

Editorial: Cross-Sector Social Interactions

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Interactions across sectors have intensified in recent years, particularly in the form of cross-sector social partnerships that span four broad arenas (Selsky and Parker, 2005):

- (1) Nonprofit and business interactions (Austin, 2000; Elkington and Fennell, 2000; Galaskiewicz and Colman, 2006; Googins and Rochlin, 2000; Gray, 1989; Hamann et al., 2008; Jamali and Keshishian, 2009; Kanter, 1999; Le Ber and Branzei, 2009; Linder and Rosenau, 2000; London et al., 2005; Murphy and Bendell, 1999; Muthuri, 2008; Rondinelli and London, 2003; Seitanidi and Crane, 2009; Stafford and Hartman, 2001; van Huijstee and Glasbergen, 2010; Wymer and Samu, 2003; Young, 1999).
- (2) Government and business (Chettiparamb, 2007; Dixon et al., 2004; Doh, 2003; Milliman and Grosskopf, 2004; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992; Pongsiri, 2002; Rosenau, 1999, 2000; Sullivan and Skeltcher 2002; Teegen and Doh, 2003).
- (3) Government and nonprofit organizations (Brinkerhoff, 2002; Deakin, 2002; Farrington et al., 1993; Hodgson, 2004; Huxham and Vangen, 1996; Lister, 2000).
- (4) Tripartite social interactions (Babiak and Thibault, 2009; Glasbergen et al., 2007; Hardy, 1994; Nelson and Zadek, 2000; Waddell, 2000; Waddock, 1991; Warner and Sullivan, 2004; Westley and Vredenburg, 1997).

In all their different constellations, organizations from different economic sectors – public, nonprofit, and business – cooperate to address social issues by providing society with “public goods” (Waddock, 1988), such as clean water, clean air, environmental

protection, health care, or education (Warner and Sullivan, 2004) in different degrees. However, when a particular form of interaction grows more popular, its shortcomings often become more manifest, leading to greater criticisms (Seitanidi and Ryan, 2007). For example, cross-sector social partnerships can suffer from overreaching rhetorical claims that promise to deliver social goods (Reed and Reed, 2009; Weaver et al., 1999), but instead comprise transactional efforts that benefit only the partner organizations (Gray and Wood, 1991; Seitanidi, 2010).

Social partnerships and collaboration have captured the interest of the research community for some time. In 1991, Barbara Gray and Donna Wood edited two special issues (Collaborative Alliances: Moving from Practice to Theory) of the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* that focused on processes of collaboration and forms of collaborative alliances. Twenty years later, with this special issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics*, we re-visit the notion of collaboration by addressing the interactions across organizations and sectors that focus on the level of interactions (micro, meso, macro; see next paragraph) that have the potential analytically to offer a framework for comparisons across different frames of practice, organizational forms, industries, sectors, contexts, and processes, and reveal emergent patterns.

The dynamic constellations of interactions have the potential for impacts at micro (individual), meso (organisational), and macro (societal) levels of social reality. In this way, the aim of this special issue is not to treat an individual organization as the sole centerpiece of theory (Gray and Wood, 1991) and instead to focus on the interdependences associated with complex networks of relationships. Moreover, by investigating cross-sector social interactions across the three levels of reality, the collection of articles in

this special issue addresses the impacts of interactions by focusing on a central but previously ignored question: How does society benefit when organizations combine their efforts across sectors (Austin, 2000)? In effect, the special issue connects the role of different levels of analysis in delivering impacts. As such, it answers the question why collaboration is important under the second group of reasons suggested by Huxham (1996, p. 2), that is, as “the only way to tackle major societal problems” and to overcome the limitations of single organizations. Answering the above question can offer key benefits to both academics and practitioners in the form of systematic practices and studies that increase the transferability, sustainability, and benefits of cross-sector interactions for society (Seitanidi and Crane, 2009). The study of these interconnections also offers unique insights into how social interactions, which target social change, can affect people, organizations, communities, and societies worldwide. Therefore, this special issue captures the effects of interactions across sectors and levels of analysis and thus aims to unpack key processes that lead to success or failure on multiple levels.

In a practical sense, the special issue also recognizes the new reality of convergence (Austin et al., 2007; Seitanidi, 2010), particularly that between “what your shareholders want and what is best for millions of people the world over” (Annan, 2001), which requires interdisciplinary understanding (Bendell et al., 2010), new skills (Waddock, 2009; Williams, 2010), and new organizational capacities (Seitanidi, 2008). New fields of enquiry thus might include studies of shifting boundaries of social sectors; the emergence of new organizational forms as a result of intense interactions; the development of constellations of entities that address pressing social problems; the legal and governance implications of intensified interactions; the intensity and consequences of social interactions in value creation processes; the consequences of such intense interactions on the socio-political environment; the effects of organizational and collective identities; the development of multilevel models that can be applied in different contexts; and change as a result of interactions between context and action.

