Review

Reviewed Work(s): The Collaborative Public Manager: New Ideas for the Twenty-First Century by Rosemary O'Leary and Lisa Blomgren Bingham

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ROSEMARY O'LEARY AND LISA BLOMGREN BINGHAM (EDS.), *THE COLLABORATIVE PUBLIC MANAGER: NEW IDEAS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY*. WASHINGTON, DC: GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009.

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Rosemary O'Leary and Lisa Blomgren Bingham offer the second volume of a set of papers first presented at an invitation-only conference in 2006 at the Syracuse University Greenberg House in Washington, D.C. The first volume, published in 2008 by M.E. Sharpe, was called *Big Ideas in Collaborative Public Management.* Thus, from this conference, we have a collection of *new* ideas and *big* ideas. The reader would expect true innovation and envelope-pushing research, theory, and philosophy. On the whole, the collections are analytically strong, but the analyses largely rely on twentieth-century thinking and conceptualization of the administrator as an expert technician, rather than the administrator as a politically astute citizen-technician. They are not forward looking and offer only glimpses of a new vision of what public administration might become (or should become); rather, the expert administrator is adapted to fit within the dynamic world of collaboration, networking, conflict management, and consensus building. There are exceptions to this generalization, and these will be highlighted in the pages that follow.

This review focuses on the second installment of conference papers found in *The Collaborative Public Manager: New Ideas for the Twenty-First Century.* The review will consider the major weaknesses and strengths of the assembled chapters. Specifically, weaknesses include a missing focus on citizenship and the role of citizens in collaborative public management and an unchallenged assumption regarding the primacy of the sector-based model of society. Strengths are the inclusion of fairly diverse policy and management topics, multiple methods used across chapters for the analysis of data, and some truly exemplary chapters. Last, the summary arguments advanced by O'Leary and Bingham are examined, specifically focusing on what they identify as paradoxical findings from the chapters.

To examine of these strengths and weaknesses, we can begin by looking at the definition of collaborative public management adopted by O'Leary and Bingham:

> Collaborative public management is a concept that describes the process of facilitating and operating in multi-organizational arrangements to

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> solve problems that cannot be solved or easily solved by single organizations. Collaborative means to co-labor, to achieve common goals, often working across boundaries and in multi-sector and multi-actor relationships. Collaboration is based on the value of reciprocity. Collaborative public management may include participatory governance: the active involvement of citizens in government decision-making. (p. 8)

The definition builds on conceptualizations by Agranoff and McGuire (2003) and O'Leary, Gerard, and Bingham (2006). The book's chapters delve into components of the definition in three sections: (1) why public managers collaborate, (2) how public managers collaborate, and (3) how and why public managers get others to collaborate. In these sections, authors reveal theoretical and practical justifications and draw inferences regarding collaborative activity, relationship building, and relationship management.

One component of the definition, however, is not given much attention: "Collaborative public management may include participatory governance" (O'Leary & Bingham, 2009, p. 8). The authors do not give that piece a chance to emerge as a pivotal or even periphery attribute of collaborative theory and practice. It is relegated in the definition to the status of afterthought and is the only part of the definition that contains the ambiguous "may" as opposed to the more definitive "is." As we move into the twenty-first century, as the book's title makes clear, with unparalleled technology-facilitated opportunities for government transparency and citizen engagement with governance actors, it is unfortunate that the book's editors do not explore the theories and practices of citizenship within the collaborative management and governance framework more explicitly. The words "citizen," "civic engagement," "public participation," or any such variation do not appear in the book's index, and no chapter addresses the "may" part of the definition in any substantive way. Indeed, in the two-volume set, only one chapter (Cooper, Bryer, & Meek, 2008), whose authorship reveals the perspective being offered here, deals explicitly with the integration of citizens into governance processes. In the effort to offer new and big ideas in public management and for the public manager, to virtually ignore the relationship of managers with their citizen-stakeholders seems a glaring omission and one that disregards a unique attribute of the public sector (Denhardt, Denhardt, & Aristegueta, 2009). Managing across sector boundaries in a way that fails to recognize the central role of the citizen appears dangerous, particularly if an issue such as democratic accountability is raised (an issue that is not addressed in the book).

