

Articles on Collaborative Public Management

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The Design and Implementation of Cross-Sector Collaborations: Propositions from the Literature

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People who want to tackle tough social problems and achieve beneficial community outcomes are beginning to understand that multiple sectors of a democratic society—business, nonprofits and philanthropies, the media, the community, and government—must collaborate to deal effectively and humanely with the challenges. This article focuses on cross-sector collaboration that is required to remedy complex public problems. Based on an extensive review of the literature on collaboration, the article presents a propositional inventory organized around the initial conditions affecting collaboration formation, process, structural and governance components, constraints and contingencies, outcomes, and accountability issues.

Cross-sector collaboration is increasingly assumed to be both necessary and desirable as a strategy for addressing many of society's most difficult public challenges (Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Goldsmith and Eggers 2004; Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan 1997; Mandell 2001; Rethemeyer 2005). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine successfully addressing global problems, such as the AIDS pandemic or terrorism, and domestic concerns, such as the educational achievement gap between income classes and races, without some sort of cross-sector understanding, agreement, and collaboration. By *cross-sector collaboration*, we mean partnerships involving government, business, nonprofits and philanthropies, communities, and/or the public as a whole.

Collaboration may be necessary and desirable, but the research evidence indicates that it is hardly easy. Based on a comprehensive review of the literature, this article examines the conditions that are likely to prompt calls for cross-sector collaboration and offers propositions to guide the design and implementation of cross-sector collaborations. We assert that collaboration occurs in the midrange of how organizations work on public problems (Crosby and Bryson 2005a, 17–18). At one end of the continuum are organizations that hardly relate to each other when it comes to dealing with a public problem that extends beyond their capabilities. At the other end are organizations

that have merged into a new entity to handle problems through merged authority and capabilities. In the midrange are organizations that share information, undertake coordinated initiatives, or develop shared-power arrangements such as collaborations (which may be a distinct organizational form) in order to pool their capabilities to address the problem or challenge. We thus define cross-sector collaboration as *the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities, and capabilities by organizations in two or more sectors to achieve jointly an outcome that could not be achieved by organizations in one sector separately.*

Cross-sector collaboration occurs for many reasons. The first is simply that we live in a shared-power world in which many groups and organizations are involved in, affected by, or have some partial responsibility to act on public challenges (Crosby and Bryson 2005a). Beyond that, in the United States, advocates of power sharing across sectors are often responding to a long-standing critique of the effectiveness of government when it acts on its own. Sometimes, the critique has been based on facts; at other times, it has been guided by principles or ideology favoring limited government or extolling the virtues of other sectors. The critique has resulted in waves of deregulation, privatization, budget caps and cuts, and the rise of “third-party government,” in which nongovernmental actors are enlisted to achieve public purposes (Salamon 2002).

At the same time, cross-sector collaborations do not solve all of the problems they tackle. Indeed, some are solved badly, and some solutions have created the problems they were meant to solve. Collaboration—especially cross-sector collaboration—is no panacea. This is partly because of the interconnectedness of things, such that changes anywhere reverberate unexpectedly and sometimes even dangerously throughout the system (Luke 1998). Complex feedback effects abound (Senge 2006). And issues that we previously thought about in fairly narrow terms, such as health care, are now being redefined as issues of economic competitiveness, industrial policy, education policy,

tax and expenditure policy, immigration policy, and more. How to respond collaboratively and effectively to problems that are so interconnected and encompassing is a major challenge.

The perceived need to collaborate across sectors has provoked two general responses. On one hand, our own view is that organizational participants in effective cross-sector collaborations typically have to *fail* into their role in the collaboration. In other words, organizations will only collaborate when they cannot get what they want without collaborating (Hudson et al. 1999; Roberts 2001). The second response is to *assume* that collaboration is the Holy Grail of solutions and always best. Often, governments and foundations insist that funding recipients collaborate, even if they have little evidence that it will work (Barringer and Harrison 2000; Ostrower 2005).

The following section presents an organizing framework for categorizing the literature on collaborations, including sections on initial conditions, process dimensions, structural and governance dimensions, contingencies and constraints, outcomes, and accountability issues. Propositions drawn from the literature are offered throughout. The final section summarizes our argument and outlines particular challenges for future research.

A Framework for Understanding Cross-Sector Collaboration

For each category, we discuss the salient dimensions, concepts, and research findings and summarize this material into researchable propositions. Figure 1 illustrates the overall framework. The framework emphasizes simplicity and does not attempt to capture the extent of interaction among or within categories or the nonlinear quality of many collaborative relationships and endeavors.

