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Designing and Implementing Cross-Sector Collaborations: 75th Anniversary Article Needed *and* Challenging

Abstract: *Theoretical and empirical work on collaboration has proliferated in the last decade. The authors' 2006 article on designing and implementing cross-sector collaborations was a part of, and helped stimulate, this growth. This article reviews the authors' and others' important theoretical frameworks from the last decade, along with key empirical results. Research indicates how complicated and challenging collaboration can be, even though it may be needed now more than ever. The article concludes with a summary of areas in which scholarship offers reasonably settled conclusions and an extensive list of recommendations for future research. The authors favor research that takes a dynamic, multilevel systems view and makes use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, especially using longitudinal comparative case studies.*

Practitioner Points

- Make sure there is a clear collaborative advantage to be gained by collaborating, meaning that collaborators can gain something significant together that they could not achieve alone. Make use of windows of opportunity to advance the collaboration approach.
- View collaborations as complex, dynamic, multilevel systems.
- Collaborating parties should take a design approach to cross-sector collaboration. This means starting as much as possible with the ends in mind and designing processes, structures, and their interactions in such a way that desired outcomes will be achieved and required accountabilities met. Build ongoing learning into the design, including learning about what goals and performance indicators should be.
- Make sure that committed sponsors, champions, and facilitators are involved throughout.
- Use inclusive processes to develop inclusive structures, which, in turn, will sustain inclusive processes.
- Adopt flexible governance structures that can adjust to different requirements across the life cycle of the collaboration.

Our 2006 *Public Administration Review* article “The Design and Implementation of Cross-Sector Collaborations” appeared when collaboration theory, research, and practice were accelerating. Cross-sector collaboration has now become a staple of public management research as governments are called on to partner with organizations across sectors and civil society in order to address public problems that they cannot successfully address alone (Kettl 2015). In the last decade, researchers have continued to highlight cases of successful cross-sector collaboration, but many report cases of failure and uneven results (e.g., Andrews and Entwistle 2010; Hodge and Greve 2007). Some research, including our own, has drawn on the design propositions presented in our original article (e.g., Lai 2012; Simo and Bies 2007), and that research has led us to alter some propositions and add new ones (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2014; see the appendix at the end of this article).

Our abiding aim is to help public managers and integrative leaders from any sector design and sustain effective cross-sector collaborations when such efforts are likely to produce public value. We are therefore pleased to have been asked to assess the theoretical and empirical work on cross-sector collaboration over the last decade and the influence that our article might have had. Much has happened, but some things have not changed. Recent research only reinforces our earlier conclusion that cross-sector collaboration is hardly an easy answer to complex public problems. Indeed, it is typically frustrating for participants (although sometimes exhilarating as well) and full of opportunities for what Huxham and Vangen (2005) call “collaborative inertia.” Yet those who seek to combat problems such as poverty and urban traffic congestion often have no choice but to work across sector lines to develop shared understandings of the problem and commitments to shared solutions.

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Public Administration Review, Vol. xx, Iss. xx, pp. xx–xx. © 2015 by The American Society for Public Administration.
DOI: 10.1111/puar.12432.

In this article, we review the most significant theoretical frameworks developed in the last decade for exploring cross-sector collaboration. We then review some of the most important empirical studies since 2006. Finally, we offer conclusions and suggest next steps for this important research and practice field.

Significant Frameworks for Understanding Cross-Sector Collaboration

Several important holistic frameworks for understanding cross-sector collaboration have been published in the last decade. This review focuses on those developed by Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006); Thomson and Perry (2006); Ansell and Gash (2008); Agranoff (2007, 2012); Provan and Kenis (2008); Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2011); and Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pfarrer (2012). Table 1 provides a summary of each theoretical framework.

The definitions of collaboration used by the frameworks' authors vary, but they are generally similar to our own in that they stress a continuum of progressively more intense interorganizational relationships. We 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* (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006, 44). We assert that collaboration occurs in the midrange of a continuum of how organizations work on public problems (Crosby and Bryson 2005). At one end are organizations that hardly relate to each other, and at the other are organizations merged into a new entity. In the middle, toward the formal end of interorganizational configurations, are collaborative entities that fit the foregoing definition.¹

Collaborations are given a variety of labels (e.g., consortium, alliance). We use the term "collaborations" interchangeably with "partnerships" because of the prevalence of the latter term in the literature. However, we make an important distinction between collaborations and public-private partnerships. We see public-private partnerships as a particular type of cross-sector collaboration based on formal, contractual relationships between two or more entities (Minnesota Department of Transportation 2011). We cite studies of public-private partnerships in this review when findings are relevant to understanding cross-sector partnerships more generally (rather than how to structure and administer contracts).

Frameworks from Earlier in the Decade

Building on prior work (e.g., Gray 1989; Huxham and Vangen 2005; Ostrom 1990; Ring and Van de Ven 1994), several holistic frameworks were published about the same time as our own. These include Thomson and Perry (2006), Ansell and Gash (2008), Agranoff (2007, added to in 2012), and Provan and Kenis (2008).

These frameworks have clear similarities. All attend to important general external antecedent conditions, more proximate initial conditions, internal processes, structural elements, and outcomes. Antecedent conditions include the availability of varied resources, characteristics of the institutional environment, and the need to address complex public issues. Initial conditions encompass the significance of preexisting histories and relationships (whether positive or negative), some agreement on collaborative aims and perceived interdependence among members, and the availability of leadership. Processes emphasize fostering trust, organizing inclusive participation, developing a shared understanding of the problem, building commitment to collective goals and actions, and formal advance planning or emergent planning. Structures highlighted by all the

Table 1 Major Cross-Sector Collaboration-Related Theoretical Frameworks

| Publication | Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2006) | Thomson and Perry (2006) | Ansell and Gash (2008) | Agranoff (2007, 2012) |
|--|--|--|---|--|
| Theory base | Diverse, including organization theory, public administration theory, leadership theory, strategic management theory | Diverse, including organization theory, public administration theory, strategic management theory | Diverse, including organization theory, public administration theory, policy studies, planning and environmental management studies | Diverse, including organization theory, public administration theory, strategic management theory |
| Major components | Initial conditions Formal and informal processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreements • Leadership • Legitimacy • Trust • Conflict management • Planning Formal and informal structures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership • Structural configurations • Governance structures Contingencies and constraints <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Type of collaboration • Power imbalances • Competing institutional logics Outcomes and accountabilities | Antecedents Processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance • Administration • Organizational autonomy • Mutuality • Norms of trust and reciprocity Outcomes | Starting conditions Collaborative process <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Face-to-face dialogue • Trust building • Commitment to process • Shared understanding • Intermediate outcomes • Facilitative leadership Outcomes Plus core contingencies: time, trust, and interdependence | Decision networks versus nondecision networks Processes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activation • Framing • Mobilizing • Synthesizing |
| Particular emphases vis-à-vis the others | Cross-sector collaboration, institutional logics, planning, contingencies, power and the importance of remedying power imbalances, the need for alignment across components | Learning, organizational autonomy, leadership, administration | Face-to-face dialogue, incentives and disincentives, the importance of remedying power imbalances | Leadership through a whole range of roles, processes, and structures, public value, capacity building, and learning |

