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Collaborative Strategic Management: Strategy Formulation and Implementation by Multi-Organizational Cross-Sector Social Partnerships

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Abstract

The focus of this article is on multi-organizational cross-sector social partnerships, an increasingly common means of addressing complex social and ecological problems that are too extensive to be solved by any one organization. While there is a growing body of literature on cross-sector social partnerships, there is little focus on collaborative strategic management, especially where implementation and outcomes are concerned. This study attends to these gaps by offering a conceptual model of collaborative strategic management, which is then tested through the use of two qualitative empirical cases of collaborative regional sustainable development strategies. The model augments previous collaboration models by highlighting two levels of implementation (the collaboration and organizational levels) and by considering the different types of outcomes, and the feedback loops.

Keywords

Alliance; Collaboration; Collaborative strategic management; Collaborative strategy; Cooperation; Inter-organizational relations; Partnership; Sustainability; Sustainable development

Introduction

Multi-organizational cross-sector social partnerships are becoming increasingly common as a means of addressing complex, social, and ecological problems that exceed the management ability of any one organization (Selsky and Parker, 2005), such as the challenge of sustainable development. These partnerships involve meso-level social interactions between organizations. The focus of these partnerships includes the formulation and implementation of deliberate collaborative strategic plans (Huxham and Macdonald, 1992; Huxham, 1993). While there is a growing body of literature on cross-sector social partnerships (CSSP) (Selsky and Parker, 2005), which is a sub-set of an even larger body of literature on inter-organizational relations (Cropper et al., 2008), there is little focus on collaborative strategic management, especially in regards to implementation and outcomes. This study begins to address that gap by offering a conceptual model of collaborative strategic management.

The article begins by introducing the concept of collaborative strategy, and reviews existing process models for organizational strategic management and for collaboration, in order to highlight the gap in the existing literature. Next, the article proposes a process model for collaborative strategic management which builds on the previous process models by incorporating two levels of implementation – the organizational and collaboration levels - while also including different types of outcomes and feedback loops. Following the methodology section, two empirical cases of collaborative regional sustainable development strategies (CRSDS) are explained using the conceptual model as a means of validating the deductively-derived model. As the two cases consist of differently sized partnerships, questions of scalability are also considered, especially in relation to the application of the model in differing contexts.

Drawing from a cross-case comparison, the unique features of the conceptual model are discussed next. We conclude by discussing the implications for researchers and practitioners, as well as the limitations of this study. As both cases are voluntary, co-operative cross-sector social-oriented partnerships, and include organizational partners with a similar ideology on sustainable development, their generalizability is discussed as part of the limitations.

Collaborative Strategy

The concept of a deliberate collaborative strategy has been explored previously in the literature. It is a complement to the other levels of strategy, including those at the corporate, business, and functional levels (Hofer and Schendel, 1978). The concept was first introduced as collective strategy (Astley and Fombrun, 1983; Fombrun and Astley, 1983; Astley, 1984), and then as shared meta-strategy or collaborative strategy (Huxham and Macdonald, 1992; Huxham, 1993). It involves an inter-organizational collaboration which may or may not be cross-sectoral (Astley and Fombrun, 1983). *Collective strategy* is defined as "the joint formulation of policy and implementation of action by members of inter-organizational collectives" (Astley, 1984, p. 526), while *shared meta-strategy* is a statement of strategy for the partnership, consisting of a meta-mission and meta-objectives (Huxham, 1993). This study uses the term *collaborative strategy* and employs a definition similar to that of Astley (1984). We define collaborative strategy as the joint determination of the vision and long-term collaborative goals for addressing a given social problem[1], along with the adoption of both organizational and collective courses of action and the allocation of resources to carry out these courses of action. This definition captures the efforts of organizations working both individually (i.e., at the organizational level) and jointly (i.e., at the

[1] Collaborative goals are the deliberate goals outlined in a collaborative strategic plan.

collaboration level) towards their collaborative goals; in other words, implementation includes the aggregation of partners' efforts (Fombrun & Astley, 1983). Table 1 outlines these definitions. While recent authors have chosen the term collaborative strategy to mean an organizational strategy that balances environmental, social, and monetary values (Tencati and Zsolnai, 2009), this study employs the original conception.

< INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

Selected Process Models from the Literature

The collaborative strategic management process involves the formation of partnerships or alliances across organizations that represent collective, joint activity; the formulation of a collaborative strategic plan; and the implementation tactics employed, at both the collaborative and organizational levels of analysis. While process models exist for the formation and management of collaborations (e.g., McCann, 1983; Gray, 1985; Waddock, 1989; Hood et al., 1993; Waddell and Brown, 1997; Seitanidi and Crane, 2008), and for strategic management within one organization (e.g., Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Andrews, 1987), to date no integrated conceptual model for collaborative strategic planning and implementation exists. This is a notable gap given that in practice there is a rising prevalence of collaborations, each of which collectively formulates and jointly implements a multi-organizational strategic plan (ICLEI, 2002). This article builds on previous work in order to present an integrative conceptual model for cross-sector collaborative strategic management.

One of the most commonly referenced collaborative process models involves the three phases of problem-setting, direction-setting, and structuring (McCann, 1983; Gray, 1985). McCann (1983) explains that *problem-setting* developmental stage is when stakeholder claims are legitimized and potential partners begin to converse. "Problem-setting is concerned with identification of the stakeholders with a domain and mutual acknowledgement of the issue that joins them" (Gray, 1985, p. 916). The *direction-setting* stage occurs when stakeholders find a sense of common purpose, including the articulation of commonly held values and goals which will guide future activities in order to achieve common ends (Gray, 1985). Finally, *structuring* "concerns how agreed-upon ends become institutionalized" (McCann, 1983, p. 180). Gray (1985) explains that it might include creating the structures to support and sustain their collective appreciation and ongoing activities. Waddock (1989) builds on McCann's (1983) and Gray's (1985) process models by contextualizing the models for use with cross-sector social partnerships: in such cases, for social partnership formation to occur, there must be issue crystallization, followed by coalition building, then purpose formation which, when combined, form the partnership.

In contrast, Waddell and Brown (1997) offer a collaborative process model with five phases: identifying preconditions for partnership; convening partners and defining problems; setting shared directions; implementing action strategies; and institutionalizing and/or expanding successful inter-sectoral collaboration. This model offers a distinct phase for identifying preconditions and another for implementing action strategies, rendering it unique and more comprehensive. In comparison to McCann's (1983) three-phase model, the second step is comparable to problem-setting, but closer to that of Waddock (1989), with separate categories for issue crystallization and then coalition-building. The third step is comparable to McCann's

and Gray's direction-setting phase. The fourth and fifth steps combined are comparable to McCann's (1983) structuring phase, though Gray (1985) tends to focus on the fifth step of institutionalizing and/or expanding successful inter-sectoral collaborations in her descriptions of the structuring phase. Lastly, Waddell and Brown's (1997) model focuses only on one type of outcome, the ongoing collaboration - a process outcome. Yet, in addressing social problems such as unsustainable development, there are many types of outcomes, including having an impact on the problem itself (Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002), which are left unaddressed by this model.

Meanwhile, Hood, Logsdon and Thompson's (1993) model focuses on both process and extrinsic outcomes. Their model of social problem-solving collaboration has four stages: *environmental factors* and *organizational factors* leading to *group interaction factors* resulting in *collaborative outcomes* (Hood et al., 1993). The authors define these outcomes as the result of the group's efforts which "may or may not be congruent with the original goals, and in fact, the goals themselves may evolve because the group's understanding of the social problems and alternative means to solve them improves with better information and analysis" (1993, p. 10). They also mention that the need to have an ongoing collaborative structure may be questioned, which is, itself, an outcome. While Hood et al. (1993) have a more comprehensive understanding of outcomes, their model is for collaboration in general, not specific to collaborative strategy, and therefore does not include an implementation phase. Though there are references to goals, there are no references to monitoring, evaluation, or performance improvement, which are important for goal achievement.

In a recent article, Seitanidi and Crane (2009) build an empirically derived model with three process stages for business partnerships with non-profit organizations. Their stages include partnership selection, partnership design, and partnership institutionalization. Each of their stages includes sub-processes, for instance, adaptation as a sub-process within the partnership design stage, and consideration of within-partner implementation as a sub-process in the partnership institutionalization stage (Seitanidi and Crane, 2009). While this model shows sub-processes, and is thus more detailed than its predecessors, it does not focus on concrete outcomes beyond relationship mastering and personal learning, nor does it separate organizational level implementation from collaboration level implementation. In fact, none of the previous models separate these differing levels of implementation. Yet recent literature (Cropper et al., 2008) has begun to differentiate between two levels within inter-organizational relations (IOR); the full partnership level and the individual partner(s) level. Huxham (1993) has also long argued that knowledge of the form, that is, arrangements at the level of the collaboration, do not capture all that is relevant in and of itself; an understanding of the collaboration requires an appreciation of what is happening at the individual partner level as well.

