Stewards, Mediators, and Catalysts:
Toward a Model of Collaborative Leadership

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ABSTRACT

Leadership is widely recognized as an important ingredient in successful collaboration. Collaborative leaders typically play a facilitative role, encouraging and enabling stakeholders to work together effectively. Building on the existing literature on collaborative governance and interviews with leaders of U.S. Workforce Investment Boards, we identify three facilitative roles for collaborative leaders. *Stewards* facilitate collaboration by helping to convene collaboration and maintain its integrity. *Mediators* facilitate collaboration by managing conflict and arbitrating exchange between stakeholders. *Catalysts* facilitate collaboration by helping to identify and realize value-creating opportunities. Although collaborative leaders are called upon to play multiple roles, the salience of these roles may vary with the circumstances and goals of collaboration. In situations of high conflict and low trust, for example, collaborative leaders may be called upon to emphasize steward and mediator roles. In situations where creative problem-solving is the primary goal, the catalyst role may become much more central. Distinguishing these three collaborative leadership roles is an important step toward building a contingency model of collaborative leadership.

Keywords: collaboration, collaborative governance, stakeholder, contingency, leadership, workforce development.

Introduction

In 1998, President Clinton signed into law the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). Much like the welfare reform, enacted only two years earlier, WIA promised to revolutionize the *work* of workforce development. Although the federal government had long been a supplier of workforce training programs under programs enacted through the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) or the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), these programs offered a patchwork approach to job training. According to former Labor Secretary Alexis Herman, these programs were "never fully brought into alignment with other components of the 'system'." Consequently, federally funded job training programs were largely scattered – offering clients limited access to services, career advice, quality job information data, and skills training.[2] It was hoped that through coordination and co-location at the service-delivery level (e.g., one stop shops), consumers would have easier access to every element

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[2] "Implementing the Workforce Investment Act of 1998: A Message from the Secretary of Labor." http://www.doleta.gov/usworkforce/documents/misc/wpaper3.cfm. Downloaded on February 15, 2012.

of the workforce development system, from simple job searches to receiving advice on career planning, to enrolling in basic more advanced skills training. However, coordination of service delivery was only one of the problems plaguing an increasingly dysfunctional workforce system, so policymakers also mandated a more comprehensive strategy of collaboration. The WIA placed control of each local workforce area (established by governors) in Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), which would be jointly governed by labor unions, community colleges, training providers, locally elected officials, industry leaders, and social service providers. These stakeholders were to develop collaborative strategies to create a more effective workforce system.

Despite this mandated collaborative framework, large variations developed in the degree, scope, type, and breadth of collaboration among workforce development areas. Some workforce development areas practiced *pro forma* collaborative governance – presenting only enough of a veneer of collaboration to please local and federal officials. Others surpassed this by implementing micro-collaboratives– supplementing the WIB's governance with smaller project-based forms of collaborative governance. A small but growing number of WIBs engaged in more extensive collaborative governance. In each of these cases, leaders played a critical role in shaping the depth and extent of WIB collaboration. Leaders of the most collaborative WIBs, for example, have begun to reassess what one referred to as the 'little fiefdoms' established by governors under WIA – workforce areas established along political rather than economic lines. These leaders are looking at the potential for true regionalism to address the impending shortfall of WIA funds and are establishing longer-term collaboratives with other workforce boards.

This paper builds on our earlier work (Ansell and Gash, 2008) that found that leadership is an important variable in explaining the success or failure of collaborative governance. Based on a meta-analysis of the collaborative governance literature, we found that many case studies and a number of important theoretical studies pointed to the importance of leadership.In this paper, we 'drill down' into this leadership variable to develop a more fine-grained view of the role of leadership.In doing this, our goal is to expand upon a 'contingency approach' to collaborative governance. A contingency approach assumes that there is no single 'best way' to exercise collaborative leadership, but that different tasks, goals, and contexts will place distinctive kinds of demands on leaders.In some collaborations, for example, the primary challenge facing leaders may be to cultivate sufficient trust among stakeholders to allow them to engage in fruitful deliberation; in others, the primary challenge may be to help an already functioning community of stakeholders engage in more innovative and creative problem-solving.Different kinds of leadership skills or types of leaders may be called upon to meet these challenges. Although we do not focus explicitly on innovation, we believe our contingency approach is a useful first step in understanding the aspects of leadership that are critical in promoting collaborative innovation.

To develop this analysis of collaborative leadership, we supplement an extensive review of recent scholarship with interviews with ten workforce development leaders conducted in August 2011. We identified these workforce leaders, who represent program managers, board directors, and partners from geographically diverse workforce development regions,

through conversations with consultants to and participants in a recent Department of Labor funded project exploring various aspects of workforce leadership.[3]

Workforce development provides an ideal policy backdrop to explore collaborative leadership. First, both the nature of workforce development – its inherent reliance on the combined efforts of educators, employers, social service providers, and economic developers – and its current statutory framework essentially require that workforce development leaders operate collaboratively. As one leader offered:

> There is no way to get anything done without collaboration. It is central to anything in workforce development. And it was designed to be collaborative… [Collaboration] is second nature.

