collaborative leadership depends on the ability of leaders to engage and collaborate with the business, the government, and the social sectors. *“If we cultivate the right collaboration, we can achieve the great things not possible when we work alone”*.

When you are collaborating externally with other stakeholder groups enthusiasm isn't enough. Most collaborations begin with mutual respect between two organisations or entities. Both parties must respect each other and have shared values.

Think about the types of people or groups you have already collaborated with or could collaborate with in the future.



There are probably a wide variety! Take a look at the picture below and see if you recognise any of the following as being stakeholder types you have previously collaborated with or might in the future.

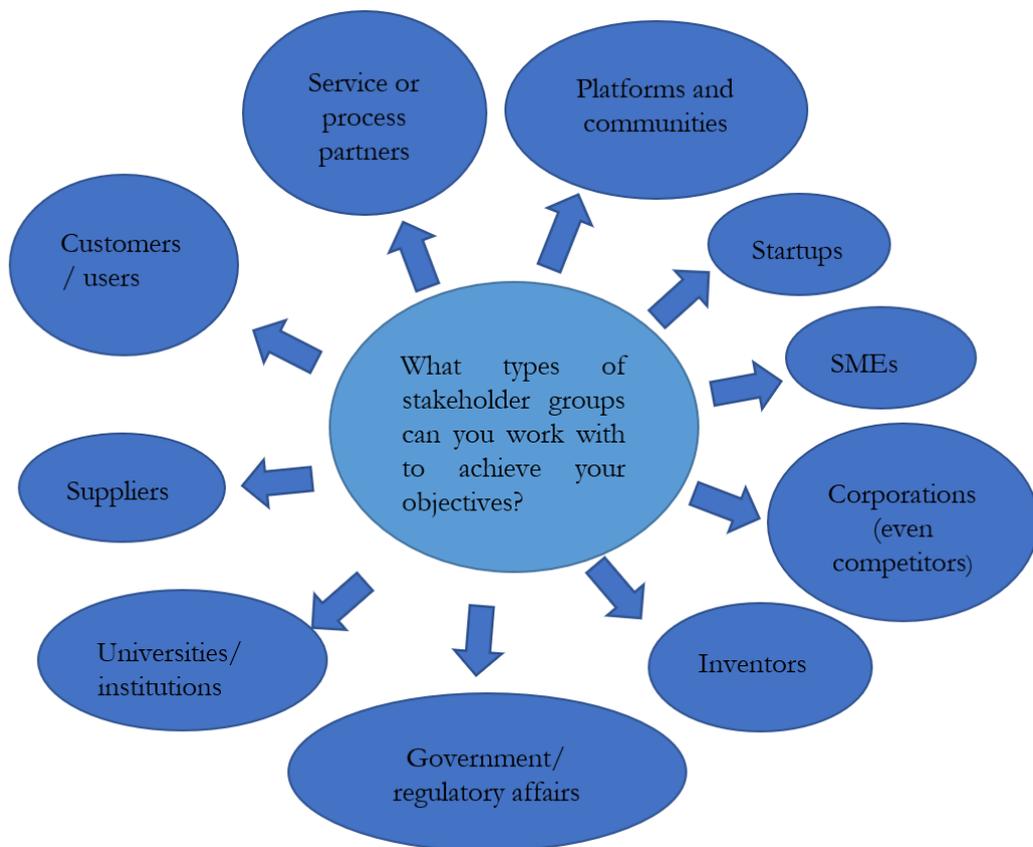


Figure 1: Groups to potentially collaborate with

There is a lot of potential for collaboration out there! The different stakeholder groups we just looked at can roughly be divided as in the following diagram. Read on for some key points to consider in each type.

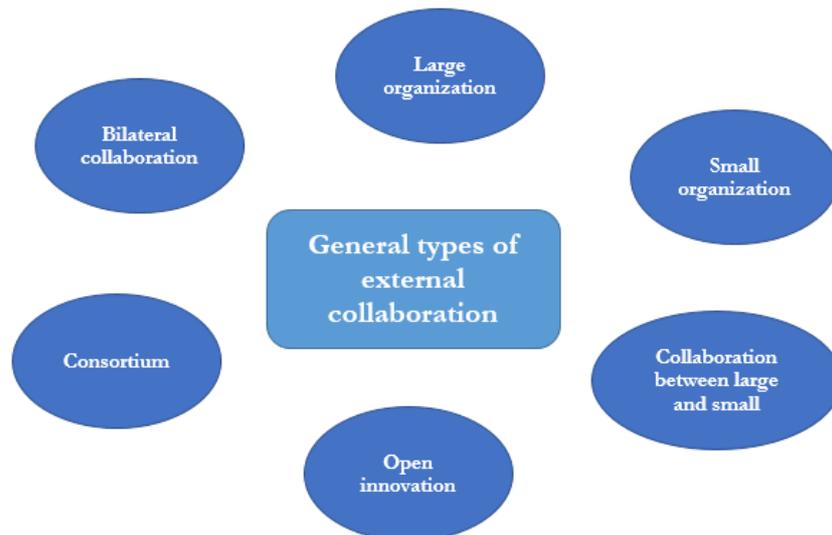


Figure 2: General types of external collaboration

Open innovation

The central idea behind open innovation is that in a world of widely distributed knowledge, with the border between the organisation and its environment becoming ever more permeable, organisations cannot afford to rely entirely on their internal knowledge. Instead they should look to complement it with external knowledge by for example buying, licensing or co-generating processes or inventions from or with other organisations.

Consortium

A consortium is an association or combination of multiple partners. It is essential to agree in advance how the consortium will work and the ownership of intellectual property.

Bilateral collaboration

Bilateral collaboration is a simpler version of the consortium where two partners are involved. Nonetheless, the same issues should be addressed.

Large organisation

For a large organisation, a smaller partner can bring access to a specific technology, speed and flexibility. They can also have weaker governance, lack resources and be frustrated with the pace of decision-making in a larger organisation. Larger organisations wishing to collaborate should:

- Minimize bureaucracy and paperwork, to be in proportion to the size of the project.
- Consider setting up a limited, project-specific team to reflect the size of the smaller collaboration partner.
- Discuss partnering expectations.
- Be fair and reasonable.

Small organisation

A small organisation partnering with a larger one can get access to resources, especially specialized ones, and a greater market impact. On the other hand, large organisations' processes can swamp a small one. Small organisations wishing to collaborate should:

- Be confident and have belief in the proposition while remaining open minded.
- Be prepared with a well-presented proposition and business plan which demonstrates how each party will benefit from the joint venture.
- Establish expectations of reporting and governance.
- Establish trust at an early stage. If the parties cannot work together in an open and trusting way then they should be prepared to walk away.
- Have patience as large organisations need time before making large financial and resource commitments. However, reasonable time scales for decisions should be agreed, particularly if the answer is to be “no”, as this can then free the parties to find alternative partners.
- Establish, even if there is a large disparity in size, if the partners who are collaborating share the same values, drive and shared objectives. If these are not present then difficulties may arise down the line.
- Clearly identify and register intellectual property before approaching a potential collaboration partner (often large organisations demand this as a prerequisite).

Collaboration between large and small organisations

Partnerships should provide mutual benefit to each participant, even when they are significantly different in size although a very large disparity in size is often perceived as a potential obstacle to collaboration. Cultural differences and speed of decision-making are two areas where problems can arise. However, there are several ways in which organisations can prepare themselves to work with others of a different size. Perhaps the most important activity for both parties is to create a partnership agreement, but there are different issues to which each side should pay attention as just outlined.

Before you start the collaborative activity, you must create your strategy or plan.