SCIN – a collaborative process to embed a process of collaboration

The establishment of the SARUA Curriculum Innovation Network (SCIN) in June 2015 and the launch of a regional Master's curriculum in climate change and sustainable development in December 2016 are significant milestones in a six-year long process of nurturing regional collaboration. When twenty four Vice-Chancellors from ten countries sat down in October 2010 at the University of Mauritius for a SARUA Leadership Dialogue, their aim was to critically engage the risks and opportunities of climate change for their institutions and broader communities, as well as identifying the options for dealing with its effects. They wanted to understand to what extent climate change was integrated into teaching and learning, research and collaboration and community engagement in their institutions, but also to discuss to what extent it *should* be integrated.

The 2010 Framework for Action on Climate Change and Adaptation in Higher Education in SADC that was published from the Leadership Dialogue specified collaboration as a key principle on which to build subsequent activities. It echoed both SARUA's purpose as fostering collaboration among higher education institutions, as well as the call upon countries in the region to work together in the SADC Protocol on Education and Training.

In establishing the Programme for Climate Change Capacity Development (PCCCD) it became clear that for such an ambitious regional programme to be successful, it needed to not only foster collaboration, but promote it and use it - collaboration became its purpose, an enabler for its success and the *modus operandi* whereby it implemented actions.

When the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) partnered with SARUA in 2012 to fund a regional mapping study of national climate change priorities and how universities where responding to these, a process began whereby collaboration would be formally embedded as the driving principle of the PCCCD.

The regional Knowledge Co-Production Framework that was published in 2014 as a result of the mapping study defined 'collaboration' as "a process in which entities share information, resources and responsibilities to jointly plan, implement, and evaluate a programme of activities to achieve a common goal," and a 'collaborative network' as "possessing some form of organisation in terms of structure of membership, activities, definition of roles of the participants, and following a set of governance principles and rules." The network management approach and definitions used in the PCCCD were adapted from the comprehensive network management framework developed by the DOMINO consortium in 2003[1]. In essence, it defines a collaborative network as a constantly evolving collection of synergistic entities that mature through a cyclical process of PLAN → BUILD → RUN →

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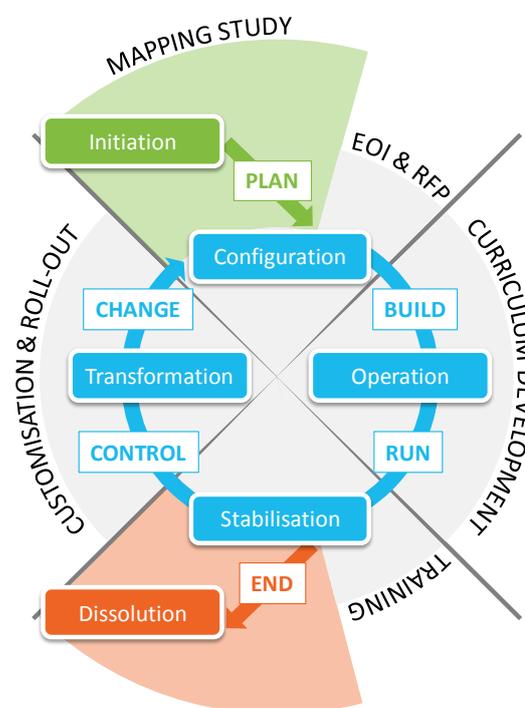
[1] Adapted from Riemer, K & Klein, S. 2006. "Network Management Framework" in Klein, S & Poulymenakou, A. [Eds.] Managing Dynamic Networks: Organizational Perspectives of Technology Enabled Inter-firm Collaboration. Springer.

CONTROL/END → CHANGE. A network can continuously transform into a newer version, or at some point dissolve if its objectives and purpose have been met.

With the decision to establish the SARUA Curriculum Innovation Network (SCIN) as a first collaborative network in 2015 it became necessary to clearly define roles that inculcate the collaboration approach into the delivery of a Master's curriculum and capacity development workshops. This was done by defining not only the roles and responsibilities of the formal delivery partners, but also to define roles for voluntary contributors and organisations who wished to participate in the network and the process. The idea was that not only could stakeholders participate in the SCIN as participating universities, individual contributors or external stakeholders, but that any individual within these groups could contribute directly and voluntarily to the delivery of the PCCCD and SCIN objectives. With the introduction of two curriculum capacity development workshops in 2016 involving 83 academics from 22 universities, some of whom already participated in the Peer Review Group (PRG), workshop participants also became active network members and potential change agents within their respective universities.

