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Collaborative Public Management: Assessing What We Know and How We Know It

Collaborative public management research is flourishing. A great deal of attention is being paid to the process and impact of collaboration in the public sector, and the results are promising. This article reviews the literature on collaborative public management by synthesizing what we know from recent research and what we've known for quite some time. It addresses the prevalence of collaboration (both recently and historically), the components of emerging collaborative structures, the types of skills that are unique to collaborative management, and the effects of collaboration. Collaborative public management research offers a set of findings that contribute to an emerging knowledge base that supplements established public management theory.

Public managers operate in collaborative settings every day. In Texas school districts, for example, superintendents manage their external environment by interacting with school board members, business leaders, legislators, state education agencies, other superintendents, parent groups, teacher associations, and federal government officials (Meier and O'Toole 2005). In Beloit, Wisconsin, the city government worked actively with a nonprofit redevelopment association to transform a blighted area by engaging officials from the U.S. Department of Transportation, the Rock County government, the Wisconsin Department of Development, and numerous industries (Agranoff and McGuire 2003). In California, an emergency collaborative task force involving federal, state, and local officials, private agencies, and other local representatives was established to address the outbreak of a deadly poultry-based disease (Moynihan 2005a). These and countless other examples represent typical activities for many public managers in the 21st century.

This article provides a synthesis of the research on collaborative public management by reviewing what we've learned recently about such management, as well as what we've known for some time. Collaborative public management is a concept that describes the process of facilitating and operating in

multiorganizational arrangements in order to remedy problems that cannot be solved—or solved easily—by single organizations. The focus in this article is the public manager. Although collaboration takes place in contexts in which government is not a major actor or is not an actor at all (Austin 2000; Lipnack and Stamps 1994), this paper views government as steering policy making and execution, and thus it is the entity through which collaborative public management occurs and management activity is channeled. Collaboration certainly relies on various leaders at various times performing different roles, but in the typical context of collaborative public management, government is ultimately held accountable for the satisfactory delivery of public goods and services. Public managers can't always command action, but they are still responsible for their collaborative outcomes (McGuire 2002). This review, therefore, assumes the governmental perspective in collaborative management.

The first section of this article examines the assumption in the literature that collaborative public management is a fresh approach to governing. If we believe the expanding body of research on the topic, collaborative public management is increasing in incidence and in importance. However, research also suggests that collaborative management in the public sector has been occurring for many decades. The second section of the article looks at the structures through which collaborations are managed. It demonstrates that, contrary to what is often put forth in the contemporary network literature, some collaborative structures actually adopt elements of single, hierarchical organizations. The third section discusses the vast array of skills that are necessary for effective collaborative management but also argues that many such skills are valuable components of organizational behavior in both collaborative settings and single organizations. The fourth section examines the positive impacts of collaboration on program performance while demonstrating the inherent difficulties of collaborative management.

The New and the Old

The Newness of Collaborative Public Management

Judging from the surge of research, it would appear that collaboration is a relatively recent phenomenon, a new world in which management principles must be rewritten and theories of organizing must be updated. One recent volume argues that governing in this collaborative, networked era “requires a form of public management different from what the country has become accustomed to over the past 100 years” (Goldsmith and Eggers 2004). Similarly, Kettl (1996) argues that the most important change in administrative functioning over this past century has been increasing interdependence among public organizations, which has changed the jobs of public administrators, who must now build critical linkages with other agencies. Stoker states that there’s a “new kid on the block, a management that defines its task more broadly than do previous paradigms and achieves many of its purposes through a dynamic of network governance” (2006, 43).

If collaborative public management is indeed new and becoming the prominent form of governing, why is this occurring? One perspective argues that societal change is a primary determinant of collaborative public management. Just as the hierarchical organization emerged during the agricultural age and bureaucracy was the dominant form of organization during the industrial age, the nascent information age has given rise to permeable structures in which people can link across organizational functions and boundaries. This social change thesis argues that the world is characterized by extreme diversity “where power is dispersed, not centralized; where tasks are becoming de-differentiated, rather than subdivided and specialized; and where society worldwide demands greater freedom and individuation, rather than integration” (Agranoff and McGuire 2003, 23). For many, it’s the age of the network and collaboration.

