

Re-mixing the economy of welfare: beyond the market and state, Seminar 6. Articulating value, Newcastle, Sept. 2010

Collaborative solutions or new challenges in community-based work?

Linda Milbourne
School of Social Sciences, Birkbeck, University of London
l.milbourne@bbk.ac.uk



Context – changing policies

Why collaborate ?

- policy drivers
- value & benefits (to whom)

Examples from studies in two areas

- when it works well...
- barriers

Implications for cross-sector collaboration

Inevitable transition towards hybridity in a re-mixed economy of welfare ?

Context

Ongoing changes in state-third sector relationships

- Public service outsourcing - decline in grant funding
- Modernisation, managerialism (big government?)
- New approaches to governance: third way, compacts, community turn & partnership working – NL and Coalition...

Parallel, linked & contradictory policy agendas:

- Competition, & command & control
- Collaboration across & within sectors (but competition also drives collaboration)
- Emphasis on localism, involving service users, community organisations and community stakeholders

Why collaborate?

Policy drivers:

Improving services and community engagement – involve third sector and civil society as change agents

New Labour: collaboration within and across sectors

- capacity building
- accessing larger contracts
- survival in recession

Coalition: Big Society

- increased devolution to partnerships & community action
- ideals of building local 'bonds' & community-led solutions to local problems and service deficiencies

Rationale and value of collaborating?

Aspirations:

- Growth, maintaining, improving, extending service provision, access to large contracts, sharing resources
- Collaborative advantage – add value (Huxham & Vangen 2004)
- Learning from others – sharing approaches
- Consensus around shared goals

But also disincentives:

- Funders /public agencies may benefit most from growth
- Small CBOs may reject growth - stay small = 'on mission'
- Enormous investment of time (resources limited)
- Learning from others implies change
- Need to address different goals, vested interests and ways of doing things, different organisational identities and values

Understanding collaboration?

- Dynamic process – not static
- Diverse, locally contingent factors, individual motivations
- Ambiguity of purposes

Different forms of collaboration dependent on levels of engagement:

- Consultation - Instrumental - Committed

If organisations & individuals engaged in committed collaboration:

- Blurring of boundaries between sectors & organisations
- Common discourse, cultures expectations & arrangements
- Shared goals, culture of consensus

What happens to:

- Real differences & independence of TSOs & civil society actors?

Studies in two areas

- Children and young people's projects in two areas
- Large inner-city areas (England), high social deprivation, diverse, multi-ethnic population, many recent refugees
- Interviews, observations, group discussion
 - 50 community-based organisations, 2006-7
 - In-depth focus on 10 'partnership' projects, 2007-9

Sites of collaboration - and difference

Overt aims: Capacity and bridge building

CYP, Kidscare & 5 small community groups working with refugee populations

Support, training, yes it's helped but we're small, we need more, and money for workers. I don't see recognised the pressure, the demands, how hard, what we do for nothing at all. And taking time to meet others [groups] it's not real... perhaps phone call....But communication [from local authority officers] is more politics than respect, it says how they, not we, getting young people involve, not what we do by each day, only with volunteers. (Samia)

Goals & targets driven 'top-down'

Instrumentality - small groups identified specific benefits not value of engaging further

Barriers to collaboration: competing interests (cross-sector)

Complex weave of motivations & interests for being involved in collaboration & cross-sector work.

New initiatives, partnerships can be very short-term, doesn't matter where they sprung from, there's a massive investment of time for small centres.... You have to trust it'll be useful, somehow, not just a pretext for agencies to access funds because community partners are fashionable...tick the box... whether or not they take our views on board. (Gary, youth centre trustee)

Barriers to collaboration: competing interests within third sector

Misgivings about failing to do the best possible work for users:

We have enormous problems..., new gangs – if you like – appear, so regular attenders gets uncomfortable, but then maybe the gang moves on. So there's issues about working together with other local groups, sharing problems, like, professionals, like we used to. But what we're faced with is competing for funding, that's the bottom line, and it creates dishonesty. ... people have to make the pretence of meeting number targets and that to survive now, so we lose that chance of working together. (Paul, St Jude's Community Centre)

Consultation and instrumentality?

Collaboration as sites of 'lifeless consultations'
(Hoggett, 2004, p. 123)

We may get consulted – sometimes not. It's hugely time consuming... everyone's got their view but with officers it's one sided ... we don't feel like respected - partners doing something they value ...and there's a lot of jargon and red tape ... and it's not about, even close to things...young people want. (Kim, youth project)

Capacity building: co-construction of projects – CAMHS and Family Links

Family Links: 'the CAMHS infrastructure removes some time-consuming burdens around funding and monitoring.' (Jan)

Paul (CAMHS): 'we could develop more creative approaches and combine our different strengths....project work freed us to operate more flexibly than if we'd been bound by the usual department protocols.'

Both CAMHS and Family Links: learned a lot from the joint work and different perspectives

But – 'it was a big effort to create the project and resolve complementary rôles. It relied on positive individual attitudes to working through and respecting differences in approach.'

Jan, Family Links: 'we had to work it out together, how we could work best... thinking back now, that was good - no blueprint - but at the time, it seemed a bit, well unstructured and daunting.'

See-saw of policy changes: Building and eroding trust in collaborative work

Sure Start project : Adult education provider (ACE) & parent-child education groups

- developed educational/ play facilities for children & accredited play worker training

Some parents are from ... two generations without jobs... The project helped a few feel brave enough to train, now they're working in the centre, they'd never have gone to college or got involved in something outside their immediate area. Building up that trust was from street level. (June, ACE project co-ordinator)

- disruptive policy changes – damage to community relationships

This funding stream ends in 2 months; local parents whose hopes have been raised may lose jobs and the children's projects. We're letting them down all over again. This is their project, their neighbourhood what they've put effort into. They can't see their role in a new, swish Children's Centre, starting again somewhere else. Why would they? (ACE worker)

Collaborative advantage or new challenges?

Successful examples – commitment to collaboration:

- Respect, legitimacy given to local knowledge, power sharing
- Learning *from* the other – openness to alternatives & change
- Committed individuals, investment of resources
- Acknowledging diversity and contingency

Barriers to committed collaboration:

- Institutional constraints
- Assumptions about consensus – suppressing conflicting interests
- Powerful consensus of formal arrangements
- Assumptions – value in growth & capacity building
- Capacity building serves competitive interests and benefits funder
- Experience of lifeless consultations
- Dark side in wider policy changes – often not visible

Value in collaboration: Implications and ongoing questions

Does instrumentality in collaboration matter?

- Space for different kinds of collaboration ?
- But lack of committed collaboration loses opportunities to learn from alternatives

Creating better spaces for mutual learning and 'collaborative advantage'
- need to address relational space and differences more positively

1. **Does committed collaboration generate hybridity and loss of TS independence?**
2. **Are new approaches to governance continuing to extend extending governable terrain ?** (Carmel and Harlock, 2008)
 - An extension of social control – just not as evident as command and control frameworks?
 - To what extent are resistance and counter-agency valuable features of this terrain?

Thank you

Some material discussed also in:

Milbourne, L. (2009). Remodelling the Third Sector: advancing collaboration or competition in community based initiatives? . *Journal of Social Policy* 38 (2) pp. 277-297.

Linda Milbourne
l.milbourne@bbk.ac.uk