

Lessons from establishing and managing multi-institution centres of research excellence

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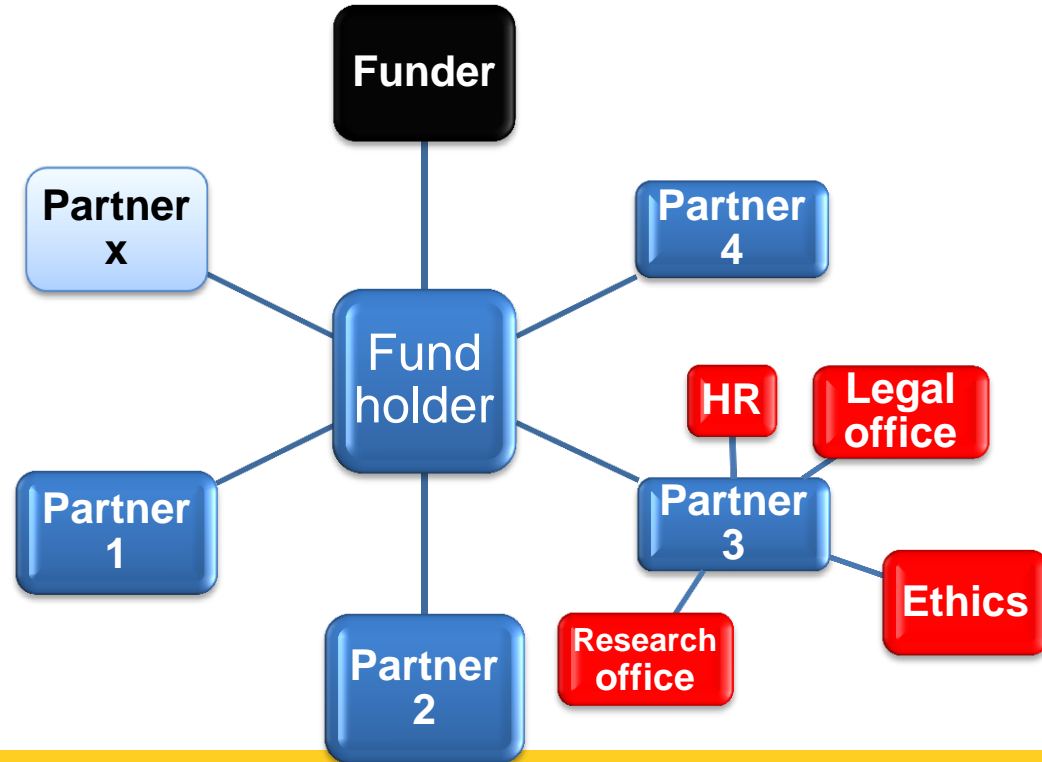
Outline

- Background
- Partnership model
- Study design
- Results
- Next step

Background

- Trend towards funding multi-institution centres of research excellence (MICREs)
- Partnerships of universities + others
- APHCRI funded 9 MICREs in primary health care
- Others exist e.g. those funded by NHMRC

Multi-Institution Centre of Research Excellence



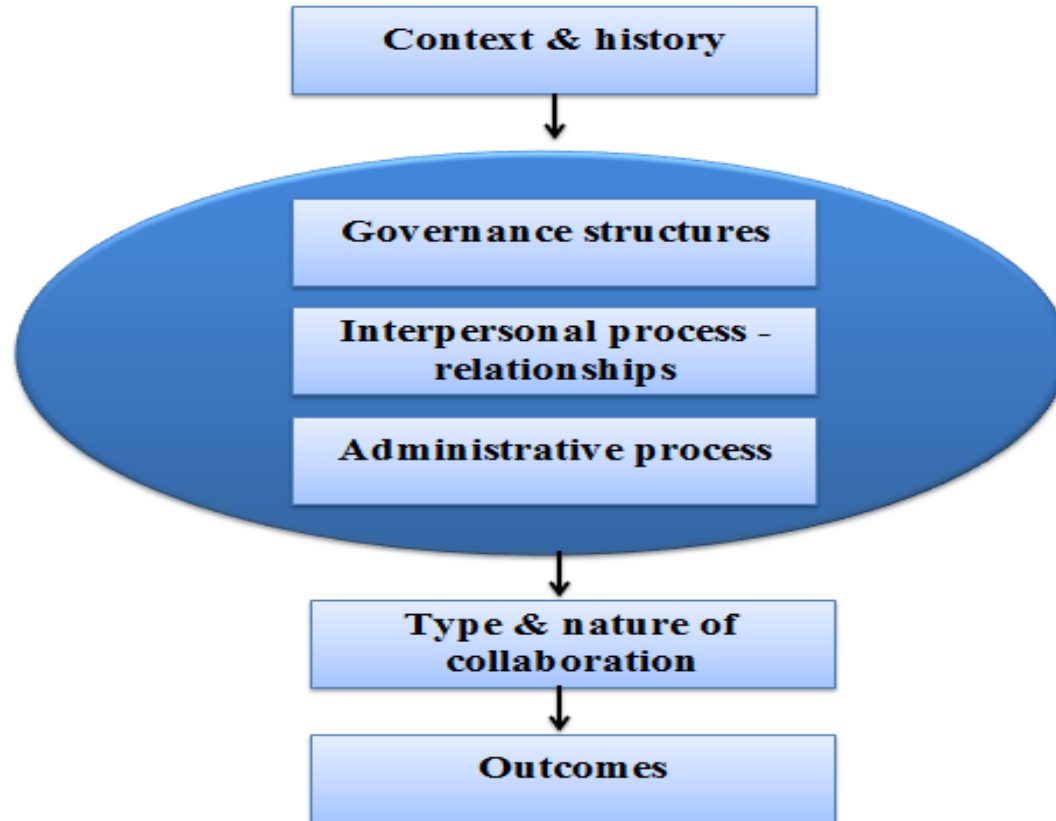
Study Rationale

- Experience of the Coordinators/Managers
- Lack of information to guide management of a MICRE
- Informal sharing of information between MICRE managers – *reinventing wheels*