Table 2 summarizes these existing processes and models as they relate to collaborative strategic management. The categories used in this table are a combination of terms and phases from both the collaboration and strategy implementation literatures. *Assessing the context, strategic plan formulation,* and *organizational strategy implementation* are all concepts from organizational strategic management (Andrews, 1987), with the understanding that implementation includes both deliberate and emergent approaches (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). *Partnership formation* is a concept from collaboration literature. The term *collaborative strategy implementation* is

terminology proposed by this article, and is based on the concept from organizational strategic management being considered at the collaborative level, and the notions that are used by other authors, such as Huxham (1993) and Waddell and Brown (1997).

< INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE>

Process Model of Collaborative Strategic Management

This article proposes a process model for collaborative strategic management that builds on previous models by incorporating partnership implementation at a dual level of analysis (both at the individual organizational level and at the collaborative level), by expanding the outcomes of interest, and by incorporating feedback loops. This model most closely resembles that of Waddell and Brown (1997), with the addition of the unique features mentioned above. Waddell and Brown (1997) focus on the enduring collaboration as the outcome, while the model presented in this article also focuses on the collaborative strategic plan; the collaborative goals achieved; both the collaborative and the individual organizational actions taken; and the organizational learning outcomes. Compared to the process model proposed by McCann (1983), this conceptual model has naming conventions that more closely match the strategy literature; an explicit focus on strategic plan formulation; and the inclusion of organization-level implementation. By providing a more comprehensive model, we better document and explain the collaborative strategic plan formulation and implementation process.

< INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE>

The first stage in the collaborative strategic plan formulation and implementation process is assessing the context and forming the partnership. The context includes different situational considerations related to the social problem(s) being considered. For example, which

organizations are potential partners; what resources might be needed; etc. Then a lead organization or convener (Gray, 1989) invites the initial partners to join together in a partnership. Note that the partnership formation process need not occur at a single, discrete juncture in time: partners may be added or removed at any stage. Indeed, a phased approach to partnership formation may be desirable, or even intended, at the outset (e.g., Rogers, 1976; Rogers, 2003)[2].

The second stage of the collaborative strategic management process model is the formulation of the collaborative strategic plan. It is in this phase where those potential partners, who have since joined the collaboration, work together to find a common vision and negotiate a collaborative strategic plan. Key tasks may involve the establishment of vision, mission and/or values statements and the translation of these statements into over-arching, collaborative-level objectives (Huxham and Macdonald, 1992). This phase may proceed quickly, or may take years to negotiate, depending on the nature and extent of the issue(s) involved (Clarke and Erfan, 2007). Generally, extremely contentious and divisive topics are not included in these consensus documents (Huxham and Macdonald, 1992).

The third and fourth stages of the collaborative strategic management process involve the implementation of the collaborative strategic plan, through both deliberate and emergent approaches. These two stages occur simultaneously, with some aspects of the implementation being collectively enacted by the partnership, and some aspects of the implementation being individually enacted by the partners within their own organizations. Implementation activities enacted by the partnership relate to broad strategic objectives that are pan-organizational in

[2] For additional literature on partnership formation, see Gray 1985 and Logsdon, 1991.

nature: these objectives may focus upon aspects of the ecological, economic, legal, political, regulatory, social, and/or technological environments (Aguilar, 1967; Fahey and Narayanan, 1986) in which the partners involved in the collaboration interact with both participating and non-participating stakeholders (Freeman, 1984; Wheeler and SiIlanpää, 1997; Svendsen, 1998; Wheeler and Svendsen, 2003). In contrast, implementation at the level of individual organizational partners are more narrowly focused, organizationally-specific, and within the capability of the individual organization to manage. During a structured implementation, there is ongoing monitoring and evaluation, with corrective actions being made as required.

The final stage is the realized collaborative strategy implementation outcomes which are the results of the actions taken by both the partnership and by the individual partner organizations. We enumerate six types of outcomes that may result from this collaborative strategic management process:

- Plan-centric: outcomes related to the underlying issue(s) around which the collaboration has formed and that are documented in the collaborative strategic plan (e.g., Gray, 1989; Logsdon, 1991; Hood et al., 1993; Westley and Vredenburg, 1997);
- Process-centric: outcomes that lead to alterations, adaptations and changes to the collaboration formation, design and implementation process, along with actions as part of the implementation process (e.g., Pinto and Prescott, 1990; Hood et al., 1993; Westley and Vredenburg, 1997; Dalal-Clayton and Bass, 2002);
- Partner-centric: outcomes related to learning and changes in the organizational behavior or structure of individual partners, both past and present (e.g., Bryson and Bromiley, 1993; Hardy et al., 2003; Huxham and Hibbert, 2004);

- Outside stakeholder-centric: outcomes involving changes in the inter-organizational relationships between the collaboration (including its individual partner organizations) and non-participating stakeholders (e.g., Freeman, 1984; Wheeler and SiIlanpää, 1997; Svendsen, 1998; Wheeler and Svendsen, 2003);
- Person-centric outcomes: those outcomes whose scope is limited to that of an individual (e.g., Hood et al., 1993); and
- Environmental-centric: unexpected outcomes related to the ecological, economic, governmental, legal, political, regulatory, social, and/or technological environments beyond the context of those involving the focal issue(s) of the collaboration (Aguilar, 1967; Fahey and Narayanan, 1986).