Another perspective asserts that the types of problems that government faces today cannot be addressed effectively through traditional bureaucracies. Solving seemingly intractable problems such as poverty, health care, and natural disasters, the argument goes, requires different mechanisms that are more flexible, more inclusive, and more adaptable and operate with greater speed (Alter and Hage 1993) than those of conventional government organizations. These problems—often referred to as “wicked problems”—have no clear solutions, only temporary and imperfect resolutions (Harmon and Mayer 1986). O’Toole (1997) suggests that policies dealing with such complex issues will increasingly require collaborative structures for execution. Collaborative structures may be needed in problem areas in which the public

simultaneously prefers more government action and less government involvement. As the velocity of government has increased over the past few decades, the propensity of citizens to expect greater choice of services administered through less traditional government activities has increased as well (Goldsmith and Eggers 2004). Thus, according to these arguments, collaborative public management is emergent.

How New?

Although the recent spate of attention to collaborative public management suggests its newness, there is ample evidence to suggest that managers have practiced collaborative public management for quite some time. Research in intergovernmental relations and management and policy implementation has described public management as being collaborative in practice. American federalism, for example, is perhaps the most enduring model of collaborative problem resolution (Agranoff and McGuire 2003). Writing in 1960, Grodzins argued that “federal-state-local collaboration is the characteristic mode of action” and that “any governmental activity is almost certain to involve the influence, if not the formal administration, of all three planes of the federal system” (1960, 266–67). His metaphor of the marble cake described a federalism that is cooperative across levels of government. Indeed, some have argued that federalism in the United States has always been cooperative, in that nearly all the activities of government, even in the 19th century, were shared activities involving all levels of government in their planning, financing, and execution (Elazar 1962; Grodzins 1966). The grant-in-aid system in America certainly is the most prominent context within which collaboration has occurred since the 19th century. The aid process has long been characterized by the presence of bargaining, cooperation, and mutual dependence (Ingram 1977; Pressman 1975). Even in the absence of cooperative financing, however, the three levels of government and nonprofit organizations cooperate—and have cooperated—both informally and officially, vertically and horizontally, in many different ways and through many different mechanisms for decades.

There is also empirical evidence demonstrating the direct connection in the 1960s between federal policy making in the United States and the development of implementation structures that involved multiple actors. Hall and O’Toole (2000, 2004) examined the institutional arrangements incorporated into the legislation enacted by the 89th and 103rd Congresses. They found that the majority of significant new legislation prescribed the involvement of collaborative structures for policy implementation. The research demonstrates empirically that “in most cases [for both Congresses], the implementation of new programs at the national levels requires U.S. public administrators to be prepared to work a variety of different kinds of

actors both within and without government—actors drawn from different organizational cultures, influenced by different sets of incentives, and directed toward different goals” (Hall and O’Toole 2004, 190). Subsequent research has shown that postlegislation rulemaking by implementing federal agencies also led to collaborative administrative arrangements (Hall and O’Toole 2004).

Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) were among the first to discuss policy implementation in terms of shared administration, suggesting the collaborative nature of public management. Based on an empirical investigation of the Economic Development Administration’s attempts to address the unemployment of minorities in Oakland, California, during the 1960s, their reference to the complexity of joint action describes the multiplicity of participants and perspectives from all levels of government pursuing policy goals that, in practice, may be conflicting. More than two decades ago, Hjern and Porter (1981) described implementation structures operating with representatives of different agencies and exercising considerable discretion in practice. Collaborative structures used to implement manpower training in Germany and Sweden during the 1970s were characterized at that time by multiple power centers with reciprocal relationships, many suppliers of resources, overlapping and dynamic divisions of labor, diffused responsibility for actions, massive information exchanges among actors, and the need for information input from all actors (Hanf, Hjern, and Porter 1978). Many policy studies in the 1980s revealed the extent of collaboration in public policy implementation (Hull and Hjern 1987; Mandell 1984; O’Toole 1985). So, although recent research often describes collaborative public management in novel terms, there is a rich history that precedes it.

