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TEACHING COLLABORATION IN THE AGE OF NETWORKS*

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Abstract

The role of collaborative forms of organizing in the functioning of public, private, and nonprofit organizations has significantly increased in the most recent years. Thus, public administrators need to posses a set of relevant skills, orientations, and values to function effectively in intra-, and inter-organizational collaboration. The current paper aims at contributing to the debate by offering a course on collaboration. The paper emphasizes first the need for preparing public servants for a networked world. It then puts forward a course proposal for teaching collaboration, and succinctly examines, among others, the content, context, and processes of such a course. The paper ends with a brief discussion.

Keywords: Teaching collaboration, collaborative teaching, public administration and management education, new forms of governance, networks, partnerships.

Öz

Ağbağlar Çağında İşbirliğini Öğretmek

Son yıllarda, işbirliğine dayalı örgütlenme biçimlerinin kamu, özel ve kâr amacı gütmeyen kuruluşların işleyişindeki rolü giderek artmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, kurum-içi ve kurumlararası işbirliğinde etkili olabilmeleri için, kamu yöneticilerinin bir dizi uygun beceri, yönelim ve değere sahip olması gerekmektedir. Bu yazı, işbirliği konusunda bir ders önerisiyle mevcut tartışmaya katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemektedir. Yazıda ilk olarak, kamu görevlilerini ağbağlardan oluşan bir dünyaya hazırlama gereğine vurgu yapılmaktadır. Ardından, işbirliğinin öğretilmesine dönük bir ders önerisi ortaya konulmakta ve ilgili dersin içeriği, bağlamı ve işleyiş süreçleri gibi

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hususlar özlüce incelenmektedir. Yazı, kısa bir değerlendirme ile son bulmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: İşbirliğini öğretmek, işbirliğine dayalı öğretim, kamu yönetimi eğitimi, yeni yönetişim biçimleri, ağbağlar, ortaklıklar.

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing agreement among public administration and management scholars that the role of collaborative forms of organizing (e.g., intra-, and inter-organizational teams, partnerships, alliances, networks and so on) in the functioning of public, private, and nonprofit organizations has significantly increased in the most recent years (e.g., Agranoff, 2007; Booher and Innes, 2002; Gulati, 1998; Meier and O'Toole, 2005; Musso et al. 2006; Newman, 2007a; Van Vugt and Snyder, 2002). In such diverse issue areas as environment, education, human services, and local and regional development, various types of collaborative organizational-institutional arrangements have been increasingly utilized in different communities and countries around the world (e.g., Agranoff and Yıldız, 2007; Ansell, 2000; Connolly and James, 2006; De Macedo, 2001; Edens and Gilsinan, 2005; Hall and O'Toole, 2004; Klinger, 2006; Newland, 2006; Newman, 2007b; Picot, 1999; Robinson et al., 2006). According to Starke-Meyerring and Andrews (2006: 25) "In corporate settings, more than 80% of the workforce work across locations, (...) crossing various boundaries, so that managers increasingly lead people, manage projects, and engage stakeholders in globally distributed environments." Similarly, in a speech to the public administration scholars, Herbert (2004: 393) forwards that:

"A world without boundaries clearly describes the nature of our work as an academic field. The boundaries that previously defined what it meant to be a public administrator and shaped the space in which we functioned are continually changing. Those boundaries have shifted so much that we must continually think critically and carefully about the skills, qualities, and values needed for public service."

Although it is too early to claim that collaborative forms of organizing are replacing altogether more traditional hierarchies, it is nonetheless true that the former are no longer treated as idiosyncratic organizational/structural creatures. In other words, while the use of intra- and inter-organizational collaborative arrangements in many issue areas is not a norm yet, it is not exception, either.