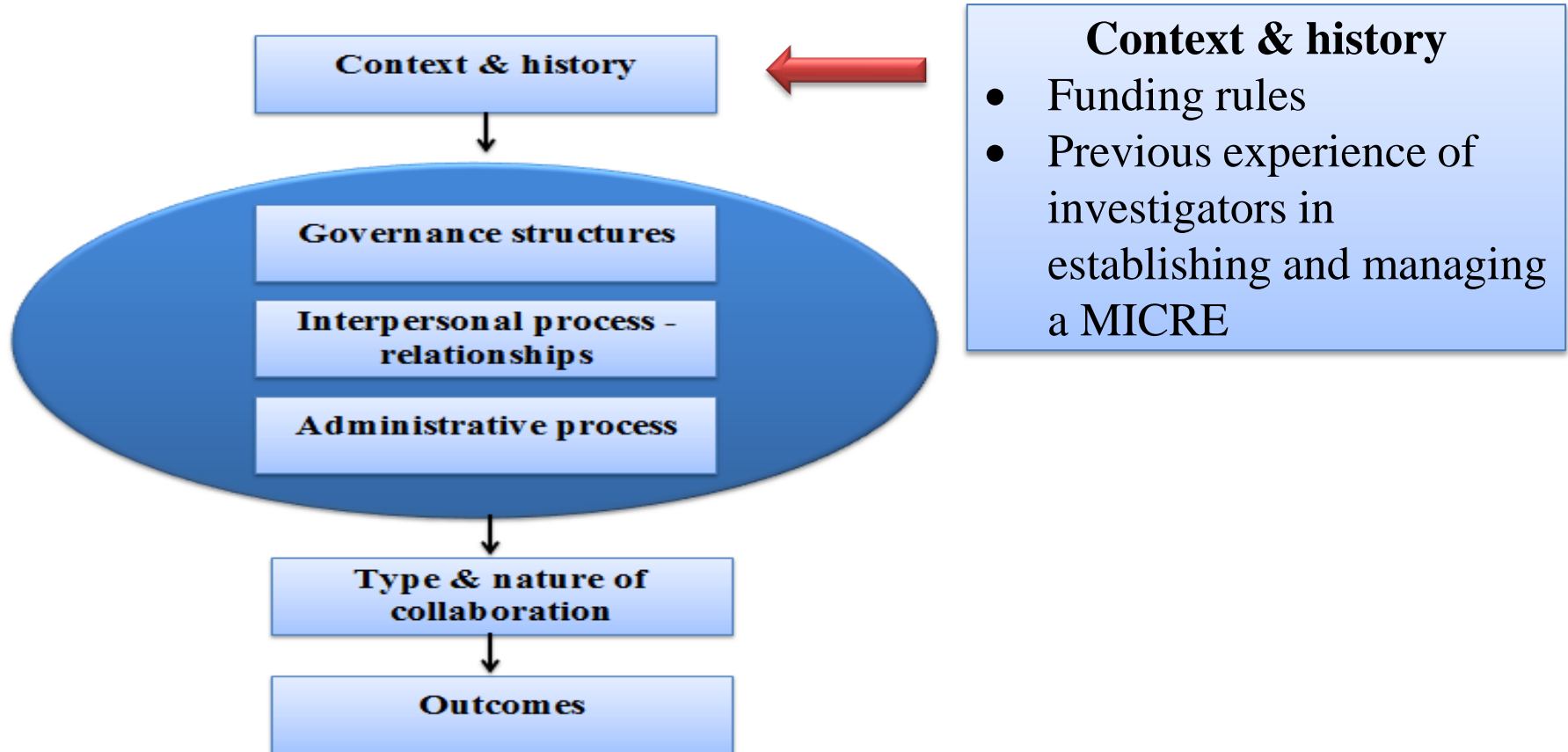
Study Objectives

- Document and disseminate lessons learned by APHCRI MICREs
- Produce 'tips' for others planning or managing a MICRE
- Provide information to assist future funders of MICREs