Second, in many ways, workforce development provides a textbook example of the contingent nature of collaborative governance. In our earlier work (Ansell and Gash, 2008), we argued that antecedent and exogenous conditions can affect collaborative success. The workforce leaders we interviewed reinforced this claim, pointing out that the success of collaboration depends on a number of often exogenous factors. "We should be okay when collaboration isn't working," said one leader. "Don't do it. It's okay – collaboration isn't always good." In their descriptions of their own personal and programmatic successes, interviewees pointed to four conditions that influenced the efficacy of their leadership: access to resources; the strength of relationships with current and potential partners; regional, state and local governance and service delivery infrastructures; and historical perceptions of workforce development shared by industry and economic development stakeholders.

Third, at its best, workforce development can be a locus of innovation. Legislative calls for local autonomy coupled with opportunities and incentives for economic competitiveness make workforce development an ideal policy arena to examine the degree to which collaborative leaders operate as innovators or change agents and the conditions that facilitate or impede this process. Many of the leaders we consulted, for instance, referenced collaboration as the key to remaining competitive in a future marked by shrinking budgets and slow job growth. As one workforce leader observed:

> Increasingly it is about competitive resources and being prepared as a region to be competitive and we are more competitive regionally together and we have demonstrated that through millions in grants. We are feeling like when we do work together it makes us more competitive and enhances our capacity to sustain after grants are done.

To successfully lead such efforts, leaders must often have particular attributes and skills and they must often develop specific strategies. In the remainder of the paper, we try to specify these attributes, skills, and strategies, drawing on both the collaborative governance literature and our interviews with workforce leaders.

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[3] See enhancingworkforceleadership.org

The Importance of Leadership for Collaborative Governance

Our original paper suggested that the key adjective that can be used to describe collaborative leadership is 'facilitative'. Although collaboration may be mandated, collaboration is typically voluntary. In addition, as Crosby and Bryson (2005) have emphasized, collaboration operates in a 'shared power' world in which different stakeholders control distinct resources and have their own distinct bases of power and authority. In this voluntary, shared power world, it is clear that leaders do not 'command' in the same way that they might in a hierarchical organization. Leaders may bear responsibility for *steering* collaboratives toward efficient service delivery, consensus, or creative problem-solving, but they must work within the constraints imposed by voluntary action and shared power. Typically, then, their role is to facilitate rather than to direct. In this sense, collaborative leadership is similar to what the network literature calls 'metagovernance' (Sørensen and Torfing, 2009). In exploring the details of collaborative leadership, our goal is to identify and analyze different aspects of this facilitative role.

The tricky part of analyzing leadership is that it tends to be a 'residual' category. Leadership is typically involved in all aspects of collaborative governance, from inception through completion. Leadership is often the most visible aspect of group action and leaders assume responsibility for collaborative outcomes, both good and bad.

Leaders are often the 'proximate cause' of success and failure of collaboration, but their ability to work effectively often depends on other less proximate factors. For all these reasons, there can be a tendency to 'load' too much of the explanatory weight on a leadership variable (as suggested by classic criticisms of the 'great man' view of history), while outcomes may in fact be due to less visible and less proximate factors. One of the implications is that it is difficult to separate leadership influences from the whole fabric of collaboration. Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2011) argue that leadership, as an essential driver of the collaborative governance process, should be kept conceptually distinct from 'system context' in which collaborative governance unfolds. We entirely agree with this point. However, it is important to recognize that leaders act *in* and *through* the system context—or as Huxham and Vangen (2000) put it, in and through the 'leadership media' of structures, processes, and participants. For example, should we attribute successful trust-building to effective leadership or to the trust-building process? It is often difficult to assign ultimate responsibility.

Another challenge in leadership research is how widely to conceive of leadership. Much of the contemporary leadership literature has clearly moved away from a 'command-oriented' view of the leadership role and has embraced a more 'distributed' view of leadership. This is especially appropriate in the 'shared power' context of collaborative governance (Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Morse, 2008; Ospina and Foldy, 2010; Crosby and Bryson, 2010).However, as the view of what counts as leadership expands, the role of 'leaders' can become blurred, adding to the tendency to load explanatory weight on the leadership variable. We acknowledge that leadership can be exercised by many stakeholders at many different levels of action. But we focus our analysis of leadership on the role of 'key leaders' who initiate, guide, or steer the collaborative process. Crosby and Bryson (2005) argue that two distinct kinds of leaders are necessary for successful collaborative governance: champions and sponsors. The champion provides the direct day-by-day leadership to move a

collaborative process forward, while a sponsor stands behind the scenes, but deploys authority and resources to support the collaboration. Our own analysis of facilitative leadership focuses largely on champions – those key leaders who play a day-to-day role in initiating, guiding, and steering collaborative governance.

In our earlier work, we identified two different *styles* of leadership in collaborative governance. One style of leadership stresses the neutrality and professionalism of collaborative leaders. Such leaders are often trained facilitators and their leadership typically stresses their function as neutral mediators in the collaborative process. Typically, these trained facilitators come from outside the community of stakeholders, which guarantees their neutrality and independence from any stakeholder. The neutral facilitator has no particular vested interest in the outcome of negotiations, but serves a professional role to facilitate improved collaboration. The second style of leadership we dubbed 'organic', to stress that these leaders come from within the community of stakeholders. Organic leaders often straddle different stakeholder groups and are often intimately familiar with and connected to stakeholders in the community. What they lack in professional facilitator training, they often make up for in subject matter expertise or local knowledge. They may not be neutral with respect to collaborative outcomes, but generally have an overriding interest in promoting collaboration. Both the professional facilitator and the organic leader can serve as 'honest brokers', but they have different strengths and weaknesses as leaders.[4]Professional facilitators have advanced skills in mediation and a legitimacy that arises from their neutrality and independence. But they often lack social capital or authority within the stakeholder community. Organic leaders have the opposite set of strengths and weaknesses.Their strength arises from their local knowledge and relationships, but they may have a harder time convincing stakeholders of their neutrality and may lack the skills to facilitate complex negotiations.

