Video Transcript: Maximizing A Team Approach_3 AD

Description Narrator (00:00): RHNTC logo, Reproductive Health National Training Center. Title: Maximizing a Team Approach to Address Complex Challenges. Presented by Sylvia Cheuy, Consulting Director, Tamarack Institute, July 23, 2025.

Sylvia Cheuy (00:16): Hi, my name is Sylvia Cheuy and I'm the Consulting Director of Collaboration at the Tamarack Institute, and I am thrilled to be with you today to explore how to Maximize a Team Approach to Address Complex Challenges. For those of you who aren't familiar with Tamarack, we are a Canadian charity with an international learning network of more than 43,000 changemakers across North America and around the world. I am passionate about the importance of collaboration for navigating complexity, and this passion comes from more than 20 years on my part as a changemaker and champion of multi-sector, community led efforts. And I continue to be inspired by the capacity of communities to innovate and find creative solutions to their most pressing issues.

Sylvia Cheuy (01:15): I personally came to Tamarack as a learner, when I was supporting a multi-sector leadership group to develop and implement a shared, region-wide plan to strengthen community wellbeing in the rural area where I live. At the end of this slide, the presentation is my contact information, and so as you're listening, if questions come up or you want to follow up on anything, please, I encourage you, I would love to hear from you, you just need to reach out.

Sylvia Cheuy (01:44): So today, what we would like to do in this webinar, I would love to see at the end, that you as a learner are able to explain how teamwork and collaboration can really be useful in improving health outcomes for your clients. I want to be able to describe to you four very tangible strategies to strengthen your team's approach for tackling the complex public health challenges. And then I want to give you a quick snapshot look at two really useful tools, which are two of many, to help facilitate improved collaboration among your team.

Sylvia Cheuy (02:27): I think for me, knowing that the space that you work in is a public health space, I think it's really important to acknowledge that public health challenges confronting individuals and families and communities are generally interconnected. They're complex, and they are enmeshed and held in place, by a range of social problems. Understanding better that interconnectivity enables us to find more innovative, more aligned, more impactful solutions, and we discover that interconnection when we create opportunities to think and learn together. Because the other thing that I think is really important and why collaboration matters, particularly when dealing with complex public health challenges, is that it is assumes that no one sector, or one organization or group, is going to be able to achieve the kind of impact needed to effectively address those challenges by working alone. Instead, before diving into action, what we need to become much more skilled at is nurturing relationships across diverse organizations, across departments, across sectors, so that we can explore how we might be able to work together to address issues that are impacting all of those that we are trying to serve.

Sylvia Cheuy (04:06): When you look at maternal health issues, this you know this to be true, right? A variety of intersecting issues and needs contribute to the well-being and health of a mother. And systems-oriented approaches put the client at the center, and they coordinate care and leverage synergies between and across organizations. A systems approach recognizes that there are many interdependent parts, relationships, and processes that contribute to a specific outcome. And they actually encourage us to take a much more holistic perspective. And if and when we do that, the results are much more powerful than any one single standalone product or service ever could be.

Description Narrator (04:57): A diagram titled Health-Related Social Needs. An icon of a mother and child are surrounded by six labeled sections: Woman and Her Family, Neighborhood and Environment, Health Care, Education, Economic Stability, and Social and Community Context.

Sylvia Cheuy (05:14): The other thing I think is that, while there's growing recognition that many of our traditional approaches to problem solving in maternal health are not as effective as they need to be in terms of addressing complex issues. And I think the other key component here is that, too often, we think we're going to just land on the one magic solution, and once we've got that nailed, then everything will fall into place beautifully. But in my experience, particularly when an issue is complex, the result... To achieve the result that you want, what's needed more often than not is an array of different solutions that are aligned and loosely connected in ways that are mutually reinforcing. This then almost certainly requires us to work collaboratively amongst our colleagues and with other community partners, as well.

Description Narrator (06:17): A diagram of arrows labeled and pointed to one another. Text: The way I think, the options I see, the choices I make.

Sylvia Cheuy (06:25): So, to get there, part of what is required is a real shift in our thinking; a willingness to work differently, not necessarily harder, but to work differently, work collaboratively, to address these complex social issues. And that requires different thinking and a different way of acting than many of us might be more familiar with if we were taking an organization, a solo organization approach. It's important to highlight how we need to think and act differently in order to leverage the multiple contributions that different people or groups or organizations can contribute to addressing maternal health. So a mindset shift, a shift in our habit, a shift in our thinking, is a change in the deep, often assumed patterns of thinking and action that shape how we make sense of the world and what we do. And I think for me, when we can see things differently and shift our mindset, we become more aware of many more possibilities for action. And that gives us many more choices about how best to move forward.