The interest in cross-sector social interactions is intense. We refer to two other special issues published in 2010. The first issue, by *Business and Society*,

was entitled “Role of Nongovernmental Organizations and the Business-Government-Society Interface” (edited by Nicolas M. Dahan, Jonathan Doh, and Hildy Teegen) and emphasized the growing impact of NGOs on both government and society (Dahan et al., 2010). The second issue, by *Business Strategy and the Environment*, was entitled “Collaborative Engagement for Sustainability in the Asia-Pacific region” (edited by Jem Bendell, Eva Collins, and Juliet Roper), a region that has been characterized as “the most culturally, politically and economically diverse region—the Asia-Pacific” (Bendell et al., 2010, p. 353). This issue explored the role of collaboration in societies with unique socio-political characteristics (state-centric societies, complex ownership, and accountability contexts).

Despite the different perspectives, focus on organizational actors and regions, it seems that in the new reality of converging interests the poles of the public-private interest continuum are coming closer together (Glasbergen, 2007). The complex institutional terrain that is likely to result may make redundant the very question of how organizations respond to the “irreducible conflict between humanitarian needs and economic objectives” (Margolis and Walsh, 2003, p. 290). In the meantime, this special issue suggests some ways that organizations in different sectors might cooperate to benefit society.

Context and structure of the special issue

This special issue consists of 3 commentaries and 10 articles, all of which reflect three common themes and an overriding meta-theme.

The first common theme addresses the types of impact, expressed as social benefits for a single organization, the organization’s partners, or society. Furthermore, the impacts reflect institutional dynamics and expected results; the studies in this theme also acknowledge that impacts might trickle up, down, or across partnerships and deliver multiple benefits through diffusion. For example, one key impact entails the potential for social regeneration among disadvantaged communities. The second theme examines various possibilities of change, including collaborative models as catalysts; diverse mechanisms, such as process-based interactions, as agents of change

in organizations and societies; and partnerships as agents of change, as well as critical perspectives on this latter notion. Then the third theme reflects multi-level perspectives that link institutional logics, partnership configurations, and leadership styles. Part of this perspective entails the multiple, simultaneous roles and effects of individuals at the micro level, which spread to organizations at the meso and societies at the macro levels.

The meta-theme that we see emerging, providing an answer to the question of the special issue, is that if cross-sector social interactions deliver negotiated multi-level value creation, it can lead to societal governance and result in society being better off due to the joining efforts of organizations across sectors.

As to its structure, this special issue comprises a prelude that includes invited commentaries by the acclaimed authors Sandra Waddock, James E. Austin, and Andrew Crane, each of whom reflects on one level of reality (i.e., individual/micro level, organisational/meso level, and societal/macro level). These insights are based on their understanding of social partnerships and enriched by their studies of social entrepreneurs, social enterprises, corporate citizenship, and corporate social responsibility.

The prelude leads into three sections that contain 10 articles in all. The articles in the first section seek to develop conceptual schemata of cross-sector social partnerships. Beginning with “Platforms for cross-sector social partnerships: prospective sensemaking devices for social benefit,” John W. Selsky and Barbara Parker argue that benefit distributions depend on the cognitive frames the participants in the partnership hold. To describe these frames, the authors use three analytic platforms – resource dependence, social issue, and societal sector – that enable project managers to make sense of their partnerships according to their desirable, or less desirable, features. The platforms vary in terms of which factors influence social benefits. By illustrating each platform, these authors demonstrate how platform choice affects key practices, including how the partnership project initiates, evolves, and produces benefits.

Assuming they have been initiated, Clodia Vurro, M. Tina Dacin, and Francesco Perrini consider how organizations address complex social problems in “Institutional antecedents of partnering for social change: how institutional logics shape cross-sector social partnerships.” They propose that business

approaches to social change-oriented partnerships depend on appropriateness needs. The theoretical framework in this article identifies and frames four partnership styles that combine the dominant institutional orientations of a field and the general level of coherence. For example, intervention models emphasize either the soundness of the initiative from a business perspective or its social value, but both ensure a consistent leadership style. Directive approaches based on concentrated governance structures attempt to set the rules of the game and prevail in fields characterized by low institutional coherence. Finally, participative models emerge in more established fields, and the partnership promoter plays an integrative role that relies on distributed governance structures.

