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**SOME METHODOLOGICAL AND SUBSTANTIVE ISSUES  
ASSOCIATED WITH THE EVALUATION OF PARTNERSHIPS**

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## INTRODUCTION

*The review benefitted from close collaboration with several other donor partners .*

This statement can be found in the recent OED report *The Drive to Partnership; Aid coordination and the World Bank*<sup>2</sup>. It mentions the positive effects of collaboration on the quality of the review. It is easy to find similar statements regarding other fields and activities. Collaborative learning in *education*<sup>3</sup> for example is believed to be more efficient than other types of education. UK-oriented *joined-up government* is believed to be able to reduce fragmentation between layers of government and quango s/agencies, while *subsidiarity in conjunction with partnerships between nation states, regions and NGO s* is believed to enhance the efficacy of EU policies.

*Public Private Partnerships (PPP)* refer to joint efforts by government entities and private organisations to provide services or facilities. Here joint streams of public and private money bring joint responsibilities in service delivery. Found in a wide variety of services such as defence, education, health and highways, PPP is more than a financial arrangement; it represents a new organisational machinery for delivering public services. Again it is believed that PPP s increase the efficiency and effectiveness of operations.

Less firmly based organisationally is *network management*, a deliberate way in which actors (especially policy initiators) try to influence the structure, the functioning and the outcomes of policy through collaborative efforts. To a certain extent, this is seen as goal-free (though not issue-free) collaboration. Different stakeholders are brought together and then start to interact. From then on they develop joint goals, i.e. goals that are agreed upon by civil servants and the other stakeholders. It is believed that by bringing interested parties together, the social acceptance and effectiveness of policy instruments will increase.

A final example concerns the production of *global public goods* through *global public policy networks*. Reinecke describes these as loose alliances of government agencies, international organizations, corporations, and elements of civil society such as NGOs, professional organizations or religious groups that join together to achieve what none can accomplish on its own (Reinecke 1999: 44).

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<sup>2</sup> The report is authored by John Eriksson and was published this year.

<sup>3</sup> Already in the early 1990 s a report by Jacques Delors indicated that next to the traditional goals of education ( learning to know, learning to do, learning to be), learning for partnerships should be high on the agenda (Delors, 1996). With the increased importance attached to knowledge sharing in organisations, collaboration between different knowledge producers, transfer agents and recipients now is indeed high on the agenda.

## EVALUATING PARTNERSHIPS AND OTHER COLLABORATIVE ARRANGEMENTS: WHY IS EVALUATION NECESSARY?

Now that partnerships (arrangements) have become important, the question is how *effective and efficient* [to use two standard World Bank OED criteria<sup>4</sup>] these arrangements are. Evaluation is necessary because, despite all possible positive dimensions, these arrangements can also help to produce or enlarge:

- free rider behavior, including NIMBY-behavior ( verbally indicating to be positive but not when it boils down to one s own backyard );
- transaction/opportunity costs;
- increased rentseeking behavior (after deals have been closed);
- regression to the mean : reducing the achievement level of goals because of the over-emphasis on what is believed to be reasonable for the parties involved.

A first role for evaluators is to find out whether the intrinsic mechanisms of partnering arrangements are working as intended and do not produce perverse incentives or dysfunctional behaviour. There is no a priori evidence that collaborative mechanisms are always cost-effective and do never have unintended side effects. Transaction costs of decentralised collaboration could be high or difficult to know.<sup>5</sup>

Evaluation is also needed to bring order to the potential complexity (some might say chaos) of collaborative arrangements. Public-private partnerships, for example, sound simple enough at the point of the collaborative deal but may conceal intricate networks of relationships within the parties on each side of the deal.

Evaluation can also assess the collaborative relationship itself, including goal-achievement and the underlying logic-s (given that there is no longer one king of the jungle , there is more than one program logic).

It may also be possible to develop ex ante evaluative capability to characterise the respective potential parties to assess their compatibility as collaborators and to inform the design as well as the suitability (ex post) of collaborative structures and procedures.

Finally, evaluation can be used as action learning to facilitate knowledge building and sharing in the collaborative development.

## TOPICS TO BE ADDRESSED WHEN PERFORMING PARTNERSHIP EVALUATIONS

Based ---amongst others-- on a collection of casestudies ( Gray, Jenkins, Leeuw & Mayne (in press)), I want to highlight the following seven topics in need of attention when doing partnership evaluations.

