BUREAUCRATS WITHOUT BORDERS:
PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND THE END OF GEOGRAPHY

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The title of my remarks is “Bureaucrats Without Borders: Public Management and the End of Geography.”

The “end of geography” thesis rests on claims that there is an extensive disconnection between social, economic and political problems on one hand and the capacity of public jurisdictions to either contain or effectively deal with those problems on the other hand. The dominant response to the end of geography thesis is an observation that there is extensive interjurisdictional collaboration or governance and a call for further governance or collaboration. The secondary response is jurisdictional reorganization in the direction of regional general or functional consolidation. I will focus on the dominant response to the end of geography—interjurisdictional governance or collaboration. (Greig, 2000; O’Brien, 1992)

First, I will ask you to join me in “seeing” collaboration. Once we believe we can see collaboration, we can consider what we know about public management as collaboration. Then we can turn to recommendations for improving collaboration.
Seeing Collaboration\textsuperscript{1}

Can we see collaboration? If so, what does it look like?

To start to build an answer to these two questions, let me recommend to you the Kanizsa Square.

![Figure 1: The Kanizsa Square](Kosko 1991:2)

What do we see in the Kanizsa Square? We see four circles with notches, like the action figures in a packman game. What else do we see? The four circles are arranged in such a way as to cause us to think we “see” a rectangle. But we actually see that rectangle only in our imaginations. Unlike the black circles, a rectangle is not really there, yet we can “see” it.

I am not satisfied with the Kanizsa Square as a way to graphically represent public management collaboration because the world is not square. The world is curved and round and so is collaboration. So, I have borrowed the logic of the Kanizsa Square and from it formulated a

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\textsuperscript{1} Although the word collaboration is used here, I use the word broadly to include cooperation, networks, administrative conjunction, and governance.
circle. The four dark triangle shaped figures are arranged in such a way as to let us “see” a circle. Let us call it “Frederickson’s Circle of Public Management Collaboration.” The dark triangle shaped figures framing the imaginary circle of collaboration might be jurisdictions, agencies, and other formal instruments of government. The triangle shaped figures might also represent quasi-governmental or non-governmental organizations that have distinct public purposes. For purposes of simplification, let us call them jurisdictions. They have the standard qualities of governmental jurisdictions including boundaries, constitutions or charters, formal powers, laws and

Figure 2: Frederickson’s Circle of Public Management Collaboration

![Frederickson’s Circle of Public Management Collaboration](image)

rules, taxes and revenues, politics and administration. And they have the full range of Weberian characteristics—specialization, coordination, hierarchy, authority, records, and so forth. Almost all of the theory and the practice of public administration simply assumes jurisdictions—the
familiar cities, agencies, bureaus, and authorities for which we work. And, we are accustomed to other key qualities of jurisdictions—permanence, order, stability, predictability. We bureaucrats tend to be comfortably at home in our organizations and jurisdictions.

Now, let Frederickson Circle represent public management collaboration. Consider now the characteristics and qualities of collaboration:

A. There are no boundaries to the collaboration,
B. participation in the collaboration is voluntary,
C. a collaboration has only the authority and power lent to it by participants,
D. a collaboration has only the permanence that participants give it.

Frederickson’s Circle of Public Management Collaboration is a fluid cognitive institutional order comprised of alliances, collaborations, networks, associations, administrative conjunctions, epistemic communities and other mechanisms established to handle and process ideas and information. In the circle are fuzzy sets of order nested in the folds and spaces between participating jurisdictions, agencies, and organizations. Frederickson’s Circle at first appears to be empty. In fact, such circles of public management collaboration, particularly the effective ones, are densely packed with the linkages and noises of collaborative arrangements. These days it is in such circles of collaboration that one finds adventurous bureaucrats, tight-rope walkers working the high wire, without a net, modern bureaucrats without borders.

To illustrate the density of collaborative arrangements and their importance, everyone take out their smart phone, Iphone, etc. Call 8-1-888-721-8686. When prompted dial 7087403#.

Imagine the dense network of electronic signals that facilitated this little experiment, although we cannot literally “see” the signals and connections that enabled us to communicate. We could have Skyped up to ten of us or we could have used Adobe Connect which would
include audio and the video of the person speaking for up to 100 persons. Collaboration in Frederickson’s Circle is like that.