Locus of Collaborative Public Management

Collaborative Structures

Collaborative public management occurs in various settings (Alter and Hage 1993), both in a vertical context through levels of government and in a horizontal context in which an array of public and private actors are mobilized. It also involves the distinct operations of managing upward, downward, and outward toward the networked environment (O’Toole, Meier, and Nicholson-Crotty 2005). A public manager may be simultaneously involved in managing across governmental boundaries, across organizational and sectoral boundaries, and through formal contractual obliga-

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tions; it is often difficult to distinguish where the boundary lies between these different environments. In some cases, management takes place in highly formalized and lasting arrangements, such as a network that is either encouraged (Schneider et al. 2003) or prescribed (O’Toole 1996; Radin et al. 1996) by law. In others, formal collaborative ties form within specific policy areas. Informal, emergent, and short-term coordination is also a common component of collaborative public management (Drabek and McEntire 2002).

One type of collaborative context or “interorganizational innovation” identified by Mandell and Steelman (2003) is *intermittent coordination*, which occurs when the policies and procedures of two or more organizations are mutually adjusted to accomplish an objective. Interaction occurs at a low level, and the commitment to each other is kept at arm’s length. Disaster response is one area in which coordination is intermittent. A second type of collaborative context is a *temporary task force*, which is established to work on a specific and limited purpose and disbands when that purpose is accomplished. As in intermittent coordination, resource sharing is usually limited in scope. A third type of collaborative context, according to Mandell and Steelman, is *permanent or regular coordination*. Such coordination occurs when multiple organizations agree to engage in a limited activity in order to achieve a specific purpose or purposes through a formal arrangement. Membership in this arrangement “is delineated strictly and restricted so that there is stable coordination” (203). Resource exchange is more extensive than in the first two arrangements, but the risk is minimal. Examples of this type of collaborative arrangement are regional planning groups or “wraparound” case management in the social services. Another example of regular coordination can be found in emergency management planning and preparedness.

The most tightly intermingled collaborative arrangements that Mandell and Steelman (2003) identify are *coalitions* and *network structures*. Similar in structure, both involve interdependent and strategic actions, but the purpose of a coalition is “narrow in scope and all actions occur within the participant organizations themselves or involve the sequential or simultaneous activity of the participant organizations,” whereas a network “takes on broad tasks that reach beyond the simultaneous actions of independently operating organizations” (204). In general, a network is a structure that involves multiple nodes—agencies and organizations—with multiple linkages.

In a network structure, there is a strong commitment to multiorganizational-level goals, and resource sharing is risky and extensive. Coalitions disband after the task is completed or the problem is solved, but networks have a long, even indefinite life span because the problems they address are either long term or become redefined as the network evolves.

Not all network structures are alike, however. Agranoff (2003) demonstrates in his study of 12 networks in various policy areas that four different types of networks can be delineated by the scope of activities undertaken within the network. *Informational networks* involve multiple stakeholders who come together for the sole purposes of exchanging information and exploring solutions to a problem or set of problems. Any action that is taken occurs within the member agencies' home organizations. *Developmental networks* involve information exchange combined with education that enhances the member organizations' ability to implement solutions, again at the individual organization level rather than at the network level. *Outreach networks* not only exchange information and improve the administrative capacity of the network members but also "carve out programming strategies for clients (for example, funding packages, usable technologies) that are carried out elsewhere, usually by the partner organizations" (11). Although action strategies are developed in the network, action does not occur at the network level. The most extensive type of network is known as an *action network*. Unlike the other three types, action networks engage in collective action by formally adopting network-level courses of action and often delivering services.

Clearly, there is no one best way to organize for collaboration, and public managers need to give careful consideration to the decisions associated with organizing collaborative activities (Imperial 2005). Smaller, flatter structures such as networks may be best in one situation, whereas a simple partnership between two actors may be best in another. Researchers should also take great care when examining collaboration and labeling the structures. *Networks* are the stated unit of analysis in much of the recent empirical research, but the term is used, sometimes incorrectly, to describe many different collaborative configurations when *task force* or *partnership* would be a more accurate characterization.

How Networked?

A common argument that is used to distinguish collaborative public management structures from traditional organizations is based in an either/or proclamation that may be inaccurately applied to collaborative management (McGuire 2003). Many observers have pointed out that such structures are different from hierarchies, which encompass a man-

agement approach based in top-down, command and control relationships (Goldsmith and Eggers 2004). In addition, a "top-down or holistic perspective of management is not likely to be very productive" in a governing system that is collaborative (Kickert, Klijn, and Koppenjan 1997, 11). Some argue that interorganizational networks are distinct from markets and hierarchical systems (Powell 1990). Agranoff and McGuire (1999) use a classical model of organizing as the comparison group, noting that such an approach is based on hierarchical coordination, strict chains of command, and management that takes place within the confines of separate organizational entities.