Table 1 Major Cross-Sector Collaboration–Related Theoretical Frameworks, Continued

| | Provan and Kenis (2008) | Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2011) | Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pfarrer (2012) |
|--|--|--|---|
| Theory base | Network theory | Diverse, including organization theory, public administration theory, conflict management theory, planning and environmental management studies | Communication theory |
| Major components | <p>Ideal types of network governance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant governed • Lead organization • Network administration organization <p>Critical contingencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree of trust, number of members, goal consensus, need for network-level competencies (nature of the task and kinds of external demands) <p>Persistent tensions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficiency versus inclusion • Internal versus external legitimacy • Flexibility versus stability <p>Evolution of these governance systems over time</p> | <p>System context</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drivers <p>Collaborative governance regime</p> <p>Collaboration dynamics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principled engagement • Capacity for joint action • Shared motivation <p>Actions</p> <p>Impacts</p> <p>Adaptation</p> | <p>Communication practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing meaningful communication • Managing centripetal and centrifugal forces • Creating a distinct and stable identity <p>Development of authoritative texts</p> <p>Trajectory of authoritative texts</p> <p>Communication practices to assess overall cross-sector partnership value</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External intertextual influence • Accounts of capital transformation |
| Particular emphases vis-à-vis the others | Governance structures | <p>Collaborative regimes, what makes collaborations work, capacity building</p> <p>Pulling out collaborative actions from overall impact/outcomes</p> | Authoritative texts and their effects on activities and partners |

frameworks include norms and rules that emerge to promote these processes as well as to reach agreement on collaborative goals and actions. Governance at the intersection of processes and structures is a feature of each framework. These early works also emphasize several different types of endemic tensions or conflicts facing collaborations. For example, Thomson and Perry (2006) emphasize ongoing tensions between the need for partner autonomy versus the interdependence of collective interests, while Kenis and Provan (2008) focus on tensions between stability versus flexibility, inclusivity versus efficiency, and internal versus external legitimacy. Several frameworks highlight power imbalances (Agranoff 2007; Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006), and ours raises the issue of conflict as a result of multiple institutional logics.

These frameworks also differ, especially regarding attention to specific aspects of collaboration. For example, some emphasize the importance of particular leadership roles (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2006; Thomson and Perry 2006), while others focus on leadership activities (Ansell and Gash 2008) or the structure of a “leadership core” (Agranoff 2007, 2012). Another difference pertains

to the extent to which collaborative structure is considered as a separate component (Bryson, Crosby and Stone 2006; Kenis and Provan 2008) or is subsumed under process dynamics (Agranoff 2007; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012; Thomson and Perry 2006). Frameworks also differ with regard to whether they focus on collaborations involving multiple sectors or primarily those led by public agencies. Our own framework highlights the role of sector failure as a prompt to cross-sector collaboration as a way of making up for the shortcomings of particular sectors.

Noticeably, most of these early frameworks do not pay special attention to outcomes and accountabilities, but they do offer important

insights. For example, most argue that evaluative assessments should consider substantive as well as process outcomes for individual participants, member organizations, the collaboration as a whole, and the community. Agranoff adds that collaborations should be judged on whether they produce public value from the standpoint of various stakeholders, while Thomson and Perry and we argue that the issue of accountabilities is especially problematic in collaborations.

More Recent Frameworks

Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh’s (2011) “collaborative governance regime” framework extends the view of collaboration as a system embedded in, and interacting with, a larger environment. They are focused principally on public organizations as collaborators but note the likely involvement of actors from other sectors as well. Determinants of the collaborative governance regime are rooted in the external context, including resource conditions, policy and legal frameworks, and politics and power conditions. A set of drivers separate from system context include leadership, consequential incentives, recognized interdependence, and uncertainty. The

authors highlight three important internal collaboration dynamics: *principled engagement*, leading toward *shared motivation*, and ending with *capacity for joint action*, which includes important elements of structure. These collaboration dynamics create action, which may further influence collaboration dynamics as well as affect the external system or context. The possible broad impacts are similar to those in our own framework. The framework is quite comprehensive, although it may excessively privilege process over structure. The framework improves on previous frameworks in its move toward articulating causal connections and calling for greater attention to exploring which causal relationships matter in which contexts.

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The final framework we review is that of Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pfarrer (2012), which theorizes communication as constitutive of organizations and collaborations. They emphasize the importance of formulating “authoritative texts” that can include implicit norms of cooperation or bylaws, mission statements, and memoranda of understanding. These texts indicate the collaboration’s “general direction and what it is ‘on track’ to accomplish” (337). Ideally, these texts will marshal the willing consent of partners, attract other resources, and help collaborators exercise collective agency. The authors argue that communication practices increase the potential impact of cross-sector collaborations by shaping public perception as well as member perspectives on issues and providing accounts of intellectual, social, and organizational capital transformation. This framework offers two noteworthy contributions: the addition of communication theory, especially the idea of communication as constitutive of collaborations, and attention to authoritative texts.

Summary

All frameworks imply some causality among particular components but eschew simple causal connections, instead focusing on important contextual contingencies. For example, a common theme across these frameworks is their attention to the influence of antecedent conditions on collaboration effectiveness. Ansell and Gash are especially explicit about particular aspects of starting conditions, including the need for a collaboration to rectify significant power or resource asymmetries, acknowledge interdependence among members, and mitigate negative prehistories. Likewise, Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh begin their causal logic model with specific elements of the external system in which the collaboration is embedded. Provan and Kenis also propose more explicit causal connections where appropriate governance structures are determined by the number of collaboration members, degrees of goal consensus and trust, and need for network-level competencies. We emphasize contingencies related to the influence of collaboration type, power imbalances, and competing institutional logics, while Agranoff adds the effects of collaborative capacity.

The frameworks leave out some important considerations. None of the frameworks delves very deeply into the effects of the broader technical and institutional environments on collaboration, including the effects of adjacent and often competing social fields (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Scott and Davis 2006); how collaboration might differ depending on the nature of the issue or task to be dealt with; the effects of technology broadly construed; the need for structural and processual ambidexterity (O’Reilly and Tushman 2013) across the life cycle of a collaboration; and the array of attitudes, competencies, and capacities needed for effective collaboration.

In calls for future research, a number of themes are apparent, including, most obviously, the need to view collaborations as complicated dynamic systems. Within these systems, a better understanding is needed of, for example, the interactions between managerial actions, processes and structures over time; the effects of various internal and external contingencies; how collaborations are affected by being embedded in, or directly affected by, existing hierarchies; and what helps create effective performance. Finally, these articles advocate for a variety of research designs and the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Most call for longitudinal research in order to capture the dynamic contexts and responses of collaborations over time.

In a review of the collaboration field, O’Leary and Vij argue that “the study and practice of collaborative public management is generally fragmented with a low level of consensus; from a research perspective, it is a low-paradigm field” (2012, 518). They make several suggestions for improvement, including the need for “more precise theoretical models of behavior, and agreement on the measurement of relevant variables” (507). We concur but note that such a state of affairs is not surprising at this stage of the field’s development, and beyond that, in the last 10 years, considerable theoretical and empirical advances have produced greater understanding of collaboration. Collectively, the frameworks reviewed here provide a rich picture of the importance of seeing collaboration as embedded in larger systems; what is involved in collaboration and cross-sector collaboration; its inherently interdisciplinary nature; its systemic, multilevel, multiactor nature; and the array of significant constituting elements. These frameworks have provided important guidance for empirical research, to which we now turn.

Significant Empirical Work in the Last Decade

This section highlights areas in which empirical work is filling in the foregoing theoretical frameworks. Occasionally, we will cite earlier work when it is important for the argument.

We developed the list of possible works using the time parameter of 2007 to early 2015 and certain keywords, such as “cross-sector collaboration” and “partnership,” and keyword combinations, including “collaboration” and “accountability,” “outcomes,” “power,” “antecedents,” and so forth. In all, we reviewed 196 articles and three books. We removed the articles that were either nonempirical or added little to existing theory or empirical work. (We use “empirical” broadly to mean qualitative or quantitative studies, meta-analyses, or literature reviews of empirical work.) The team further refined the list using five criteria: the study (1) was situated within a larger systems view of collaboration; (2) was focused on cross-sector collaboration; (3) illuminated a key aspect of the frameworks discussed earlier; (4) had an empirical grounding; and (5) specified influence relationships, or contextual constraints, such as rules, resources, or settings that alter the range of possible effects. The team divided up responsibility for reviewing articles and books and then discussed collectively specific findings and overarching themes. In spite of the limitations of our search procedures, we are reasonably confident that the included references provide an important overview of empirical findings over the last decade and additional needed work. We describe the studies according to the major categories encompassed in the frameworks just described: general antecedent conditions; initial conditions, drivers, and linking mechanisms; processes, structures, and links between them; endemic tensions or points of conflict; and outcomes and accountabilities. Figure 1 presents a reasonably parsimonious and pragmatic synthesis of the theoretical frameworks and empirical studies we reviewed. (The figure represents a significant adaptation of a similar figure in our 2006 article.)