But collaborative arrangements are never as simple as Frederickson’s Circle nor as easy as our little cell phone experiment. We need a way to illustrate the actual complexity of real collaboration. For a depiction of a circle of collaboration that accommodates greater complexity, consider this graphic representation of a Compound Sphere of Public Management Collaboration.

**Figure 3: Frederickson’s Compound Sphere of Public Management Collaboration**

Note that this circle has eight jurisdictions, agencies or organizations and is shaded in a way that presents an imaginary sphere in two dimensions. Also note that what was once a circle is now better described as a compound sphere of collaboration. It is not really there but can you see it?
Now, consider this sphere with lines which represent our cell phone experiment. My call to the persons here today is represented by this line. Your calls to the conference call management company are likewise represented. Together we are filling in the substance of collaboration, although the sphere and the lines of collaboration in the sphere are virtual, which is to say, not seen.

Figure 4: Simple multi-party listserv email in a Compound Sphere of Collaboration

Now consider a far more complex pattern of collaboration. How many of you traveled to the recent ICMA conference in Phoenix by air? Let your air trip be represented by a compound sphere of collaboration.
1. Say you took Southwest Airlines, a corporation.
2. Say you left from Kansas City International Airport owned and managed by the City of Kansas City, Missouri.
3. Say the fuel was provided by Exxon, a corporation.
4. Say passenger security was provided by the Transportation Security Administration of the Department of Homeland Security.
5. Say the aircraft maintenance was provided by the Total Quality Airplane Maintenance Corp.
6. While in flight your airplane is guided by federally employed air traffic controllers.
7. Rules and policies for commercial air travel are made by the Federal Aviation Administration of the Department of Transportation.
8. You land at the Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, which is owned by the City of Phoenix.

Now let these lines represent all of the forms of collaboration between the participants in the American commercial air travel system that made your flight possible. Now multiply your flight by the thousands of commercial flights and the tens of thousands of passengers who fly daily. Imagine if you could see it, how densely packed the commercial air travel sphere of collaboration is, particularly at about 5:00 PM each day when it is estimated that just under a million Americans are in the air.

Commercial air travel is a so called “high reliability system” a form of collaboration which rarely fails. In such a high reliability system collaboration takes this form: (1) very tight coupling between participants; (2) redundant system; (3) high standards for personnel training, and
lots of it; (4) elaborate systems of error detection; (5) rigid protocols for equipment maintenance; (6) fuel quality requirements; (7) standards for passengers and baggage security; (8) and highly discipline interfaces between technology and human resources.

In theoretical terms such high reliability systems are not the same as formal public organizations with elected political principals, hierarchies of authority, task specialization, rules and procedures, revenues and expenditures, etc. Such organizations have a professional manager or a chief executive. The commercial air travel system has no such manager or chief executive, yet it is very highly reliable.

The point is this. Some spheres of interjurisdictional and interorganizational collaboration, although involving many participants, are nevertheless highly effective. Collaboration does work.

Now consider another sphere of collaboration, the American metropolitan area. Here is my favorite aphorism about American metropolitan areas. “The people have problems. The metro area has cities.” The point is that there are serious disconnections between cities, counties, school districts, and other local jurisdictions on the one hand and the range and nature of problems such as crime, drugs, gangs, traffic, air and water pollution, on the other hand. It seems that wicked problems pay little attention to the boundaries of jurisdictions. Collaboration is the only way jurisdiction can make collective progress dealing with their wicked problems. Unlike high reliability collaborations such as commercial air travel, metropolitan collaboration tends to be trial-and-error, two steps forward and one back--anything but high reliability. Such forms of collaboration are accustomed to low rates of performance. It is very often the case that metropolitan area “councils of government,” usually led by professional public administrators, are the primary catalysts for metropolitan collaboration.
These days public managers at the top almost always work along the boundaries of their organizations and often across those boundaries. Collaboration is sometimes vertical, as in the case of local-state or state-federal relations. Collaboration is sometimes horizontal, as in the case of regionalism. Collaboration is often multi-sector involving governmental and nongovernmental actors. A top public manager “may be simultaneously involved in managing across governmental boundaries, across organizational and sectoral boundaries, and through formal contractual obligations; it is often difficult to distinguish where the boundaries lie between these different environments (McGuire, 2006, p. 35).”