The manner in which sectors are addressed in the book is another potential weakness. Though the chapter authors and book editors should not be faulted for using the commonly accepted language of *sectors* to describe components of social and economic organizational life (i.e., public, private/for-profit, nonprofit), as the book raises questions for managers in the twenty-first century,

it seems desirable to perhaps question the primacy of sector-based divisions. The book does not do this. Indeed, the work falls prey to a characterization by a group of scholars from the Minnowbrook III conference who wrote about the possible implications in the move toward a sectorless society. They wrote, "[G]overnance critics and enthusiasts alike still reify the underlying division of labor of the three-sector society. As Catlaw (2007) shows in his analysis of the literature, though governance theorists emphasize the blurring of sectors and 'decentering' of government, government is paradoxically recentered and the stability of the three sectors is reestablished" (Bryer et al., 2009, p. 3). These authors go on to suggest that it may be possible (and desirable) to devise a societal and governance framework through which all organizations, whatever their economic interest, act to administer the commons or achieve some semblance of the common good. Continuing to institutionalize economic motive as a means to divide segments of society may prevent achievement of a normatively desired common good, or, as Bryer et al. describe it, the pursuit of human flourishing for all. To largely restrict public service to the government misses an opportunity to expand citizen-serving and community-building values such as transparency, public participation, and political equality to actors in the sector-based society who have preferred values of efficiency, profit, and consumer-based responsiveness. Chapters in this book do not consider values shifts but implicitly assume that potentially competing values, based largely on economic interest, will continue to pervade the landscape in the years and decades to come. By not questioning the primacy of these sector divisions, strategies for pursuing a potentially more desirable set of universal citizen-serving values across actors and agencies are not considered. This is a disappointing limitation in a book that promises new ideas for the twenty-first century.

Despite these weaknesses, in select chapters one finds some valuable contributions. As a whole, there is strength found in the multiple analytic methods used across chapters as well as in the assortment of managerial and policy issues considered. Three chapters (McGuire; Hicklin et al.; and Waugh) focus on various aspects of emergency management, a subject area rife with potential for explorations in collaboration. The chapter by McGuire is particularly strong in teaching the reader about the professional skills and talents needed to be an effective collaborator in the emergency management arena. McGuire shows why emergency management is such a vibrant field for practicing and understanding collaboration; it requires activity across independent agencies (often with strong command-and-control structures), and it spans service areas, including health, public safety, and community development. Waugh complements McGuire's chapter well by focusing on the command-and-control dynamics of collaborative process in emergency management. Hicklin et al. focus their attention on the collaborative response required specifically in the response phase of emergency management in their

study of the jurisdictions that had to receive and care for individuals and families displaced by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Among the other chapters worth highlighting are those by Graddy and Chen ("Partner Selection and the Effectiveness of Interorganizational Collaboration"), Van Slyke ("Collaboration and Relational Contracting"), and Emerson ("Synthesizing Practice and Performance in the Field of Environmental Conflict Resolution"). Graddy and Chen examine the important topic of how collaborative partner selection affects partnership performance. Failure to select the right partner, or a partner who is equally prepared for collaborative activity, can potentially lead to a dysfunctional partnership grounded in the lack of trust and commitment. Specifically, the authors ask, "How do the motivations involved in forming partnerships affect the perceived effectiveness of the resulting relationship?" (Graddy & Chen, 2009, p. 54). Their measure of perceived effectiveness is based on collaborative partner perception. They acknowledge that this narrow focus is not comprehensive, and they may be missing something by not assessing the perceptions of clients or analyzing community-level outcomes. However, their study of partners involved in the delivery of family preservation services in Los Angeles County provides an informative case study with thoughtful implications for theory and practice.