Initial Conditions

This category focuses on broad themes related to the general environment in which collaborations are embedded, the notion of sector failure as an overlooked precondition for collaboration, and other specific and immediate preconditions affecting the formation of collaborations.

Environmental factors. Work on interorganizational relationships has directly linked certain environmental conditions with the necessity of single organizations joining with others. Most notably, Emery and Trist (1965) argued more than 40 years ago that increased environmental complexity, such that the “ground is in motion,” necessitated linkages among organizations to decrease uncertainty and increase organizational stability. The fundamental need to reduce resource dependencies in the environment (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) or to decrease transaction costs (Williamson

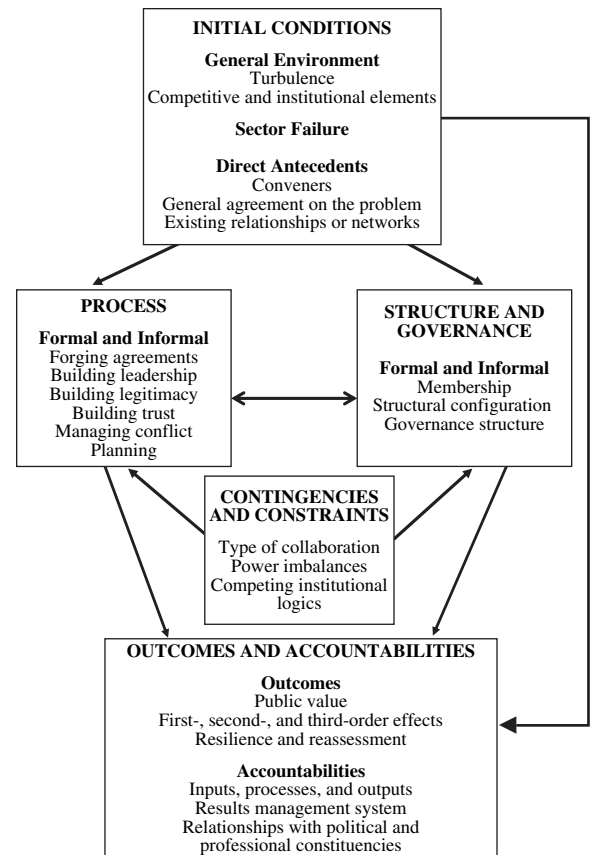


Figure 1 A Framework for Understanding Cross-Sector Collaborations

1975) also propels organizations toward various types of interorganizational relationships.

Collaborations are subject to both competitive and institutional pressures that significantly affect their formation as well as long-term sustainability (Oliver 1990; Sharfman, Gray, and Yan 1991). The institutional environment includes normative, legal, and regulatory elements that organizations must conform to if they are to achieve the legitimacy that is necessary for survival (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). For partnerships focused on public policy or public problem solving, the institutional environment is especially important because it includes broad systems of relationships across public jurisdictional areas (Scott and Meyer 1991) that can directly affect the collaborative purpose, structure, and outcomes. For example, in their study of a public–private partnership in the garment industry, Sharfman, Gray, and Yan (1991) found that driving forces in both the competitive and institutional environments helped stimulate the partnership’s formation but quickly became restraining forces that hindered its sustainability. Institutional forces appeared to be more intractable than competitive forces; for example, a decrease in public funds and changes in welfare payment policies created strong disincentives for the partnership to continue.

Proposition 1: Like all interorganizational relationships, cross-sector collaborations are more likely to form in turbulent environments. In particular, the formation and sustainability of cross-sector collaborations are affected by driving and constraining forces in the competitive and institutional environments.

Sector failure. Though environmental factors can greatly affect the formation of all interorganizational relationships, cross-sector collaborations in particular appear to be influenced by the degree to which single efforts to solve a public problem have failed. We call this *sector failure*, referring to the often-observed situation that single-sector efforts to solve a public problem are tried first and found wanting before cross-sector efforts are attempted. As a society, we rely on the differential strengths of the for-profit, public, and non-profit sectors to overcome the weaknesses or failures of the other sectors and to contribute to the creation of public value. In the United States, the presumption is that we will let markets work until they fail—the case for government intervention is compelling only if they fail—and then try fixing the failure; only as a last resort are direct government provision of goods and services offered (Brandl 1998; Weimer and Vining 2004). On the other hand, Salamon (1995) argues that, historically, the United States has relied first on voluntary action to solve public problems, moving to government solutions (including service provision) only after “philanthropic failure.” In other words, government solutions, including service provision, have historically been the product of either market failure or voluntary action failure. If all three sectors fail, we have a public value failure (Bozeman 2002) that can be addressed in one of several ways: We can live with the problem, engage in symbolic action that does little to address the problem, or mobilize collective action to fashion a cross-sector solution that holds the promise of creating public value. For a fuller elaboration of this argument, see Crosby and Bryson (forthcoming).