Sylvia Cheuy (07:41): So there are four specific mindset shifts that I really want to drill down on with you. The first is that commitment to collaborate. Asking yourself how our different perspectives, including those of your clients, considered and leveraged in developing the strategies to enhance health. Really understanding and appreciating the nature of complexity. Complex issues are solved with different tools and approaches than what we would use for more simple or complicated or technical problems. And it requires a number of us to come together and agree on what the problem is that we think we're trying to solve, and what type of problem it is. Framing is really important. What framing is, is a way of understanding an issue and recognizing that we bring our own assumptions to it. And when we see things differently, that's when we see new opportunities. And lastly, connected to that is the need to embrace innovation. So you want to be building relationships, understanding individual roles and contributions, and exploring opportunities to make your work more aligned and supportive of the other work that's already going on in your space.

Description Narrator (09:00): A slide titled Interdisciplinary collaboration. Text: Reveals assumptions and co-creates deeper understanding of a shared issue. Includes the perspective of "content experts"—including clients—who are closest to the problem. Requires a mindset of curiosity, exploration, and innovation. Assumes shared responsibility for addressing the issue. Builds broad understanding to support successful implementation.

Sylvia Cheuy (09:26): So, I love the importance of collaboration, right? How do we value different perspectives, including those of the patient, and consider and leverage those in the creation of strategies that are put forward? So we often talk about the person with lived or living experience as the context expert, and their wisdom and knowledge is as essential to designing a great solution as a subject matter expert's would be. And it's really about building shared understanding and really questioning our own assumptions about what's needed before diving into action.

Description Narrator (10:07): A close-up photo of a scallop and an abundance of blue dots around its mouth.

Sylvia Cheuy (10:12): I love this metaphor of the scallop. So this photo you can see here is a scallop, each one of those little blue dots is an eye. Scallops, to defend themselves, the most important thing for them is that they have eyes 360-degrees around the entire circumference of who they are. And when you think about it's a great metaphor for collaboration, because if you think about the age-diverse perspective you bring to your table is an eye. And when you have left someone off that 360-degree look at an issue, then you are blind. And so, in a similar way, when we only engage certain perspectives, we are leaving out an eye and we are designing solutions with only half a look at the problem.

Description Narrator (11:08): Text: To invite interdisciplinary perspectives: Suspend certainty, See the whole, Seek the wide range of perspectives, Be open, and Trust the process.

Sylvia Cheuy (11:19): The other thing that I think is really important to recognize is, rather than just putting our heads down and getting busy on our own work plan, the importance of looking on either side of us and noticing what's already happening around you that you can leverage. Know the importance of mobilizing community support and the importance of community education and action. That, combined with aligned programs and projects, as well as connected to efforts to shift systems and policies— it's the combination of those sets of strategies that will drive forward the targeted population level outcomes that you're looking for.

Description Narrator (12:04): An arrow listing the strategies points to three bullet points: team agreement on key outcomes, Coordination and appreciation, and Complementary array of linked solutions.

Sylvia Cheuy (12:18): So I think that that one is really important, but this visual, I think, says so much to me about what a typical collaboration journey looks like. It comes from our colleagues at Twyfords and Max Hardy from Australia.

Description Narrator (12:34): A diagram featuring two vertical axes. The left axis is labeled Increasing Trust and the right axis is labeled Increasing Capacity. The horizontal axis features an arrow pointing from left to right labeled Build readiness, Build Relationships, and Build capability. Below the axis, text: Appreciative Mindsets plus Deliberative Processes equals Enduring Solutions. Two lines, labeled Appreciative mindsets and Deliberative Processes, follow the same path from the bottom left corner of the diagram, labeled Dilemma, to the upper right, labeled Solution. The lines circle around five check points: 1, Commit to collaboration; 2, Co-define dilemma; 3, Co-design process; 4, Co-create solution; 5, Co-deliver actions.

Sylvia Cheuy (13:19): Part of what I love about this visual is it does such a great job highlighting the journey of collaboration and also pulling out those process elements that are so important and needed to sustain effective collaboration. Things like trust, relationships, capacity, readiness, appreciative mindset. That's the foundation that creates a good collaborative journey. And then I love the six key milestones of work, right? The commitment, the choice to collaborate. The co-defining of the dilemma you're working on together. Getting clear on the problem you're trying to solve. Co-designing a process that leverages the collaborative connections that you have, the skills and assets that you have, and then working together to co-create solutions, and then ultimately, co-deliver them.