The second section then shifts focus; the articles in this part of the special issue apply various theoretical perspectives, sourced from prior research into governance, social justice, collaborative strategic management, culture, social exchange, contagion, social learning, and attraction–selection–attrition theories. Consider “Odd couples: understanding the governance of firm–NGO alliances,” by Miguel Rivera-Santos and Carlos Rufin. These authors believe that the sectors represented by the partners influence the governance of their alliance, because it limits the applicability of some governance mechanisms and makes various mechanisms more available or particularly relevant. Specifically, they predict that business-to-nongovernmental organization (B2N) alliances use contracts, adopt a restricted scope, and take non-equity hostages (e.g., reputation, stakeholder involvement), which means each partner has limited protection against opportunism. Therefore, these B2N alliance partners are forced to rely on trust-based governance mechanisms, even though trust is hard to build in such alliances.

The following article focuses on another context that defines partnerships. Specifically, to explore whether partnerships can generate goods that enhance quality-of-life measures in socially and economically deprived urban communities, in “Cross-sector partnerships: city regeneration and social justice,” Nelarine Cornelius and James Wallace undertake an ethical evaluation of different partnership approaches designed to assist neighborhood regeneration (i.e., social regeneration of disadvantaged communities). The governance of these cross-sector partnerships

depends on negotiated values and a strong community voice, which results in a greater sense of procedural justice and improved orderliness in the local neighborhoods. However, distributive justice, as exemplified by the accumulation of easily accessible goods that enable societal participation, remains elusive. The authors therefore recommend that partnerships can deal more effectively with the causes of disadvantage by enhancing both the capabilities and the social capital of local communities, even if that approach constitutes a longer-term, costly endeavor.

In “Collaborative strategic management: strategy formulation and implementation by multi-organizational cross-sector social partnerships,” Amelia Clarke and Mark Fuller specifically consider the implementation and outcomes of collaborative strategic management. To test their conceptual model of collaborative strategic management – which features two levels of implementation (collaboration and organization), different types of outcomes, and potential feedback loops – they use two qualitative empirical cases related to regional sustainable development.

Matthew Murphy and Daniel Arenas instead argue that an indigenous corporate perspective can yield more insights. Therefore, in “Through indigenous lenses: cross-sector collaborations with fringe stakeholders,” they highlight the largely ignored range of cross-sector engagement types, emphasize the need to build cross-cultural bridges, and note the potential for innovation through collaborations with fringe stakeholders. Their overarching typology of cross-sector collaborations leads to a theoretical framework for cross-cultural bridge building that accounts for the value creation possible from working with fringe stakeholders. Furthermore, they illustrate their claims using case studies and thus demonstrate their model’s usefulness for analyzing and developing such indigenous corporate collaborations.

The final article in this section, “Trickle effects of cross-sector social partnerships,” by Ans Kolk, Willemijn van Dolen, and Marlene Vock, takes yet another perspective, namely, the micro perspective (i.e., individual interactions between and across organizations engaged in partnerships to address the social good). According to this micro-level interaction-based lens, partnership effects may trickle from management to employees, from employees to management, or across employees. This article therefore clarifies that even micro-level interactions can have

wider benefits, because individuals take multiple roles, and the effects at the micro level spread to meso and macro levels.

The third section collects empirical articles. The first, “Partnership formation for change: indicators for transformative potential in cross-sector social partnerships,” investigates the increasing trend in which business and nonprofit organizations partner to address social issues. M. M. Seitanidi, D. Koufopoulos, and P. Palmer develop a model that features organizational characteristics, organizational motives, and the history of partner interactions as critical indicators of the potential for social change – that is, of transformative capacity, transformative intention, and transformative experience. Change thus has a reciprocal, multilevel nature in social partnerships, marked by the interplay of organizational, individual, and social levels of reality.

Marlene J. Le Ber and Oana Branzei also address how cross-sector partners recognize and reconcile value creation frames to co-construct social value in “Value frame fusion in cross sector interactions.” Their method relies on longitudinal narratives about four dyads, which enables them to show that partners initially contrast sector-embedded diagnostic frames but then begin to work together to develop partnership-specific prognostic frames. The proposed four-stage model (i.e., prognostic frame negotiation, elasticity, plasticity, and fusion) attempts to explain the relational, value-creation process in cross-sector partnerships. In support of this proposal, qualitative analyses indicate that partners engage in multilevel coordination to support and calibrate relational processes.

Finally, the co-creation of value has a slightly different meaning in “The Manchester Super Casino: experience and learning in a cross-sector social partnership,” by Jon Reast, Adam Lindgreen, Joëlle Vanhamme, and François Maon. Because managing cross-sector social partnerships (CSSPs) that span government, business, and nonprofit entities can be complex and difficult, this article highlights the importance of organizational experience and learning. The case study of the Manchester Super Casino reinforces the significant benefits of prior experience with CSSPs, which enables the partners to learn and develop beneficial relationships, skills, and capabilities over time. The result of this study is a refined learning model of the CSSP process that includes key success variables and thus produces a template

for managing complex CSSPs, according to the perspectives of the different partner organizations.

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