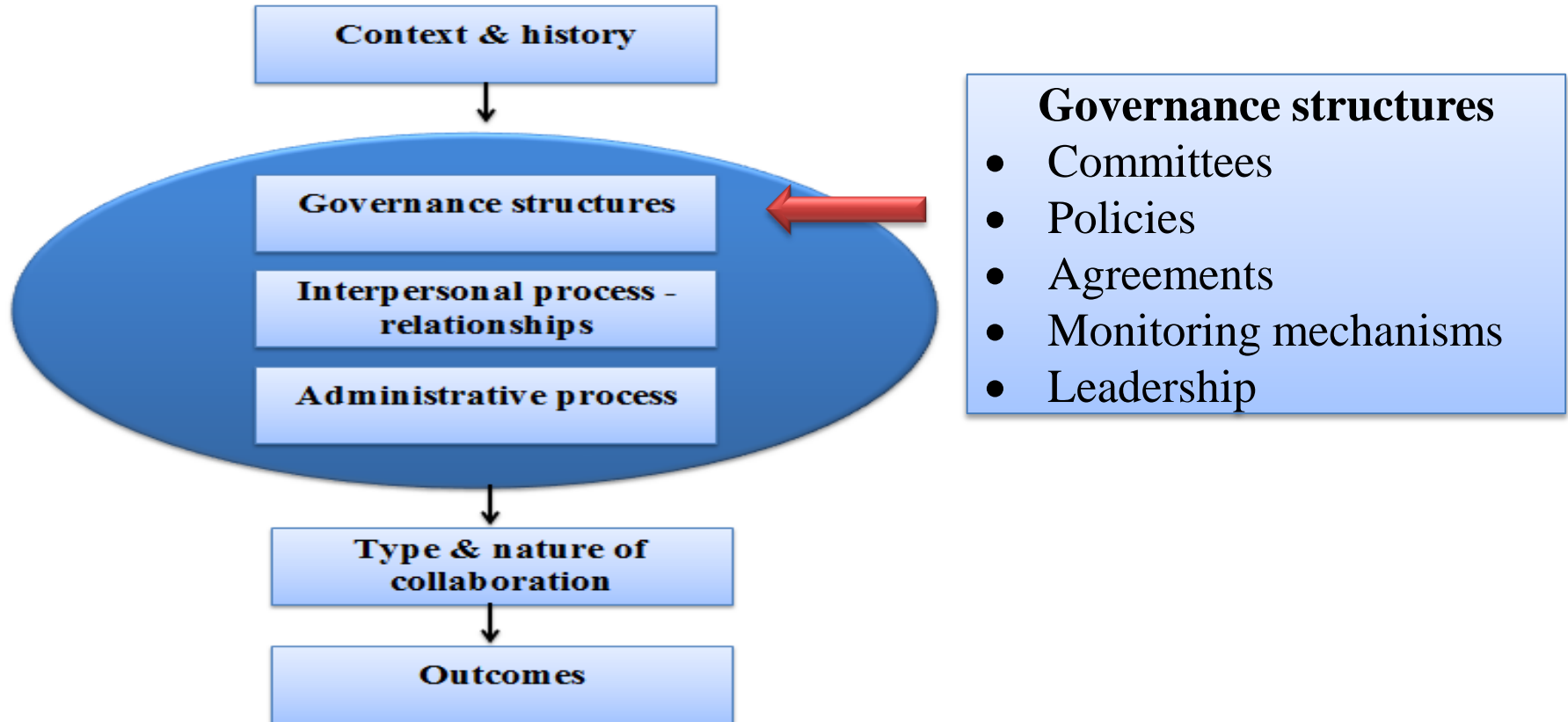
Evidence-informed partnership model



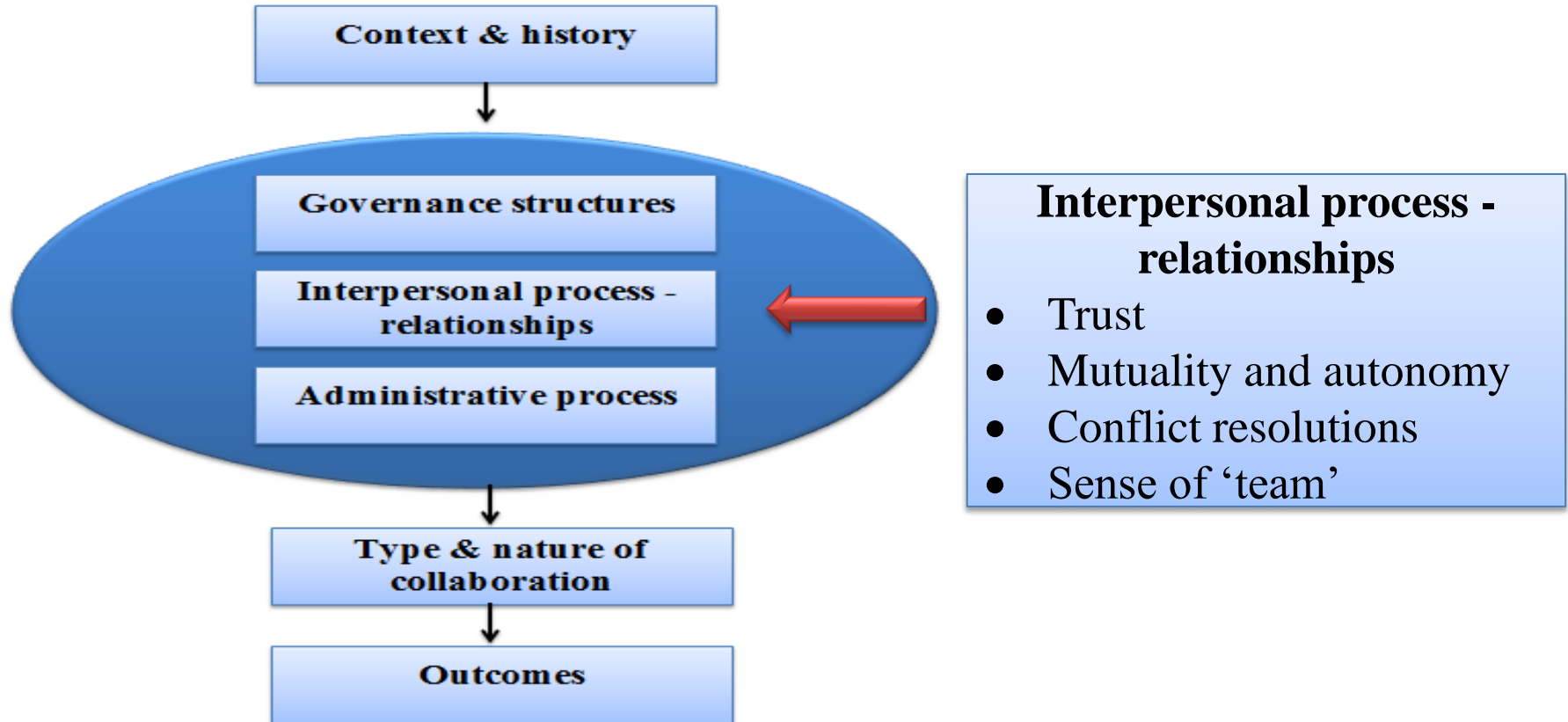
Partnership model



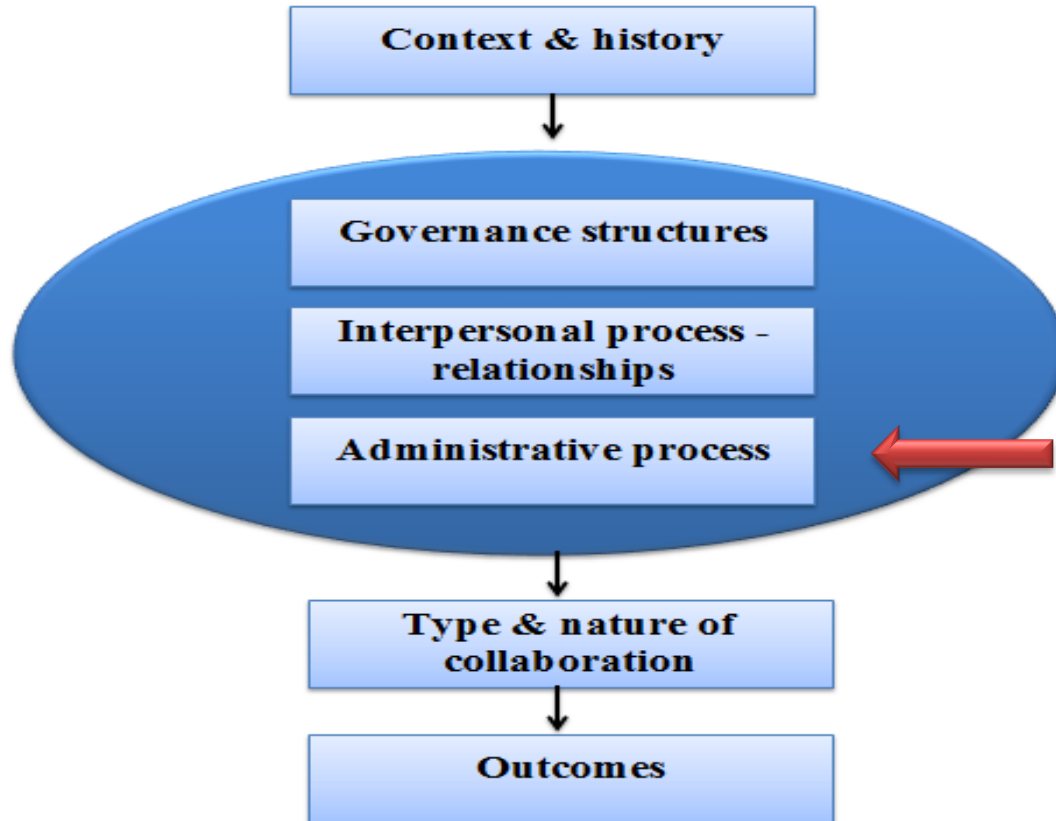
Partnership model



Partnership model



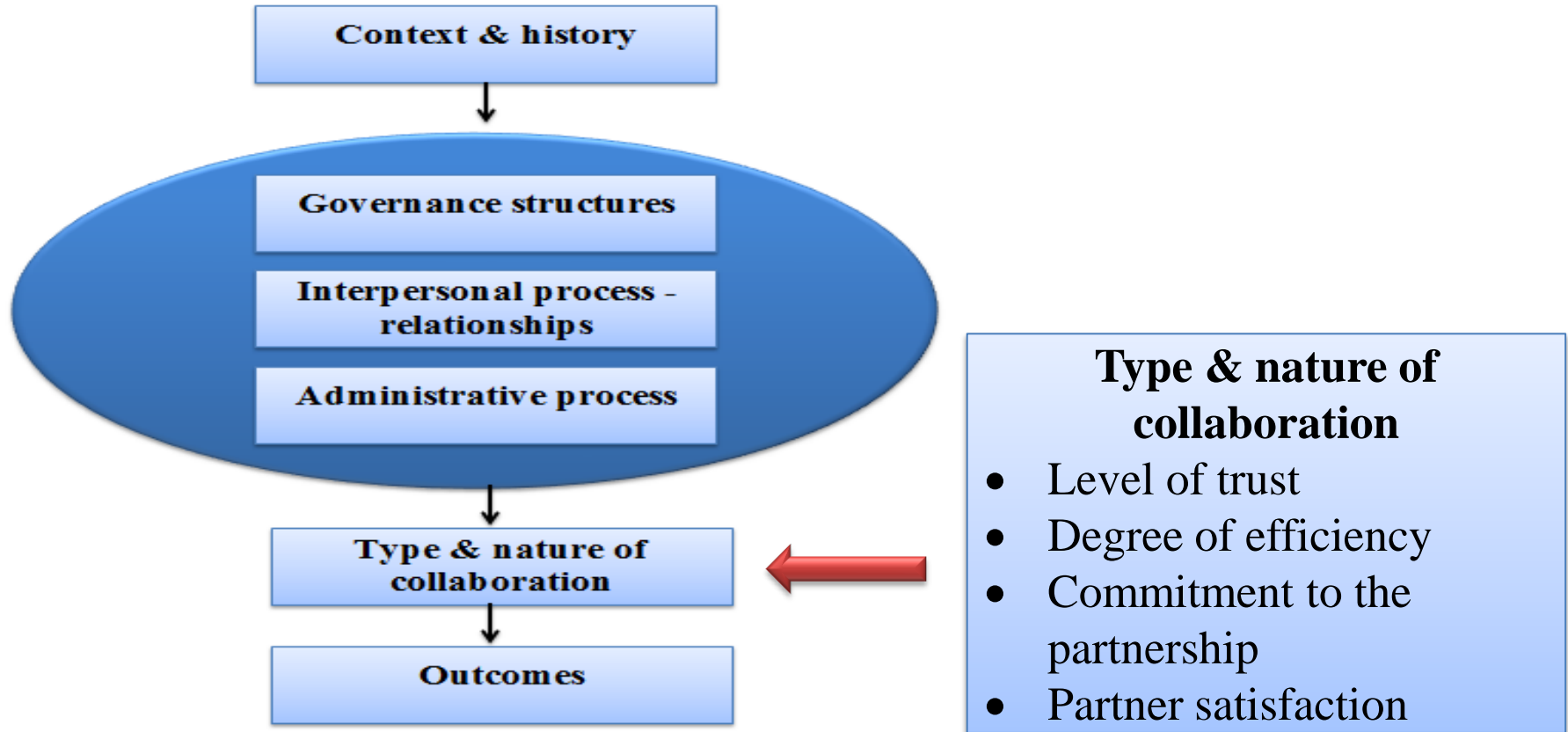
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