General Antecedent Conditions

Recent research confirms that the institutional environment is especially important for partnerships focused on public policy or public problem solving because it includes broad systems of relationships across jurisdictional areas (Sandfort and Moulton 2015; Scott and

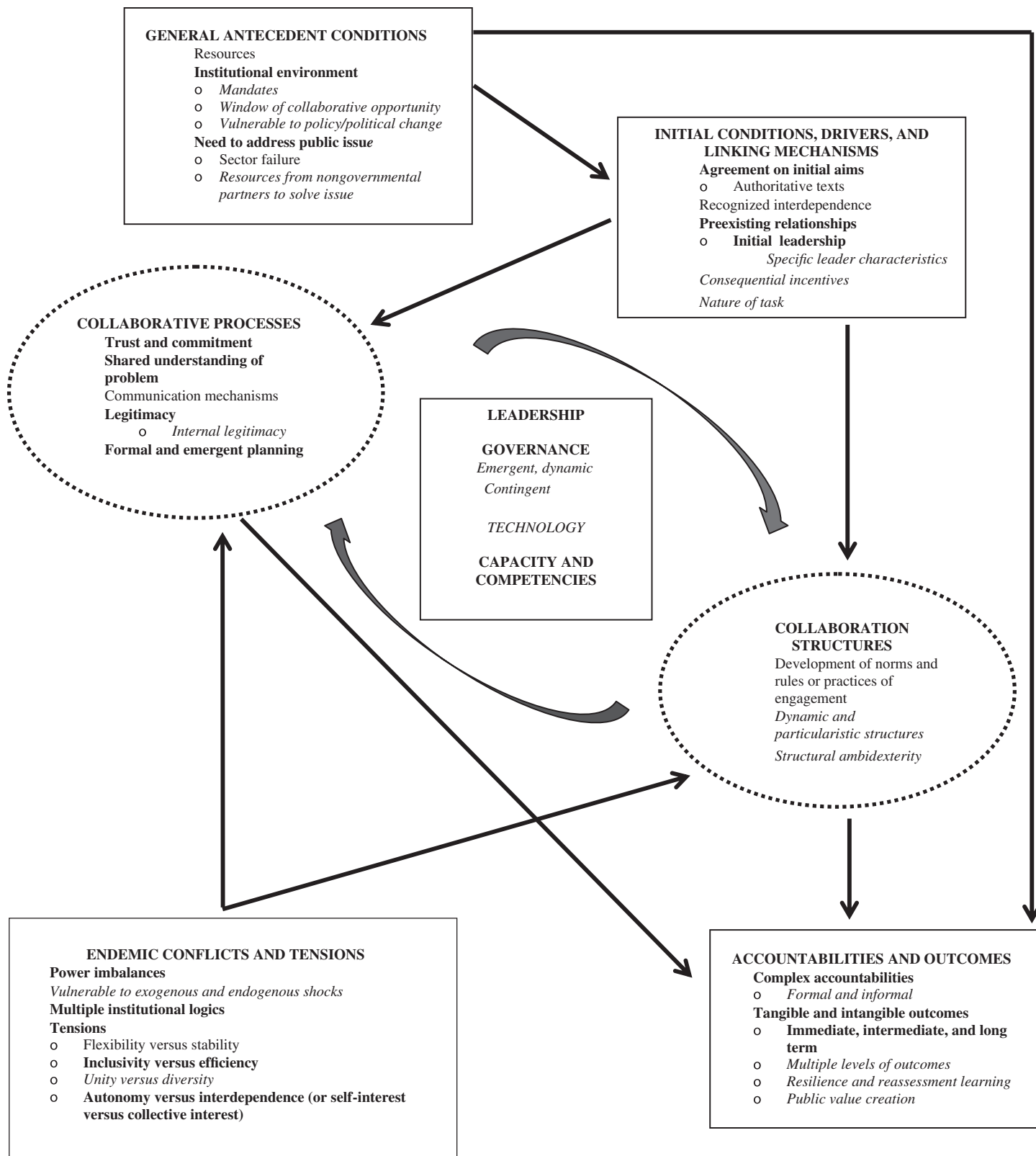


Figure 1 Summary of Major Theoretical Frameworks and Findings from Empirical Studies, 2006–15. Bolded elements are from both the theoretical frameworks and recent empirical studies; elements in italics are new elements from empirical studies

Meyer 1991) that can directly affect collaborative purpose, structure, and outcomes (Dickinson and Glasby 2010; McGuire and Agranoff 2011). In particular, attention to mandated versus voluntary collaborations has increased. For example, government policies or grant programs often require or strongly suggest that public

managers organize cross-sector collaborations in order to obtain public funds (Stone, Crosby, and Bryson 2013). These mandates may specify collaboration membership, designate decision makers, and establish performance measures or accountability mechanisms (Andrews and Entwistle 2010; Vangen and Huxham 2012).

Dynamics in the political environment also can strongly affect the formation of cross-sector collaborations. For example, the cross-sector collaboration that formed in Minnesota as part of the federal Urban Partnership/Congestion Demonstration Program was initially stymied by the governor's refusal to endorse any initiative that involved tolling on preexisting highway lanes (Bryson et al. 2008). Related to factors in the political environment is the notion of collaborative windows of opportunity (Lober 1997). Drawing on Kingdon's (1995) notion of policy windows of opportunity, some suggest that collaboration formation is contingent on the confluence of relatively independent streams (such as a problem stream of worsening situations and the existence of a solutions stream) that a collaboration entrepreneur recognizes. The entrepreneur then is able to mobilize resources and partners around this opportunity (Lober 1997). Takahashi and Smutny (2002) argue from their case research that these "collaboration windows" are likely to create static and nonadaptive governance structures (but conflicting results come from other research cited later).

A key reason for forming cross-sector collaborations is public managers' and policy makers' realization that government cannot remedy a public problem on its own, or at least that involving business, nonprofit, and community partners can spread risk and provide more effective remedies (Kettl 2015). Nongovernment partners may have additional expertise, technology, relationships, and financial resources that can be deployed in a joint endeavor (Demirag et al. 2012; Holmes and Moir 2007).

Initial Conditions, Drivers, and Linking Mechanisms

Even when environmental conditions favor the formation of cross-sector collaborations, they are unlikely to get under way without the presence of more specific drivers or initial conditions. While several of the theoretical frameworks discuss the importance of leadership both initially and during implementation, much more empirical work has been done on specific leader characteristics. Especially important is the involvement of committed, boundary-spanning leaders, whom we call sponsors and champions (Crosby and Bryson 2010). A "collaborative mind-set" is a key characteristic of both sponsors and champions (Cikaliuk 2011). Also needed is the ability to frame the issue at hand so that diverse partners can understand its importance and its relevance to them (Page 2010). Other significant individual leadership characteristics include a belief that a problem needs to be addressed, relevant educational qualifications, and age (Esteve et al. 2012; McGuire and Silva 2010).

Other important drivers or initial conditions have also been identified in recent studies. First, in line with several theoretical frameworks, there is evidence about the importance of initial, albeit general, agreement on the problem definition that also indicates the interdependence of stakeholder organizations when it comes to addressing the problem (Simo and Bies 2007). While informal agreements about the collaboration's composition, mission, and process can work, formal agreements have the advantage of supporting accountability. The absence of formal agreements can make collaboration more difficult, especially when accompanied

by a lack of administrative capacity (Babiak and Thibault 2009). Furthermore, Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pfarrer (2012) emphasize that naming the collaboration, weaving a compelling story of the collaboration's work, and developing an "authoritative text" can help marshal the willing consent of partners and foster collective agency. This text may include implicit norms of operation or by-laws, mission statements, and memoranda of understandings; it indicates the collaboration's "general direction and what it is 'on track' to accomplish" (Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pfarrer 2012, 337). ("Text" in this case clearly overlaps with structure and governance, discussed later.) Additionally, the need for different types of initial agreements and the reworking of agreements are likely to increase as collaborations grow to include more geographically dispersed partners and diverse actors within a problem domain (Clarke and Fuller 2010; Sandström, Bodin, and Crona 2015; Vangen and Huxham 2012).