Proposition 2: Public policy makers are most likely to try cross-sector collaboration when they believe the separate efforts of different sectors to address a public problem have failed or are likely to fail, and the actual or potential failures cannot be fixed by the sectors acting alone.

Direct antecedents of collaboration formation. In addition to environmental factors and the actuality or likelihood of sector failure, other antecedent conditions, or “linking mechanisms” (Waddock 1986), affect the likelihood of collaboration formation. Three are emphasized here.

First, a brokering organization or a legitimate convenor can facilitate collaboration formation (Gray 1989;

Waddock 1986). Powerful sponsors or brokering organizations draw attention to an important public problem and accord it legitimacy within a stakeholder group (Crosby and Bryson 2005a). Conveners, who are often recognized as boundary-spanning leaders with credibility in multiple arenas touched by the problem (Kastan 2000), can draw together an initial set of stakeholders (Gray 1989). Conveners may be powerful individuals, such as a mayor or chief executive officer, or organizations, such as the United Way or a private foundation.

Second, an important linking mechanism is initial (albeit general) agreement on the problem definition (Gray 1989; Waddock 1986). Agreement can help clarify the stake or interest that an organization has in resolving the social problem and how much the organization needs others to solve the problem. For example, Logsdon (1991) found that both recognized self-interest and acknowledged interdependence are necessary preconditions for collaboration formation.

Third, the role of prior relationships or existing networks is important because it is often through these networks that partners judge the trustworthiness of other partners and the legitimacy of key stakeholders. Scholars call this the *degree of structural embeddedness*: The more partners have interacted in positive ways in the past, the more social mechanisms will enable coordination and safeguard exchanges (Jones, Hesterly, and Borgatti 1997; Ring and Van de Ven 1994). If prior relationships do not exist, then partnerships are likely to emerge more incrementally and begin with small, informal deals that do not require much trust (Gulati 1995; Ring and Van de Ven 1994).

Proposition 3: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when one or more linking mechanisms, such as powerful sponsors, general agreement on the problem, or existing networks, are in place at the time of their initial formation.

Process Components

Researchers have emphasized several aspects of process within collaborations. We focus on six: forging initial agreements, building leadership, building legitimacy, building trust, managing conflict, and planning. The research on process overlaps with some aspects of the research on initial conditions and structure. For example, a key process in collaboration is negotiating formal and informal agreements about the purpose of the collaboration after some initial agreement on problem definition has been reached. By agreeing on the purpose of the collaboration, partners may consider elements of structure, such as roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority.

Forging initial agreement. Informal agreements about the collaboration's composition, mission, and process can work (Donahue 2004), but formal agreements have the advantage of supporting accountability. The need to have different types of initial agreements and to rework agreements is likely to increase as collaborations grow to include more geographically dispersed partners and diverse actors within a problem domain (Kastan 2000).

Elements of formal agreements might include a broad purpose, mandate, commitment of resources, designation of formal leadership, description of members, decision-making structure, and built-in flexibility (such as allowing waivers) for dealing with local conditions and changes (Arino and de la Torre 1998; Crosby and Bryson 2005a; Page 2004). When partners do not completely agree on a shared purpose, they may not be able to agree on next steps (Huxham and Vangen 2005). Studies of collaboration highlight the importance of a drafting process that is highly participatory and involves key stakeholders and implementers (Page 2004). Less powerful partners may have more difficulty than others advocating their interests in this process, although managers of the process can use several techniques to equalize power (Crosby and Bryson 2005a, 2000b).

Proposition 4: The form and content of a collaboration's initial agreements, as well as the processes used to formulate them, affect the outcomes of the collaboration's work.