Sylvia Cheuy (14:18): The best definition I think I ever heard of collaboration was having it described as a shared innovation space that a network of diverse leaders creates together to help them figure out what else and what more might be needed beyond their typical way of working currently to address an issue that they agree is not being effectively addressed with our current approaches.

Description Narrator (14:46): Text: Collaborative initiatives engage leaders and sectors to think and learn together to co-create a deeper understanding of their shared issue to identify and prototype promising new solutions; Focus on enabling greater alignment among existing programs and services, as well as advancing strategies to address barriers; Appreciate that leaders are required to actively contribute to implementing their shared agendas; Grow the network of individuals and organizations contributing to their effort.

Sylvia Cheuy (15:16): The collaboration table then becomes a bit of a protected space for them to think and learn together, to step off the treadmill of their day-to-day commitments, and support each other to reimagine and co-create new solutions that they can then prototype on a small scale, learn from, tweak, and if they work, scale up to greater impact. And because they're working together, it allows them to actually diversify that risk also about setting out to try a new approach.

Description Narrator (15:20): A slide titled Characteristics of complex problems (1 of 2). Text: Involve multiple factors and perspectives; this makes them difficult to define and challenging to solve. Are interconnected; Changes in one area can have unforeseen consequences in other parts of the system. Have many uncertainties; The absence of complete information makes it difficult to get a clear understanding of the problem or its potential solutions.

Sylvia Cheuy (16:14): I think the second of those mindset shifts we talked about was acknowledging complexity. And so you'll see here, right, that it reminds us that not all problems are the same. And in fact, there's a theorist known as David Snowden, and he's the one who really started to unpack that there are four different types of problems. There's simple ones which are known problems where the relationship between cause and effect is very clear, and those type of problems are ideally suited to best practice solutions because they're predictable and therefore the results will be as described, a second level of problem, often talked about as a complicated or technical problem are knowable, meaning that there is a clear relationship. There may be a clear relationship between cause and effect, but determining what that is requires a bit more expert analysis. As a result, I think complicated problems have multiple right answers, and therefore we can only define good practice, not best practice. And when solving a complicated problem, context doesn't matter— does matter, excuse me— and may actually affect the solution, but complicated problems can be controlled. So a great analogy for a complicated problem would be putting on a play. So every single play we put on, there's about seven different components you have to get figured out. You have to have a good cast, a good script, a good director, good staging and sets and props, great lighting and a marketing kind of dimension. Once you've got those all figured out through your rehearsals and you launch the play, that play can keep on humming along night after night after night, and everything should be fine, because the world around it is pretty contained and stable. Complex problems are the fourth type of problem and the challenge with a complex problem is that they are dynamic. They are unknowable because the result of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, and that the system itself is often in comp in flux. And that notion of getting to a best practice solution or a good enough solution can only be discovered through trial and error. There's no set rules or recipes that will absolutely guarantee that you'll have a perfect outcome, and so while having experience and expertise is important, it's not necessarily sufficient, because every solution has to be adapted to the unique context that it's being implemented in. So think about it; you have lots of knowledge, expertise, and research to inform what's important to sustain maternal health. But every time you engage with a different family, the unique needs of that family require you to tailor and tweak some of your responses. And then the final type of problem are chaotic problems, and in a chaotic situation, the best thing to do is to act immediately to try and shift it into a way, and into something that's sort of at least roughly complex, so that we can start managing the elements as best we can.

Description Narrator (19:55): A slide titled Characteristics of complex problems (2 of 2). Text: Have no single solution; Often multiple possible solutions are needed, and the "best" solution is subjective and depends on the specific context. Are dynamic and evolving; Because they change over time, it is virtually impossible to develop a fixed solution. Require a multifaceted strategy; They are often resistant to traditional, linear problem-solving approaches.

Sylvia Cheuy (20:23): Taking time to identify and agree on the problem that you're trying to solve and the type of problem it is, is really important because that affects the tools that you choose to use. And if you use the wrong tools, you could actually end up making the problem way worse because you're tweaking with the wrong things, if you like.

Description Narrator (20:49): A quote from Albert Einstein: "If I had an hour to solve a problem, I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions."

Sylvia Cheuy (20:59): Albert Einstein, there's a reason why he's so brilliant, but this is one of my favorite quotes of his, and it encapsulates, I think, one of the unlearning pieces that's so important when you're collaborating, which is you invest a lot of time not diving into action, which is what many of us, myself included, are much more familiar with, but rather to take our time learning from one another, being aware and noticing how our own assumptions are being surfaced and challenged.