Recent empirical research suggests that a clear distinction between hierarchies and collaborative management is not always accurate. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that a blending of the two management approaches in practice is not uncommon. Instead of a completely flat, self-organizing network, the presence of a lead organization, acting as system controller or facilitator, is often a critical element of effectiveness in collaborative management. Such a network administrative organization can reduce the complexity of self-governance and enhance the legitimacy of a network. The larger the network, the more difficult it is to delineate tasks, and the fewer the available network skills, the more likely that centralized forms of network governance will be adopted (Provan and Kenis 2005). A study of community mental health, for example, demonstrates that the effectiveness of networks is partly based on the extent to which the network is coordinated centrally through a core agency (Provan and Milward 1995). These authors argue that "centralization appears to facilitate both integration and coordination, something that decentralized systems have a difficult time accomplishing because of the number of organizations and linkages involved" (Provan and Milward 1995, 24). Strategic activity still occurs at the network level when coordination is more centralized, but administrative and operational decisions are left to the central organization. Lead organizations in economic development that are themselves administered collaboratively through a diverse board and with a single director are associated with greater levels overall of collaboration (Agranoff and McGuire 2003). Thus, single, more centralized organizations act as primary coordinators of what are otherwise collaborative activities.

A merging of hierarchy and collaborative networks is also present in emergency management. As Moynihan (2005b) shows, responses to a man-made disaster can take place through collaboration that is governed by command and control procedures. His study of the outbreak of exotic Newcastle disease in the state of California describes the formation and management of a task force charged with limiting and eliminating the disease. The task force operated much like the

collaborative arrangement described by Mandell and Steelman (2003), but it did so within the context of a top-down incident command system. The emergency response network was coordinated hierarchically, suggesting the existence of a “hierarchical network” (Moynihan 2005a).

Collaborative partnerships can take on a number of features that are more commonly associated with formalized agencies. Bardach observes that “interorganizational collaborative capacity is very much like an organization in its own right” (1998, 21). That is, the standard characteristics of a single hierarchical organization—formalization, specialization, coordination—are embodied in the ability of agencies to work together effectively. Similarly, a study of six watershed management programs found that “collaborative organizations” were formed as a strategy for improving watershed governance (Imperial 2005). Collaborative organizations are “organizations composed of other organizations” that perform a variety of more traditional functions by institutionalizing rules, procedures, and processes into a coordinative organizational structure. Thacher (2004) argues that in practice, such partnerships have a great deal in common with conventional organizations: A distinct organizational structure with routines, roles, norms, and values is developed, and a culture that governs the collaboration emerges. His case study of the Community Security Initiative, a national effort designed to forge partnerships between police departments and community development corporations, revealed that partnerships became “traces of a new organization in the space between those that already existed” (116) and more accurately resembled inchoate hierarchies than purely networked collaborative arrangements. A network management orientation can thus be hierarchically focused and rule driven (Herranz 2005).

Collaborative Management Skills

The Unique Skills of Collaborative Management

Many writers have made the case that collaborative management skills are unique to the collaborative context. For example, Agranoff and McGuire (2001a, 2001b; see also McGuire 2002) distinguish collaborative management behaviors in terms of their operational differences and organize the behaviors into four different categories: activation, framing, mobilizing, and synthesizing. Activation is the identification and incorporation of the right people and resources needed to achieve program goals. This is similar to what Scharpf refers to as “selective activation,” which is “an essential prerequisite for successful interorganizational

policy formation and policy implementation” (1978, 364). The right people for the effort are those who possess the policy-making resources—finances, knowledge, information, expertise, experience, legal authority, and labor—on which the collaborative effort depends in order to attain its goals. One important criterion for determining who becomes involved in collaboration may be that member agencies offer resources that other agencies lack. One study reveals the benefits of continually expanding the involvement base through “recruiting” potential members (Agranoff 2003).

Framing includes facilitating agreement on leadership and administrative roles; helping to establish an identity and culture for the network, even if it is temporary or continually changing; and helping to develop

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a working structure for the network (i.e., committee involvement, network assignments) (McGuire 2002). Strategic planning by participants in the collaboration is one important way to develop an overall purpose and framework for the collaborative effort. Mobilizing behavior on the part of a public manager is intended to induce commitment to the joint undertaking and build

support from both key players outside the collaborative effort and those who are directly involved (Innes and Booher 1999). Synthesizing involves engendering productive and purposeful interaction among all actors. This includes facilitating relationships in order to build trust and promote information exchange.