One implication of a "networked world" for public administration and management education relates to the question of how to prepare the next generation of effective "networkers", and "collaborators". A broad argument can be forwarded that in addition to being equipped with the skills and expertise that their specific tasks require; public administrators and managers are increasingly being in need of possessing a set of skills, orientations, and values to function effectively in and around intra- and inter-organizational collaborative settings. Although, for the most part, "the questions of the 'what' and 'why' to teach students (and in what dosage) still remain a vexing issue" in public administration education (Ventriss, 1991: 5), it is argued here that public administration and management educators should strive for finding better ways and means to prepare their graduates for a networked world if they are to succeed their goals toward "educating students to be *public leaders* and/or *administrators*." (Ventriss, 1991: 7, emphasis original), and having them being able "to function effectively on either side of the table" in public-private partnerships (Stoke, 1996: 166).

Aside from the observations of some scholars, who have advised that inter-organizational collaboration should be given much deserved attention in public administration curricula (e.g., Box, 1995; Brown, 1998; Robertson, 1998), there has been not much debate in the literature exclusively focusing the implications of an emerging networked world for public administration and management education. The current paper thus aims to contribute to the debate in a small way by offering some information and ideas regarding the issue at hand. In the following section, a course proposal for teaching collaboration is outlined. The content, context, and processes of such a course, as well as the assignments and evaluation involved are briefly discussed. The paper concludes with a few observations and suggestions.

1. A COURSE PROPOSAL FOR TEACHING COLLABORATION

Citing others, Kluth and Straut (2003: 228) claims that to be effective in collaborative work, "Teachers need opportunities to practice and learn about shared decision making, communication and planning. For this reason and countless others, teacher preparation programs have recently been called to include models of collaboration in their programs." It can be argued that "the lack of attention to collaborative skills and ethics in the curriculum" has not been a challenge facing only the schools/departments preparing teachers: When it comes to teaching collaboration, public administration and management educators have had their own missing piece all along.

There are some indications, however, that things are changing, albeit slowly. For instance, the School of Policy, Planning, and Development (SPPD) at the University of Southern California (USC) has recently introduced a new course, Cross-Sectoral Governance to its professional master's degree programs. According to Tang (2005: 377) "The introduction of this new course

is based on the recognition that most public problems are solved through cooperation across organizations from multiple sectors—public, nonprofit, and business." Similarly, Ducoffe et al. (2006) state that: "Given the widespread use and success of cross-functional teams in industry and the American assembly of Collegiate of Business's focus on the importance of interdisciplinary education, many business schools have incorporated interdisciplinary elements into their curricula." Finally, Kalliath and Laiken (2006: 747) concur with the observation that there has been an increasing use of teams in management education, partly because of "the continuing demand from stakeholders of management education for graduates who are equipped with team skills." It is against such a backdrop that various dimensions of the proposed course, including its purposes, content, context, and processes, are succinctly examined below.

Purposes: The proposed course should be designed to achieve multiple purposes at once, including the following:

• Raising participants' awareness of the need for more effective intraand inter-organizational collaboration to solve the complex problems that contemporary organizations and societies are facing;

• Raising participants' appreciation about the types and scope of various kinds of interdependencies and mutual ties within and across organizations, and betterment of their abilities to identify and evaluate the potential opportunities and challenges waiting to be further explored and examined;

• Expanding and updating participants' knowledge-base regarding collaborative experience of different sectors, organizations, and individuals by providing them with a set of cutting-edge samples of conceptual and empirical study materials;

• Improving their collaborative skills by encouraging and enabling them to work in different experiential learning "settings", and thus contributing to the aim of further emphasizing the interconnectedness of various parts of institutions of higher education, as well as of higher education institutions and the communities surrounding them by creating new or better opportunities for all involved in learning about and from their "closeness" and "connectedness";

• Helping the participants to become more vigilant about the ethical and educational issues involved in working with "others", and in evaluating work of others, and ultimately recognizing the universal value of collaboration while acknowledging and appreciating the differences among people in terms socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, areas of interests, and so on.