In this paper, we further elaborate on the character of collaborative leadership by distinguishing three different roles for facilitative leadership: steward, mediator, and catalyst.

Leadership Roles for the Collaborative Leader

Huxham and Vangen (2000: 1161) define collaborative leadership as "making things happen". Facilitative leadership might be described as helping others to make things happen. In keeping with our contingency perspective, we suggest that there are a number of different ways to help people to make things happen and they can be broadly captured by the terms 'steward', 'mediator', and 'catalyst'. Simply put, a steward is someone who facilitates the collaborative process by establishing and protecting the integrity of the collaborative process itself; a mediator is a leader who facilitates by helping to arbitrate and nurture relationships between stakeholders; and a catalyst is someone who helps stakeholders to identify and realize value-creating opportunities. Building on the existing literature on collaborative leadership and incorporating our findings from interviews with workforce leaders, Table 1

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[4] In contrast with our earlier work, we have slightly changed the language used here to describe these two leadership styles in order to clarify that both types of leaders may be "honest brokers."

summarizes our central findings about each of these leadership roles. In the remainder of the paper, we discuss each role in detail in terms of how they relate to antecedent conditions, systems context, and the goals of collaboration.

Steward

In our previous work, we found that leaders play a critical stewardship role in the collaborative process and are important for establishing and maintaining the integrity of that process (Ansell and Gash, 2008; see also Chrislip and Larson, 1994). Although stakeholders are encouraged to 'take ownership' of the collaborative process, this often takes considerable work and time. At early stages of the collaborative process, in particular, leaders 'represent' the collaborative process as a whole and they exercise authority in the name of the collaboration – something that no single stakeholder can unilaterally do. Scott's recent study of collaborative health reform in Georgia describes the key leader as follows:

> He was a highly respected lawyer and elected official in the community; his staturebroughtcredibilitytotheprocessandsignifieditsimportancetoGeorgians; and he also ensured that the process was bipartisan by inviting other members of the House of Representatives from different political parties to join the working group as their time permitted and kept them fully informed as the process unfolded (Scott, 2011: 446).

In this example, we see that this organic leader played an iconic role in establishing the collaborative process. He lent his considerable legitimacy in the community to the collaborative and he symbolized the possibilities for collaboration. Note, however, that this leader was also a Republican representative in the Georgia House of Representatives and hence his bipartisan 'honest broker' role depended on the perception that he was not simply structuring collaboration to advance his partisan interests. At the same time, we note that it probably would have been more difficult for a neutral professional facilitator to establish the initial legitimacy of collaborative health care reform, because he or she would have no social capital to 'lend' to the establishment of the process.

Page (2010) identifies 'convening stakeholders' as one of three distinct leadership tactics, along with framing the agenda and structuring deliberation. The role of stewardship is to help establish the 'integrity' of the collaborative process. We can return to our Georgia health care example to provide an illustration of how leadership can work to establish this integrity. Scott (2011) refers to the key leader as a 'convenor' who sought to develop an inclusive process with wide representation of stakeholders. This leader also convened the process in a 'neutral' setting, remained neutral with respect to the outcome of the collaboration, and "provided a broad framing of the working group's goal – transparency, inclusiveness, and outcome effectiveness" (Scott, 2011: 446). He also "kept the process moving and on track through all its phases" (ibid.). By attending meetings and being actively involved, he "visibly demonstrated his ongoing and consistent commitment to the collaborative process" (ibid.). In all of these roles, this leader was acting as a steward of the collaborative process by helping to establish and maintain the integrity of the process itself.

Table 1: Collaborative Leadership Role

Collaborative Leadership Roles	General Definition	Skills & Strategies	Distinctive Role of Neutral Facilitator	Distinctive Role of Organic Leader
Steward	Establishes and Protects integrity of the Coll. process	-Lends reputation and social capital to convene process -Establishes the inclusiveness, transparency, neutrality, and civic character of process -Manages image and identity of collaborative	Professional facilitator may be more important in establishing process ground rules than in initially convening the process	Organic leader may be critical in convening a collaborative process, because organic leader has reputation and social capital to invest
Mediator	Arbitrates and Nurtures relationships between stakeholders	-Serves as 'honest broker' in mediating disputes -Facilitates construction of shared meaning -Restores process to positive interaction -Builds trust among stakeholders (specific strategies depend on goals and baseline trust)	Professional facilitator role may have an easier time establishing credentials as 'honest broker'; professionals often have sophisticated communication and negotiation skills	Organic leaders may be more effective in intervening to move difficult processes forward; may have context-specific knowledge valuable for adjudication
Catalyst	Identifies Value-creating opportunities and mobilizes stakeholders to pursue them	-Engages in 'systems thinking' -Frames or reframes problems -Creates mutually reinforcing link between collaboration and innovation	Professional facilitators are probably less likely to engage in catalytic leadership	Organic leaders are likely to draw on contextual knowledge and unique relationships to act catalytically