It is often the case that effective collaborations move from informal to formal. This involves the development of many of the features of formal public organizations—hierarchy, revenues and expenditures, rules and policies. Unlike standard public organizations such as nations, states or provinces, or cities, these organizations make no claims of sovereignty, no claims of political legitimacy based on elections, have no powers of taxation, limited capabilities to enforce rules, and either no borders or only fuzzy borders. These are public organizations created and maintained by their members, often other public organizations. The most complete study of such organizations has been done by Jonathan GS Koppell in *World Rule: Accountability, Legitimacy, and the Design of Global Governance*. He studied and describes a dense network of global governance organizations including the International Accounting Standards Board, the International Atomic Energy Commission, the International Civil Aviation Agency, the Organization for Standardization, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers, the World Health Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the World Trade Organization, and the World Wide Web Consortium. While we do not have world government we do have a dense network of multiple global governance organizations. These
“global governance organizations” all share a common pattern of challenges. Because they are not nation states, global governance organizations face questions of political legitimacy and accountability on one hand and questions of authority on the other. Koppell found that the stronger members tend to be particularly influential in setting the rules; that rules tend to be “soft,” the most that can be agreed upon by members with diverse interests, and that all have accountability problems. “Global governance organizations do not ‘solve’ the accountability problem, they manage it with a mixture of structural and procedural features that trade legitimacy for authority and vice versa.” (Koppell, 319)

These and other forms of interjurisdictional and interorganizational collaboration are the means, by which jurisdictions reconcile their fixed borders with the so-called end of geography, (Grieg, 2002; O-Brien, 1992) Gilles Paquet refers to such forms of collaboration as the new geo-governance (2004). Richard Roseneau describes collaborations of this type as “distant proximities.” (2002) Distant proximities describe local responses to distant forces and distant response to local forces. A popular form of this logic is found in the phrase, “thinking globally, acting locally.”

2. What Research Tells Us About Public Management Collaboration

Organizational and managerial behavior in spheres of collaboration has been the subject of academic research for some time. Thirty-five year ago, using the word “governance,” Harlan Cleveland set the stage for the modern study of spheres of public management collaboration when he wrote that modern organizations “will be systems—interlaced webs of tension in which control is loose, power diffused, and centers of decision plural. Decision-making will become an increasingly intricate process of multilateral brokerage both inside and outside the organization
which thinks it has the responsibility for making, or at least announcing, the decision.” (p. 13) In the years that have passed since Cleveland’s prescient observation, scholars and practitioners have gradually and rather systematically built a body of knowledge that helps us actually “see” what is inside multijurisdictional and multiorganizational spheres of collaboration. Although the contemporary body of knowledge of spheres of collaboration is now rather well developed, much of it does not come directly from the study of collaboration. Instead, using somewhat different academic languages and perspectives, much of what we know about spheres of collaboration comes from the study of networks, governance, policy communities, international relations, and other fields and specializations.

To enable us to see what is actually inside spheres of collaboration, the following series of generalizations represent my synthesis of studies of collaboration. Taken together, these generalizations amount to a growing and impressive understanding of how collaboration works.

What is collaboration?

Collaboration is a process in which autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions (Thompson and Perry, 2006; Wood and Gray, 1991; Thompson, 2001).

How is collaboration different than cooperation?

Collaboration is a higher order of collective action than cooperation, differing in terms of their depth of interaction, integration, commitment, and complexity, with
cooperation falling at the low end of the continuum and collaboration at the high end (Thompson and Perry, 2006)

What is the presupposition or predicate for all collaboration?

Collaboration is entirely dependent upon the resources and capabilities of participating actors (institutions or persons) and their willingness to make resources and capabilities available to a collaboration (Frederickson, 1999).

How can collaboration be a form of interjurisdictional or interorganizational governance?

Collaboration is a system of participative decision-making, arrangements for sharing power, arrangements for carrying out decisions, and arrangements for collective problem solving (Thompson and Perry, 2006).

