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Relationships and Collaboration among Associations

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A. Introduction

The collaboration among voluntary associations (VAs), as well as among non-profit agencies (NPAs), with different external organizations as actors is part of our social and institutional landscape (Smith 2015a, 2015b). This phenomenon is not new, but what has changed in recent decades is the growing presence of such collaboration all over the world. This chapter focuses on collaboration especially between and among larger paid-staff VAs, often national and other supra-local associations (see Handbook Chapter 33) and also by NPAs. There is little or no attention to collaboration involving smaller, local associations, especially to the vast majority of VAs that are all-volunteer grassroots associations (GAs; see Handbook Chapter 32). This approach results partly from the relative lack of research on collaboration at the level of GAs, but also from the specialized expertise of the authors.

As for every other complex social phenomenon, definitions, analytical frames, and interpretations are quite open and subject to debate in academia and among practitioners. In this chapter, we address and review the definitions of collaboration, its dynamics as well as the historical background leading to the present collaborative landscape. Further on, the chapter focuses on three key issues identified: seeing collaboration as a dynamic process, examining the kinds of leadership and managerial challenges involved, and discussing various organizational arrangements of the different kinds of actors involved. Finally, the chapter summarizes usable knowledge extracted from previous discussions and proposes future research needed on collaboration.

B. Definitions

This chapter accepts the set of definitions in the Handbook Appendix.

Several authors have defined the collaborative work of VAs and NPAs differently, but what is common in all of them is that they see the collaboration

as an exchange relationship between one VA or NPA and one or more other organizations of the same or a different societal sector (nonprofit, business, government). The collaboration between organizations could be formally established (e.g., through contracts) or not, with equal or unequal benefits (whether material or not) to all partners involved, and is usually seen as a process with graduated levels of collaborative activities (e.g., Klonglan et al. 1973:340). In this common work there can be some kind of division of labor, shared activities, or delegation.

The articulation between VAs/NPAs and other actors has been called *Collaboration* (Austin 2000; Guo and Acar 2005), *Partnerships* (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff 2002, Brinkerhoff 2010), *Coalitions*, *Networks*, *Movements* (Fox 2010), *Strategic Alliances* (Yankey and Willem 2010), and so on. These different terms usually tend to overlap. The term *collaboration* has been used especially in the joint work between the nonprofit and business sector. For example, Mattessich et al. (2001:4) understand collaboration as the relationships involving two or more organizations from the business and nonprofit sectors to achieve their own objectives that are common to both of them. In this view, “collaborative relationships can be further categorized into relationships that are philanthropic, transactional, or integrative” (Austin and Ebrahim 2010:471).

Beyond the term used for exchange relationships among VAs/NPAs or between VAs/NPAs and organizations from other sectors, the focus here is not on the occasional relationship but on (at least some degree of) institutionalization of that collaborative articulation.

If the collaboration among several VAs/NPAs becomes institutionalized, it leads to the creation of some sort of *umbrella organization*, defined by Young (2001:290) as “nonprofit associations whose members are themselves nonprofit organizations.” However, this broad definition needs a further focus, as Melville (2010:1577) suggests: “The most common terms used to describe umbrella organizations are *intermediaries*, *federations*, *advocacy coalitions*, *loose associations*, *ad hoc coalitions* and *resource organizations* [emphasis added].” In spite of this ambiguity, umbrella organizations usually take some form of public or external representation of their members on whatever issue or cause that the members decide to delegate to their umbrella. Young and Faulk (2010:660) define *federations* very much in the same way, taking the definition of Selsky (1998:286) as “associations in which the affiliates are organizations rather than individuals.”

Then, as part of this *umbrella* universe, and according to Fox (2010:486), *coalitions* “involve collective action” and “collaboration between actors that remain distinct in some way.” On the other hand, *networks* (ibid:487) “involve shared goals among their participants,” but “they do not necessarily involve joint action.” And finally, *movements* “imply a high degree of shared collective

identity, for example, yet neither networks nor coalitions necessarily involve significant horizontal exchange” (ibid:487).

Networks involve a set of actors or *clusters* of organizations that share common goals with interdependent but autonomous members. Overall, the group of entities within a network tends to promote collective action of some sort, as each one member alone cannot handle the task ahead. A distinction can be made analytically within networks, forums, and platforms. *Forums* can be understood as communities of organizations grouped together with the goal of creating a common space to reflect on shared issues and to exchange experiences, learning, and information. In turn, *platforms* are sometimes referred to as structures that serve to achieve some purpose with a program and collective action. In this sense platforms are sometimes called *coalitions*.

In addition, one form that institutionalized collaborative relationships can take is the *strategic alliance*. The term usually refers to regular, significant, and relevant exchange relationships between VAs/NPAs and private actors that create important benefits to the members. Such alliances are defined as “capacity building mechanisms that enable partnering entities to achieve results exceeding those that might be attained on the basis of each participant’s individual resources” (Yankey and Willen 2005:257).