This operational categorization is similar to that devised by Kickert and Koppenjan (1997), who differentiate network (collaborative) managerial tasks according to three general activities: intervening in existing patterns of relations and restructuring relationships, furthering the conditions for cooperation through consensus building, and joint problem solving. They argue that these strategies occur in the process of both game management and network structuring. Game management involves activating the network by deciding “who should be involved and who not” (47), arranging interaction, brokering to match problems and solutions with collaborative actors, facilitating interaction, and mediation and arbitration. The collaborative manager plays the role of mediator and stimulates interaction (Koppenjan and Klijn 2004). Network structuring, or “tinkering with the network” (51), involves influencing formal policy, influencing interrelationships, influencing values and perceptions, mobilizing new coalitions, and managing by chaos. With regard to network structuring, it may not be the number of actors in a collaboration that is important but the arrangement of the actors (O’Toole 1988).

Negotiation and mediation are also in abundance in collaborative management. For example, a network analysis of the Century Freeway Project in Los Angeles, California, reveals that managers' success in that effort was based on their ability to fill a "multi-lateral brokerage role," that is, linking "actors both horizontally and vertically through the skills of bargaining and negotiation ... in order to maintain a cohesive whole" (Mandell 1984, 676). The tasks required to facilitate exchange consist of diplomatic skills involving persuasion and conflict resolution (O'Toole 1988).

Similar themes emerge from Goldsmith and Eggers's (2004) look at governing by networks. They observe that some of the main elements of network management are big-picture thinking, coaching, mediation, negotiation, strategic thinking, interpersonal communications, and team building. Like the activation and framing behaviors that Agranoff and McGuire describe, Goldsmith and Eggers's design phase includes determining which goals government hopes to accomplish (mission and strategy), which tools will be used to activate the network, the partners needed to help accomplish the goals, the structure of the collaborative effort, and how the network should be governed and managed. Essentially, "the success or failure of a network approach can often be traced to its original design" (91). After the design phase, public managers involved in a collaborative effort must be concerned with how to link the organizations together in a functioning network. These "ties that bind" are created by establishing both formal communication channels through technology and informal channels through face-to-face interaction, coordinating activities across organizations, and building relationships as a means to share knowledge and create trust. The more points of contact among network members, it is argued, the better the communication and the greater the trust.

Williams (2002) conducted empirical research designed to identify and categorize the different competencies of "boundary spanners"—a term used to describe key agents who manage within an interorganizational context—in the United Kingdom. Surveys of collaborators in three policy areas (environment, crime and community safety, and health promotion) and in-depth interviews with partnership managers within a region revealed at least four general competencies for the "art of boundary spanning" (114): building sustainable relationships; managing through influencing and negotiation; managing complexity and interdependencies; and managing roles, accountabilities, and motivations. The skills that make up these competencies include communicating to create shared meaning, understanding, empathy, conflict resolution, networking, creativity, innovation, empowerment, and building trust as the "lubricant."

The important role of the collaborative public manager in building trust is apparent from this review of collaborative skills. It is generally accepted that in the absence of a legal charter, partners in a collaboration join, remain, and work together because of some element of trust (Agranoff and McGuire 2001b). However, it is difficult to know whether trust exists *a priori* and to assess its effect on collaboration empirically (Brass et al. 2004). Some studies suggest that the success of collaboration depends on a collaborator trusting another organization, even if not a specific individual (Zaheer, McEvily, and Perrone 1998), whereas others conclude that trust is grounded in a positive expectation about the behavior of individual participants in a collaboration (Ferguson and Stoutland 1999). Short of stating that increased interaction and communication produce trust (Goldsmith and Eggers 2004), there is no general agreement about what a public manager can do to build it. The management of trust is thus problematic (Entwistle and Martin 2005).

Vangen and Huxham (2003) offer recommendations for public managers to follow. They argue that trust is built through a cyclical trust-building loop. When there is no history of prior ties, partners must be willing to take some risk in order to initiate the collaboration and aim for realistic goals. That is, the collaboration should first take small steps toward some modest level of achievement (see also Agranoff 2003). Such success reinforces attitudes that the parties to the collaboration can be trusted, thus leading to more ambitious undertakings. The lesson for the public manager is that trust takes time to develop and that it grows as the collaboration becomes successful. Collaborations may begin virtually "trust free," but ultimately trust becomes a necessary component of future success.