Building leadership. Collaborations provide multiple roles for formal and informal leaders (see, e.g., Agranoff and McGuire 2003; Crosby and Bryson 2005b). Formal leadership positions might include co-chairs of a steering committee, coordinator of a collaborative, or project director. To be effective, these people need formal and informal authority, vision, long-term commitment to the collaboration, integrity, and relational and political skills (Crosby and Bryson 2005a; Gray 1989; Waddock 1986). Two key leadership roles are *sponsors* and *champions* (Crosby and Bryson 2005a). Sponsors are individuals who have considerable prestige, authority, and access to resources they can use on behalf of the collaboration, even if they are not closely involved in the day-to-day collaborative work. Champions are people who focus intently on keeping the collaboration going and use process skills to help the collaboration accomplish its goals.

The parceling out of formal leadership positions has implications for the level of buy-in among the collaborating partners. If more powerful partners receive plum positions, less powerful partners may require

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other assurances their interests will be taken into account (Alexander et al. 2001). The development of informal leadership throughout a collaboration is especially important because participants often cannot rely on a lot of clear-cut, easily enforced, centralized direction. (For example, lead organizations may not be powerful enough to lead in a traditional sense, or an individual participant may be a formal leader in a partner organization but not play a formal leadership role in the collaboration.) Because leader turnover is to be expected in collaborations that continue for years, collaborating partners have an incentive to prepare successors and build in ways that will sustain the collaboration during changes in leadership (Alexander et al. 2001; Merrill-Sands and Sheridan 1996).

Proposition 5: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they have committed sponsors and effective champions at many levels who provide formal and informal leadership.

Building legitimacy. As institutional theory contends, an organization that seeks to acquire the resources necessary for survival must build legitimacy by making use of structures, processes, and strategies that are appropriate for the institutional environment (Suchman 1995). However, when a newly organized entity is a network of organizations, not a single organization, how does the network gain legitimacy to begin with? A network or collaboration is not automatically regarded by others—insiders or outsiders—as a legitimate organizational entity because it is less understandable and recognizable than more traditional forms, such as bureaucratic structures. In their research, Human and Provan (2000) found that three necessary and distinct dimensions are critical for networks: (1) the legitimacy of the *network as a form* that can attract internal and external support and resources; (2) the legitimacy of the *network as an entity* that is recognizable to both insiders and outsiders; and (3) the legitimacy of the *network as an interaction* that builds trust among members to freely communicate within the network.

Proposition 6: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they establish—with both internal and external stakeholders—the legitimacy of collaboration as a form of organizing, as a separate entity, and as a source of trusted interaction among members.

Building trust. Trusting relationships are often depicted as the essence of collaboration. Paradoxically, they are both the lubricant and the glue—that is, they facilitate the work of collaboration and they hold the

collaboration together. Trust can comprise interpersonal behavior, confidence in organizational competence and expected performance, and a common bond and sense of goodwill (Chen and Graddy 2005). Many researchers realize that collaborations begin with varying degrees of trust but emphasize that trust building is an ongoing requirement for successful collaboration (Huxham and Vangen 2005; Ring and Van de Ven 1994). Collaboration partners build trust by sharing information and knowledge and demonstrating competency, good intentions, and follow-through; conversely, failure to follow through and unilateral action undermine trust (Arino and de la Torre 1998; Merrill-Sands and Sheridan 1996). For example, Huxham and Vangen (2005) emphasize the effectiveness of achieving “small wins” together.

Proposition 7: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when trust-building activities (such as nurturing cross-sectoral and cross-cultural understanding) are continuous.

Managing conflict. Conflict in a collaboration emerges from the differing aims and expectations that partners bring to a collaboration, from differing views about strategies and tactics, and from attempts to protect or magnify a partner’s control over the collaboration’s work or outcomes. The mission of the collaboration may also affect levels of conflict. For example, if the collaboration is formed mainly to plan for systems change rather than to agree on how to deliver a service, the level of conflict may be higher (Bolland and Wilson 1994). Furthermore, Gray (1996) has found that power issues, as prime sources of conflict, vary by phases. As groups try to agree on the nature of the problem that concerns them, issues are likely to revolve around convening and inclusion; as they debate the direction they should take in dealing with the problem, issues concern the shaping of the collaboration agenda and sharing of relevant information; once the implementation is under way, power issues revolve around the exercise of influence, action authorization, and resource control (Gray 1996).

Conflict may be exacerbated when the collaborating organizations differ in status (either because of size, funding, or reputation). Less powerful partners will need assurance that their interests are being taken into account, or else their involvement and commitment cannot be counted on (Merrill-Sands and Sheridan 1996). It may be wise for collaborators to use their resources to put all participants on a more equal footing—for example, by educating participants about the concepts, information, and tools that are key to its work (Keast et al. 2004).