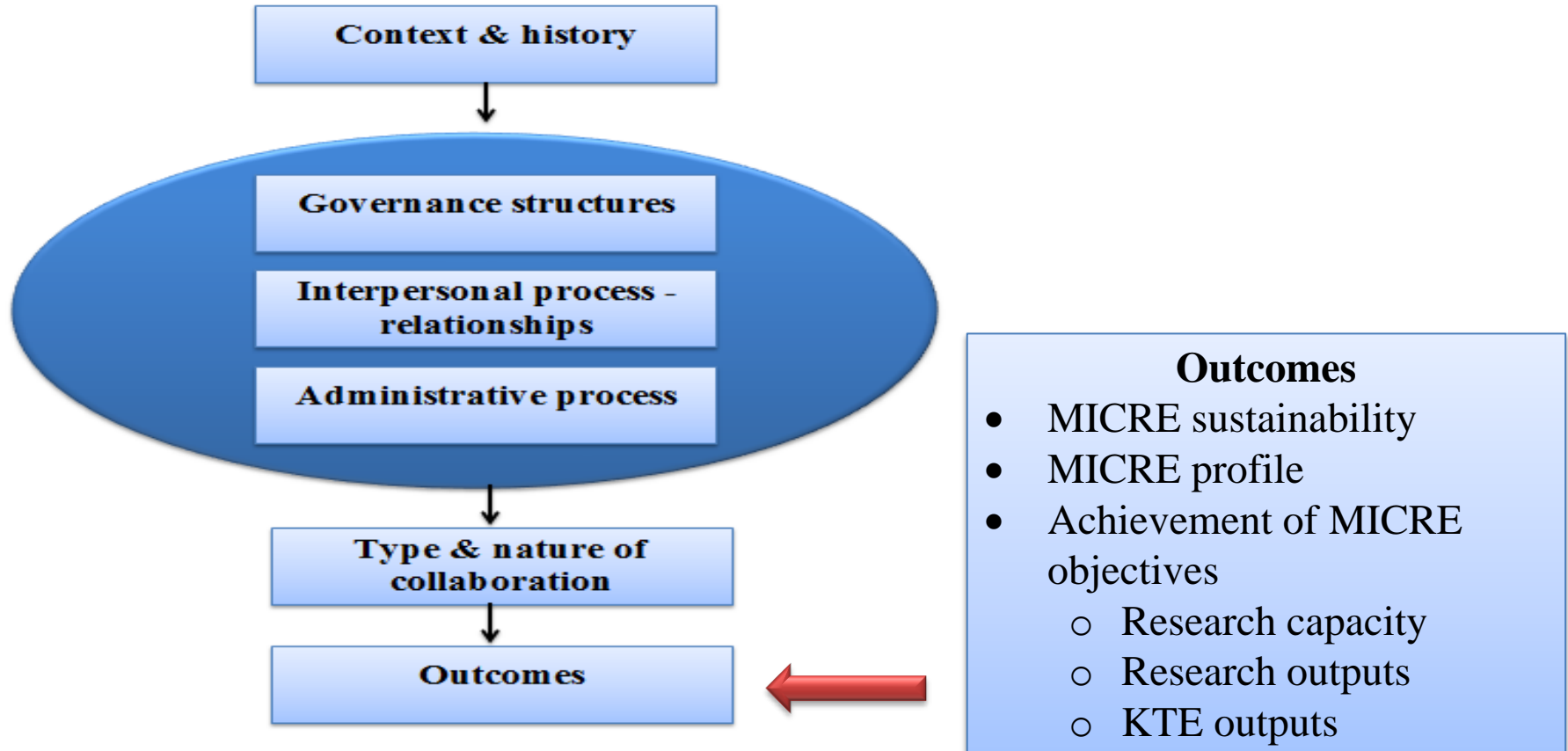
Administrative process

- Contracts
- Budgets
- Reporting to funding body
- Recruitment
- Implementation of policies & decisions of meetings
- Risk management

Partnership model



Partnership model



Study method

- Key informant consultations
N=21
 - CRE Director / Chief Investigator n=9
 - CRE manager/coordinator n=9
 - Funding body: APHCRI n=2
 - PHCRED evaluation team n=1
- Iterative development of draft document

Sample

- Number invited 21
- Number interviewed: 13 62%
 - Directors 6/9
 - Coordinators/Managers 4/9*
 - Other 3/4#
- Response rate for MICREs: 6/9 67%