What is interesting about the Georgia case is that this organic leader shared the leadership process with leaders who came closer to the professional facilitator model.[5]The 'convenor' drew on the neutral facilitation skills of the faculty of the Georgia State University College of Law. These faculty leaders saw themselves as providing a public service as neutral facilitators as well as legal expertise on the issues related to the health care issues at stake (suggesting a kind of hybrid between the neutrality of a professional facilitator and the expertise of an organic leader). As Scott notes, the law faculty were not trained as facilitators and this might have been a liability. But they made up for this lack of training by hard work and good will. Scott (2011: 448) notes that they successfully nurtured a "constructive climate for collaboration."As the process became more conflictual, they also

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[5] Following Crosby and Bryson (2010), it is tempting to distinguish these roles as "sponsor" versus "champion", yet because of the convenor's active engagement, the boundary between these roles was not clear cut.

sought to ensure the representation of different perspectives and voices and took steps to maintain the transparency of the process by circulating information to all stakeholders. They also sought to ensure that all stakeholders had an opportunity to exercise their voice during the deliberations. As Scott (2011: 450) writes:

> By being so transparent about what was going on at every step in the process through giving everyone the same information and opportunity to comment and participate actively in the revisions, they established an atmosphere of fair play and confidence that there were no 'back-room deals' being cut between meetings. Their transparency and consistently respectful attitude to divergent voices allowed for trust to develop among the participants.

The role of these more neutral facilitators was also to some extent iconic for the collaborative process. Scott notes that by being consistently prepared, they served as role models for the participants.

Workforce development leaders take on a similarly iconic role while also attempting to positively position the collaborative in the minds of the public. This involves both maintaining, as the public face of the collaborative, a strong personal reputation with stakeholders and in the community, as well as marketing the products and outcomes of the collaborative. To maintain a strong personal image as stewards of the collaborative, workforce leaders constantly worry about the degree to which their identity as a stakeholder in the workforce community conflicts with or impedes that of the collaborative. In so doing they also attempt to model the ideal of power-sharing for their stakeholders. Credit-sharing served as the main vehicle for this goal. Each of the leaders we interviewed strived to reject the impulse to credit-claim for themselves or their individual organizations and instead to elevate the status of their partners and stakeholders:

> You have to have a level of humility and not always be out front. (…)It takes a very particular kind of leader – a leader has to be confident that the work that they do is valuable without public recognition…The leader has to be one who likes to plant seeds and see it grow and to see the benefits of your contribution germinate in a way that makes the system better – that has to be enough of a reward…The leader has to have a personality and value system that is aligned with that frame of mind.

During interviews, leaders repeatedly stressed that collaboration fundamentally requires that partners not only compromise on program and policy preferences, but also on accomplishments. "In this environment," explained one leader, "identity becomes really important. Identity and collaboration can be really challenging. While everyone knows that it is a good way to get things done you don't get the same level of credit."

Leaders need to model for their stakeholders both the process and the promise of credit-sharing."Partners", explained one leader, "know what they want to accomplish, but they aren't aware of what they are willing to give up in return."A strong leader will practice this in both small and significant ways. For some, this entails deliberately altering a status quo that consistently privileges larger, politically powerful workforce areas to benefit smaller, isolated workforce regions. As one urban leader described:

> Some challenges for us happen at the regional level – [our county] and the four counties had formed years ago a regional WIB collaborative. There was an agreement that we would not compete against each other for grants, that we would collaborate whenever possible, and that we would meet monthly. The challenge is the footprint of [our county] relative to the other counties. If [our county] is involved we always get the lion's share of resources so we have intentionally in different instances taken a step back and allowed our other counterparts to serve as the lead organization. There are a number of statewide projects that are regional and we have decided 'okay' the administrator of the funds is going to be another county, not us. We want them to be seen as a leader.

Some leaders have even opted to reduce their share of funding to better the collaborative and the community. One leader, for instance, elected to share a grant opportunity with his regional partners rather than applying for it on his own – despite the fact that his organization was all but assured by the funder that they would receive a sizable grant as a single applicant. "We will have less money coming to our board area", he explained "but we are willing to do that for the sake of the regional collaborative." Over time, explained the workforce leaders we interviewed, this focus on credit- and resource-sharing will earn leaders (and their organizations) the respect of partners. This, in turn, has the potential to expand opportunities for the collaborative.

The need for self-awareness extends to all areas where the collaborative operates, be it a board meeting, a social event, or a private meeting between parties not associated with the collaborative, recalls one leader of a state level meeting unrelated to workforce development:

> At the meeting I was conscious about not doing most of the talking and deferring to my colleagues. Even if I had an idea I would pause to make sure that other people had a chance to speak. This is something that I have learned over time, having made mistakes – going to a meeting and talking more than I should have.

Collaborative leaders often present themselves as humble, observant, and thoughtful.

In their role as stewards, workforce leaders also devote significant resources to managing the image of the collaborative. As public relations specialists, workforce leaders must look for ways to sell the collaborative to potential stakeholders or to the public. Sometimes this can be as simple as building or maintaining a positive reputation, but often it requires more deliberate strategies. One leader explained that the success of their collaborative centered, to a large degree, on keeping "our name in the public through events that will help keep the public educated as to how we can help them."