Proposition 8: Because conflict is common in partnerships, cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when partners use

resources and tactics to equalize power and manage conflict effectively.

Planning. Two different approaches to planning in collaborative settings are evident in the literature. One approach emphasizes deliberate, formal planning as a precursor to success. Careful articulation of mission, goals, and objectives; roles and responsibilities; and phases or steps, including implementation, are often cited as an important key to success (Mattessich, Murray-Close, and Monsey 2001). This approach—what Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (1998) call “deliberate” and McCaskey (1974) calls “planning from goals”—appears to be most likely when collaboration is mandated. The second approach argues that a clear understanding of mission, goals, roles, and action steps is more likely to emerge over time as conversations involving individuals, groups, and organizations grow to encompass a broader network of involved or affected parties (Huxham and Vangen 2005; Winer and Ray 1994). This approach—what Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (1998) call “emergent” and McCaskey (1974) calls “planning from thrust”—seems most likely when collaboration is not mandated. Clearly, careful attention to stakeholders is crucial for successful planning regardless of approach (Bryson 2004; Page 2004). The process should also be used to build trust and the capacity to manage conflict effectively (Bryson 2004). Planning is more likely to be successful to the extent that it builds on the distinctive competencies of the collaborators, including those arising from the sectors in which they operate (Bryson, Ackermann, and Eden, forthcoming).

Proposition 9: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they combine deliberate and emergent planning; deliberate planning is emphasized more in mandated collaborations and emergent planning is emphasized more in nonmandated collaborations.

Proposition 10: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when their planning makes use of stakeholder analyses, emphasizes responsiveness to key stakeholders, uses the process to build trust and the capacity to manage conflict, and builds on distinctive competencies of the collaborators.

Structure and Governance

Structure is a highly developed concept in organization theory and typically includes elements such as goals, specialization of tasks and division of labor, rules and standard operating procedures, and designated authority relationships. Structure concerns vertical and horizontal components. The need for organizations to both differentiate and integrate across components is a common structural tension (see, e.g., Bolman and Deal 2003; Scott 1987). Within the

collaboration literature, structure has not attracted the same degree of interest, in part because researchers have emphasized *organizing* as a process over *organization*, meaning more formal structural arrangements. Indeed, structure and process often interact in collaborations. For example, building leadership is a process that may produce informal leadership activities, as well as formally designated authority positions. In this section, we will focus on research that recognizes structure in relation to other important elements of the collaboration context and links structural components to overall effectiveness.

Structure in context. Collaboration scholars are quick to point out that structure is influenced by context, including system stability and the degree of resource munificence (Human and Provan 1997; Provan and Milward 1995; Sharfman, Gray, and Yan 1991; Van de Ven and Walker 1984). For example, changes in government policy often destabilize systems or alter resources in the policy fields in which networks are embedded and hence rearrange the structure of ties among members (Sharfman, Gray, and Yan 1991; Stone 2004).

The strategic purpose of the network or partnership also appears to affect structure. Agranoff and McGuire (1998), in examining local economic development networks, make an important distinction between the strategic purposes of those networks, delineating policy-making and strategy-making networks from resource-exchange and project-based networks. They find that differences in purpose are related to the composition and size of networks.

Furthermore, structures are likely to be dynamic because of the ambiguity and complexity that is inherent in collaborations (Huxham and Vangen 2005). Ambiguity arises from many features of membership, including perceptions of who belongs to the collaboration, what these members actually represent (themselves, their organizations, or a particular identity group), and turnover among members. Membership turnover may be especially important when powerful players such as top elected officials leave, join, or alter their level of involvement in the collaboration (Crosby and Bryson 2005a; Kasten 2000). This ambiguity is further exacerbated by hierarchies of collaborations in which individuals and organizations are often members of multiple and overlapping partnerships. For self-governing partnerships (Provan and Kenis 2005) in particular, structures may begin to blur among these interrelated, multiple partnerships.

Proposition 11: Collaborative structure is influenced by environmental factors such as system stability and the collaboration's strategic purpose.

Proposition 12: Collaborative structure is likely to change over time because of ambiguity of membership and complexity in local environments.