On the other hand, when the collaboration is referred to as joint work between VAs/NPAs and private or, especially, government actors, the term used frequently is *partnership*. A partnership can be defined as a

relationship among diverse actors, based on mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labor based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. This relationship results in mutual influence, with a careful balance between synergy and respective autonomy, which incorporates mutual respect, equal participation in decisionmaking, mutual accountability, and transparency. (Brinkerhoff 2002:14)

More narrowly, a partnership can also be defined as an arrangement “between a public sector organization and any organization outside the public sector” (Bovaird 2004:200). Two key features have been noted in partnerships: they have *organizational identity* – a goal or outcome sought with the articulation and that does not yet exist in each of the organizations – and *mutuality* – a sense of perceived equality between the partners, despite their differences (Brinkerhoff 2010:1135).

As can be seen, there are two common dimensions in all the definitions: the first is the *why* of the collaborations among organizations and the answer tends to be teleological. Collaborations are processes that tend to structure a mechanism that better serves a set of goals that each organization cannot fulfill on

their own (e.g., to achieve their own objectives or objectives common to both of them; Mattessich et al 2001) or to “enable partnering entities to achieve results exceeding those that might be attained on the basis of each participant’s individual resources” (Yankey and Willen 2005). Secondly, signaling *what it takes* to sustain the relationship, which in turn is broken down into two factors: one factor is *structural* – to generate mechanisms and conditions to sustain the collaboration (e.g., with “mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the most rational division of labor based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner”; Brinkerhoff 2010:1135). The second factor is *intangible* – the generation of a common culture between the associates through the developing of a “shared collective identity” (Fox 2010), an “organizational identity” (Brinkerhoff 2002).

C. Historical background

Research on interorganizational relations (IOR), including collaboration, goes back only about six decades, not centuries. Scholars in organization studies in the United States only began to focus on IOR in the 1950s. For instance, Thompson and McEwen (1958) developed an IOR typology, with competition being common for the outputs of third parties, but also discerning three types of cooperative relationships: bargaining, cooptation, and coalition formation, with the latter being the focus of this chapter. Looked at more broadly, any given organization can usually be seen in the context of other similar organizations, sometimes referred to as the *organization-set* (Blau and Scott 1962:195–196; see also Caplow 1964:chapter 6; Evan 1966). The somewhat broader concept of the *interorganizational field* has received more attention and use subsequently (Warren 1967), referring to all organizations external to a given organization, as the organizational environment in which it is embedded.

The famous early monograph/text on organizations by March and Simon (1958:131–135) treated relationships with other organizations only very briefly, in the context of inter-organizational conflict. Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) wrote an influential early monograph on IOR. By the date of publication of the first edition of Hall’s (1972) literature review/text book on organizations, the environment of organizations had become a standard chapter and topic in texts on organization studies. By the mid to late 1970s, review articles and monographs began to appear on IOR (Aldrich 1979; Aldrich and Pfeffer 1976; Meyer and Associates 1978; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978).

Researchers in organization studies *per se*, however, paid virtually no attention to VAs/NPAs then, as now (e.g., Hatch 2012; Tolbert and Hall 2008). But researchers interested specifically in VAs/NPAs began to study IOR at about the same time, in the 1960s. They were possibly influenced by the IOR theory being developed by organization studies researchers, but were clearly also influenced

by what they saw empirically in looking at VAs/NPAs and their actual IOR (e.g., Black and Kase 1963; Dynes and Quarantelli 1969; Levine, White, and Paul. 1963). Some early examples of research focused on IOR for VAs are Dillman (1966), Klonglan and Yep (1972), and Klonglan, Yep, Mulford, and Dillman (1973).

Turning to the history of the phenomena of organizational collaboration itself, since the last years of the 20th century there has been an ever-increasing trend of public, business, and nonprofit organizations working collaboratively. Organizations that used to embrace all their activities within their borders started to identify their core activity, and the rest of the process was outsourced in a network of providers, suppliers, and so on. The complexity of this environment forced organizations to focus on what they really had as a competitive advantage. In this sense, the collaborative work analyzed here is not an exclusive feature, issue, or strategy of VAs/NPAs: Collaboration has been a common response of organizations in all three sectors to environmental changes.

The standard paradigm of isolated large organizations was slowly abandoned in the 1970s, and *thin* organizations working collaboratively started to appear in the social, political and economic realms. The new, networked, organizational world was a result of radical technological changes that increased the speed of processing information, cheaper flows of exchanges and communication, changing habits of consumers and citizens, and so on. These structural forces propelled the collaboration processes among organizations, including VA. The complexity of the social arena led VAs/NPAs, business firms, and government agencies to rule out playing *solo*.

Amidst this trend of organizational outsourcing and networking in the 1970s, governments have relinquished some services and activities to businesses and VAs/NPAs. And in turn, businesses started to deepen their associations with VAs/NPAs in the process of handling their activities in the even more complex social realm, more attentive to the relationship between the firm and their stakeholders. Thus, the nonprofit sector started to witness an increasing role in the social services arena (Salamon 1994). As the literature indicates (Austin and Ebrahim 2010:469; Brinkerhoff 2010:1136), the density of relationships between VAs/NPAs and different organizational actors has risen particularly since 1990s.