To maintain a positive image and keep the focus on the needs and accomplishments of the collaborative rather than any single organization, workforce leaders stressed the importance of issue or needs-focused rhetoric. A strong leader will help the collaborative develop a "common understanding of … the issue" and will remind participants that they are "negotiating for everyone's happiness." Some rely on this strategy to help attract previously disinterested – but nevertheless critical – partners. As one leader noted, a new issue might

be introduced "in terms of the advantage it could have for individuals and the positioning of the city and region by having a stronger skilled workforce who could fill jobs in the local and regional area."

In conclusion, collaborative leaders facilitate collaboration by serving as stewards of the collaborative process itself and often of the community they represent. By developing and promoting the legitimacy of collaboration and by ensuring that the process is indeed collaborative, leaders establish the basic framework in which collaboration unfolds. This stewardship role shades into the role of leaders as mediators.

Mediator

A second role for collaborative leaders is to serve as a mediator or broker between different stakeholders. This mediation role grows out of the basic structure of collaborative governance, with its context of voluntary participation and shared power. Since stakeholders hold diverse perspectives and interests, they often do not see eye-to-eye. Much of the impetus for collaborative governance, in fact, grows out of the movement for alternative dispute resolution and conflict management. Therefore, leaders are called upon to facilitate positive exchanges between different stakeholders through adjudication of conflict, to arbitrage between different positions, to stabilize the conditions for positive exchange, and to promote trust-building. In bemoaning current trends to privilege efficiency over process, one workforce leader argued that "it takes relationship building and trust and you can't short-circuit those items because it is a human endeavor."This remains true even when a collaborative has the advantage of strong pre-existing relationships among its leaders and participants. Communicating and maintaining good will among stakeholders is still a priority– despite its often time consuming and challenging nature.One leader (a self-described 'business and process guy') noted:

> We tried to put together this shared framework to parse out the flow of industry engagement. Something that emerged in this conversation is that there is angst in one county about losing their identity to [our workforce area.]There has been a couple of days of back and forth meetings—we are trying to clear the air to get to a place where we can move on…you have to constantly work at it even though we are all very good friends... But overall we will get to a place where we have a defined way of figuring out how, why and if we work together.

This quote demonstrates the important role collaborative leaders have in mitigating and managing conflict (Crosby and Bryson, 2010).

Collaborative efforts often fail because leaders are unable to manage bitter conflict between stakeholders. Matthews and Missingham (2009: 1054) describe the failure of collaborative governance in the Wombat Forest in Australia in these terms:

> Interviewees reported that meetings often included screaming matches, people breaking down into tears, and disrespect for participants. Two Working Group representatives stated that much of the infighting was among men 'puffing their chests'. When meetings digressed to verbal conflict, neither the chairperson nor the [Department of

> Sustainability and Environment] [DSE] made significant attempts to intervene or protect the volunteers. The DSE's ability to manage the group may have been compromised by the atmosphere of conflict between the DSE and certain community members that had been initiated before the [Community Forest Management] process began.

This quote also suggests, however, that the failure to manage high levels of conflict cannot simply be 'loaded' on the variable of leadership. A range of factors and antecedent conditions stack the deck against effective conflict mediation. Even the most skillful mediators may have had difficulty overcoming the conflict in this situation. This case also suggests how the steward and mediator roles may interact. The inability to mediate, in this case, was linked to an erosion of the integrity of the collaborative process itself.

Institutional or infrastructural features may work against the effectiveness of mediation. Often the success of workforce leaders as mediators is contingent upon the position of their organization within the larger workforce system and the infrastructure of the state workforce system – factors that are largely beyond a leader's control. Despite what one leader described as the 'natural' requirement for collaboration in workforce development, quite a few leaders feel that the system is designed to thwart all but the most superficial forms of collaboration. One leader attributed his struggles with promoting regional collaboration to the state infrastructure mandated by WIA:

> There are incentives by WIA against collaboration – within a workforce region there are incentives to collaborate, but across boards there aren't. There is a fractured system. It doesn't encourage regional collaboration and economies are not the same as political boundaries of the workforce system. So automatically you set up these disconnects.

While institutional fragmentation creates the need for mediation, it can also make it exceedingly difficult to achieve in practice.

Effective conflict mediation is sensitive to stakeholder perceptions that collaborative leaders are acting as 'honest brokers'. As a result, we find a tension between the neutral professional facilitator and the organic leader roles. Conflict tends to breed distrust and leaders can easily become a target of this distrust, undermining their ability to mediate conflict. In the Wombat Forest case, the selection of an organic leader interacted with the distrust associated with spiraling conflict to undermine the legitimacy of leadership:

> In the Wombat initiative there was a government-appointed [Community Development; CD] officer and a committee appointed chairperson. The CD officer was the former president of the Wombat Forest Society and had for years been conducting campaigns for sustainable logging in the Wombat. From the government's perspective, appointing the former WFS president as the CD officer was a natural choice, due to his support for continued sustainable logging, his long history in the forest, and his existing networks. The CD officer had also lobbied the government to implement the CFM model, because he saw it as an opportunity to bring everyone to the table and resolve the community conflict over the logging issue. Although the CD officer appeared to be a good choice for the government, he was not well received by all stakeholders. The CD officer's

history on the contentious issue of logging in the Wombat meant that he brought a
particular commitment to the process. Due to this commitment, some participants in the
process were ideologically opposed to him from the beginning (Matthews and
Missingham, 2009: 1059-1060).