Structural configurations. Two important studies concern the extent to which structural configurations relate to the overall effectiveness of networks in the adult mental health policy field (Provan and Milward 1995; Provan and Sebastian 1998). Here, *effectiveness* is defined as the achievement of desired outcomes from the client's perspective. The first study found that networks centralized around a lead organization were more effective than dense, strongly tied networks, raising questions about the effectiveness of "fully integrated" networks (Provan and Milward 1995). The second study highlighted the importance of cliques within networks in which a dense integration of services takes place at the client level among a few network members (Provan and Sebastian 1998).

Proposition 13: Collaboration structure and the nature of the tasks performed at the client level are likely to influence a collaboration's overall effectiveness.

Governance. An elusive question is what constitutes governance for networks or collaborations. If we assume that networks are horizontal systems, then a hierarchical concept such as governance is troublesome (Provan and Kenis 2005). However, governance as a set of coordinating and monitoring activities must occur in order for collaborations to survive. Some argue that network governance emerges through frequent, structured exchanges that develop network level values, norms, and trust, enabling social mechanisms to coordinate and monitor behavior (Jones, Hesterly, and Borgatti 1997; Ostrom 1990).

In addition to social mechanisms, the choice among types of governance structure is likely to influence network effectiveness (Provan and Kenis 2005). These types include (1) self-governing structures in which decision making occurs through regular meetings of members or through informal, frequent interactions; (2) a lead organization that provides major decision-making and coordinating activities; and (3) a network administrative organization, which is a separate organization formed to oversee network affairs. Contingencies such as network size and the degrees of trust among members influence which form is appropriate, and managerial choice is critical for matching the best form to conditions.

Proposition 14: Formal and informal governing mechanisms are likely to influence collaboration effectiveness.

Contingencies and Constraints Affecting Process, Structure, and Governance

In this section, we draw attention to three factors that have been shown in the research or in theory to have an influence on a collaboration's process, structure, and governance, as well as its overall sustainability. These factors include the type of collaboration, power imbalances among members, and competing institutional logics within the collaboration.

Collaboration type. Important differences exist among partnerships formed for system-level planning (identifying and defining system problems and solutions), administrative activities (involving resource transactions, such as staff sharing), or service delivery (such as client referral agreements) (Bolland and Wilson 1994). Service delivery partnerships are more frequent and easier to sustain than those aimed at planning for systems change because system-level planning activities, like agenda setting in the public policy process, involve negotiating tough questions about the problem and creative solutions (Bolland and Wilson 1994). Similarly, Alter (1990) found that partnerships involving administrative-level managers are more prone to conflict, whereas those coordinating service delivery among line staff experience greater cooperation.

Proposition 15: Collaborations involving system-level planning activities are likely to involve the most negotiation, followed by collaborations focused on administrative-level partnerships and service delivery partnerships.

Power imbalances. Huxham and Vangen (2005) identify power imbalances among collaborating partners as a source of mistrust and therefore a threat to effective collaboration. Power imbalances become most significant when partners have difficulty agreeing on a shared purpose. In addition, over time, a collaboration is likely to experience both exogenous and endogenous shocks that affect relations among partners, resources, and even the purpose of the collaboration. Once-reliable funding streams may dry up and others may flow. The demographics of the collaboration's clientele may change. The collaboration may be caught up in scandals involving one or more members or in partisan political shifts. Some members may drop out and new ones join. Tactics such as strategic planning and scenario development can help collaborations anticipate and shape future developments and manage shifts in power effectively (Bryson 2004).

Proposition 16: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they build in resources and tactics for dealing with power imbalances and shocks.

Competing institutional logics. Building legitimacy, leadership, and trust, along with managing conflict, becomes more complex in multisector collaborations because of the likelihood that members represent and enact competing institutional logics. Institutional logics are macro-level historical patterns, both symbolic and material, that establish the formal and informal rules of the game and provide interpretations of action (Friedland and Alford 1991; Thornton and Ocasio 1999). For example, the logic of the market includes the material practices of accumulation and ownership, where competition and efficiency are part of its symbolic system. The logic of the bureaucratic state concerns the regulation of human activity and includes legal and bureaucratic hierarchies, rules, and standard operating procedures. The logic of democracy emphasizes popular control over human activity and citizen participation with symbolic supporting systems such as voluntary association (Friedland and Alford 1991). Logics influence organization-level behavior by focusing the attention of decision makers on issues, outcomes, and sources of power that are consistent with the dominant logic and away from those that are inconsistent with that logic (Thornton and Ocasio 1999).