Sylvia Cheuy (21:41): It's really interesting. I read somewhere recently, a study from Ohio State University that looked at 350 different decision making processes at medium and large companies, and they found that more than half failed to achieve their desired results, often because perceived time pressure caused people to not pay enough attention to examining the problem that they were solving from multiple angles and exploring the different options before diving into action. And I think there's wisdom for us there. So another value I think of working collaboratively and navigating complexity is it does give us time to think, and it does give us sounding boards of other perspective to help challenges.

Sylvia Cheuy (22:29): Framing is the third mindset shift that we've talked about. And for me, framing is really about how we make sense of what it is we think we're seeing. The way we understand an issue is influenced by our assumptions, as I said earlier, and when we see things differently, that's when we see new opportunities start to emerge. So how we frame an issue— the values, the metaphors, the examples that we use— determines how others think about it, too. For those of us whose work involves social issues, framing asks us to consider how might we translate private suffering into a public concern? How are our words, our stories, influencing how we and others perceive the situation? And how can we make a complex issue more understandable, more relatable, maybe more urgent? Framing is important because it fuels innovation. It also influences public perception; framing shapes how people understand and interpret information. It also drives action. If we effectively frame things, it can help motivate individuals to feel more hopeful and or can increase courage people to come together and work around a common cause to make life better. And ultimately, it is how we think about and shape public discourse and facilitate social change. It is sort of how we start to shift attitudes and behaviors of everyone around us.

Sylvia Cheuy (24:19): So the way we ask questions is really critical to how an issue is framed. So we could frame a question around debate, like a win/lose; what's more important, protecting nature or allowing people to enjoy it? So it's an either-or choice. An alternative way to frame it might be around a compromise. How can we balance the need to protect natural environment with enabling easy access too, right? And so there's a bit of a bias there, right? Obviously, we want to see the natural environment protected, and of course, allow people to access it, but that's secondary. A better way to frame, a creative way to frame the issue or the opportunity is how can we maximize enjoyment of the environment, and at the same time, better protect it? So it's not preferencing one option over another, it's inviting us to sit in the tension of the competing needs and use that as a source of creativity.

Description Narrator (25:29): A table with two columns: Business-As-Usual and Innovation Mindset. Business-As-Usual: Emphasizes logic, asks "how do we know?" Move quickly to decisions, asserts "right" or "wrong," Yes or No, Shies away from ambiguity, Expects linear cause and effect, Seeks to clarify the immediate decision-making context, Set it and forget it, Plans then acts, Learn then execute. Innovation Mindset: Emphasizes intuition, asks "what if…?" Considers multiple options and reserves judgement, asserts "there is a better way," yes and… Embraces ambiguity, seeks to understand the full system, Anticipates non-linear interactions and unintended consequences, ongoing, iterative planning and reflection, continuous learning and refinement of ideas.

Sylvia Cheuy (26:22): This evokes the innovator's mindset, right? It's about how we... When we're trying to create something new and different, we need to be more in the "what if?" What if thinking about multiple options embraces the unknown, right, and anticipates that things aren't all going to be linear and figured out? So it's a less comfortable place in some ways in terms of predictability, but actually important to get to new results.

Sylvia Cheuy (27:00): So, there are two tools I think I mentioned to you, that are just two of many, for how to bring people together, and in a sort of contained way, get them to think differently together. The first one of these is called TRIZ, and I love it because it invites us in a fun way to actually identify counterproductive activities and innovate instead. It uses humor, which makes it a little bit safe sometimes to bring up some of those "sacred cows" or taboo issues that nobody ever wants to talk about. So let me tell you how it works.

Sylvia Cheuy (27:46): First, you start by asking people to imagine and design the worst possible version of the system. So how might we design a program that guarantees absolute the worst possible experiences and outcomes for participants? And how can we ensure that the solution requires tons of resources and produces minimal results? People usually are frozen for a minute, but then they get into it, and they start becoming more and more ridiculous about all the things that we would do if we were going to design the worst possible program. And then what you ask them to do is write down all those ideas for the terrible program, right? Oh, we would make people sign up every single time they attended the program. Oh, we wouldn't actually advertise the program, we would just assume that people would hear about it and show up when we were ready. Anything like that. And then what you ask them to do is take out a red pen and in brutal honesty, put a checkmark beside any one of these sort of awful behaviors that we are doing, even if it's just a little bit. And then the third step of the process is then to reflect back on all of those checked box things and say, "okay," "so what are the things that we're doing right now that we should probably stop?" And that's really beautiful. You know, what can we personally stop doing? What can our organization stop doing? Are there rules or practices or policies that we could change in the way that we've always done things? And that's important because before we take on anything more, can we at least give ourselves permission to stop doing the things that are not useful and helpful to make space to take on other things instead?