In sum, the emphasis has shifted from control and centralization in one big, self-sufficient, organization to a greater effort of coordination among *thin* partners. The development of relationships between actors in the main societal sectors seems to be the norm for dealing with the complexity of the contemporary environment. Briefly, we face a *hybrid* organizational landscape in VA/NPA dynamics today, and

the lines delimiting the sector have frequently been subject to challenge and revision, as funds and responsibilities have shifted back and forth among business, nonprofit and government organizations. Reaching consensus on the very definition of nonprofit and voluntary sector is difficult because many of the core features and activities of nonprofits increasingly overlap and compete with those of business and government.

(Frumkin 2002:1)

The *blurring* boundaries among the sectors (Brandsen 2010:839), is an ever more present feature in the dynamics of the VA, and is both the cause and the consequence of the collaborative efforts (see Handbook Chapter 8).

D. Key issues

In this section we first consider the larger societal context of collaboration by VAs/NPAs, elaborating on the broad issues of pluralism-corporatism-authoritarianism in Handbook Chapter 46. Then we will analyze collaboration as a *dynamic process*. Later we will see how, all along this way, several *managerial challenges* arise and how they were treated under various *organizational arrangements*. Penultimately, we will examine how this dynamic process differs according to the *actors* involved in the collaborations.

And finally, we will focus briefly on collaboration in local, all-volunteer VAs, as grassroots associations (GAs), on which little research exists.

1. Broader societal context of VA/NPA collaboration

Comparative studies of new governance spaces “where governments invite non-governmental and private sector actors to participate” (Miller et al. 2009:75) have provided an opportunity to differentiate among and compare different regimes of civil society (see also Handbook Chapters 45–47). This relates to Salamon and Anheier’s (1998) stress on the need to locate non-governmental action in the context of the wider political economy and social contexts: the degree of political centralization, government policies toward the non-governmental sector, the existence of a facilitative legal framework, and the degree of nation-state development.

The *strength* of any civil society or nonprofit sector, often measured by the level of associational activity, is connected to the depth of the democratic system and cultures that value and tolerate difference, acknowledge historical legacies from previous political regimes, and have an enabling legal and policy framework. Such theoretical considerations must be seen also in the larger context of societal regime structure in terms of pluralism, corporatism, and authoritarianism, as discussed in Handbook Chapter 7.

Other critical factors that optimize the nature of the nonprofit sector/ civil society and the relationships between it and the state or market include the following:

- A level of economic development sufficient to produce surpluses from
- which basic collective needs can be met and that ensure relative freedom from aid-dependent relationships.
- A political culture that places a high value on public goods and recognizes collective inter-dependencies.
- A state with sufficient capacity to fulfill its coordination function, while
- finding an acceptable balance between centralized and de-decentralized political systems.
- Multiple political parties with strong and competing value positions and a capacity to value divergent viewpoints.
- A clear distinction between formal political party organizations and other nonprofits/VAs/NPAs/CSOs (civil society organizations).
- An educated, urbanized, cosmopolitan, and autonomous middle class,
- comfortable in its relationships with authority and whose value is
- recognized by the state.
- Strong relationships between the different segments of the nonprofit sector/civil society, in which proactive labor union and other social movements can nourish and support non-governmental/nonprofit organizations, community-based organizations, and networks (Miller et al. 2009:84).

Following this argumentation, Miller et al. (2009) suggest a typology of civil society (CS) seen as a complex interplay between actors and between the different societies and the external social environment:

- (a) A *contentious* CS, that emerges in fragile democratic states with a history of colonialism and authoritarianism and still subject to frequent, sometimes violent, regime change, in which the military continue to play a prominent role, matched by weak often corrupt political parties sometimes propped-up by foreign governments, high levels of poverty and inequality, with weak economies dependent on external loans and international agencies (Miller et al. 2009:86).
- (b) A *manipulated* CS, characteristic for some post-totalitarian, *transitional* states that are taking steps to join the *global community* of democracies and are expected to demonstrate an active commitment to developing civil society. This is a CS that has not emerged organically, but rather has been created and shaped by the state and other external actors. Political parties in such contexts tend to be weak, unstable, and unreliable. The state continues to exert centralized control, [and] is likely to be ill-equipped to

respond to the contemporary challenges of social, economic, and political life. In its embrace of “democracy,” [the state] must create the appearance of devolving power. As such, it is rather a defended state that resists the postmodern world, [still] seeking to preserve outmoded mechanisms of governing (Miller et al. 2009:87).

In manipulated CS, citizens tend to lack the confidence for self-organization and the creation of a sustainable politics. The CS lacks authenticity in political action and a secure inner-self, but rather possesses a distorted relationship to authority, the *knowing other* (Petrov 2009). This absence of authenticity produces a vulnerability to the agendas of others.