Second, the role of prior relationships or existing networks is also important because it is often through these that partners judge the trustworthiness of other partners and the legitimacy of key stakeholders (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2014; Bryson et al. 2011). Third, consequential incentives to collaborate are important drivers (Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh 2011; Romzek, LeRoux, and Blackmar 2012). Fourth, early research (Alter and Hage 1993), and later Provan and Kenis (2008), noted that the nature of the task to be addressed could be expected to have a significant impact on the membership, structure, and process of an interorganizational network. Unfortunately, later scholarship has not pursued this issue systematically, although there are exceptions. Simo and Bies (2007), for example, explore the effects of the extreme conditions posed by Hurricane Katrina on collaboration responses. Finally, observations from our fieldwork prompt us to take a broader view of drivers than we had previously. Requests for proposals, plans, projects, various technologies, and consequential incentives all were drivers in one or more of the case studies because they facilitated collaborative efforts (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2014; Quick and Feldman 2014).

Collaborative Processes

Research indicates that processes and structures work closely together in fostering effective cross-sector collaboration. Inclusive processes in particular help bridge differences among stakeholders and help partners establish inclusive structures, create a unifying vision, and manage power imbalances. Inclusive structures, in turn, facilitate governance of the collaboration and help implement the partners' agreements (Berardo, Heikkila, and Gerlak 2014; Quick and Feldman 2011, 2014; Saz-Carranza and Ospina 2011).

Trust and commitment. Trusting relationships are often depicted as the essence of collaboration (Lee et al. 2012). Trust can comprise interpersonal behavior, confidence in organizational competence and expected performance, and a common bond and sense of goodwill (Chen and Graddy 2010). Many researchers realize that collaborations begin with varying degrees of trust but emphasize that trust building is an ongoing requirement for successful collaborations (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012; Nolte and Boenigk 2011; Walker and Hills 2012). Collaboration partners

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build trust by sharing resources such as information and demonstrating competency, good intentions, and follow-through; conversely, failing to follow through or serving one's own or one's organization's interests over the collaboration undermines trust (Chen 2010). Often this work is highly personal—in other words, it is about building relationships among individuals, which, in turn, leads to trust among organizations (Lee et al. 2012; Murphy, Perrot, and Rivera-Santos 2012).

Communication. Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pfarrer note the importance of communication—that is, the “complex process of meaning negotiation and construction” (2012, 335)—throughout. Indeed, they argue that communication *creates* collaborations as “higher-order systems that are conceptually distinct from individual member organizations” (334). Much of this work probably must be face to face (Ansell and Gash 2008; Romzek, LeRoux, and Blackmar 2012).

Legitimacy. As institutional theory contends, an organization seeking to acquire necessary resources must build legitimacy by using structures, processes, and strategies deemed appropriate within its environment (Fligstein and McAdam 2012; Suchman 1995). In the context of collaborations, both external and internal legitimacy are critical. For example, nonhierarchical structures and inclusive decision-making processes may not be perceived as legitimate by outsiders more accustomed to traditional command and control bureaucracies. It is critical, however, that both outsiders and collaboration members see the collaboration as a legitimate entity in its form and interactions (Human and Provan 2000). Internal legitimacy as perceived by collaboration members has garnered particular attention, especially as it relates to establishing commitment among members. Aspects of internal legitimacy include procedural legitimacy, meaning that stakeholders feel they have gotten a “fair hearing” in decision-making settings (Ansell and Gash 2008), and cognitive legitimacy, which arises from mutual understanding, recognition of interdependence, and trust (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012).

Collaborative planning. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel (2009) distinguish between deliberate and emergent approaches to planning. Deliberate, formal planning involves careful advance articulation of mission, goals, and objectives; roles and responsibilities; and phases or steps, including implementation. In the emergent approach, a clear understanding of mission, goals, roles, and action steps emerges over time as conversations encompass a broader network of involved or affected parties (Koppenjan 2008; Vangen and Huxham 2012) and as the need for methods of overcoming problems in a system becomes apparent (Campbell 2012). Deliberate and emergent planning are likely to occur at both the collaboration level and in individual collaborating organizations (Clarke and Fuller 2010).

Regardless of approach, several elements are important: careful attention to stakeholders in both formal organizations and informal groups (Simo 2009; Simo and Bies 2007), deep understanding of the problem(s) addressed by the collaboration and the development of an array of potential solutions (Clarke and Fuller 2010), and clarification of the collaboration's goal system, including process and outcome goals (Vangen and Huxham 2012). Vangen and Huxham

(2012) recommend seeing a collaboration's goal system as a partly hierarchical “tangled web” of individual, organizational, and collaboration goals that are partly congruent and partly diverse and that change over time.

Collaboration Structures

Within the collaboration literature, structure has not attracted the same degree of interest as process, in part because researchers have emphasized “organizing” as a process over “organization” (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012). Nevertheless, scholars now recognize that collaborations or networks have often overlaid—rather than replaced—existing hierarchical arrangements (Agranoff 2007), and thus attention to structural components has increased.

Contextual influences on structure. In line with traditional organization theory, scholars point out that collaborative structure is influenced by numerous external factors, including windows of collaborative opportunity; public policies and policy fields; system stability; and degree of resource munificence, environmental complexity, and dynamism (Cornforth, Hayes, and Vangen 2014; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012; Siddiki et al. 2015). The effects of government mandates have already been noted. Furthermore, one study found that collaborative governance structures formed in response to particular windows of collaborative opportunity were unable to adapt to significant changes later on (Takahashi and Smutny 2002). More recent research suggests that while initial collaborative governance structures pose important constraints on further development, these structures are often quite adaptive and changeable (Cornforth, Hayes, and Vangen 2014; Kenis and Provan 2008; Stone, Crosby, and Bryson 2013).

Internally, several aspects of a collaboration influence structure. Agranoff (2012) notes that networks self-organize into “particularistic structures” that are affected by what partners bring to the network and how they decide to manage their joint work through norms and rules or practices of engagement. The ambiguity and complexity inherent in collaborations also make these structures especially dynamic. A “tangled web” of goals, uncertain membership, and overlapping collaborations create a context within which structures are formulated and reformulated over time (Vangen and Huxham 2012). Complexity is heightened when collaborations span national boundaries (Vangen and Winchester 2014).

The role of structural and related processual ambidexterity. Our research illustrates another aspect of structure not highlighted in previous literature, and that is the importance of being structurally ambidextrous on an as-needed basis (Bryson, Crosby, and Stone 2014; Bryson et al. 2008; O'Reilly and Tushman 2013). Ambidexterity involves effectively managing tensions: stability versus change, hierarchy versus lateral relations, the existing power structure versus voluntary and involuntary power sharing, formal networks versus informal networks, and existing forums versus new forums. Managing the tensions—that is, being ambidextrous in handling both poles—typically involves separating the elements of the tension in time or space. For example, collaborating organizations are likely to keep stable all aspects of the organization not involved in a collaboration while making changes to those parts that are. This is the *strategy of spatial separation*. Alternatively, the strategy formulation process relies a great deal on lateral relations,

informal networks, new forums, and more power sharing, while the implementation process typically produces a reemergence of reliance on hierarchy, formal networks, existing forums, and less power sharing. This is the *strategy of temporal separation*. In this discussion of ambidexterity, we are reminded of Thompson's (1967) classic description of reciprocal interdependence, entailing mutual adjustment of each unit to the action of other units; thus, the coordination mechanism for reciprocal interdependence is mutual adjustment among units (Ansell and Gash 2008; Thomson and Perry 2006) in order to effectively manage spatial and temporal separations (Clarke and Fuller 2010). Future research might explore what kinds of ambidexterity are necessary in large, multiactor, multilevel collaborations and how ambidexterity is best developed and managed.