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<sup>4</sup> Relevance, sustainability and institutional development are the other three.

<sup>5</sup> The OED report on partnerships ( Eriksson, 2001) makes this clear. In Annex 3, page 43 ff the problems of measuring the coordination costs are discussed.

## 1. The attribution problem

As the OED report *The drive to partnership* (Eriksson, 2001) correctly says, it clearly is difficult to attribute development results to aid coordination, when there are so many other potential intervening influences. But this difficulty does not diminish the importance of the attribution question. The methods and sources the Bank uses in this report are broad and include a literature review, staff interviews, survey questionnaires, workshops, field visits and country assistance (strategy) evaluations. Persons interviewed are mostly officials like World Bank staff, recipient government personnel, donor officials, INGO and NGO-representatives. However, in order to realize effective collaboration in partnerships participation from all persons involved, including and in particular the work floor is important. As I will argue below, *grass roots people* and persons *inside* the participating organizations exchange, invest and destroy relationships that are relevant for the success of the partnerships. It is not only management, officials and boards that count. One of the reasons is that official stakeholders can have stakes in addressing collaboration in rather positive terms, because of rentseeking and the prevention of losing possible *future* collaborative actions with the same sponsor/investor. In terms of Scott (2001: 77-83), collaborative arrangements then start to act as *routines* and even organizational *artifacts*.

The OED report does not make fully clear to what extent attention to *this topic* was given. Pollit (1995: 133) presents a somewhat similar example, dealing with evaluating NPM (new public management initiatives). He stresses that often the knowledge of *grass roots staff and/or citizens* may well be *superior* to that of *senior managers*, whose opinions more frequently figure in official [and many academic] accounts on what the impact of the reforms (NPM, fl) is (emphasis added, fl).

## 2. Social capital inside partnerships

Although the focus often is on partnering arrangements *within and between organizations*, it should be stressed that human and social factors are crucial to the success of networks and collaborative arrangements. In particular:

- *people* exchange ideas;
- *people* invest in each other and in each others networks;
- *people* form (and destroy) friendships and exchange relationships within and between organizations;
- *people* are able to pay lip service to collaboration and act different.

So, when one evaluates the efficiency or effectiveness of partnering arrangements, it is essential to pay attention to sociological aspects of collaboration and exchange not least since there is strong evidence that informal relationships and networks have a significant impact on the performance of organizations and their collaborations (Flap et al, 1999 for a rather complete review).

Three types of network relationships have become somewhat of a standard (Brass, 1985; Bulder et al, 1996; Flap et al., 1999):

- The occurrence of day-to-day communication between participants: to what extent do people communicate and interact with each other?;
- The embeddedness of persons in networks. This is operationalized in terms of measuring and drafting the friendship-oriented or trust network. Here the focus is primarily on the (emotional) support participants provide for each other;
- The exchanging of information and advice on work/topic-related issues.

It is desirable that evaluators pay attention to these network-relationships because that information helps to explain and predict the efficacy of partnership arrangements ( Bulder et al, 1996).

### **3. The mix of partner (ing) organizations**

The extent to which partner organizations are similar in various respects, including capacity, size, structure, cohesiveness and accessibility, will determine the potential for coordination. This factor also plays a role in explaining the efficacy of partnerships. In some partnering arrangements, very different organizations work together in anomalous ways. In particular, the capacity of organizations underpins coordination activity. The state of development of the organization will determine its effectiveness as a partner. Here relevant factors include:

- age, maturity, experience of the organization;
- quality of the mission and mandate;
- clientèle and membership size;
- resources and facilities; and
- internal and external credibility (McDonald 1994).

### **4. The structure of the partnering arrangement**

Eriksson (2001: 3) highlights the point that aid development implies three levels of coordination:

- information sharing and consultation;
- strategic coordination and
- operational coordination.