While previously the state was the coordinating agency in authoritarian regimes, it is now the economy that has acquired this function, with the appearance of an irresistible force for citizens long denied access to consumer goods. Yet the market economy usually remains weak and underdeveloped, unable to deliver the promised prosperity by acting as entrepreneurs or consumers. Although the state remains trapped in outmoded forms of politics, it is unable to respond to such economic expectations or to adopt a political model more appropriate to a market economy (Miller et al. 2009:87).

Nonprofits/VAs/NPAs/CSOs may proliferate to give the appearance of independence and autonomy, but are more likely to be either covert state bodies (GONGOS) or dependent on external bodies for funding and direction and thus largely ignored by the state. The subsequent emergence of new VAs/NPAs is closely monitored, and various strategies are deployed by the state to ensure that their behavior is compliant, such that they are as influential as they are allowed to be (Miller et al. 2009:88).

(c) A *disciplined* CS is considered to be a self-governing one, where one might expect to find a strong state and market economy with multiple, long-standing, broad-based political parties representing competing political perspectives, working within deeply embedded political, social, and cultural rules and institutions. This situation is usually found in *old* social democracies with established citizen, political, and social (civil) rights, a mature technologically advanced economy with high participation rates, well-established machinery for industrial relations, and producing enough surplus to provide a range of universal social-material goods and services to meet basic needs. The state is the primary agency of coordination, whilst citizens are well versed in self-organizing and VAs/NPAs are prevalent and widespread. Dissent is a feature of society, and is valued as such, but it is a dissent that is generally expressed “responsibly” (Miller et al. 2009:88).

- (d) A *competitive* and interest oriented CS is one in which there is an abundant associational life but few shared goals, and only a weak sense of common identity. This “affiliative drive” is merely an extension of the pursuit of individualism in a more organized way. The market is the key agency of coordination and provider of the means to need satisfaction in which citizens compete as best they can (Miller et al. 2009:89).
- (e) A *repressed* CS is a feature of powerful centralized states that continue to exercise a pervasive grip on economic, social, and political life, ensuring that only those loyal to the regime occupy key strategic positions of command and control.... There remains a strong and visible military presence loyal to the regime. Citizens have few rights and live under constant fear. Attempts to establish citizen-based organizations [VAs/NPAs] function at the clandestine level, often as informal networks rather than traditional organizations (Miller et al. 2009:90).

Such studies differentiate also a civil society *in-the-mind*, conceived as something to which civil society actors aspire and which influences the way they evaluate the civil societies they are part of.

Collaboration between CS/VA/NPA actors and the state in the context of the manipulated civil society would leave participants vulnerable (Petrov 2012) to their own un-authenticity, dependency, and mistrust of authority – their own, that of the government, and the other social actors. Some argue that a culture of de-authorization (Petrov 2012) has taken over large areas of the policy process of EU funded social transformation in such contexts (e.g., in Bulgaria).

2. Collaboration stages, motivations, and conditioning factors

When defining collaboration as a process, one can recognize a continuum of *closeness* between the participant organizations along a series of dimensions. Brinkerhoff (2010:1135–1136) uses a dimension in this process, ranging from *contracting* – when one organization purchases the skills, and so on of another organization – to *extension* – one organization directs and the other has some small room to maneuver – and finally *co-optation* and *gradual absorption* – “when organizations appear to mutually agree on ends and means, and/or an organization is convinced that it is in its interest to follow the dominant organization’s lead” (Ibid.). This kind of relationship usually involves one of the actors taking a pre-eminent role.

In the same fashion, involving the relationships between government and VAs/NPAs, Najam (2000:375) also describes the articulation between partners in a similar way, proposing

a four-C framework based on institutional interests and preferences for policy ends and means: cooperation in the case of similar ends and similar

means, confrontation in the case of dissimilar ends and dissimilar means, complementarity in the case of similar ends but dissimilar means, and co-optation in the case of dissimilar ends but similar means.

This spectrum is also seen by other authors, but while reflecting on the articulation between a VA and a company: for example, Austin (2000:72) proposed a *Collaboration Continuum*, with three typical stages – philanthropic, transactional, and integrative. This framework has been also applied to study social alliances in Latin America (Austin et al. 2004) and collaborations between VAs and NPAs (Vernis et al. 2004).

Fox (2010:487) labels the stages in the articulation process of VA in terms of the organizational arrangements achieved as *networks*, *coalitions*, and *movements*. In turn, Bradach (2003) refers as well to the intensity of the collaboration as a result of the process of articulation in networks, differentiating in a more general sense between *tight* and *loose*.

Collaborative processes are not exempt from power negotiations or even conflict among the actors. Thus, when there is division of labor between actors, the resources wielded by those actors are an independent variable to consider, as those resources have an impact on the development of the relationship. As Tzasis (2009:5) points out,

A balance of dependence and autonomy is needed for initiating interorganizational relationships. These relationships are stabilized at the interpersonal level through positive attributes (attitudes, perceptions, and trust) and interpersonal ties of individuals representing their organizations. Sources of conflict, such as value differences, divergent goals, and personality clashes, also influence the working relationships of these organizations.