Intersections of Processes and Structure

As mentioned earlier, there is a recognition that processes and structures are difficult to consider separately in the collaborative context, as in the case of ambidexterity discussed earlier. In this section, we highlight particular areas in which research suggests their interactions.

Leadership roles, practices, and skills. Leadership for collaboration has received considerable attention in the last decade. As noted earlier, collaborations are unlikely to get off the ground without the involvement of sponsors and champions. In order for collaborations to thrive, they need ongoing sponsorship from people who have formal authority and championing from people who use mainly informal authority to engage partners in their mutual work. More specifically, research indicates that collaborations that are dependent in some important way on a public bureaucracy need one or more consistent sponsors and champions who are embedded near the top of the public bureaucracy (Agranoff 2012). Furthermore, a champion acts as a "collaborative capacity builder," which Weber and Khademan describe as "someone who either by legal authority, expertise valued in the network, reputation as an honest broker, or some combination of the three, has been accorded a lead role in the network's problem-solving exercises" (2008, 340). A crucial task for sponsors and champions is managing the tensions surrounding unity and diversity in collaborations; for example, they must help partners shape a unifying identity for the collaboration while highlighting the unique contributions of partner organizations (Ospina and Foldy 2010; Saz-Carranza and Ospina 2011). Because collaborations are likely to extend over years, original champions or sponsors may move on to other causes or positions; therefore, collaborators need strategies for managing transitions in these roles (Ivery 2010; Koliba, Mills, and Zia 2011; Simo 2009).

Beyond key sponsors and champions, many other people must exercise leadership at the level of the collaboration and in partner

organizations if the collaboration is to succeed (Agranoff 2012; Baker, Kan, and Teo 2011; Clarke and Fuller 2010). They keep the collaborative vision at the forefront of everyone's efforts and facilitate collaborative processes and inclusive structures but also may practice "collaborative thuggery" at times in order to ensure the collaboration does not succumb to "collaborative inertia" (Huxham and Vangen 2005). Sullivan, Williams, and Jeffares argue that prime assignments for leaders in collaborations are "in coming to terms with ambiguity, dilemma, risk and loss of control, in building trust and productive relationships between partners and in finding ways of influencing people and organizations outside leaders' direct authority" (2012, 56). These leaders "can best be seen as 'situated agents'—a product of the particular structural characteristics that define collaborative contexts, yet capable of independent action through their skills, experience and expertise" (58).

Other authors have described the integrative leadership practices and skills that foster effective collaboration (e.g., Crosby and Bryson 2010, 2012; Morse and Stephens 2012; Ospina and Foldy 2010; Sun and Anderson 2012). Morse (2010), for example, suggests that leadership enables the different dimensions of cross-sector collaboration to form a whole and achieve outcomes in the absence of hierarchical power and control. He uses three case studies from North Carolina to illustrate the following elements of public integrative leadership: creating and sustaining boundary organizations, creating common purpose, and organizing boundary experiences that create boundary objects. Morse also emphasizes some leaders' skill in building "relationship capital." Based on a case study, Page (2010) describes three broad leadership tactics for developing collaborative governance: framing the agenda, convening stakeholders, and structuring deliberation. Leadership development programs can help build such skills (Getha-Taylor and Morse 2013). In a study of two Finnish cross-sector partnerships, Ritvala, Salmi, and Andersson (2014) found that managers engaged in "bricolage"—strategically combining resources—in order to enact integrative mechanisms that helped the collaboration function more effectively. Future research might consider more thoroughly how leaders at different levels of a collaboration draw on personal and organizational resources as they engage in these practices.

Governance. What constitutes governance for networks or collaborations is an elusive question (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012; O'Leary and Vij 2012; Provan and Kenis 2008) but is gaining more attention. Scholars distinguish between collaborative governance (i.e., a public policy implementation tool that involves government and nonstate actors) and the governance *of* collaborations through structures and processes for collective decision making (Stone, Crosby, and Bryson 2010, 2013; Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth 2014). Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth offer a useful definition: "The governance of a collaborative entity entails the design and use of a structure and processes that enable actors to

The strategy formulation process relies a great deal on lateral relations, informal networks, new forums, and more power sharing, while the implementation process typically produces a reemergence of reliance on hierarchy, formal networks, existing forums, and less power sharing.

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direct, coordinate, and allocate resources for the collaboration as a whole and to account for its activities” (2014, 8). Unlike many aspects of organizational governance that are taken as “givens,” the governance of collaborations typically emerges through frequent, structured exchanges that develop network level values, norms, and trust enabling social mechanisms to coordinate and monitor behavior (Thomson and Perry 2006).

The literature on the governance of collaborations emphasizes attention to contextual elements. Key external factors include government policies and mandates and preexisting relationships among members (Cornforth, Hayes, and Vangen 2014; Crosby, Stone, and Bryson 2015; Siddiki et al. 2015). Mandates, in particular, may specify hierarchical collaborative governance structures in which one partner is granted more authority and control. As a consequence, the more powerful partner may ignore other partners, thus undermining the potential for more genuine collaboration (Dienhart and Ludescher 2010; Van Gestal, Voets, and Verhoest 2012). Previous relationships among collaboration members are also likely to influence collaborative governance. If positive, these relationships likely contain residual trust, making it easier to build commitment to the new endeavor (Crosby, Stone, and Bryson 2015).

Governance structures are also influenced by internal contingencies such as network size, collaborative task, and degrees of trust among members (Provan and Kenis 2008; Stadler 2011). Stage of collaborative development has also garnered attention relative to governance structures. As noted earlier, while some argue that initial governance structures resist adaptation over time (Takahashi and Smutny 2002), others describe considerable churning as collaborations respond to fluctuations in their external environments and internal dynamics (Cornforth, Hayes, and Vangen 2014; Stone, Crosby, and Bryson 2013).

Recent research has also cited the role of paradoxical tensions as an influencer of collaborative governance (and a contributor to its dynamic quality), including tensions around control versus trust, inclusivity versus efficiency, congruent versus divergent goals, and unity versus diversity (Cornforth, Hayes, and Vangen 2014; Provan and Kenis 2008; Saz-Carranza and Ospina 2011; Schirmer 2013; Stone, Crosby, and Bryson 2013; Vangen and Huxham 2012; Sandström, Bodin, and Crona 2015). Further research seems merited on management of these tensions through structures as well as processes.

Technology. Traditionally technology includes both work procedures and specific tools or equipment; now it is often conceptualized in organizations and interorganizational networks as part of an organization’s social system and as an actor in its own right (Sandfort 2009). Viewed as technology-in-use (Orlikowski 2000), technology is an “ensemble or ‘web’ of equipment, techniques, applications, and people that define a social context” (Orlikowski and Iacono 2001, 122). Technologies can facilitate the work of the collaboration itself. Technologies fulfill two crucial roles for collaborations: First, technology can act as facilitator of collaborative behavior (Ritvala, Salmi, and Andersson 2014). Technology may be viewed as a motivating or attractor force when the prospect of using new technologies incentivizes participation. As a relationship builder among partnership members, technologies

allow or force people to integrate across boundaries, both within their own agencies or across different agencies and organizations (Bryson et al. 2011). Second, technology also acts as a “nonhuman actor” (Latour 2005), meaning it can provide solutions and present a systems view of complex interactions that surpass perceptions of individual actors, be a significant policy mechanism and political factor, be essential to changing public perceptions, and stimulate internal organizational changes (Bryson et al. 2008; Bryson et al. 2011).