Content: It seems evident that course coverage needs to be carefully and jointly crafted by all involved. It must fit the specific needs of the institution and its members. Said differently, details should be worked out later in collaboration with others. Yet, a tentative list of suggested readings may be provided, reflecting the diversity of existing theoretical and empirical work for further consideration by all. It is my contention that the existing body of knowledge on the intra- and inter-organizational collaboration can be organized around three distinct yet closely related categories: *collaboration*, *collaborating* and *collaboratives*. Hence, the course can be organized around three different but closely related modules: collaboration, collaborating, and collaboratives. In the first module, such issues as definitions, antecedents, and consequences of collaboration should be covered. The second module should mainly focus on processes of collaborating. Suggested readings in this section should mostly, if not exclusively, devoted to theoretical or empirical descriptions of development processes in and around inter-organizational relations, or various stages of a collaborative endeavor. The third module should be devoted to learning more about converging and diverging properties of different forms of intra-, and inter-organizational collaboration, such as virtual teams, digital teams, strategic alliances, public-private partnerships, human collaboratives, issue networks, public management networks, and so on. These modules should reflect the underlying logic of collaboration, should be developed from general to specific, should reflect the diversity both in theory and practice, and should be in concert with overall course objectives.

It is needless to say that the distinction between these three modules is meant to for analytic purposes only. Indeed, it is proposed to give an idea about topics that can be covered, and issues that might be taught and discussed throughout the course. It is my expectation that members of the learning communities would cover them simultaneously, and some kind of overlap is inevitable. For instance, the process of collaboration (collaborating), would inevitably touch upon the idea of different forms of collaboration (collaboratives), to explain whether and how those processes might vary across different types of collaboratives. In a similar vein, when one talks about the antecedents and consequences of collaboration, she/he has to give some examples from various collaboratives.

Diversity of theoretical perspectives about the emergence, organizing properties, and functioning of intra-and inter-organizational collaboratives should be maintained in selecting reading materials for such a course since individual theoretical perspectives alone do not provide adequate grasp of complexities exist in inter-organizational systems and networks. It should also be kept in mind that: "Given the inherent interdependency of public issues, an interdisciplinary approach appeared not only to be reasonable, but a necessity." (Ventriss, 1991: 8).

Context and Processes: In most recent years, importance of the context and processes in public administration and management education and training has been increasingly emphasized. Creating a community of learners requires that we pay attention not only to the content of the courses the public administration and management school/programs offer, but also to the context in which the whole educational experience is gained, and to the processes through which that experience is pursued and enhanced. As such, relevant skills, values and orientations should be gained in a learning climate where collaboration is promoted and practiced by using every means possible. It is the argument of this paper that the context and processes of a course on interorganizational collaboration should reflect the underlying logic of a genuine partnership. Partnership models of management education or otherwise collaborative context have been well documented. According to Booth et al. (2003: 23) "The shared responsibility of planning and executing classroom instruction has been described in many terms. Often, terms such as 'team teaching,' 'collaborative teaching,' 'co-teaching,' or 'shared teaching' are employed interchangeably." An emphasis should be on the need for collaboration not only between students and teachers but also between university administrators and staff as well as between the university and the community within which our schools are located. Such a model of collaborative learning for teaching interorganizational collaboration in public administration and management can be depicted as in Figure 1.

Figure 1: A Model of Collaborative Learning for Teaching Intra- and Inter-Organizational Collaboration



In fact, underlying ideas of the model are not new. First, calls for a greater collaboration or partnership between teachers and students have been made by management educators for quite some time. It has been argued that the role of the teacher should be a facilitor, resource person, and coach, instead of being the sole authority in classroom settings. The authority relationship between teachers and students should be revised so that it reflects newly defined partnership model of learning (e.g., Bilimoria and Wheeler, 1995; O'Leary, 1997; Ramsey and Couch, 1994). According to Gueldenzoph and May (2002: 9), as the need for employees to be effective team players has increased, "collaborative learning has evolved in both secondary and post-secondary classrooms. This evolution is supported by post-modernistic and constructivist learning theories, which suggest that the role of the instructor should shift from the 'sage on the stage' to the 'guide on the side'." (Emphasis added).