In this case, the collaborative leader's commitment to collaboration, substantive
knowledge, and community social capital did not overcome stakeholder distrust of his bias
for certain positions.

While it is difficult to draw a strong conclusion from a single case, a neutral professional
facilitator might have made more progress in overcoming the distrust in the Wombat case.
But there may simply be a dilemma here; facilitative leadership typically must become
more interventionist as stakeholders become less able to work together or to make progress
in consensus building (Ansell and Gash, 2008).In general, we suspect that organic leaders
are in a better position to take this interventionist role, because of their knowledge of local
conditions, substantive expertise, and community social capital. One workforce leader, for
example, recalled the value of recruiting the collaborative's first president from within the
community: "Because of [the new president's] social capital, we were able to move
projects more effectively and we had that level of trust that wouldn't have been there had
we hired someone from another community."Yet, as the Wombat forest case demonstrates,
an organic leader may also find it difficult to establish legitimacy as an honest broker.

A second aspect of the mediating role is what we refer to as 'arbitrage'. Given the different
perspectives and interests that stakeholders have, collaborative leaders must facilitate the
communication and translation of perspectives. Even if conflict is not high, stakeholders
may still have considerable trouble in understanding each other and in aligning their
perspectives. As Crosby and Bryson (2010) observe, collaborative leaders must often play
the role of facilitating the construction of shared meaning between stakeholders. For
instance:

> [I]n a workforce collaborative, one of the key techniques or qualities for a leader is to
> adjust all the information that is coming in and condense it to the common
> denominators. Take away Dave or Sally's specific set of issues and have a set of data
> that represents the group not the individuals. It takes particular skills to do that and
> keep the group cohesive and not alienate folks at the table.

Professional facilitators are often trained to facilitate the process of communication.
However, organic leaders may sometimes have the specific legitimacy and knowledge that
enable them to most effectively serve this role. Here is an example from Crosby and
Bryson (2010: 21):

> Randall Johnson had been a local planner and critic of MC projections, so he could
> speak the language of local planners and be seen as a legitimate champion of better
> regional solutions that addressed local needs and concerns. In short, he could work well
> with policy makers, planners, and technical personnel.

Johnson was effective at arbitrage because he "could speak the language of local planners." However, leaders may also benefit from a certain professional distance from local affairs. As one workforce leader pointed out, "[Collaborative leaders] have to sort of separate themselves from whatever their current programs or resources are and listen."

A third mediating role collaborative leaders are called upon to play is what we will call a 'stabilizer' role. Collaborative governance is a dynamic process and is prone to 'deviation amplification' or 'negative feedback' (as in 'vicious cycles').Thus, a key leadership role is to intervene to prevent these negative dynamics or to restore more positive interactions. Workforce development leaders call the stabilizer a 'connector'. Connectors must be able to assert themselves into the conversation to point out flaws or problems concerning partners.[6]

In describing the need for 'iterative adjustment' of leadership tactics, Page (2010: 261) offers a hypothesis, grounded in his case study evidence, which also comes close to describing the 'stabilizer' role:

> When collaborative processes become difficult or trying, stakeholders draw negative interpretations about one another's intentions or abilities and about the legitimacy, distributional equity, or integrative potential of the initiative. In turn, understandings of public problems and collaborative opportunities diverge. Changes in leadership tactics that respond to these negative interpretations by improving convening and deliberation processes may reshape the stakeholders' understandings and perceptions of the legitimacy and distributional equity of collaboration.

When collaboration engenders negative dynamics, the mediator must act as a stabilizer, who dampens down the negative consequences of interaction and helps to restore collaboration to more positive interactions.

A final mediating role that facilitators play is trust-building, which might be seen as a particularly important case of an intervention to restore collaboration to a positive feedback cycle. Trust-building is also one critical way to intervene to manage conflict, since destructive conflict like that seen in the Wombat Forest is likely to be ameliorated by greater trust. The importance of collaborative leaders in engaging in trust-building is widely recognized (Crosby and Bryson, 2010; Vangen and Huxham, 2003).When stakeholders lack relationships with each other, a positive relationship with the collaborative leader can fast-track trust-building with other members of the collaborative.

Vangen and Huxham (2003) suggest that the precise tactics for managing trust in collaboratives will depend on how ambitious collaborative goals are and on the prior level

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[6] As one leader suggested, this can be a real struggle with stakeholders who are essentially peers, colleagues, or even friends rather than contractors or employees: "A lot of triangulation happens. A lot of 'this partner isn't doing what we need to do so how do we make it work' instead of just talking. Workforce leaders are good at running organizations but not always good at being up front at the table. These are people that we care about – they aren't vendors or providers – and it makes the communication really difficult."

of trust. Where goals are modest and baseline trust is weak, they suggest a 'small wins' approach that helps stakeholders identify measurable gains that can build trust. Often this may require leaders to develop specific activities or events designed to showcase the promise of the collaborative – even if those activities are unnecessary to the overall substantive goals of the collaborative. For instance, one workforce leader described his efforts to maintain participation in a collaborative comprised of rural community residents and leaders. Representatives from smaller communities were beginning to lose faith in the collaborative as the benefits were perceived as accruing primarily to stakeholders in larger towns. In order to sustain committed participation from these smaller communities – which was vital to the goals of the collaborative – he had to take time to develop activities that advantaged smaller towns, even when these activities did not align with the specific tasks of the collaborative. "It is important to create local activities," he stated "where [these communities] benefit from the boost rather than something we do just to make the town or county more successful. That isn't just words – it is activities."