How does collaboration differ from simple organization?

Organizations almost always involve divisions of labor, coordination, levels of authority and other forms of hierarchy. Collaborations almost always involve deliberation, negotiation, consensus, and support for agreed-upon decisions (Thompson and Perry, 2006).

How do participants in collaboration reconcile their accountability to their own organization and their participation in a collaboration?
Because collaboration is voluntary, partners generally need to justify their involvement in it in terms of its contributions to their own aims or the aims of their primary organizations or jurisdictions (Huxham, 1996).

What are the dynamics of conflicts between the autonomous goals of partnering organizations and the goals of a sphere of collaborative?

Unless the particular problem facing a collaborating group is of sufficient urgency to all partners, it is likely that individual or organizational missions will trump collaboration missions (Thompson and Perry, 2006).

What are the problems that tend to lead to effective collaborations?

Collaboration is more likely when: (a) some participants have unique resources needed by other participants; (b) participants share a common view of moral imperatives such as environmental degradation or humanitarian crises; (c) participants share a strong mutual understanding of their interdependence; (d) participants have essentially homogenous characteristics.

What are the characteristics of effective collaborations?

Successful collaborations have these characteristics: (a) repeated reciprocal experiences (if you will, I will) that lead to trust; (b) the development of a trustworthy reputation on the part of participants; (c) a recognition that collaboration takes time and the patience to required to build collaboration.
What is the most costly resource in spheres of collaboration?

In collaboration time and energy are dearer than money. Time and energy given to collaboration by participants is time and energy deducted from their home organizations and jurisdictions.

How, in the absence of hierarchy and formal systems of coordination, are spheres of collaboration effectively administered?

The effective administration of spheres of collaboration is surprisingly like the effective administration of ordinary decentralized organizations. Effective spheres of collaboration must find creative ways to clarify roles and responsibilities, reliable systems of shared communication, agreed-upon objectives, and agreed-upon means by which to measure outcomes (McGuire, 2006).

Do formal organizations and established jurisdictions actually participate in spheres of collaboration?

Yes, but always in the form of managers and officials. Effective collaboration is deeply dependent upon the skills of officials and managers. Organizations may appear to collaborate, but in fact it is individuals representing organizations who collaborate.

What are the managerial characteristics associated with effective collaboration?

The right people for collaboration are those who posses the policy-making resources—finances, knowledge, information, expertise, experience, legal authority, and
labor—upon which the collaborative effort depends in order to obtain its goals (McGuire, 2006).

Other qualities associated with effective collaboration are team building skills, big picture thinking, strategic thinking, mediating skills, and interpersonal communication skills (Goldsmith and Eggers, 2004).

Do the different roles of public leaders matter in their proclivity for effective collaboration?

Elected executives (mayors, governors, presidents) and top level public managers are more inclined to collaborate than elected legislators (Matkin and Frederickson, 2007). Elected legislators appear to be short-sighted and to suffer from the NIMTO Syndrome. The NIMTO Syndrome means “not in my term of office.”

How are public management collaborations controlled and held accountable?

Attempts to control the outputs of collaborations or to hold them accountable for outputs tend to result in a series of unintended and undesirable consequences such as cheating, resistance to innovation, goal displacement, and additional costs. Forms of “reputational control” work better, as do procedural controls (Kenis and Provan, 2006).

What do we know about so-called “dark networks” such as Al Qaeda, cocaine and heroine cartels, and the Mafia?

As forms of collaboration, “dark networks” can be very resilient and resistant to control. Attempts to extinguish dark networks tend not to work, so long as the problems behind their existence are not treated (Milward and Raab, 2006).
The Future of Collaboration

Conclusions

1. We will increasingly organize in the way we communicate. How we now communicate as a useful metaphor for how we will “organize” in the future.

2. In the future effective public managers will, using Harlan Cleveland's great comment, know how to “make a mesh of things.”

3. It was the jazz musician Miles Davis who said this.

   “Good musicians can play the notes that are there.

   Great Musicians can play the notes that are not there.”

4. To be great public managers we must be in and of our jurisdiction and yet transcend the boundaries of our jurisdictions and work with others in spheres of mutual collaboration and make up the notes as we go along.
References