Logics compete because actions, processes, norms, and structures that are seen as legitimate from the vantage point of one institutional logic may be seen as less legitimate or even illegitimate from the perspective of another logic. For example, the contradictions embedded in a cross-sector collaboration might include the extent to which efficiency (the market), adherence to bureaucratic rules (the state), or inclusive participation (democracy) is regarded by collaboration members as essential to the design of the collaboration's process, structure, governance, and desired outcomes.

Logics compete because actions, processes, norms, and structures that are seen as legitimate from the vantage point of one institutional logic may be seen as less legitimate or even illegitimate from the perspective of another logic.

Proposition 17: Competing institutional logics are likely within cross-sector collaborations and may significantly influence the extent to which collaborations can agree on essential elements of process, structure, governance, and desired outcomes.

Outcomes

This section discusses the outcomes of cross-sector collaboration in three categories: public value; first-, second-, and third-order effects; and resilience and reassessment.

Public value. We argue that the point of creating and sustaining cross-sector collaboratives ought to be the production of “public value” (Moore 1995) that cannot be created by single sectors alone. Public value in cross-sector collaborations is most likely created by making use of each sector’s characteristic strengths while also finding ways to minimize, overcome, or compensate for each sector’s characteristic weaknesses. Playing to the strengths of the different sectors seems logically linked to managing costs effectively and attending to diverse human needs and aspirations.

Especially valuable is the creation of a “regime of mutual gain” that produces widespread, lasting public benefits at reasonable cost and taps people’s deepest interest in and desire for a better world (Crosby and Bryson 2005a, 23). By *regime*, we mean “sets of implicit or explicit principles, rules, norms, and decision-making procedures around which actors’ expectations converge in a given area” (Krasner 1983, 2). We suspect that to be lasting, such regimes must effectively link individuals’ and organizations’ self-interests and sector capabilities with the common good.

Proposition 18: Cross-sector collaborations are most likely to create public value when they build on individuals’ and organizations’ self-interests and each sector’s characteristic strengths while finding ways to minimize, overcome, or compensate for each sector’s characteristic weaknesses.

First-, second-, and third-order effects. Innes and Booher (1999) argue that collaborative planning efforts have first-, second-, and third-order positive effects. First-order effects are immediately discernible as a direct result of the collaboration process. These include the creation of social, intellectual, and political capital; high-quality agreements; and innovative strategies. Second-order effects are likely to occur when collaboration is well under way, or else they may occur outside the formal boundaries of the effort. These might include new partnerships, coordination and joint action, joint learning that extends beyond the collaborative, implementation of agreements, changes in practices, and changes in perceptions. Finally, third-order effects may not be evident until some time later. These might include, for example, new collaborations; more co-evolution and less destructive conflict among partners; results on the ground, such as the adaptation of services, resources, cities, and regions; new institutions; new norms and social heuristics for addressing public problems; and new modes of discourse. Gray (2000) offers a different but complementary list of outcomes: achieving goals, generating social capital, creating shared meaning, increasing interaction, and shifting the power distribution.

Proposition 19: Cross-sector collaborations are most likely to create public value when they produce positive first-, second-, and third-order effects.

Resilience and reassessment. Collaborating partners need to be able to regroup and reframe after failure (Crosby and Bryson 2005a). Obviously, failure to achieve desired outcomes can erode support for collaboration, but successes can cause supporters to forget the need to sustain the collaboration. If big wins are not possible, the collaboration should orchestrate small wins that accomplish its strategies. Whether big or small, the wins should be publicized. After a regime of mutual gain has been fully implemented, leaders should assess whether it should be continued, modified, or terminated (Crosby and Bryson 2005a).

Proposition 20: Cross-sector collaborations are most likely to create public value when they are resilient and engage in regular reassessments.

Accountability

Accountability is a particularly complex issue for collaborations because it is not often clear whom the collaborative is accountable to and for what. Relationships between the collaborative and home organizations may be abstruse, and multiple stakeholder perceptions typically compete in defining results and outcomes.

Accountability may pertain to inputs, process, or outcomes. Donahue (2004) suggests three general criteria by which to judge the success of cross-sector collaborations: (1) simply existing, (2) meeting the organizational imperatives of the partners, and (3) outperforming feasible alternative arrangements for creating public value. Page argues, “An accountable collaborative . . . needs a measurement system to document its results and how those results change over time. It also needs a ‘managing for results’ system that links the data it measures to specific actors and interventions, that provides critical performance information to its stakeholders, and that uses the information to improve its operations” (2004, 592). To implement such a system, collaborating partners need “strong relationships with key political and professional constituencies as well as the capacity to measure results and use the information strategically to improve performance” (Page 2004, 593). Of course, accountability may not always be clear-cut—for example, when a collaborative works with other collaboratives. Additionally, collaborating organizations may have their own accountability frameworks that conflict with the collaboration’s accountability approach (Sullivan, Barnes, and Matka 2002).