* Includes 2 investigators; # includes 1 investigator

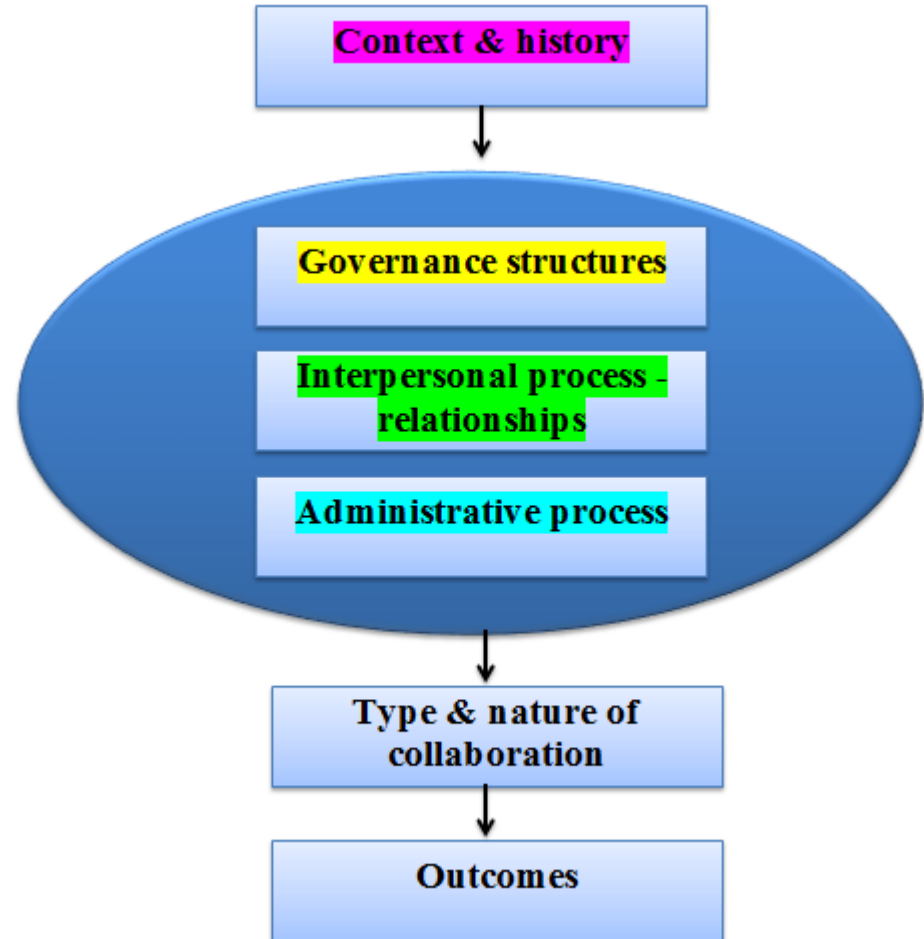
Data collection

1. Specific problem
2. How unique to a MICRE?
3. Impact of the problem
4. Causes or contributors to problems
5. Lessons: how to avoid or manage next time

Results: Problems

- Budget
 - For postdocs
 - For management & admin
- Contracts
 - Head Agreement
 - Partner agreements
 - In-kind support
 - Allocation of funding
- Recruitment
 - Delayed appointment of manager
 - Across institutions
- Communication
 - Communication infrastructure
 - Meeting management
- Team
 - Investigator engagement
 - Monitoring activities & outputs
 - MICRE profile

Did the data fit
our model?