An additional feature of our process model for collaborative strategic management is the inclusion of feedback loops. Selsky and Parker (2005) call for more complex models of cross-sectoral social-oriented partnerships including such feedback loops. McCann notes that each phase of the development process can be influenced by external factors (McCann, 1983) such as changes in the domain. As the partnership is only a sub-set of all the organizations in the domain, the outcomes might also be achieved by other organizations, or through the interaction of other, non-participating stakeholders and the collaboration. Accordingly, Mintzberg (1990) has questioned the validity of linear process models, due in part to the fact that formulation and implementation tend to overlap in organizational strategy. To address this limitation within the literature, a sixth box called ‘changes in the domain’, and a series of feedback loops have been added to the model allowing for corrective action, overlapping activities and cyclical decision-making.

Case Study Methodology

To test our deductively-derived process model of collaborative strategic management, we examined two case studies on collaborative regional sustainable development partnerships and strategies using standard case study methods (Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). Regional sustainable development partnerships are one type of cross-sector social partnership; they are bounded by geography and involve numerous partners including local businesses, universities, the municipal government, and non-governmental organizations (Geddes, 2008). These partnerships provide an opportunity for studying deliberate strategic planning and implementation as their collaborative strategies involve a distinct formulation phase that is followed by a distinct implementation phase, which includes a deliberate cycle of review and reformulation, while at the same time being open to emergent strategies and corrective action. The initiatives we examined are situated in the Canadian communities of Antigonish, Nova Scotia and Montreal, Quebec. These communities differ in terms of scale, scope, complexity, and demographics (see Table 3). Thus the commonalities among these case studies serve to validate the proposed collaborative process model, the use of which will better facilitate both the strategic management and study of cross-sector social-oriented partnerships.

<INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE>

The two cases were selected based on the following criteria: each case involves a multi-organizational cross-sector partnership; both cases feature a collaborative regional sustainable development strategy (CRSDS); the cases have each progressed to the implementation phase; the two cases differ in scale, scope, complexity and demographics, designed to test the scalability of

the process model; and that sufficient information exists and is accessible to document the cases and triangulate the information (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). The first three criteria enabled the study of a collaboration, from the formulation through to the implementation phases, including the development of a collaborative strategic plan. The fourth criterion facilitated testing the model in regions with very different contexts to examine the extent to which the model was scalable. The final criterion was to ensure researcher access was feasible, that sufficient data existed, and that such data was accessible and documentable. In Canada, there are 27 regions which have adopted collaborative regional sustainable development strategies (Clarke, 2010). Of these, there are a very limited number which have a documented history of implementation. The two cases in this study were chosen for their contextual diversity and their accessibility to the co-authors.

Data were collected through primary and secondary means using the conceptual model as a deductive framework (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003). Primary data were collected through 15 interviews for the Antigonish case study and 12 interviews for the Montreal case study, each lasting between 30 and 75 minutes. These were transcribed and potential quotations were checked with the relevant interviewees. Secondary documents and archival records of interest included reports produced as part of strategic planning, such as annual indicators reports, renewal documents, the collaborative strategic plan, minutes, and website content. A coding procedure was used to reduce the information to the stages of the process model. For each case a large table (Excel spreadsheet), based on the process model, was completed with qualitative data, thus creating "word tables that display data from the individual cases according to some uniform framework" (Yin, 2003, p. 134). This was further reduced and compiled into one matrix, with

one column per case, and with the phases in rows. Once the matrix had been compiled with the synthesized content, the two cases were compared to draw out the commonalities and variances (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1989; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). Theory testing was undertaken to explain the utility of the model, implications of contextual consideration such as scale, and the general replication of the approach.