Where goals are modest and more baseline trust is present, collaborative leaders should attend closely to factors that could derail this trust, such as power imbalances and stakeholder instability. Where goals are more ambitious and where baseline trust is weak, collaborative leaders should engage in exploration of where and with whom trust might be built. Finally, where goals are ambitious and baseline trust is present, collaborative leaders should provide for transparent communications, promote shared ownership of the process, and other strategies that nurture trust. In some respects, this last category describes features that we have attributed to the stewardship role. In other respects, this category builds on features of the mediator role we have already described.

Catalyst

The third role for collaborative leaders is to serve as a catalyst for effective and productive collaboration. The importance of leadership for catalyzing collective action and collaboration is also well represented in the literature (Luke, 1997; Mandell and Keast, 2009; Morse, 2010).This catalytic role is sometimes captured by describing this leadership role as 'entrepreneurial' (Weber, 2009; Morse, 2010).The catalytic role goes beyond a mediating role in the sense that it must often engage with the substantive content of negotiations with the aim of identifying and exploiting opportunities for producing value. Morse (2010: 243)sums up the catalytic role of leaders of several successful collaborative projects in North Carolina:

> Opportunity is the key variable in all three of the cases. Leaders such as Gibson saw in the set of conditions in front of them an opportunity to do something different. They saw opportunity for integration. This perhaps lies at the core of what it means to be a catalyst. In order for integration…to even be possible, someone has to imagine the process of coming together to create something new. Thus, the vision of public value is often dependent on these individual leaders, the entrepreneurial boundary spanners, unsatisfied with the status quo and willing to take risks to realize something better.

To recognize these opportunities, Crosby and Bryson (2010) argue that collaborative leaders must engage in 'systems' thinking, surveying the existing and emerging constraints and opportunities.

Collaborative leaders have limited capacity to act unilaterally. Therefore, their catalytic interventions must work through the actions of stakeholders. One instrument at theirdisposalisproblemframingordefinition.Leaderscannotdictateproblemdefinition, but they can help stakeholders identify and invent productive framings. One way they can do this is by helping stakeholders 'surface' underlying assumptions and beliefs and to identify alternative framings (Feyerherm, 1994).Assisting with the reframing of problems that lead to stalemate and intractable conflict is one important role for collaborative leaders (Crosby and Bryson, 2010). Ospina and Foldy (2010) identify five leadership practices important for the 'bridging' work inherent in collaborative governance: Prompting cognitive shifts (similar to the concept of 'reframing'); naming and shaping identity; engaging dialogue about difference; creating equitable governance mechanisms; and weaving multiple worlds together through interpersonal relationships. Although these five practices build on the steward and mediator roles, they are catalytic in that they try to proactively produce constructive collaboration.

The most surprising outcome of our interviews was the degree to which the workforce leaders we interviewed perceived themselves as change agents or innovators and the methods they used to catalyze innovation. As one leader articulated, "WIBs have a broader impact – if you take that role seriously you have to recognize that you are charged to be an influencer." Workforce leaders launched innovative approaches to job training and placement by courting specific stakeholders and framing the collaboration around these players:

> So it seems like it is so obvious and when I get together with people all over the country people would say: How did you get bioscience to develop a curriculum for engineers?" The answer was: "Go to employers first, participate in their associations. Start with employers."Otherwise the systems can be beautifully designed programs serving needy populations with zero impact. Sometimes it is such stupid little things that prevent this – but when they do put in the time, it works.

As this quote suggests, workforce leaders understood that innovation comes about *through* collaboration.

Catalysts understand that collaboration and innovation can be a mutually reinforcing dynamic: Innovation depends on collaboration, but collaboration is enhanced through innovation. In designing strategies to remain economically competitive and to forestall the effects of federal budget cutbacks, workforce leaders argued that collaboration gave them a competitive edge:

> I really believe that it is to our competitive advantage to be able to demonstrate that we can do something at a regional level because no one else can. (…) I want to be ready when our federal funds diminish to be able to turn to our local constituents to say that we are important.

Faced with economic uncertainty, this workforce leader viewed regional collaboration as a tool for attracting future investors when federal funds run dry. At the same time, many collaboratives developed products to attract partners and promote interest. One leader commissioned a 'commute pattern analysis' to compel participation in a regional collaborative and to "show that employers didn't care whether people lived in this city or that – they wanted skilled workers."Another commissioned a report "to raise the visibility of an issue that for the most part was a challenge" to sell. The leader deliberately "included quantitative information around the impact and the opportunity it would have on the local and regional economy." By commissioning a report, generated by an impartial third-party and comprised of "hard facts," the leader was able to reach partners that had previously been unsympathetic to the collaborative's goals:

> The report had a unique value in that it put [the issue] in the framework of dollars and sense. It talked about the econ[omic] benefit in millions of dollars in taxpaying workers in the economy and that raised the interest of people who otherwise say [it] is a social service. This report allowed us to generate a greater level of interest and use it as a convening piece. We went on a campaign of briefings to anyone who would listen to us about what this report said. When we implemented things we referenced the report….It allowed us to have an audience with various key stakeholders within various systems; resulted in contextualizing the degree to which adult literacy plays; and allowed stakeholders to consider the ways in which [the issue] played in their areas.