Context & history



Governance structures

Interpersonal process - relationships

Administrative process



Type & nature of collaboration



Outcomes

What caused or contributed to the problem	Lessons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Salaries and on-costs for personnel (including postdoctoral fellows) were calculated on the basis of one institution's costing model, when in actual fact, salaries and on-costs for each institution were different. The allocation of funding to partners did not need to be specified in the grant application so decisions on how the funding was to be distributed could be made after the grant had been awarded. 	<p>During grant development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure salaries and on-costs for each institution are calculated at the appropriate rate. Agree upon the allocation of funding across the fund-holder and partner institutions or Agree upon an efficient process for distributing or redistributing funding to partner institutions throughout the life of the MICRE. Funding allocations and/or processes should be documented in an MOU.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinating/managing a MICRE is a complex task that requires a high level of skill and experience as well as adequate time (ITE). Workload and/or skill level was higher than originally anticipated. The budget for the MICRE coordinator was insufficient for the workload and skill level required. Some partner institutions did not have the required infrastructure or support to facilitate inter-institution meetings and other communications. 	<p>During grant development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure management is sufficiently funded and supported to accommodate the complexity of the MICRE. Support can also include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> administrative assistance support to develop a peer network Identify the communication infrastructure and support required across the institutions e.g. video- or tele-conferencing, virtual meeting spaces. Confirm what infrastructure will be provided by the partner institutions as 'in-kind'. Identify and agree on the necessary costs of new equipment, licences, software and/or training. Include costs in the budget or note 'in-kind' contributions from the institutions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legal offices of partner institutions had not reviewed and accepted the Head Agreement prior to submitting the grant application. In the first funding round, a sample Funding Agreement was not made available to applicants. In the latter rounds of funding, a sample Funding Agreement was made available on the APHRCI website. However, this did not solve the problem. It is either very difficult or impossible to make changes to the Head Agreement after it has been executed. 'In-kind' contributions were not clear in the grant application or not written in a manner that was sufficient for the partnership agreements. 	<p>At the beginning of preparing the grant application, gain in principle support from each institution's legal office prior to submission of the application.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the sample agreement is available as part of the grant application process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chief investigators from each institution provide their legal offices with a copy of the sample agreement for consideration and comment prior to submitting the application. The Head Agreement need to be negotiated before submission of the grant application. If the sample agreement is not available as part of the grant application process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct discussion with research office to ensure the application is clear, that each institution is aware of the 'in-kind' contributions and that contributions are clearly articulated (in the Head Agreement) between the partners. drafting partner agreements. To facilitate this process, a checklist of in-kind contributions that each body could generate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This was the first time APHRCI had funded CREs, so universities scrutinised the agreement. More time was spent negotiating the terms of the Head Agreement than was anticipated by the funding body. Consequently, administering institutions were still negotiating the Head Agreement after the date that the CREs should have commenced. 	<p>At the beginning of preparing the grant application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gain in principle support from partner institutions prior to submission of the grant application.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays in executing the Head Agreements (see above). Preparation for recruitment of the Manager did not commence until after the Head Agreement had been executed. 	<p>As soon as the grant has been awarded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make all possible preparations for appointment of the Manager, prepare statement of duties (sample PD attached). Identify a selection panel, identify how the position will be advertised. <p>As soon as the Head Agreement has been executed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit the MICRE Manager.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were no processes for recruitment across institutions when the positions could be located at any institution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with the HR departments of the partner institutions to develop a stream-lined recruitment process. Some options are provided below. Allow enough time for recruitment across institutions. <p>Options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A joint advertisement across institutions. An expression-of-interest placed with just the MICRE logo, noting that the
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was no time limit placed upon the institution to fill the position, after which the funding would be transferred to another partner institution. There was no stream-lined process for the transfer of funding from one partner institution to another. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MICRE team are located in different buildings, institutions, cities and time zones.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult with the HR departments of the partner institutions to develop a stream-lined recruitment process. Agree upon a process for flexibility in recruitment to positions to ensure that if an appointment can't be made at one institution, then the funding can flow to one of the other partner institutions. 	<p>As soon as the grant is awarded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule regular meetings of all components of the CRE, i.e. chief investigators, streams. A schedule of meeting dates could be prepared at the start of each year with all meetings listed to maximise attendance. During the life of the MICRE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that every institution has the capacity to participate via video/teleconferences, and that details are provided. Train some investigators in new technology if required. Ensure best practice meeting management, e.g. agenda, action list, minutes, not too long or too frequent/inrequent, send reminders, be effectively chaired. Provide easy to use reporting templates for the meeting. Identify who manages the diaries of investigators and seek their assistance with organising meetings.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During grant development: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the requirements for reporting to the funding body are provided. Ensure investigators understand reporting requirements. Ensure there is agreement from investigators to contribute to reporting. Only in the life of the MICRE: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a KTE plan with indicators for monitoring that are consistent with the reporting requirements, updated annually. MICRE Manager to set up and maintain database of overall research impact and knowledge exchange activities. Provide easy-to-use template/ access to a database where research activities are recorded. Ensure investigators appreciate the benefits to themselves and to the MICRE of reporting their research activities. Regular reminders to the entire team to report recent research/KTE activities. Distribute copies of the list of outputs, or ask the investigators to prompt them to add outputs. 	<p>During grant development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure the requirements for reporting to the funding body are provided. Ensure investigators understand reporting requirements. Ensure there is agreement from investigators to contribute to reporting. <p>Only in the life of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a KTE plan with indicators for monitoring that are consistent with the reporting requirements, updated annually. MICRE Manager to set up and maintain database of overall research impact and knowledge exchange activities. Provide easy-to-use template/ access to a database where research activities are recorded. Ensure investigators appreciate the benefits to themselves and to the MICRE of reporting their research activities. Regular reminders to the entire team to report recent research/KTE activities. Distribute copies of the list of outputs, or ask the investigators to prompt them to add outputs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For the funding body: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure applicants understand reporting requirements. Provide resources to assist MICREs to report KTE in a useful/usable manner e.g. adapt the rural CRE database for use by future MICREs. 	<p>For the funding body:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure applicants understand reporting requirements. Provide resources to assist MICREs to report KTE in a useful/usable manner e.g. adapt the rural CRE database for use by future MICREs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The MICRE would exist for a limited time (4 years). Investigators tended to consider the MICRE as a 'short-term project' rather than a 'research centre'. Little apparent benefit from promoting the MICRE. Investigators had careers with their institution, not with the MICRE, there was greater affiliation with their own institution than with the MICRE. A MICRE is a virtual centre, with no physical place and little recognition of the MICRE within its own institution. Sometimes affiliation with the MICRE was not possible. For example, some journals would only allow one affiliation, it was simpler for media to only report a single affiliation and they generally chose the university affiliation as the university had established credibility and profile. Variable engagement with the MICRE (see below). 	<p>Early in the life of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree on a policy of when and how the investigators will declare affiliation with the MICRE in email signatures, journal articles, conference papers, media etc. Provide templates/books to assist declarations of affiliation e.g. logo and text to add to investigator signature. <p>On establishment of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree on a process for monitoring and supporting adherence to the policy regarding declaring affiliation with the MICRE. <p>During the life of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly circulate a list of outputs that can be attributed to MICREs to encourage investigators to add to the list. Provide positive and public reinforcement to investigators who contribute to raising the profile of the MICRE.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being located in multiple locations: limited opportunity for face-face interaction could have assisted development of the MICRE. The investigator's allegiances to their own institution, in which they are generally already leaders or working towards leadership. varied ideas of what involvement with the MICRE meant. Investigator time was not funded by the MICRE and they had limited capacity to give time to the MICRE. Investigator time for KTE activities was underestimated in the grant application. Lack of relationship between investigators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose partners wisely – investigators identified from pre-existing relationships (where possible) can be increasingly difficult with large numbers of investigators. Ensure that all investigators have agreed upon the common goals to be achieved via the MICRE. Agree upon high level partnership principles e.g. autonomy, clarity on roles and responsibilities in the MICRE. Ensure investigator time required for KTE activities is included in the estimated time to be provided as an 'in-kind' contribution to the MICRE. MICRE activities other than usual academic work (research and student supervision) need to benefit the investigators and be directly relevant to MICRE research and capacity building. Agreeing upon intended contributions of investigators towards KTE, ensure that the roles are relevant. Suggest face-face meetings for building relationships. <p>During the life of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual review of the common goals and partnership principles. Organise face-face meetings or team-building activities – use opportunities such as at conference to meet. Effective collaborative leadership is essential for developing and maintaining investigator engagement.