Collaborative capacity and competencies. Several researchers have found that individuals and organizations are more reliable and productive partners in collaborations when they have particular attitudes, competencies, and capacities. Among the individual attitudes deemed helpful for cross-sector collaboration are interpersonal understanding, openness to collaboration, and concern for the common good (Crosby and Bryson 2010; Getha-Taylor 2008). Key individual and organizational competencies include the ability to work across boundaries, analyze and involve stakeholders, engage in strategic planning, and participate in teamwork (Crosby and Bryson 2012; Quick and Feldman 2014; Simo 2009; Simo and Bies 2007). Past experience working in collaboration or with a particular issue is likely to be helpful as a source of capacity and competency. Depending on the collaboration, additional technical competencies and expertise may be needed. Collaborative capacity is an important determinant of success (Babiak and Thibault 2009; Weber and Khademian 2008).

Endemic Conflicts and Tensions

Endemic conflicts and tensions are both likely to be present in these multiorganizational arrangements and likely to influence their internal workings. Tensions noted previously involve power imbalances, competing institutional logics, autonomy versus interdependence, stability versus flexibility, inclusivity versus efficiency, and internal versus external legitimacy. Conflicts often erupt around these tensions. Additional sources of conflict are noted here.

Sources and consequences of conflict. Conflict in a collaboration emerges from the differing aims and expectations that partners bring to a collaboration, tensions in loyalties to home organizations versus the collaboration, differing views about strategies and tactics, as well as from attempts to protect or magnify partner control over the collaboration’s work or outcomes (Berardo, Heikkila, and Gerlak 2014; Vangen and Huxham 2012). Conflict may be exacerbated when the collaborating organizations differ in status (either because of size, funding, constituency, or reputation). There is some indication that power conflicts are also more likely at the inception of collaborations than at later stages. Ingold and Fischer (2014), for example, found that partners’ beliefs and power seem less important in establishing collaborative ties during implementation compared with early stages.

Effective conflict management is more likely if partners are “willing to explore alternatives rather than enroll others in a preexisting vision” (Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pfarrer 2012, 341; see also Leach et al. 2014). Use of effective conflict management practices, such as extensive use of regular meetings to raise and resolve issues, and other kinds of “boundary work” (Quick and Feldman 2014) are

important. Irregular meetings may be needed to stop the action and deal with particular conflicts before moving ahead. Vangen and Winchester (2014), in the only article dealing directly with cultural differences, offer a three-stage process (focusing on recognition, research, and reconciliation) for dealing with collaborative tensions tied to those differences.

Although the rhetoric of collaboration emphasizes partnership and inclusion, some partners will have more power (of various kinds) and authority than others. The ability to manage power imbalances therefore becomes important. Government partners have special authority by virtue of representing the public (McGuire and Agranoff 2011). A nonprofit organization might have authority and power because of its connection to a particular constituency; a business partner might have knowledge of a needed technology. Thus, collaboration leaders intent on organizing the inclusive processes and structures that collaboration requires would be wise to work with power differences and find ways to minimize them when needed. As Battisti (2009) notes, less powerful partners may have reduced commitment to a collaboration because they fear they will be exploited. Purdy (2012) suggests ways of increasing the “discursive legitimacy” of partners who may be at a disadvantage—for example, by organizing separate forums for those partners. Sometimes increasing the power of a government partner may be necessary, as Weir, Rongerude, and Ansell (2009) found. In a study of Swiss cross-sector networks focusing on climate change, Ingold and Fischer (2014) found that government partners with formal decision power were more active than other actors in the networks—that is, they had a greater number of intranetwork ties.

Fueling conflict and tensions are exogenous and endogenous shocks, to which collaborations are especially vulnerable because of their permeable boundaries. Shocks can affect relations among partners, resources, and even the purpose of the collaboration (Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2012; Fligstein and McAdam 2012). Funders may change their priorities. 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 flexible governance arrangements can help collaborations anticipate and shape future developments (Bryson et al. 2008).

Building legitimacy, leadership and trust, along with managing conflict, all become more complex for multisector collaborations because of the likelihood that members represent and enact competing institutional logics and because collaborations, by their nature, face institutional complexity (Koliba, Mills, and Zia 2011; Saz-Carranza and Longo 2012). Institutional logics are macro-level historical patterns, both symbolic and material, that establish formal and informal rules of the game and provide interpretations of action. Logics compete because actions, processes, norms, and structures that are seen as legitimate given one institutional logic may be seen as less legitimate or even illegitimate when one uses other logics (Kraatz and Block 2008; Pache and

Santos 2013). Saz-Carranza and Longo’s study (2012) found that collaboration actors adopted two practices to manage competing logics: involving and communicating with a wide array of stakeholders to build external legitimacy and facilitating joint-learning spaces to promote internal trust.

Accountabilities and Outcomes

In this section we discuss assessing outcomes of cross-sector collaboration in four categories: (1) public value; (2) immediate, intermediate, and long-term effects; (3) resilience and reassessment; and (4) accountability.

Public value. We argue that the point of creating and sustaining cross-sector collaborations involving governments ought to be the production of “public value” (Benington and Moore 2011; Bozeman 2007; Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg 2014) that could not be created by single sectors alone and that is within the scope of what networked solutions might accomplish (Agranoff 2012; McGuire and Agranoff 2011). Public value in cross-sector collaborations seems most likely to be created by using each sector’s characteristic strengths while finding ways to minimize, overcome, or compensate for each sector’s characteristic weaknesses.

Andrews and Entwistle (2010) surveyed managers of departments providing an array of services in Welsh local governments. The authors found that intergovernmental partnerships appear to increase effectiveness, efficiency, and equity; government–business partnerships appear to decrease effectiveness, have little effect on efficiency, and decrease equity; and government–nonprofit partnerships appear to have no impact on effectiveness, efficiency, and equity. Because the findings are based on correlations, the authors do not make causal claims. They speculate that intergovernmental partnerships may have the best outcomes because they have special legal power, specialized expertise, and a public service ethos; employ certain collaboration strategies; and enjoy higher mutual trust and greater goal alignment.

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Immediate, intermediate, and long-term effects. Innes and Booher (1999, 2010) argue based on their case studies that collaborative planning efforts have first-, second-, and third-order positive effects, analogous to immediate, intermediate, and long-term effects. Immediately discernable effects are a direct result of the collaboration process. These include the creation of social, intellectual, and political capital; high-quality agreements; and innovative strategies. Intermediate effects occur when collaboration is well under way, or else may occur outside the formal boundaries of the effort. These might include new partnerships, new physical facilities, coordination and joint action, joint learning that extends beyond the collaboration, implementation of agreements, changes in practices, and changes in perceptions. Finally, long-term effects may not be evident for some time. These might include new collaborations; more coevolution and less destructive conflict between partners; adaptations of services, resources, cities, and regions; new

institutions; new norms and social heuristics for addressing public problems; and new modes of discourse.

Clarke and Fuller (2010) in their comparative case study provide a complementary list of six categories applied to the collaboration and to the individual collaborating organizations: effects that result directly from the planning process or the plan, those related to learning or behavior change by the partners, those involving changes in relations between the collaborators and nonparticipating stakeholders, outcomes affecting individuals, and unexpected outcomes beyond the focal issue(s) of the collaboration. Herranz (2010) uses Provan and Milward's (2001) levels of organization, network, and community in a multilevel comparative case study to identify important performance dimensions and outcomes. It is important to recognize that not all effects at whatever level are likely to be positive (Andrews and Entwistle 2010; Codecasa and Ponzini 2011; Koliba, Mills, and Zia 2011).

Resilience and reassessments. Ongoing learning appears to be an important feature of successful collaborations (Chen 2010; Koppenjan 2008; Leach et al. 2014). Learning is a product of effective emergent planning (Clarke and Fuller 2010); active, networked governance (Lindencrona, Ekblad, and Axelsson 2009); and a focus on boundaries between organizations as sites for learning about how to work together (Quick and Feldman 2014). Learning is particularly important when goals and performance indicators either are not or cannot be known in advance; in other words, ongoing learning is the way to figure out what the goals and indicators might and ought to be (Koppenjan 2008).