Description Narrator (29:46): Text: spark creativity and highlight opportunity; articulate the tensions that need to be balanced; avoid being framed as an either-or (win-lose) question; avoid compromise that reflects any bias.

Sylvia Cheuy (30:00): And then the final tool that I wanted to introduce to you is called Co-defining your dilemma. And I love this tool because it really invites us to spark creativity. I should say both tools actually, this one and the TRIZ tool; you can actually download, off the Tamarack website, a real short two-pager around how you would do this if this is a tool you want to try. But the reason that I love this co-defining the dilemma tool in particular is it brings together... It's a way of sort of navigating, a variety of diverse and even polarized perspectives on the same issue in a way that helps to reframe it, so that all the stakeholder perspectives would feel honored and willing to sort of step into helping to address and resolve that issue. I also like it because it assumes that responsibility to resolve a problem or a dilemma is shared by multiple players. So the questions we ask when we engage have tremendous impact on the outputs of our engagement efforts. This tool shares a process for designing a compelling engagement question that's rooted in creativity and appreciation of the interests of multiple stakeholders. So let me show you what it looks like. It asks us how might we collectively reframe an issue in a way that diverse stakeholders with very strong opinions would be committed to being part of the conversation to help answer it and resolve it. And it is grounded in what's most important and to each stakeholder perspective and what each stakeholder perspective considers is most concerning about addressing the issue. So, let me give you an example of what this would look like.

Sylvia Cheuy (32:17): Let's assume that we're all living in the same sort of small community that has been experiencing a tremendous amount of flooding, and the consensus is that something needs to be done about this. So you can imagine there are a number of different players who are affected by this issue, and they all have their own ideas and thoughts about it and what needs to happen. So you've got the Municipal Counselor. Their position is, "wow, I'm so nervous to talk to people in the community about this, because I know it's like it's, an issue that many people are worried about." The Counselors—what's most important to the Counselor is minimizing resistance to the community doing something about it. And the question that they think is most important to pay attention to is how to ensure broad public support.

Sylvia Cheuy (33:12): Then you've got the City Planner, whose job is going to be to kind of like implement the ideas that that are generated. And the number one thing the City Planner needs is a plan, an endorsed plan, that people have agreed to. The most important thing to the Planner is to ensure that there's good risk management and good outcomes for the community and the question that they really believe needs to be resolved is, "what does our community's adaptation plan look like?" You've got a Homeowner who's most important issue or position is, "I want my grandkids to enjoy the property just the way I have." The most important things about the issue are financial well-being and the opportunity to keep their beloved home, and their number one question to be resolved is, "how can I stop this process from ruining my home?" And then you've got a Property Developer and they, their number one position is, "please just tell me what I can do with my land." What's most important to them? "I need certainty, give me a decision about what's going to happen." And the question that must be resolved is, is, "what can I do with the land that I own?"

Sylvia Cheuy (34:41): So all of these perspectives are legitimate and valid. And the challenge is, how do we find a path forward that's honoring of the legitimacy of each one of these perspectives? We do this by framing the challenge as a dilemma. And we ask, and in that framing of the dilemma, we start with, how might we? How might we—because we're all we all have a stake in resolving this— how might we adapt to sea level rise and manage risk, providing certainty for all, knowing that solutions may be costly and have a wide range of impacts on our lives and on our places? That question creates a space of conversation, of learning and of creativity, and that's the beauty of this tool.

Sylvia Cheuy (35:24): So we've come to the end of this webinar, and I think what would be lovely, is if you could take some time, and think about a challenge that you and or your team has recently encountered, or maybe you are currently still navigating. What new perspectives or shifts in thinking might help you and or your team to see things differently, because when you can see things differently, new options start to show up. How might your shifts in thinking help your team and others to see new benefits, new possibilities? And how might these shifts in thinking enable you to better leverage not just— well, the skills of your team, certainly— but the skills of others as well? Thank you so much for spending this time with me. Again, I would love it— to hear your stories or hear your questions. If there are things that you would like to learn more about, if I could help you build a powerful collaboration to address maternal health, I would love to hear from you. Thank you!

Description Narrator (36:36): Sylvia Cheuy, Consulting Director, Collaboration, Tamarack Institute Learning Centre, sylvia@tamarackcommunity.ca.