Second, the recognition of preparing professionals for a work world where interdependence of public issues have been taken into account has led some universities to create specific inter-professional programs and courses (e.g., McCroskey and Robertson, 1999; Oxley and Glover, 2002). Third, it also has been the focus of attention that university administrators and staff should be thought of as an essential part of whole educational experience (Denhardt, 1997). Fourth, the need for an educational institution where the mutual interdependence of public education schools and the community within which they live has gained more attention in recent years. If the universities are to pay attention to the whole context of educational experience they offer to their students, then, the community connection should be recognized and encouraged more than it is currently the case. Instead of limiting themselves to bringing the practioner wisdom into the classroom, the educators should give more attention to the value of collaboration between their schools/programs and their communities more than what they have now. As aptly argued by Lappe and Du Bois, (1997):

the real challenge is to move forward a new era in which we are enabled to function as common problem solvers within all aspects of our public lives. In other words, maybe the challenge is not simply to enhance civil society and re-ignite the volunteer realm, however vital that renewal is to our society's health. Just as important is infusing the principles, norms, and expectations of civil society into all arenas of public life.

Communities cannot effort university campuses, especially schools/departments of public administration and management be exceptions. In short, educators of public administration and management should practice what they preach (Kluth and Straut, 2003). As Romme and Putzel (2003: 512) rightly posed:

Students can experience the concepts they are learning if the curriculum is organized and run according to the management and organization principles being taught. Lecturers and instructors in management subjects can practice what they teach. (...) At once outside observers and inside participants, students cite and site: The organization provides both their lexicon and their job.

Finally, ideas and practices regarding experiental learning and service learning are spreading around fast in recent years (e.g., Kayes et al., 2005). As Cunningham (1997: 219) forwarded:

An experiential learning (EL) perspective recognizes the classroom as a place for interactive learning, where teacher and students learn by sharing knowledge and experiences. EL de-emphasizes professional lectures, memorization/regurgitation of facts and theories, and the five-hundred-page text. EL priorities are people, emphasizing the student; passion, emotion as well as cognition in the lesson; and pragmatism, integrating theory and practice. ..

Referring to the age-old "schism between theory and practice" in public administration, (p. 5), Ventriss (1991) suggests that: "the emphasis must be on *mutual learning* that jointly links scholars and practitioners in furthering their knowledge and maturity on public issues." (p. 6). What, then, might be more appropriate opportunity to do this, rather than creating and nurturing an educational climate that conducive to "mutual learning" by emphasizing collaborative learning between students and faculty, among students, between faculty themselves, and between all these groups and community as well as school administrators and staff?

From the very beginning, all stages of developing, designing, and teaching the course on collaboration should reflect the underlying logic of a partnership. The course should be collective product of different faculty members and students from various departments. The course should be open to students from all relevant departments. The collaborative preparation and teaching of the course by more than one faculty members from different departments is a must. The content, objectives, and schedules of the course should be decided jointly by relevant faculty members. The materials as well as teaching and evaluation methods to be used should be designed suitable to purposes of such a course.

The course should be designed to allow maximum interaction and collaboration between faculty members, between students and teachers, and among students themselves. So, it may involve some conventional teaching techniques, but it should go beyond the "*chalk and talk*" lecture format. For

one, the value utilizing information technologies for collaborative work by the faculty and students should be emphasized and displayed. In a similar vein, selection of cases, guest speakers, site visits, and so on should be designed in ways to maximize collaboration among all participants. It is only logical to argue that a course on interorganizational collaboration should reflect at least main processes of such collaboration in "real world" settings (O'Brien and Buono, 1996). An open communication, participation of relevant stakeholders into the whole process, the team work, negotiation, and conflict resolution, and reflective skills are among the most important ones to be brought to the classrooms. Again, details of any such course should be decided jointly by all participants in accordance with their specific needs and capabilities. But, the underlying logic remains the same: Processes should be carefully examined and encouraged so as to increase learning-by-doing, learning-by-living

Assignments and Evaluations: It goes without saying that evaluation of faculty and students, and grading of the course should reflect the underlying logic of the course, and should be conducive to foster collaboration within and outside the classroom. There might emerge some problems stemming from existing university policies regarding faculty and student evaluation requirements, but this should and can be overcome. For example, at least initially, instead of standard faculty evaluation surveys conducted at the end of each semester, there might be more emphasis on an ongoing stream of reflections and feedback mechanisms. Content and processes of the course can be subject to constant evaluations by all participants. Both faculty and student participants should be evaluated and rewarded for their collaborative efforts more than their individual works. In this vein, group projects and presentations, as well as collaboration between faculty and students and practitioners should be encouraged, and they should be exposed to 360-degree evaluation opportunities.