Catalytic leadership will exploit possibilities for positive interactions between expanding collaboration and innovative action.

In fact, it is because they prioritize innovation that workforce leaders pride themselves on thriving in conditions of uncertainty. As one leader stated:

> In an environment of complexity, rigidity is not a strength. You have to have flexibility, the ability to assess a situation and use these assessments creatively. Where there is agility and flexibility, you have opportunity.

Rather than hiring an expert to head a collaborative, offered one leader, "you really want the ability to learn quickly. Someone who is good at piloting, testing, running a lab – that kind of person is better suited for being a leader in a complex environment."

How would the contrasting leadership styles of neutral professional facilitator and organic leader affect the role of leadership catalyst? Professional facilitators are trained to constructively mediate between stakeholders and help them to discover creative solutions to their problems. However, our expectation is that the neutral stance of the professional mediator places them in a position where they are less likely to take the initiative required by catalytic leadership. We also suspect that successful catalytic leadership often requires leaders to engage in 'persuasion'. The organic leader is more likely to possess the substantive knowledge, commitment, and relationships to effectively exercise the influence that a catalytic 'value creating' leadership role seems to call for.

Conclusion

Leadership is an important variable in explaining the success or failure of collaborative governance. We have argued that the distinctive quality of collaborative leadership is that it is *facilitative* rather than *directive* – it must create the conditions that support the contributions of stakeholders to the collaborative process and effective transactions among them. To better understand the character of facilitative leadership, we distilled three types of facilitative leadership from the existing literature on collaborative governance. A *steward* is someone who facilitates the collaborative process by protecting the integrity of the collaborative process itself; a *mediator* is a leader who facilitates by helping to arbitrate and nurture relationships between stakeholders; and a *catalyst* is someone who helps stakeholders to identify and realize value-creating opportunities. We proposed that facilitative leadership will typically require leaders to play all three of these roles, but that antecedent conditions, systems context, and collaborative goals (service delivery, consensus-building, creative problem-solving) will influence the relative prominence of these roles. Innovation, we expect, probably requires greater emphasis on catalytic leadership.

We also extended our analysis of two different *styles* of facilitative leadership – the professional facilitator and the organic leader. The professional facilitator adopts a neutral stance towards outcomes, comes from outside the community, and is independent of any of the stakeholders. The organic leader comes from the stakeholder community, and can generally draw on extensive social capital, but may not be neutral with respect to outcomes. We argued that these two styles of leadership have different strengths and weaknesses. Both can serve as honest brokers, but the professional facilitator will have an easier time establishing their neutrality, but a harder time motivating and persuading stakeholders to make effective contributions. Organic leaders can cajole and mobilize, but may have trouble convincing stakeholders of their neutrality. Thus, the professional facilitator will probably not have much luck in convening stakeholders, but may do a good job of maintaining the integrity of the process. Organic leaders may do a good job convening collaborative forums, but may also become the target of distrust as collaboration unfolds. With respect to mediation, professional facilitators will easily stand 'above the fray' and will have the professional skills to effectively mediate. Organic leaders, however, may have advantages in arbitrage that requires translation between different specialized idioms. Finally, with respect to catalytic leadership, our expectation is that organic leaders will have the advantage, since recognition of value-creating opportunities often requires a deep familiarity with the substantive issues at stake. Our expectation is that collaborative governance that aims for creative problem-solving will require strong catalytic leadership from organic leaders.

Our interviews with collaborative leaders of Workforce Investment Boards (WIB) reinforce our view that collaborative leadership must be facilitative rather than directive. This is not surprising to us, but it is worth noting. Although elements of the Workforce Investment Act are mandated, effective collaboration necessarily entails a strong voluntary element. Regional collaboration, in particular, requires considerable facilitation to bring local jurisdictions to the table to work on a regional basis. Second, we find support in our

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interviews for all three kinds of facilitative leadership. The WIB leaders express ideas that conform to our expectations for the steward, mediator, and catalyst roles. The interviews suggest that these roles are not very clear-cut in practice, because it is often difficult to see where the stewardship role ends and the mediator role begins, etc. Clearly, the leadership of WIBs is complex and requires leaders to be flexible and adaptive, playing slighting different roles depending on the situation (the interests and motivations of stakeholders, the structure of the regional economy, the jurisdictional tensions between stakeholders).However, we found that the catalytic role of WIB leaders was strongly in evidence.

Although workforce development is, in part, a process of integrating service delivery, there are many challenges that must be addressed before this integration can take place. Addressing these challenges calls for WIBs to be creative and innovative in finding strategies that motivate integrated service delivery. Basically, this phase of creative problem-solving precedes the more technical and administrative details of working out common service delivery platforms. The relative salience of catalytic leadership in the WIBs provides some preliminary (but hardly conclusive) support for the idea that collaborative leadership that aims for (or demands) innovation will enhance the importance of catalytic leadership.

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