Those differences in size, resources, or power indicate a crucial point usually overstated in the aforementioned *continua*: even if collaboration is deemed desirable, various problems arise later as a result of intrinsic features of the social relationships between actors: the differences in resources, the different organizational cultures of the actors involved, etc. Despite some normative tone in the literature that talks about mutuality, divergent points of view between the partners, or the different level of power among collaborators, can become major impediments in the collaboration process, generating a myriad of practical and managerial problems.

As mentioned above, VAs/NPAs work with diverse types of actors. The relationships can be collaborative, complementary, or adversarial (Austin and Ebrahim 2010), although most of the focus of the literature is put on the first two of these. Despite the names used to describe collaboration, the literature tends to view the drivers for collaboration as the interplay between internal

and external factors of maximizing players that see these exchanges as the best way to reach their goals. Thus, it is assumed that the actors decide consciously to act *collaboratively* as part of an *explicit* strategy. However, it is also plausible to consider collaboration as part of an *implicit* strategy, a situation not always adaptable to a thorough assessment of needs or capacities. In any case, the collaborative approach is generally accepted as a better way to reach organizational goals. Young and Faulk (2010) summarize the drivers in collaboration efforts as the search for economies of scope and scale, inter-organizational externalities, management of transaction costs, and principal-agent considerations.

In the view of organizations acting collaboratively as resource-maximizers, the analysis of Brinkerhoff (2010:1134 – our emphasis) points this out clearly: “a *logical* response to resource scarcity, problem complexity.... Through partnership, actors work across sectors and organizations to maximize available skills, expertise, resources, and representativeness based on respective comparative advantages.” In this analysis, drivers for collaboration are grouped among the following reasons: enhancement of efficiency/effectiveness; gaining scale with a multi-actor approach, articulation of collective actions problems, and/or search of a more open decision-making process.

Some authors (e.g., Yankey and Willem 2001) suggest internal factors as drivers for collaborations, among them financial, managerial and programmatic factors. Associated with economies of scale, those internal drivers include (a) being in a better position in relation to clients, audiences, etc.; (b) gaining efficiency by avoiding duplication of activities between members, or through dividing the work of the associates allowing every partner to focus on their core activity; and (c) programmatically, by gaining public impact from the joint work of members aligned in a particular issue.

Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006:46) paid attention to environmental conditions as a determinant factor in the setting of the collaborative effort: “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.” Once again, the organization is doing collaborative practices because *this is what it takes* to maximize its resources as a result of how the environment impacts its activities.

But the opposite approach could also be envisioned: in turbulent environments, *vertical integration* could be the strategy to follow. There is a risk in uncritically linking environmental turbulence with collaborative responses as part of this *taken for granted* or *best* managerial practices that might work in some cases. But collaboration cannot be taken as a universal response to diverse environmental or organizational conditions. Another rationale for collaboration is related to the recognition that no actor alone can solve a public problem: As Bryson puts it “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" (p. 51).

In sum, the literature usually considers collaboration as a result of an *explicit* rather than an *implicit* strategy of the VA/NPA, and the different actors involved (with few exceptions, like Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006:47–48). This, in turn, has led to some authors to have a "how to build and maintain a successful collaboration" approach, rather than to problematize the social reasons behind the occurrence/desirability of this phenomenon.

3. Managerial challenges and organizational arrangements

Collaboration arrangements face distinct managerial challenges. Common managerial-organizational issues appear on most collaborative relationships, such as leadership styles, managing conflict, structural design, strategy formulation and implementation, governance mechanisms, control and performance measurement, degree of institutionalization of the relationship, etc. (Austin 2000; Brinkerhoff 2010; Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006; La Piana and Kohm 2003; Yankey and Willen 2010).

In this sense, managerial challenges are not easy to resolve, as many of them seem to be intrinsic to the different natures of the actors involved. As Di Domenico et al. (2009:898–900) summarized, there are a series of managerial *contradictions* in the collaborative process between firms and VAs/NPAs: regarding *the goals and logic* (commercial versus social); *the ownership* (from the legal form of the organizations involved until what to do with the surplus if exist); *governance* (shareholders-directors versus stakeholders involved in the decision making); and *accountability* (vertical, to inform the decision making on behalf of the owners vs. horizontal, on behalf of several constituencies).

Generally speaking, as Kumar and Roberts (2010:793–794) sum up:

Governance within civil society organizations is, arguably, more complex and more challenging [than in private firms]... First, the right to control is contestable... Second, organizational effectiveness is also often contestable, and the goods produced are un-measurable... Third, internal governance within commercial firms is augmented by the external governance of the market... the absence of such structures places more emphasis on the internal governance of civil society organizations. Finally, civil society organizations can be more vulnerable than commercial firms to principal-agent dilemmas.

Governance challenges in collaborative settings are even more complex.