Van Slyke writes on a topic that is perhaps the most significant in terms of the future of collaborative relationships. Rather than focus on principal-agent relationships embedded within highly structured, accountability-based contracts, he considers the development of relational contracts. Relational contracts are grounded in informally constituted, trust-based patterns of interaction. There might still be a formal contract document between government and service producer, but the contract may not be as detailed as in the case of traditional contracting arrangements. These relational contracts represent a potential future for collaborative relations as they to a large extent break away from the structured relations that may perpetuate sector-based differences. They require a mutual understanding of motive across agencies as opposed to formal contracts that attempt in their design to keep the less desirable motivations of partnering agencies in check.

Emerson's chapter complements Van Slyke's work on the development of less formal relations as well as McGuire's emphasis on professional skills necessary to be an effective collaborator. He reports on the conflict resolution literature, specifically in the environmental arena, and suggests that managers would do well to develop skills in conflict management in order to successfully navigate complex relations in collaborative partnerships. His case analysis of environmental conflict resolution attempts to tie this relatively narrow field to the larger question of collaborative public management. The principles identified are useful in considering how to make relational contracts work; for instance, participants to a collaboration should provide informed commitment to the partnership, representation among the agencies should be voluntary and

balanced, decisions should be based on consensus or made through mediated resolution, and so on.

There is one topic that received relatively little attention but is deserving of much more: curricular adaptation of MPA programs to this emerging area of collaborative public management and governance. Indeed, this topic could potentially fill an entire volume with best practices and techniques. Only one chapter is devoted to this issue, written by Paul Posner. Unfortunately, Posner's chapter represents only one view on this question, one grounded in a descriptive framework advanced by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO). In this framework, titled "the three faces of governance," the GAO identifies a set of actors, tools, and management skills needed in collaborative relations. Management skills identified consist of strategic planning, performance management, human capital, budgeting, financial management, information technology management, and acquisitions. All are important, no doubt, but these skills do not go far enough, as suggested by the chapters authored by McGuire, Van Slyke, and Emerson. The list of tools is similarly constrained and does not include relational contracts, citizen surveys, or deliberative democracy, the latter two being required in pursuing values of citizenship in governance activity. Along the same line, the actors listed include the usual players: executive agencies, state and locals, government corporations, foreign governments, government-sponsored enterprises, nonprofits, for-profits, contractors, and faith-based organizations. Though this list is inclusive of a diverse set of actors, it fails to include citizens directly. The book could be much improved if more diverse pedagogical theories and techniques were included. (Note, though, that O'Leary's leadership at Syracuse University's Program on the Analysis and Resolution of Conflicts or PARC has been instrumental in the development of a significant teaching resource. The program hosts a growing set of teaching case studies and simulations in collaborative public management, available at www.maxwell.syr.edu/parc/eparc/.)

In their summary, O'Leary et al. identify a set of paradoxes within the practice of collaborative public management. For instance, public managers are unitary leaders of independent organizations, but they also need to lead within multiorganizational networks. Managers, according to the authors, need to be both authoritative and participative. The ultimate and, for the authors, most significant paradox is that collaborative public management may bring conflict. They suggest, "Conflict within networks is not inevitable, yet it is predictable if it is not managed" (p. 12). One question emerges here: Should there be paradoxes, or should one of the apparent opposites be excised? What might the twenty-first century for public administration look like if managers were only interdependent and participative, with fewer authoritative attributes? What if conflicts were encouraged and actively facilitated, rather than managed, in order to reveal the underlying motivations and values of the collaborators?

Rather than accept paradoxes inherent in the job description of the twenty-first century public manager, is it possible to evolve fully from twentieth-century management techniques to relationally based, socially embedded, sector-diminished (if not sectorless) relations? These questions may inspire *new* and *big* ideas that would place public administration scholars and practitioners in a leading position to achieve the more just, equitable, and democratic future toward which we ought to strive.

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