The main governance and network roles for the period 2015 – 2016 are illustrated below.

Governance Theme	Entity	SCIN Role
MANAGEMENT AND COORDINATION	Higher Education Management Africa (HEMA) with support by Nexus Partnerships and VM Productions	SCIN coordination, UDC management, stakeholder engagement and delivery of overall programme deliverables
CURRICULUM DELIVERY	University Delivery Consortium (UDC), coordinated by African Climate Development Initiative, University of Cape Town	Master's curriculum and courseware development in a consortium of seven universities
CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT DELIVERY	Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT)	Development of a training framework and delivery of regional curriculum capacity development workshops
PEER REVIEW	Curriculum Review Team (CRT)	Curriculum design & peer review, advisory role to CIWG
	Peer Review Group (PRG)	Curriculum and courseware peer review
	SCIN Participants	Curriculum delivery support
	University Delivery Consortium	Internal peer review of curriculum and courseware
QUALITY ASSURANCE	CDKN	Sponsorship and project management
	SARUA Curriculum Innovation Working Group (CIWG)	SCIN and curriculum development oversight and engagement
	SARUA Exco	Final approval and PCCCD and SCIN advocacy
	SARUA CEO's Office	Project leadership, membership coordination and SCIN advocacy

While such an approach might seem very formal for something as inherently flexible as a network, the appropriate balance between coordinated role clarity and openness to new developments are

crucial to maintain momentum when multiple stakeholders are involved, especially if they have different expectations, available time and levels of commitment.

The SCIN experience is borne out by research on network principles for collaboration success. Wei-Skillern and Silver[2] identify four principles that are critical to collaboration success in non-profit environments:

1. **Strategy Is Determined by Mission Impact Before Organisational Growth** – in the case of SCIN, it was important that network partners all worked towards achieving objectives which would make an impact in higher education in SADC, rather than merely strengthen and build the organisations involved in delivery. This approach ensured that sufficient momentum and capacity is built to ensure programme sustainability after its first funding cycle.
2. **Build Partnerships Based on Trust, Not Control** – higher education is strongly associated with a collegial culture of management, which emphasises peer review, robust engagement and transparency. With the selection of SCIN delivery partners and with the introduction of a regional peer review process, it was made clear that the pioneering nature of the project meant it needed to be open, tap into as many experiences as possible and receive as much diverse input as possible, to deliver a curriculum and related outputs which have the support of the network participants. This continuous interaction built the necessary trust in the quality of eventual outputs that were delivered.
3. **Promote Others Rather Than Yourself** – while there were contracted outputs and delivery partners, the SCIN process required many peer contributions and these were acknowledged and made visible throughout the process. It was important for the network and the programme to be a visible example of collaboration, so that positive experiences of collaboration could be acknowledged and used for building new networks and connections. The truly regional nature of the process that started with the 2013 mapping study was a constant theme of SCIN communications.
4. **Build Constellations, Not Stars** – Wei-Skillern and Silver eloquently state that: "Networked organizations do not strive to be the brightest star, but rather to build the constellation that will enable achievement of the shared vision… the goal is to mobilize the various organizations and resources that together can deliver more impact." This is the essence of the SADC Protocol for Education and Training and also underpins the African Union Agenda 2063. SCIN network building and collaboration is aimed at the formation of partnerships that can continue to grow after the initial network cycle and can transform into multiple other collaborative opportunities, in order to support the aim of revitalising higher education in Southern Africa.

SARUA views the PCCCD growth and establishment of SCIN as a replicable model for collaboration in the region. It is based on the simple approach that those who will benefit from collaboration need to participate as much as possible in unlocking collaborative opportunities. Only by connecting different entities can a process of shared learning happen. The processes supported by CDKN – the multi-stakeholder mapping study, the definition of clear network roles, the open curriculum development process and the freedom to let partners choose how they wish to engage – all contributed to the development of a network of experts and practitioners in the SADC region who will continue to collaborate and thereby grow the community further.

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[2] Wei-Skillern, Jane and Silver, Nora (2013) "Four Network Principles for Collaboration Success," The Foundation Review: Vol. 5: Iss. 1, Article 10.