Some have argued that the greater the amount of trust, the less need there is to monitor compliance (Alter and Hage 1993). For example, Gulati's (1995) study of more than 2,400 alliances among American, European, and Japanese firms over a 20-year period demonstrates that over time, partner firms develop looser practices, forgoing in some cases strict, cautious contracting and relying more on less formal linkages. In this sense, prior ties lead to greater confidence among partners, such that "familiarity breeds trust." Thus, previous interaction fosters trust in collaborative operations. However, the findings from a longitudinal study of a community mental health center suggests that this inverse relationship over time between the presence of trust and the use of (and need for) formal contracts does not hold for some agencies in the public and nonprofit sectors (Isett and Provan 2005). Rather than becoming looser and more informal in collaborative relationships, "the need for formal contracts generally remains constant among publicly

funded organizations, and trust is not negatively affected by the presence of contracts” (162). Thus, trust may be still be important, but external issues such as regulation, mandated compliance, and centralized coordination may also contribute to the cohesion of a network. The public manager should thus “create trust where you can; find alternatives where you can’t” (Moynihan 2005b, 33).

How Unique?

Much has been made of the skills that managers need to operate successfully in collaborative settings. An assumption is often made that such skills are unique to collaboration. However, it has been argued that there are similarities between the skill demands of collaborative management and those of managing single organizations (McGuire 2003). For example, having the right people and resources in place—what some refer to as “activation” or “initiation” in collaboration—is equally important in hierarchies and in collaborations. Managers in hierarchies carry out the personnel function within single organizations to recruit, screen, hire, and remove actors from an organization, and, as shown, this function is critical in collaboration. Similarly, all organizational forms—hierarchical or collaborative—have a defined structure, even if that structure changes. It is true that in hierarchies, who reports to whom is defined, how daily tasks are to be performed is reasonably clear, and the roles that staff members play are made explicit in job descriptions. A collaborative manager cannot rely on an organizational chart or consult history for operational guidance, as the boss in a hierarchical organization can do. However, managers in both contexts influence rules and structure daily. The same principle and application thus apply both to networks and hierarchies: If the structure does not fit the task, performance will suffer. Other skills that are often attributed as “new” for collaboration are common in hierarchies. Communication among employees within an organization is one of the foundations of purposeful organizational behavior. Inclusive strategic planning and management are important in each context. As in collaborative structures, successful organizations develop mechanisms to organize and disseminate information. And as in collaborative management, managers in hierarchies also must be prepared to resolve conflict. So, although new competencies are needed for collaboration, some of these are already inherent in the public manager.

The Benefits and Costs of Collaborative Public Management

Collaboration as a Positive Force

The literature on collaboration is often celebratory and only rarely cautious (Berry et al. 2004). There are few studies that measure the impact of collaborative public management on program outcomes, but the

general assumption in much of the public management literature is that collaboration is a positive factor to be pursued by managers. That is, because collaboration is the new form of governance, it follows that collaboration in and of itself must be desirable. Thus, many studies, perhaps wrongly in some cases, equate the presence of collaboration with the success of a program without adequate empirical verification.

A few empirical studies have found an association between collaborative behavior and program outcomes. Provan and Milward’s (1995) study of four community mental health systems examines the relationship between collaboration and effectiveness, which they define as “the degree to which clients and their families were satisfied with the treatment they received from the community mental health system” (Milward and Provan 2003). Developing a preliminary theory of effectiveness, the authors found that the greater the degree of centralized integration and the presence of direct, nonfragmented control, the greater the level of satisfaction. These structural factors are mediated by contextual factors including resource munificence and network stability. Constant change or relative newness in network development negatively affected satisfaction.