One of the key issues in any collaboration is about membership: (a) challenges appear because of the distances—whether geographical or

cultural – between the members, which in turn impact their communication and internal cohesion; (b) whether and eventually how to incorporate new members; (c) how much time each member devotes to the exchange and how much time to devote to the *business as usual* that every organization needs to accomplish; and (d) development of the collaborative skills of the members.

Given that defining the strategy to be pursued by the collaborators is always a difficult task, the literature is usually prescriptive. The advice generally tends to be that if the organizations have some degree of sharing or complementarity in vision, values, etc. then there is a paved way to set goals for the collaborative effort.

Structure follows strategy: accordingly, most of literature on this subject focuses on two broad dimensions after the strategy is set, regarding the *structure* and regarding the *dynamics* of collaborative arrangements. Usually, when the *structural* dimension is considered, these include type of articulation between members; reach, number and scale of operation of the collaboration; governance of the collaborative effort, and what resources will be allocated to it. Regarding the *dynamic* process, the issues are focused on the diverse history of its original members and of the collaborative setting; how the relationship evolved, how the division of labor, responsibilities and roles of the different organizations forming the collaborative setting changed; dynamics regarding accountability and conflict resolution among members, etc.

When collaborations involved several organizations there is a particular challenge to be attentive to: the tradeoff and balance between a more democratic process among each of the members who voluntarily engage and claims to have their voice heard, and the need to gain effectiveness through a more hierarchical decision making process. In other words, there is an ever-present debate between degrees of centralization-decentralization, control-autonomy, that appears with increased complexity within an inter-organizational arrangement. The balance in these three dimensions has implications in the design of governance structures and processes. As also happens with individual organizations (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006), a third variable is related to the degree of formal (organizational charts, systems, procedures, etc.) versus informal forms of operating.

The need to understand the power asymmetries, cultural diversity and the different main drivers of the actors involved adds another set of complexities to the usual managerial views of the collaborative process identified in the literature. The tacit stance is that no matter the nature of the organizations involved, they are analyzed in a continuum that tend to overlap collaboration with identity (e.g., the most advanced degree of collaboration usually appear when two organizations seems to act as one or even merge) or desirability (e.g. considering that the most integrated degree of articulation add more social value).

However, as organizational ecology theory points out (e.g., Hannan and Freeman 1989), organizational *inertia* is a structural feature of every organization, and once one organization has found a way to deal with problems of collective actions, it turns out to be very difficult to leave aside its core assumptions, adapt and change. Most of the collaboration literature tends to ignore the power asymmetries that make more difficult the articulation with other organization, and focus on managerial issues, applying to collaborative efforts the logic of autonomous organizations. This approach tends to ignore that both cultural and structural reasons tend to erode the eventual success of an arrangement between two organizations.

Finally, the need for accountability in these collaborative settings has also been recognized as a management challenge. Brinkerhoff (2010:1138) remarks:

Both the accountability and governance challenges highlight the need for more effective and comprehensive partnership evaluation. Too often, evaluation ... remains centered on program evaluation, rather than seeking to assess partnership's value-added... partnership accountability, and governance implications... The perceived touchy- feely nature of partner relations along with conflict aversion, has further stymied concerted efforts to evaluate partnership effectiveness.

4. The structures and forms of collaborative processes

There are some collaboration structures and forms that are frequent among VAs/NPAs. One of them is the *federation*, "a network of local affiliates that share a mission, a brand, and a program model, but are legally independent of one another and of the national office" (O'Flanagan and Taliento 2004:113). Within the *federation model*, Young and Faulk (2010) identified three forms: (a) corporate organizations in which authority and control are centralized; (b) federal organizations featuring a balance between central authority and local affiliates; and (c) trade associations where sovereignty resides in organizational members. The key analytical dimension is the degree of autonomy of the actors within the arrangement.

Guo and Acar (2005) identify eight different forms of collaboration among VAs based on their levels of formality, and further collapse these forms into two major categories: informal collaboration (information sharing, referral of clients, sharing of office spaces, and management service organization), and formal collaboration (joint program, parent-subsidiary, joint venture, and merger). In the case of informal collaborations, individual VAs retain their autonomy over key management functions and do not make an ongoing commitment to the partnership. In the case of formal collaborations, however, participating VAs reduce their autonomy and become more interdependent in their services, resources, or programs.

Another frequent form of collaboration among VAs/NPAs appears when organizations try to *replicate* successful programs in order to gain scale with a more centralized scheme, creating a network, which can have more or less centralization:

The key dimension driving the shape of the network is the degree to which the operating model can be standardized. The greater the standardization, the looser the network can be... Conversely, when culture is an important part of the model, a tighter network is likely to be required.

(Bradach 2003:24)

Given that a critical requirement for replication is the set of elements that can be standardized, this creates a special challenge for VAs/NPAs, because the "critical knowledge is often tacit" (Ibid.). More recently, attention has been given to the form of the replication agreement between organizations, such as licensing and social franchising.

