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Abstract

For the past few decades, there has been a shift in the public sector, which has been documented by academics and thoroughly felt by public administrators. The increase of public-private partnerships as a result of contracting, privatization, and other mechanisms has changed expectations and created new demands for managers.

Keywords

public-private sector cooperation, city planning, leadership, Sioux Center, Iowa

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Collaboration in Public and Private Partnerships

For the past few decades, there has been a shift in the public sector, which has been documented by academics and thoroughly felt by public administrators. The increase of public-private partnerships as a result of contracting, privatization, and other mechanisms has changed expectations and created new demands for managers. Although hierarchy and direct chains of command remain in public jobs, many positions have typically expanded to include tasks of collaboration and partnership. Leaders and managers find themselves managing extra and intra-governmental relationships as they seek to solve problems and deliver services in their communities. Clarke and Celenti, in their 2018 study on collaborative leadership, found that this can be difficult work due to narrow perspectives, conflicting goals among organizations and individuals, and strained partnership relationships that result in disengagement. As a result, different skills are needed for success in managing relationships to achieve successful outcomes.

Helpful Frames

To understand this type of working relationship, it is helpful to consider useful framing concepts that inform our approach to leadership and management. First, some consider these partnerships primarily as management of networks. With a network, the relationships and the tasks are spread out across partners horizontally. Managing across a network requires greater collaborative skills than managing within a top-down hierarchical setting. Secondly, others, including Torfing and Triantafyllou, articulated a new description of these public-private partnerships as

part of a new way of understanding governance and public administrations' role within it. They would likely agree that thinking in terms of networks is clarifying, but they also suggest considering the work done between partners as co-producers in solving wicked and complex public problems. Co-producers suggest a more horizontal understanding of the work that occurs in partnership. However, it does not require that the partners have equal power and authority but does suggest a relationship model in which power is shared within the partnerships.

Leading in Collaboration

To lead well in this context, leaders and managers should focus on developing collaborative skills in vision-based and process-building leadership. For those who thrive on getting tasks accomplished quickly, the work of collaboration may be initially frustrating. However, Clarke and Celenti stress that the management of relationships among partners is essential and often requires soft skills that include listening well and intentionally working to build an empowered team. It can be challenging to consider how to do this well when budgets and schedules are tight, but it is essential to building a collaboration that is founded in trust and working toward shared goals. In fact, if a working partnership is built on trust and shared goals, it is often more efficient and productive in the long run. If managers embrace the co-producer frame mentioned above, the activities of empowered participation make sense. In this work, the role of the public administrator may more be understood as a

References:

Clarke and Celenti, *Developing Collaborative Maternal and Child Health Leaders* (Maternal Child Health, 22, 2018) 21. Milward and Provan, *Governing the Hollow State* (Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 10, 2000) 359-379. Torfing and Triantafyllou, *Enhancing Public Innovation by Transforming Public Governance* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) Yoon, et al., *Collaborative Governance at Scale* (American Review of Public Administration, 6, 2022) 439-456.



convener or facilitator. Drawing together and coordinating the work of partners is not a secondary task but is fundamental to leading well in collaboration.

A recent study on collaborative leadership stressed the importance of engaging systems thinking in collaborative work (Clarke and Celenti, 2018). Is it clear to those who are engaged in collaborative work who is involved and what the primary goal is for this shared work? Developing a visual picture of this work can be a helpful tool to check for shared understanding and also to point back to when things get complicated. This can be especially important with multiple levels of collaboration (Yoon et al., 2022). The visual map can include specific roles that partners play as well to remind everyone of their responsibility in the shared project and to ideally build consensus for the path forward.

Successful leaders in collaborative work can build trust, foster buy-in, and empower partners to participate in shared partnerships. These responsibilities require careful attention to the structure and nature of collaborative partnerships as well as the intentional management of healthy working relationships among public and private partners.

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The partnerships between the city of Sioux Center, Dordt University and the Sioux Center Community School District are examples of unique collaboration in public-nonprofit partnerships with multiple 28E agreements in place.

These allow for Dordt University, Sioux Center and the Sioux Center school district to support one another in a unified approach to provide both city residents and educational institutions with high-quality facilities. These agreements are managed through regular meetings of joint use committees on which each partner is represented.

There are several examples of what this partnership looks like in practice. The All Seasons Center is a recreational use space that houses an indoor pool and ice arena; it is home to the Dordt University hockey team as well as the Sioux Center youth hockey league. Dordt University and Sioux Center High School share the baseball, softball, and football fields in Open Space Park. Also, the city of Sioux Center and Dordt University are partnering to build a large indoor turf facility that will be available to the community and utilized by Dordt's athletic program.

The collaboration between groups has allowed the community to utilize space in the city well, support local programs, and provide excellent recreational opportunities. ●

Photos provided by Dordt University