Context & history



Governance structures

Interpersonal process - relationships

Administrative process



Type & nature of collaboration



Outcomes

What caused or contributed to the problem?	Lessons
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This was the first time APHRCI had funded CREs, so universities scrutinised the agreement. More time was spent negotiating the terms of the Head Agreement than was anticipated by the funding body. Consequently, administering institutions were still negotiating the Head Agreement after the date that the CREs should have commenced. 	<p>As soon as the grant has been awarded:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make all possible preparations for appointment of the MICRE Manager e.g. prepare statement of duties (sample PD Attached), draft staff creation forms, identify a selection panel, identify how the position will be advertised etc. <p>As soon as the Head Agreement has been executed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit the MICRE Manager.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delays in executing the Head Agreements (see above). Preparation for recruitment of the Manager did not commence until after the Head Agreement had been executed. 	<p>Consult with the HR departments of the partner institutions to develop a stream-lined recruitment process. Some options are provided below.</p> <p>Allow enough time for recruitment across institutions.</p> <p>Options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A joint advertisement across institutions. An expression-of-interest placed with just the MICRE logo, noting that the
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MICREs did not always have a KTE plan which would provide clear and agreed indicators for monitoring and reporting to APHRCI. Lack of understanding among investigators about what's needed other than academic outputs - particularly in the area of exchange e.g. phone calls or meetings with end-users can be useful for KTE. Chief investigators are accustomed to reporting outputs to their own institution, not to the MICRE. There is no consequence for investigators if they did or did not report all outputs specific to the MICRE. Much of what APHRCI wanted reported does not get otherwise routinely collected or reported by investigators. APHRCI were not explicit enough in their expectations for reporting in the early years of the MICRE. 	<p>The MICRE would exist for a limited time (4 years).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigators tended to consider the MICRE as a 'short-term project' rather than a 'research centre'. Little apparent benefit in promoting the MICRE. Investigators had careers with their institution, not with the MICRE, there was greater affiliation with their own institution than with the MICRE. A MICRE is a virtual centre, with no physical place and little recognition of the MICRE within its own institution. Sometimes affiliation with the MICRE was not possible. For example, some journals would only allow one affiliation, it was simpler for media to only report a single affiliation and they generally chose the university affiliation as the university had established credibility and profile. Investigator engagement with the MICRE (see below). <p>During the life of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly circulate a list of outputs that can be attributed to MICREs to encourage investigators to add to the list. Provide positive and public reinforcement to investigators who contribute to raising the profile of the MICRE. <p>On establishment of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree on a process for monitoring and supporting adherence to the policy regarding declaring affiliation with the MICRE. <p>During the life of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly circulate a list of outputs that can be attributed to MICREs to encourage investigators to add to the list. Provide positive and public reinforcement to investigators who contribute to raising the profile of the MICRE. <p>On establishment of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree on a process for monitoring and supporting adherence to the policy regarding declaring affiliation with the MICRE. <p>During the life of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regularly circulate a list of outputs that can be attributed to MICREs to encourage investigators to add to the list. Provide positive and public reinforcement to investigators who contribute to raising the profile of the MICRE. <p>On establishment of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree on a process for monitoring and supporting adherence to the policy regarding declaring affiliation with the MICRE.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being located in a face-face interaction could have restricted development of relationships. The investigator's allegiances to their own institution, in which they are generally already leaders or working towards leadership. varied ideas of what involvement with the MICRE meant. Investigator time was not funded by the MICRE and the had limited capacity to give time to the MICRE. Investigator time for KTE activities was underestimated in the grant application. Lack of relationship between investigators. 	<p>It was increasingly difficult with large numbers of investigators to ensure that all investigators have agreed upon the common goals to be achieved via the MICRE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agree upon high-level partnership principles e.g. autonomy, clarity on roles and responsibilities in the MICRE. Ensure investigator time required for KTE activities is included in the estimated time to be provided as an 'in-kind' contribution to the MICRE. MICRE activities other than usual academic work (research and student supervision) need to benefit the investigators and be directly relevant to MICRE research and capacity building. Agreeing upon shared contributions of investigators towards KTE, ensure that the values are evident. Suggest face-face meetings for building relationships. <p>During the life of the MICRE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual review of the common goals and partnership principles. Organise face-face meetings or team-building activities - use opportunities such as at conferences to meet. Effective collaborative leadership is essential for developing and maintaining investigator engagement.

Example: MICRE profile

- **Challenge:** obtaining investigator support to raise the profile of the MICRE
- **Impact:**
 - Low MICRE profile – nobody knows to approach us
 - Non-compliance with contractual clause
 - Cannot report activities/outputs as MICRE achievements
- **Unique** to MICRE? Yes

Example: MICRE profile - Causes

- MICRE viewed as short-term project vs research centre
 - Limited lifespan (4 years)
 - A virtual centre, with no physical place
- Little apparent benefit in promoting the MICRE
 - Investigator careers are with their institution - affiliation
- Acknowledging affiliation not always possible
- Variable investigator engagement with the MICRE

Example: MICRE profile - Lessons

- Early in the life of the MICRE:
 - Policy/Agreement
 - Process for monitoring
 - Provide templates/tools
- During the life of the MICRE:
 - circulate a list of MICRE outputs
 - positive and public reinforcement

13 Problems documented and analysed

- Budget
 - For postdocs
 - For management & admin
- Contracts
 - Head Agreement
 - Partner agreements
 - In-kind support
 - Allocation of funding
- Recruitment
 - Delayed appointment of manager
 - Across institutions
- Communication
 - Communication infrastructure
 - Meeting management
- Team
 - Investigator engagement
 - Monitoring activities & outputs
 - MICRE profile

Lessons from the study

1. All 3 domains (admin, governance and relationships) are necessary for effective functioning
2. MICREs' experienced added complexity in all 3 domains
3. Most challenges could have been prevented:
 - a. during grant preparation – requires resources
 - b. At commencement of the MICRE – requires sufficiently experienced, skilled and resourced coordinator appointed early

Next step

Tips document to be developed and disseminated
e.g. posted on PHCRIS website

To be on a mail list for the tips document:

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Australian
National
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Thank you

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