Other network types among VAs/NPAs appear when organizations share either a common theme or a shared territory of action and establish an institutional structure and processes to coordinate exchanges, cooperation or joint activities (e.g., Milofsky 2008). The key analytical factors in these cases are related to the balance of resources and power among organizations, the scope and depth of the articulation sought by the members, and level of formalization – loose versus tight- that are willing to develop for the coordination mechanisms (Berger et al. 2008).

A different set of challenges can be observed when VAs/NPAs articulate with governments. Young (2000:149) emphasizes that this relationship can be understood in one of the following ways: (a) operating independently as supplements, (b) working as complements, or (c) engaging government in an adversarial relationship of mutual accountability. More generally (Coston 1998) analyzes the phenomenon, developing a typology of VA and government relationship, using three dimensions: the degree of *government acceptance of institutional pluralism*, *the balance of power in the relationship*, and *the degree of formality and the level of government linkage*. This gives as a result a continuum ranging from *repression*, *rivalry*, *competition*, *contracting*, *third-party government*, and the final stages, *cooperation*, *complementarity* and finally *collaboration*. Accordingly, as we saw, Brinkerhoff (2002:22) uses a similar set of variables: *mutuality* (which can be linked to Coston's balance of power; 1998), and *organizational identity*.

Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) conclude that cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when they are able to create one or more linking mechanisms, such as powerful sponsors, general agreement on the problem, or existing networks are already in place at the time of their initial formation.

Even when it is possible to differentiate at an actor-agency level, the nature of the political context does matter when it comes to analyzing relationships between government and VA. The collaboration between governments and VAs/NPAs has grown considerably in the last four decades as a result of processes of retreat or redefinition of the *welfare state* (Salamon 1994; S. Smith in Anheier et al 2010; S. Smith and Lipsky 1993). In addition, collaboration is usually considered from a liberal point of view that the civil society is the locus of VA/NPA, and that locus is somewhere *in between* the state and the market.

Thus, even though most of the analysis of the relationships between governments and VA are based on democracies, there are approaches of how these relationships work when the political regime has a different nature. In this sense, Heurlin (2010:220) developed “a theory of non-governmental organizations (NGO)–state relations under dictatorship.” The role of VA in the Socialist Bloc was considered critical in the turn of 1970s to 1980s to bring about the ending of those regimes. In the developing world, especially in Latin America, VAs/NPAs played new roles in social dynamics in the 1970s, as new organizations were created or existing ones broadened their scope to include human rights issues. The networks constructed between nascent local VA and established international VA supporting human rights work was critical in their subsistence. In the dawn of democratic regimes, those VAs/NPAs had an important role in helping to reconstruct democratic procedures, working to investigate crimes of the armed and police forces, as was the case in Argentina, Chile, etc.

On the other hand, collaboration between VAs/NPAs and businesses have been increasing steadily since 1990s due to at least two processes: (a) the greater recognition of the social responsibility of corporations and their role in supporting local communities and addressing social problems; and (b) the professionalization of larger VAs and of NPAs in the nonprofit sector and the search for new forms of cooperation and support from the private sector. Both of these processes are expressed in cultural changes and the recognition that VA and corporations have in many circumstances more to gain from working together than from confrontation, duplication of efforts or even indifference. Collaboration goes beyond one way flow of resources from companies to VA (e.g. cash donation) or the other way (e.g. connecting to local groups) and involved either two way exchanges or even creation of new shared value (Austin et al. 2004).

Collaboration by VAs/NPAs with businesses may occur in different kinds of arrangements, applying diverse instruments and methods: corporate volunteering, social marketing, cause-related marketing, technical assistance, joint initiatives and programs, sponsorships, licensing, etc. (Sagawa and Segal 2000). When analyzing these types of collaborations, key dimensions are the

kinds of resources involved, centrality of the initiative for each organization, frequency of interaction, leadership and staff participation, and value creation.

Another set of issues needs to be considered when the focus is on articulations involving international organizations. International collaboration is a universe formed by diverse actors, and among them are the International NGOs/INGOs (see Handbook Chapter 42). Globalization has been a factor widely recognized as an accelerator for VA involvement in international affairs (Brown et al. 2000; Martens 2010). This influence started to peak after the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In the context of globalization, multilateral institutions started to work *directly* with actors of the civil society. In this sense, VAs of the so-called developing world were recognized by multilateral institutions as legitimate recipients of technical assistance, networking, financial resources, and so on. Local partnerships between governmental institutions and VAs were encouraged to form, and to channel or supervise multilateral or international funds directed to promote pro-market reforms, increase the accountability or boost development policies.

This cooperative work between VAs and multilateral institutions is a clear example of a broader process, a triumph of what has been labeled pro-market policies. The multilateral institutions supported the networking and global joint work among those VA involved within their *Bretton Woods umbrella* and since then “The number of NGOs maintaining official relations with the UN has risen... in 1996, 1,226 NGOs were enrolled on the consultative status... and by October 2007, 3,051 NGOs had official relations with the UN” (Martens 2010:1042).