O’Toole and Meier (1999) develop a general model of public management addressing actions that stabilize the internal operations of a system, exploit shocks in the environment of the system, and buffer the system to minimize the impact of the environmental shocks. Network management is a specific allocation of resources whereby leveraging external opportunities and buffering the system from unwanted shocks supplements hierarchical functions. The variable that is conceptualized as the network management component in the model is measured as the level of interaction between school district superintendents and other actors from the school district’s organizational environment. Analyzing a data set of more than 500 Texas school districts over a five-year period, the authors found that the frequency of interaction was positively related to school district performance; the greater the number of actors with whom the superintendents networked and the greater the level of interaction, the higher the performance (Meier and O’Toole 2003). In another large-*N* study of 237 cities, Agranoff and McGuire (2003) found a link between the extent of local economic development policy making and the level of collaboration, measured in terms of the number of linkages between governmental and nongovernmental actors. Though a count of contacts and types of contacts may constitute imperfect measures of collaborative management (McGuire 2002), such measures have been shown to be adequate proxies for collaborative management research (Meier and O’Toole 2005).

How Positive?

The recent literature also explores some of the negative aspects of collaborative public management. In practice, collaborating can be less than advantageous. For example, the extensive empirical research of Huxham and associates finds that the common wisdom of collaboration often does not square with collaboration's common practice (Huxham 2003; Vangen and Huxham 2003). In some cases, collaborative arrangements attain a "collaborative advantage which is concerned with the potential for synergy from working collaboratively" (Huxham 2003, 401). In many cases, however, "collaborative inertia" is a more apt description of the collaborative process. Often, participants in a collaborative endeavor cannot agree on common aims, the amount of power within the collaboration is unequal, trust is difficult to build, and participants do not know with whom they are linked. The stark conclusion from this research is that "unless the potential for real collaborative advantage is clear, it is generally best, *if there is a choice*, to avoid collaboration" (Huxham 2003, 421).

A study of the expansion of a harbor in the Netherlands reveals that governmental organizations may not be adequately prepared for the movement toward partnerships and networked governing (Teisman and Klijn 2002). The authors found that governments do not naturally exchange information or look for mutual solutions, as is required for effective partnerships. Goals may not be aligned among network partners, and poor performance by a government agency can hurt the performance of the network as a whole (Goldsmith and Eggers 2004). In essence, the way governments continue to conduct business does not lend itself to the demands of operating in collaborative structures (Keast et al. 2004). Negative relationships may also develop within partnerships, which some argue may be more important for collaborative performance than positive relations (Brass et al. 2004). Finally, some groups may benefit more from collaborative activity than others, causing some to assert that there may be a "dark side" to network management (O'Toole and Meier 2004). Excitement over the possibilities of collaborative public management should thus be tempered by the realization that such management is difficult and not always beneficial.

Conclusion

Collaborative public management research offers a set of findings marked by rapid progress and a continuing focus on knowledge generation. Although collaborative management has been occurring for quite some time, the amount of empirical research on the subject

has increased significantly over the past decade. Several conclusions emerge from this review.

First, there is an acceptance that collaborative management is a standard component of public management in general. Far from being episodic or occurring in just a few programs, collaboration in public management is as common as managing bureaucracies, and even more so in such areas as economic and community development, the environment, emergency management, and the entire gamut of social and human services. It's important to recognize that bureaucracy is not going away; collaboration still complements rather than supplants single organization management. However, the research reveals that it is common enough to begin developing a knowledge base akin to what we know about organizational behavior.

Second, there has been a focus in the literature on identifying the types of skills that are necessary in collaborative settings. On this point, practitioners know more than researchers, but the gap is closing. Although some basic skills are transferable from single organizations to collaborative groups, new techniques and new competencies are required for effective management in such settings.

Third, there is a renewed focus on determining the effect of collaboration on program outcomes. Just as some early implementation research sought to examine the reasons for policy failure and success, we are beginning to see research that evaluates collaborative management within a program context. From comparative case studies to large-*N* quantitative research, there is a growing realization that collaboration is not an end in itself and that only by examining its impact will general management theory be advanced. Thus, there is a growing concern for determining the strength and influence of collaborative management instead of simply documenting its existence.

Overall, there is a general understanding that there is still much to learn about collaborative public management, and the questions left to be answered are nearly endless. For example, what do collaborative managers do when faced with an imbalance of power and influence among participants within a collaboration? How do managers ensure accountability in collaborative settings? Do collaborations in the public sector evolve over time, such that there is an identifiable cycle or sequence to their development? That is, do collaborations "learn"? These and other questions are sure to stimulate future research for years to come.

The recent literature also explores some of the negative aspects of collaborative public management. In practice, collaborating can be less than advantageous.

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