However, relevant for *all* three levels is information on the ways in which a partnering arrangement is organized. In theory, a partnering arrangement can function without a coordinator, which can refer to an organization, as well as to a chief executive, board, manager or staff, responsible for coordinating activities. However, a number of studies have pointed to the strategic value of having a coordinator, especially in the form of a hub or core organization. Metcalfe (1994b, 280-284) noted that the capacity to coordinate begins with a clear understanding of the extent of organizational autonomy, defining the scope for coordination with other partnering arrangement participants. It then proceeds through several levels of competence, gradually improving the performance of coordination, e.g., by avoiding conflict, arbitrating differences and establishing priorities. These higher levels of coordination require the involvement of a coordinator. Decision making and enforcement are complemented by well-functioning horizontal communication and information systems aimed at voluntary compliance. Metcalfe's policy coordination scale (Exhibit

1) shows the progression in levels of coordination; the higher functions depend on the existence and reliability of the lower ones.

Exhibit

**Exhibit 1 - A Policy Coordination Scale**

9	Network strategy
8	Establishing priorities
7	Setting limits on partners' action
6	Arbitration of policy differences
5	Search for agreement among partners
4	Avoiding divergences among partners
3	Consultation with other partners (feedback)
2	Communication to other partners
1	Independent decision making by partners

## 5. The level of available resources

The allocation of financial, human and physical resources may be critical for the management of a partnering arrangement. The extent to which organizations are funded autonomously, in common or through the partnering arrangement itself determines the potential for leverage through funding. Resources and funding are one of the elements to be coordinated in a partnering arrangement, and one analysis suggests that the institutional level (e.g., governmental), as opposed to other organizations or individuals, is the appropriate level for such coordination to take place.

## 6. The stability of the partnering arrangement

The stability of the partnering arrangement relates to its durability over time and its adaptability to change. The stability of the arrangement may depend to a large extent on the conditions prevailing in the external environment. Because partnering arrangements tend to be permeable, with multiple relationships among component organizations and individuals involving other networks or hierarchies, they also tend to be highly reactive to changes in external conditions. One model of network effectiveness suggested that major changes instigated by external forces impacted negatively on common outcomes, advancing the following proposition: other things being equal, the effectiveness of the partnering arrangement will be enhanced under conditions of general system stability, although stability alone is not a sufficient condition for effectiveness (Provan and Milward 1995). Stability may also be determined by the attributes both of the partner organizations and the partnering arrangement itself. If there is a coordinating partner, one of its key tasks may be to see to the continued stability of the network.

The stability-related attributes of partner organizations are the following and all have to do with the extent to which an organization is well established, in terms of:

- The infrastructure of the organization: staff, skills, credibility, facilities, revenues and finances;
- The ability of the organization to use or disburse government-provided funds efficiently and effectively;
- The capacity of the organization to carry out the desired activities in a manner that is satisfactory to the other partners (this may mean satisfactory to the governance or coordinating process in the network) and to the clients (if service to the public is involved);
- Developmental needs that can be addressed through the resources of the network; and
- Good management and understanding of the needs of clients and the other partnering organizations.

### 7. The degree of formalization of agreements

It is assumed that there are agreed decision making rules in operation in a network with managed coordination or a collaborative arrangement. However, the nature of these rules may vary widely. Some of the processes may be largely informal and undocumented. The conditions governing meaningful participation may not be well defined, including the basic question of how an organization first accedes to membership, then moves on to participate fully.

## CONCLUSIONS

I have suggested 7 topics (if you will: variables) that deserve attention for anyone doing an evaluation of a partnering arrangement. For some (standard) methodology is available (i.e. measuring networks and charting/drafting them) (Ucinett IV-methodology; see: Borgatti et al, 1992; Burt, 1992 ), for others no such thing is available. Needless to say that time and money constraints play a role in deciding whether or not this set of topics is fully taken into account. My message is that *the more complex and important a partnership is and the larger the stakes involved, the more it is desirable to take this set of topics on board when designing an evaluation.*

What also may help is to focus on the *reconstruction and assessment of the logic underlying the activities of the different partners.* As there are multiple actors involved in collaborative arrangements, the chances are that also multiple logics are involved. To find them is important because underlying logics partly determine (overt) behavior. However, usually the partnership itself is also based on a logic, which can be reconstructed and assessed. Comparing and confronting both sets of logics helps to understand what the mechanisms are for a successful partnership<sup>6</sup>.

Together with a *multimethod approach in datacollection* (Greene et al, 2001), this approach, I think, helps to bring the attribution problem a little bit closer to a solution.

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<sup>6</sup> This implies using Scriven's Modus Operandi approach together with the application of methods for reconstructing and evaluating program theories ( Rossi et al, 1999; Leeuw, 2000).

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i This is adapted from McDonald (1994).