Collaboration between international agencies and VAs has not always been easy, and confrontation has increased as well. The anti-globalization social movement expressed itself violently in the streets of Seattle at the 2000 WTO Summit, and since then has become another example of the interaction between international organizations and VAs/civil society. As Martens puts it (2010:1041), “The extent and the intensity of participation on the part of NGOs in these events showed their capacity for mobility and networking across borders.” Since then, a period has begun in which an important group of VAs (both national and International) have expressed their discontent with the governance of the globalization process. Not surprisingly, many VAs have also started to articulate themselves within global social networks to express their contestation (the *World Social Forum*, a countermovement of the *World Economic Forum* for instance). Regardless of the ideological position of VAs, whether *pro* or *anti* multilateral, and regardless of the degree of formalization of the arrangements, the development of new technologies of communication and the growing global interdependence have facilitated the global articulation of several VAs with the same set of interests.

5. Collaboration among all-volunteer, GAs

Some research shows that there is modest collaboration among GAs, but the specific conditions under which this occurs have not been well studied. Research on a few communities also shows that collaboration by GAs in the United States with either government agencies or businesses is infrequent, and only very rarely regular, rather than occasional (Smith 2000:163–164). However, collaboration of GAs with government is much more frequent in Europe and in other nations where GAs can obtain government subsidies (*ibid.*). Collaboration of GAs with businesses is rare everywhere, except that a few GAs occasionally receive gifts of food from local businesses for GA public events.

In general, all-volunteer GAs, especially ones with internal/member-benefit goals (Smith 1993), are much less likely to benefit from collaboration than will larger, paid-staff VAs with external/public benefit goals and most NPAs, which nearly all have external/public benefit goals. Research by Young and Larson (1965) in a small New York community found that the most important GAs (based on ratings by community members) originated more inter-organizational activity in the town. However, a study by Smith (1986) of outstanding GAs in eight Massachusetts towns and cities showed that although such GAs were more likely than a control set of GAs to be polymorphic, as part of a larger, state or national VA, contact and cooperation with other local GAs did not distinguish significantly between the two sets of GAs (pp. 28, 30).

E. Usable knowledge

The practical challenges in the collaborative processes can be summarized as follows:

- a. defining the degree of formalization and institutionalization of the relationship;
- b. organizing and conducting the work agreed;
- c. measuring the joint performance;
- d. managing relationships between the personnel of the organizations;
- e. communication both externally and internally;
- f. evaluating the collaborative dynamics.

However, with those limitations in mind, how can one address those challenges in order to make a sustainable collaboration? The leadership dimension, trust-building devices, flexible strategies, and power equalizing mechanisms are recognized as key issues to consider. Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) sums up recommendations found in most of the existing literature on the subject:

- Look for committed sponsors and effective champions at many levels
- Establish – with both internal and external stakeholders – the legitimacy of collaboration as a form of organizing
- Manage trust-building activities
- Use resources and tactics to equalize power and manage conflict effectively
- Combine deliberate and emergent planning
- Use stakeholder analysis, emphasize responsiveness to key stakeholders, use the process to build trust and the capacity to manage conflict, and build on distinctive competencies of the collaborators.

As can be seen, usable knowledge from this discussion takes advantage of lessons from planned change processes and from multi-stakeholder negotiation practices.

F. Future trends and needed research

The likely future trend of *collaboration as an actual phenomenon* among VAs/NPAs and between VAs/NPAs and businesses or government agencies is for a gradual increase, as has been happening in the past couple of decades in the most modern nations. This trend will likely be most pronounced in developing nations that become industrialized, but especially in industrial nations that move toward service-information, post-industrial nations, as suggested by the research of Smith and Shen (2002) and by Schofer and Longhofer (2011). The general effectiveness of the collaboration process for larger, especially paid-staff VAs and for the usually paid-staff NPAs almost guarantees such an increase in collaborative activities by many VAs/NPAs. It is less clear what the future trend will be for smaller, local, all-volunteer VAs, as GAs, not reviewed in this chapter (see Handbook Chapter 32). However, some increase in collaboration is also likely for such GAs.

There are a number of issues deserving further research, and three emerge as most promising. First, the conditions, requirements, and relative benefits of different degrees of formalization and institutionalization of collaboration arrangements can shed light and provide guidance to inter-organization processes. Second, the comparative analysis of different collaboration arrangements, their structures, and the organizing mechanisms and procedures require more attention as there is overlapping and many times lack of differentiation in the literature among the different forms which are found. Finally, a deeper analysis is needed on governance structures, processes, the rules applied in collaboration settings, in order to get a better understanding of what are their consequences in terms both of the evolution of inter-organizational efforts and of their impact.

Further, recognizing the relevance and importance that collaborating efforts have, there is a need to learn more about how successful articulation initiatives address critical planning, organizing, and implementation challenges, and to extract lessons that can be considered in future efforts as organizations confront social, economic, and sustainability issues of increasing complexity.

Finally, the scarcity of research on collaboration among and by GAs and other all-volunteer VAs needs to be remedied. Much more research on collaboration by GAs is needed, both among GAs and between GAs and businesses or government agencies.

G. Cross-references

Chapters 45–47 and 50.

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