Proposition 21: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to be successful when they have an accountability system that tracks inputs, processes, and outcomes; use a variety of methods for gathering, interpreting, and using data; and use a results management system that is built on strong relationships with key political and professional constituencies.

Summary and Research Agenda

As the propositions presented here indicate, cross-sector collaborations are difficult to create and even more difficult to sustain because so much must be in place and work well for them to succeed. The challenge of designing and implementing effective cross-sector collaboration is daunting—a conclusion that leads to a perhaps unwelcome summary proposition:

Proposition 22: The normal expectation ought to be that success will be very difficult to achieve in cross-sector collaborations.

Success depends on leadership of many different kinds. We have highlighted leadership roles such as sponsors, champions, boundary spanners, and facilitators. But Huxham and Vangen argue that leadership—in the sense of what “makes things happen” (2005, 202–12)—also occurs through structures and processes. Therefore, the leadership challenge in cross-sector collaboration may be viewed as a challenge of aligning initial conditions, processes, structures, governance, contingencies and constraints, outcomes, and accountabilities such that good things happen in a sustained way over time—indeed, so that public value can be created.

To say that cross-sector collaborations are complex entities that defy easy generalization is an understatement. Studies of interorganizational collaboration have proliferated, producing rich material for those who seek to understand the relationships among the initial conditions, processes, structures, governance, contingencies and constraints, outcomes, and accountabilities of collaborations. Yet few, if any, research studies have gathered data on all of these in a way that could easily guide research or help policy makers in government, business, nonprofits, the media, or communities understand when cross-sector collaborations make sense, let alone how to design and implement them. We have identified, in summary fashion, 22 propositions related to collaboration outcomes and success. The variables referenced in these propositions may lead directly to success, but they are more likely to be interrelated with, moderated by, or mediated by other variables; embedded in fairly complicated feedback loops; and change over time. For example, it is likely that structural variables such as the degree of network centralization relate to network effectiveness. However, structural variables appear to be moderated or mediated by environmental factors and may or may not be

influenced by (or influence) critical process variables, which have also been shown to influence effectiveness.

Part of the intellectual challenge of studying cross-sector collaboration is blending multiple theoretical and research perspectives (Rethemeyer 2005). Many public management scholars view these collaborations as “networks,” use network theory to ground research questions, and situate their research within recent work on policy implementation tools. This perspective offers a rich theoretical base focused on structural variables, but it tends to disregard three critical components of cross-sector collaboration: (1) an appreciation of the uniqueness and differential strengths and weaknesses of governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and communities; (2) ongoing process dimensions, including leadership broadly defined; and (3) the dynamic nature of collaborative development. On the other hand, scholars who focus on collaborations as collective action solutions to public problems offer less theoretically grounded research but rich material on process dimensions, sources of ambiguity within collaborative work, and findings that can more easily be translated to the world of practice. Scholars from each perspective rarely use research from the other perspective and thus consistently miss opportunities to explore more facets of collaboration. Future research must bridge these two perspectives to begin to capture the complexity that is inherent in cross-sector collaborations.

Furthermore, a quick scan of our propositions shows a mix of environmental factors that managers have little control over and strategic choices that managers may have some control over. Support from the institutional environment is critical for legitimizing cross-sector collaboration but is not easily controlled by local managers. On the other hand, the choice of governing mechanism, stakeholder participants, planning processes, and conflict management techniques, for example, are likely within the purview of managerial choice. We have attempted to demonstrate in this article that research must pay attention to the external environment in which cross-sector collaborations are embedded. Many of these components represent strategic contingencies that influence but do not necessarily determine managerial or collaborative action. Leaders and managers, constrained though they may be, are likely to produce independent effects on collaboration success (Agranoff and McGuire 2003).

The research challenges involved in studying cross-sector collaborations and providing practical, research-based guidance to policy makers regarding the design and implementation of cross-sector collaborations are clearly substantial. But the challenges must be met or else effectively addressing the major public problems that confront us will be unlikely, and some of the most important opportunities for creating public value will be missed.

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