Empirical development and application of a structured framework with respect to power and trust to Collaborative Governance

Key Words
Collaboration; Power; Trust; Collaborative Governance.

Introduction

The effects of COVID 19 on business collaboration is unclear with authors split between little to no change due to the switch to virtual methods compared to those who found the lack of face-to-face contact in collaborations limiting. The aim of this research is to fill a gap in knowledge and practice by undertaking an empirical analysis of collaboration which took place during the pandemic period to assess whether power and trust relationships in several collaborative situations had compromised outcomes.

Background

The literature on collaboration has identified several potential benefits including improved coordination of activities, better leveraging and pooling of resources, increased social capital, enhanced conflict management (prevention, reduction, and resolution), better knowledge management (including generation, translation, and diffusion), increased risk-sharing in policy experimentation, and increased policy. Likewise, outcomes can be unpredictable, short lived and expensive. There are serious problems with measuring the cost efficiency of networked policy processes (Sørensen 2009). The output of collaborative networks can be extremely difficult to quantify, since it often includes intangible results such as joint problem understandings, common values, future visions, enhanced coordination, cooperative processes, and so on. Moreover, it is exceedingly troublesome to measure the total costs of networked policy outputs since the governance networks in question are seldom in control of the production of the tangible and intangible policy outputs.

Collaborative governance has a popular following but a mixed track record of sustainable outcomes (Sorensen and Torfing 2009). Arguably, improved outcomes where collaboration takes place may feasibly come from the recognition that power and trust relationships, often unequal from the start, are overlooked and should be managed as part of a collaborative system (Gash & Ansell 2008; Emerson & Nabatchi 2016). Better understanding and management may improve sustainable outcomes and reduce costs. The research will critically evaluate collaborative governance and the relationship of both organisations and individuals in active collaborative situations.

A systematic review of literature shows that whilst the detailed address to both power and trust singularly has been undertaken, a framework that brings both together as a means of analysis and improvement in collaborative arrangements outcomes has not been developed. An initial systematic review of literature revealed a framework applied to taxation policy the 'slippery slope' (Gangl et al; 2015; Kirchler et al 2007) that contained a seemingly workable method

that could be adapted and applied more widely to collaborative governance. This research will apply the framework to collaboration initiatives and test its applicability to improve how they are run, managed and their outcomes achieved.

Research Approach

The research which is ongoing, undertook a systematic review of literature to assess the significance and relationships between power and trust in collaborative governance and in so doing derive the key factors that need to be taken into account when undertaking a research project. The research developed a detailed methodology for primary data collection method to test the relationship between power and trust. Primary data collection thus far has been through quantitative electronic questionnaire to obtain baseline information across the respondents to be followed up by semi-structured interviews.

The data collection has given 18 usable cases for analysis. The questionnaire was derived from literature on power and trust relationships in collaborative environments administered electronically to collaboration participants and initial results analysed. Based on the results and triangulated to the literature review, a series of semi-structured interviews will be undertaken as a next step, to clarify the value of a framework approach and deduce in more detail the motivations for practitioner involvement. The findings will be coded against power and trust criteria derived from the literature for the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The various initiatives will be tested and compared to see if the structured approach to power and trust imbalances and resultant collaborative states (antagonistic/voluntary or committed) are anticipated to lead to improved outcomes.

Initial Findings and discussion

General findings are that of the 18 projects surveyed, which ranged in size from 2 party collaborations to an initiative of over 30 participants, 13 (72%) of projects were judged by the participants to have been a success, 4 of the projects were viewed as partial successes and 1 project as unsuccessful.

			Q3: In your judgement how successful was the overall collaboration initiative ?			
			Total	Fully successful	Partially	Not succes
Q9: Do you think the following affected the outcomes of the initiative?	Relative Power positions	Positively affected outcome	6	5	1	0
		Neither positively nor negative	9	8	1	0
		Negatively affected outcomes	3	0	2	1
		Total	18	13	4	1
	Relative Trust positions	Positively affected outcome	8	7	1	0
		Neither positively nor negative	7	6	1	0
		Negatively affected outcomes	3	0	2	1
		Total	18	13	4	1

Much of the literature on collaboration deals with the problems of alignment and systematic failures of collaboration but the findings of this research are that the majority of collaboration projects achieve or are judged to have achieved, by their participants at least, to be successes.

The above cross tabulation shows participants thought, where the outcome was successful, the relative power positions positively affected or was not a major factor indicating facets of power resident in all collaborative situations is used to support the collaboration. Likewise, Trust between collaborative partners was also judged to positively affect outcomes or to be neutral.

Power and trust are judged by participants to be equally important to successful outcomes. Literature has generally dealt with either trust or power individually, but this is the first time both have been judged together and their combined positions assessed.

The problems of alignment between power and trust arise where the projects do not work as initially envisaged where both relative power and trust affect the outcome. It is the contention of this paper these need to be judged on a case by case basis depending upon the initial aims, roles and power/trust positions from the outset.

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