Complex accountabilities. Accountability is a particularly complex issue for collaborations because it can be unclear to whom the collaborative is accountable and for what (Koliba, Mills, and Zia 2011; Romzek, LeRoux, and Blackmar 2012; Romzek et al. 2014). Relationships between the collaborative and home organizations may be abstruse, and there typically are multiple and competing stakeholder perceptions of how to define results and outcomes (Clarke and Fuller 2010). Further complicating the picture, collaborations will vary in their ability to exercise collective agency and to have their "authoritative texts" affect public perceptions, collaborative legitimacy, and justifications for collaborative action, as well as to affect individual organizational texts and actions along with those of other constituents (Koschmann, Kuhn, and Pfarrer 2012).

Accountability actually can be for inputs, process, outputs, or outcomes. Forrer et al. (2010) argue that public-private partnerships should be accountable in terms of understanding and allocating risk, costs and benefits, political and social impacts, expertise, collaboration, and performance measurement. Koliba, Mills, and Zia (2011) offer an accountability framework that applies more broadly to cross-sector collaboration. They consider democratic, market, and administrative frames, each with a different set of accountabilities to different kinds of people or organizations, differing strengths of accountability relationships, and different explicit and implicit standards. Romzek et al. (2014) provide and test a framework for understanding informal accountability that emphasizes the link between shared norms and facilitative behaviors with informal rewards and sanctions where these relationships are often mediated by challenges that may undermine the development of

informal accountability. Page et al. (2015) offer an accountability framework focused on public value creation. They argue that public value in the context of collaboration involves three dimensions—democratic accountability, procedural legitimacy, and substantive outcomes—that reflect distinct priorities and concerns for public administration. Of course, accountability may not always be clear-cut, for example, when a collaboration works with other collaborations; additionally, collaborating organizations may have their own accountability frameworks that conflict with the collaboration's accountability approach (Clarke and Fuller 2010; Sullivan, Barnes, and Matka 2002). Clearly, substantial additional work is needed on cross-sector collaboration outcomes and accountabilities.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Cross-sector collaborations have proliferated in recent years for a variety of reasons, but first and foremost because the organizations in the collaboration are trying to accomplish something they could not achieve by themselves (Provan and Kenis 2008, 240). Many see such arrangements as a necessary approach to dealing with challenging public problems (Bryson, Crosby, and Bloomberg 2014; Kettl 2015; Popp et al. 2014). In the last decade, scholars have developed comprehensive theoretical frameworks for understanding cross-sector collaborations and how they might produce desirable outcomes. The frameworks have much in common, but they differ in important ways. Collectively, they show that cross-sector collaboration is a very complex phenomenon that should be conceptualized as a dynamic system. The complexity is inescapable because these collaborations are dynamic fields that brush up against and are penetrated by other dynamic fields (Fligstein and McAdam 2012). A systemic view is necessary in order to understand how the parts fit together and to avoid unintended deleterious effects. The challenge for scholars is clear, as Berardo, Heikkila, and Gerlak note: "Collaboration processes are complex enough as to demand a simultaneous analysis of all its moving parts, a goal that should drive future research efforts in this area" (2014, 701). The challenge for practice is the same—how to understand collaborations and their moving parts well enough to actually produce good results and minimize failure.

Figure 1 presents our attempt at a reasonably parsimonious and pragmatic synthesis of the frameworks and empirical studies we reviewed. The immediate challenge for scholars is the need to take into account contributions from multiple theories, as so many offer relevant insights. The frameworks reviewed here draw on a broad range of theories from organization studies, public administration, leadership, strategic management, conflict management, collective action, policy studies, planning and environmental management, network theory, and communication. Given that cross-sector collaboration is an inherently interdisciplinary phenomenon, this is to be expected. The challenge for scholars is to understand these theories, their assumptions, and their strengths and weaknesses well enough to use them appropriately and in integrated and complementary, rather than conflicting or contradictory, ways. The challenge for practitioners is analogous if they are to make reasonable assessments of the utility of the research for practice. Because learning is an important feature of successful collaborations (Ansell and Gash 2008; Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh 2011; Leach et al. 2014; Thomson and Perry 2006), they are natural sites for action

research that has theory building and testing as its aim (Eden and Huxham 1996). Given that collaboration practice is generally ahead of collaboration scholarship, research that collaboratively joins practitioners and scholars makes sense (Popp et al. 2014).

Meanwhile, empirical research has proliferated and filled in details about how elements of these theoretical frameworks work, or do not, in practice. Clearly, the practical challenges of designing and implementing effective cross-sector collaboration are substantial. Theory, empirical research, and practice all reveal that because cross-sector collaborations are so complex and dynamic and operate in such diverse contexts, it is unlikely that research-based recipes can be produced. Probably the best that research can offer is design guidance (Romme and Endenburg 2006) and what Huxham and colleagues have called “handles for reflective practice” (Huxham and Vangen 2005; Popp et al. 2014).

Some research areas are very well developed and offer reasonably clear conclusions. These areas include when and when not to collaborate (e.g., Agranoff 2012; Popp et al. 2014); the antecedents of effective collaboration (e.g., Crosby, Stone, and Bryson 2015); the elements of effective collaboration leadership (e.g., Clarke and Fuller 2010; Morse 2010; Ospina and Foldy 2010; Page 2010; Saz-Carranza and Ospina 2011; Sullivan, Williams, and Jeffares 2012); the multilevel nature of collaboration (e.g., Herranz 2010; Popp et al. 2014); the range of, and contingencies guiding, effective governance approaches (e.g., Cornforth, Hayes, and Vangen 2014; Provan and Kenis 2008; Vangen, Hayes, and Cornforth 2014); likely collaboration outcomes (Innes and Booher 2010; Popp et al. 2014); and the difficulties or challenges of collaboration (e.g., Vangen and Huxham 2012; Popp et al. 2014).

Based on the empirical research, it is safe to say that collaboration success depends on leadership of many different kinds. Scholars have highlighted several roles that people play, such as sponsors, champions, boundary spanners, and facilitators. Huxham and Vangen (2005) and Sydow et al. (2011) argue that leadership—in the sense of what “makes things happen”—also occurs through structures and processes. The leadership challenge in cross-sector collaboration may therefore be viewed as the challenge of aligning initial conditions, structures, processes, and outcomes and accountabilities such that good things happen in a sustained way over time—indeed, so that public value can be created. We have suggested that researchers focus on leadership at multiple levels.

Also important is the mix of environmental factors over which managers have little control and strategic choices over which managers have some control. Support from the institutional environment is critical for legitimizing cross-sector collaboration, but it is not easily controlled by local managers. On the other hand, the choices of governing mechanism, stakeholder participants, planning processes, and conflict management techniques,

for example, are at least partially within the purview of managerial choice. Research and practice must pay attention to the external environment and also recognize that many of these components represent strategic contingencies that will influence, but not necessarily determine, managerial or collaborative action. Leaders and managers, constrained though they may be, are likely to produce independent effects—in part by design—on collaboration success (Agranoff 2007; Agranoff and McGuire 2003). Future research should explore what the range of those effects might be in different circumstances.

While considerable progress has been made on understanding collaboration outcomes, including process outcomes, further research is needed to understand how collaborations can contribute to the creation of public value (e.g., Page et al. 2015) and to clarify the complex nature of accountabilities (e.g., Romzek et al. 2014). Perhaps surprisingly, given the general agreement in the literature that collaboration only makes sense when there is some kind of collaborative advantage to be gained (Huxham and Vangen 2005), there is very little on how to actually go about discerning what the collaborative advantage is in specific circumstances other than engaging in dialogue and deliberation (e.g., Emerson,

Nabatchi, and Balogh 2011; Innes and Booher 2010).