In addition, some innovative rewards and incentives might be used to support collaborative effort on the part of students. For example, a group of students might be selected by their peers for such positions as "the champion(s) of creative collaboration ideas", "the best negotiator," "the best problemshooter", "the best networker", "the visionary", and "the best group motivator". Similarly, different kinds of non-material rewarding opportunities for the students should be brought to the light. For instance, a number of much-coveted internship opportunities can be slated for top grade-getters in the class.

Although assignments can be jointly decided by the course participants, some suggestions can be put forward in this realm, including the analysis of collaborative portfolio (something more than a stakeholder analysis, but less complicated than a full network analysis). Student participants can be assigned to prepare a collaborative portfolio analysis for individual organizations. Alternatively, the focus of assignment might be on a group of organizations in some kind of collaborative settings. The role of different organizations and players within them can be analyzed by using the theoretical perspectives the students are exposed to throughout the course. The stages of an inter-organizational collaboration as well as the quality of interactions among the collaborators can be subjects of individual and group projects. In addition to analyzing the different roles played by various organizations within a given collaborative setting (e.g. service provider, contractor, negotiator, and conveyor); students should be able to apply such concepts as participation, accountability and effectiveness to inter-organizational collaborative settings.

Diversity: It should be encouraged and celebrated throughout the course; in learning different theoretical approaches, in selecting course materials, in teaching methods and so on. Maybe more importantly, diversity of course participants should be encouraged. For one, having a diverse student body would facilitate the processes toward reaching one of the main objectives of the course; recognizing the universal value of collaboration while acknowledging and appreciating the differences among ourselves in terms of demographics, culture, research interests, working and learning styles, and so on (e.g., Malekzadeh, 1998). It can be expected that students from certain departments choose assignments more relevant to their major, or area of interests (e.g., students from business school prepare term papers on strategic alliances, as opposed to those from school of social work focusing on human service collaboratives). Having a diverse student body may prove more valuable to all involved in understanding common challenges facing all of us in working collaboratively with and through others, while still allowing some to focus on issue specific/context specific dimensions of collaboration.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the paper, I have emphasized the need for preparing present and future public servants to function effectively in an increasingly networked world. Then, I have proposed a course on intra-, and interorganizational collaboration, along with a model of collaborative learning for teaching such a course in public administration and management education.

Many undergraduate and graduate public administration and management programs around the country are undergoing changes in their structures, processes and curriculums. It is possible to go through an indexing of and a careful examination of existing curricula in the light of above discussions. Faculty members can emphasize the issues pertaining to intra-and interorganizational collaboration in their respective courses. Also, it is possible that a capstone course can be created and taught for this specific purpose in mind. These issues can be integrated into experiential learning and/or service learning components of programs currently in use. It should also be noted that the content of the course might be easily customized/modified into the needs of specific programs. My aim has been just to scratch some possibilities, far from providing an exhaustive analysis. After the experience of individual faculty and students, it is always possible to revise the content and/or context of the course. It seems that such a course on collaboration is more suitable for master's level students, but, if it is wanted, an undergraduate version of the course can be developed—"collaboration light" of sorts. In a similar vein, the course can be developed and offered as a doctoral seminar with some modifications and adjustments.

I am not suggesting that a single course on collaboration will be sufficient to prepare public administration and management students for a networked world. Neither do I imply in any sense that the "model" described in the preceding pages is a fully-developed one; it is used here only to organize some thoughts and ideas around introducing collaboration into public administration and management education. Nor did the paper raise potential challenges that might arise from teaching the course in the way described therein. Despite these and possible other shortcomings, I would only hope that the paper has achieved its purposes to some extent in highlighting the need for preparing our graduates for a networked world.

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