Several of the theorists we have cited argue for grounding collaboration research in a multilevel, dynamic systems view, and we would underscore that argument. Such a perspective would include attention to the effects of a collaboration’s embeddedness in an institutional environment, the role of technology, and effects on the collaborating partners as well as the social and institutional environment. A dynamic systems perspective also would allow researchers to more perceptively probe the interaction of processes and structure and the way crucial tensions play out over time. Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2011), for example, argue persuasively that the dynamic interaction of shared motivation, principled engagement, and capacity for joint action leads to actions, impact, and outcomes, but the structural aspects of this progression are left in the background. The other theoretical frameworks we have reviewed similarly privilege process over structure, with the exceptions of our own and that of Provan and Kenis (2008). Research on leadership in complex adaptive systems (e.g., Uhl-Bien and Marion 2009) is likely to offer helpful insights how to help collaborations learn and adapt structurally and processually. A dynamic systems perspective also should deepen understanding of the effects of antecedents, processes, structures, and contingencies on outcomes (positive and negative). Ideally, researchers will seek to uncover the precise causal mechanisms that can advance or undermine effective collaboration (Mayntz 2004; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). Emerson, Nabatchi, and Balogh (2011), for example, posit that the dynamic interaction of shared motivation, principled engagement, and capacity for joint action is, in effect, a causal mechanism leading to actions. Additional theorizing and empirical research are needed to move

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beyond variable-based explanations to clearly understand more precisely what is causing what.

Advancing collaboration scholarship presents a number of methodological challenges. One challenge is the need to blend multiple theoretical and research perspectives (Rethemeyer 2005). Many public management scholars tend to 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, often focused on structural variables, but tends to disregard three critical components of cross-sector collaborations: an appreciation of the uniqueness and differential strengths and weaknesses of governments, nonprofit organizations, businesses, news media, and communities; ongoing process dimensions, including leadership broadly defined; and the dynamic nature of collaborative development (O’Toole 2014; Popp et al. 2014). 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. Future research must bridge these two perspectives in order to begin to capture the complexity inherent in cross-sector collaborations (O’Toole 2014).

A second challenge involves the limitations of single-case studies and variable-driven research for studying complex, dynamic phenomena, in comparison with longitudinal, multilevel, multimethod comparative case studies that collect rich qualitative and quantitative data. The latter kind of research fosters better understanding of the impacts of context and changes in context, internal and external dynamics, causal connections, and systemic connections in general. Very little such research has been done because it is hard, expensive, and typically takes a team. Quite a few case studies, even comparative case studies, focus on some part of the more comprehensive frameworks and offer valuable insights in particular areas (e.g., Agranoff 2012; Bryson et al. 2011; Clarke and Fuller 2010; Herranz 2010; Innes and Booher 2010; Weir, Rongerude, and Ansell 2009). More work of this kind is needed to trace causality among antecedents, process, structure, and outcomes; compare cross-sector collaborations focused on similar problems but in very different contexts and on different problems in similar contexts; trace the effects of power dynamics and differing governance structures on outputs and outcomes; and incorporate the multiple dimensions of outcomes—including public value outcomes—and accountabilities. Experiments, simulations, and games, which are gaining traction as public administration research methodologies, provide complementary methodologies for exploring complex, dynamic interactions in collaborations (Bretschneider et al. 2015; Richardson, Anderson, and Luna-Reyes 2015).

The research challenges involved in studying cross-sector collaborations and in providing practical, research-based guidance to policy makers regarding the design and implementation of cross-sector collaborations are clearly substantial. Yet the challenges must be met, or 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.

Note

1. Please note that we are not reviewing the extensive literature on interorganizational networks (see Popp et al. 2014). “Network” is a general term encompassing all interorganizational relationships, while collaborations and partnerships are specific types of networked relationships. Hence, not all networks are collaborations, but all collaborations and partnerships are networks.

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Address Initial Conditions

Proposition 1: Similar to all interorganizational relationships, cross-sector collaborations are more likely to form in turbulent environments. In particular, the formation and sustainability of cross-sector collaborations will be affected by driving and constraining forces in their competitive and institutional environments, *including political forces and the availability of relevant technology.*

Proposition 2: Public policy makers are most likely to try cross-sector collaboration if they believe that separate efforts by several sectors to address a public problem have failed, or are likely to fail, and the actual failures cannot be fixed by a separate sector alone, *or, less dramatically, that no sector can address the presenting problem effectively on its own.*

Proposition 3: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed when one or more linking mechanisms—such as powerful leaders and sponsors; general agreement on the problem; existing networks; neutral conveners; *requests for proposals, plans, projects or technologies requiring collaboration; and consequential incentives favoring collaboration*—are in place at the time of their initial formation.

Design Effective Processes

Proposition 4: The form and content of a collaboration's initial agreements, *as well as the processes used to formulate them, will affect the outcomes of the collaboration's work. A sequence of increasingly operational agreements involving key decision makers, a certain degree of flexibility, and re-negotiability are likely to be important elements of the agreement process.*

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

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

Proposition 7: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed if a *continuing virtuous circle* of trust-building activities (including nurturing of cross-sectoral and cross-cultural understanding) *can be established and maintained.*

Proposition 8: Because conflict is common in partnerships, cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed if partners use resources and tactics to help equalize power and manage conflict, *particularly in the early phases of planning and organizing the work to be done.*

Proposition 9: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed if they use a combination of deliberate and emergent planning, with deliberate planning emphasized more in mandated collaborations and emergent planning emphasized more in nonmandated collaborations. *At some point, however, emergent planning needs to be followed by formalization; too much emergent planning can undermine collaboration success.*

Proposition 10: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed if 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 the competencies and distinctive competencies of the collaborators.

Proposition 11: Inclusive processes are needed to produce inclusive structures that, in turn, foster inclusive practices. Both inclusive processes and structures facilitate effective collaboration. (Proposition 12 has been moved to a different category and will be found below proposition 18.)

Create Effective Structural and Governance Arrangements

Proposition 13: Collaborative structure is influenced by environmental factors, such as system stability and the collaboration's strategic purpose; *structures must be able to handle changes in the environment and strategic purpose.*

Proposition 14: Collaborative structure is also likely to change over time due to ambiguity of membership and complexity in local environments.

Proposition 15: Collaboration structure and the nature of the tasks to be performed at various levels, including the client *or street level*, are likely to influence a collaboration's overall effectiveness; *a measure of structural ambidexterity is likely to be necessary to manage the array of tasks.*

Proposition 16: Governing arrangements, including those that operate at both informal and formal levels, *must be able to respond effectively to strategic, operational, and mixed issues and the extent to which they do is likely to influence collaboration effectiveness. This responsiveness is needed in part to decide who gets to decide and to be able to manage spatial and temporal ambidexterity.*

Manage Contingencies and Constraints Affecting Process and Structure

Proposition 17: *Collaborations that are prepared to take advantage of a window of opportunity are far more likely to succeed than those that are not.*

Proposition 18: *In order to be effective, collaborations must manage the many roles of technology as a facilitator of collaboration and as a nonhuman actor capable of providing solutions, affecting policies and politics, altering public perceptions, and, stimulating internal organizational changes.*

Proposition 12: Collaborations involving system-level planning activities are likely to involve the most negotiation, followed by collaborations focused on administrative-level partnerships, followed by service delivery partnerships.

Proposition 19: *Needed competencies must be available or developed or cross-sector collaboration goals will not be achieved.*

Proposition 20: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to succeed if the collaborations build in resources and tactics for dealing with power imbalances and shocks. *Shocks need to be expected and can be positive, for example, a window of opportunity.*

Proposition 21: 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 and structure as well as outcomes. Competing logics must be managed effectively.

Manage Outcomes and Accountabilities

Proposition 22: Cross-sector collaborations are most likely to create public value if they build on individuals' and organizations' self-interests along each sector's characteristic strengths, while finding ways to minimize, overcome, or compensate for each sector's characteristic weaknesses.

Proposition 23: Cross-sector collaborations are most likely to create public value if they produce positive first-, second-, and third-order effects *far in excess of negative effects.*

Proposition 24: Cross-sector collaborations are most likely to create public value if they are long-lived, resilient, *and engage in regular reassessments.*

Proposition 25: Cross-sector collaborations are more likely to be successful if they have an accountability system in place that tracks inputs, processes, and outcomes; use a variety of methods for gathering, interpreting, and using data; and have in place a results management system built on strong relationships with key political and professional constituencies.

Proposition 26: The normal expectation ought to be that success will be very difficult to achieve in cross-sector collaborations.