Case 1: Antigonish Sustainable Development (ASD)

Context / Partnership Formation:

The community of Antigonish is situated on the northern coast of Nova Scotia, Canada, and is governed by two municipal government entities – the comparatively urbanized Town of Antigonish and the more rural County of Antigonish that circumscribes the town – together, the two municipalities have a collective population of 18,836 (Statistics Canada, 2010). In conjunction with public, civil society, and private sector partners, a community visioning exercise was undertaken in 2006 (Antigonish Area Partnership, 2006, p. 3). A number of themes were identified around which a community vision would be developed. Of these themes, one was sustainability, which subsequently spawned a distinct non-governmental organization, Antigonish Sustainable Development (ASD), whose purpose is "to identify and set goals related to sustainable development, and to come up with a framework required for success" (Antigonish Sustainable Development, 2007, p. 2).

Antigonish Sustainable Development quickly established itself through the formation of a board of directors and the appointment of an executive director. The ten-member board initially consisted of two representatives from each of a diverse array of sectors, including local

government, as well as cultural, economic, environmental and social interests. At this early stage, the Town of Antigonish was represented on the board. However, the County of Antigonish was not, divisions between the two municipalities having led to differing approaches to community environmental sustainability.

Collaborative Strategic Plan Formulation:

In terms of formulating the collaborative strategic plan, Antigonish Sustainable Development developed a three-part strategy to promote sustainability practices in Antigonish. The first part involved influencing the local governments' Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSPs)[3]. The second part focused upon organizational outreach and involved a cohort of 20 for-profit and non-profit partner organizations adopting sustainability practices while sharing knowledge and best practices with one another and the future cohorts to follow them. The final element of the strategy was community outreach as a way of enabling individuals to achieve greater sustainable living practices. To implement the second part of this collaborative strategic plan, individual for-profit companies and not-for-profit organizations had to implement within their own organizations. The first and third parts could be implemented by the partnership (i.e., ASD).

Deliberate and Emergent Collaborative Strategy Implementation by the Partnership:

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[3] These plans were required by the federal government in order for a municipality to receive a portion of funds from the federal gas tax; in the case of Nova Scotia, this was mandated by the Canada-Nova Scotia Gas Tax Agreement. Reference: Canada-Nova Scotia Infrastructure Secretariat. Website accessed on May 22, 2009 from http://www.nsinfrastructure.ca/pages/ICSP-Introduction.aspx

At the partnership level, the role of ASD was to influence government plans, engage partners in the initiative using a phased adoption model (Rogers, 1976, 2003) and to outreach to individuals. The changing nature of strategic implementation by Antigonish Sustainable Development is evident in the nature of the tactics employed. While initially very proactive in the design and implementation of their approach to promote their agenda, the organization increasingly turned to accommodative tactics (Wilson, 1975; Carroll, 1979) in order to advance their interests. Sustainable business tools such as those of The Natural Step, the Five Capitals Model, and the Ecological Footprint were adapted for use by the partnership (Antigonish Sustainable Development, 2007). Additionally, some early participants in the organizational outreach component of ASD's strategy – notably the non-profit partners – had the motivation but lacked the financial resources to formally join the "early adopter" phase of the sustainable development project, so ASD adapted their approach and funding model to enable their participation. Thus there were numerous emergent features and feedback loops to implement the collaborative strategy at the partnership level.

Another example is that while Antigonish Sustainable Development was successful at engaging the Town of Antigonish in their efforts – the town contracted the organization to draft their ICSP on their behalf while providing material resources and support such as office space – the organization was unsuccessful at coordinating the development of the ICSP for the County of Antigonish. The County decided to employ their own sustainability coordinator directly and, though not affiliated with ASD, worked co-operatively with the executive director of ASD on issues of common interest and concern. During this process, the organization continued to employ proactive and/or accommodative tactics toward the County.

Deliberate and Emergent Collaborative Strategy Implementation per Organization:

The second part of the strategy involved individual partner organizations proceeding with organizational-level sustainability strategies and/or initiatives. The first cohort of partners each undertook efforts to make their organizations more sustainable, with varying levels of progress made. A second cohort of partners was then engaged, including learning from the experiences of the first cohort.

Realized Collaborative Strategy Implementation Outcomes:

Of the six types of collaborative strategic management outcomes enumerated earlier, several were notably present in the activities of Antigonish Sustainable Development. Plan and process-specific outcomes were noted in the progress achieved at developing the ICSP for the Town of Antigonish to promote environmental sustainability and through various community activities to promote organizational and individual environmental sustainability; from highlighting the importance of sustainable development on Earth Day, to reducing energy consumption and promoting green living practices. Process-centric outcomes also included the adaptation of the process, and the cost of financial participation, to facilitate the involvement of non-profit organizations in the collaboration. Examples of partner-centric outcomes arose from the individual activities of partner organizations to reduce their ecological footprint and to engage in more environmentally-sustainable behaviours. Outside stakeholder-centric outcomes were most notably identified in the interaction with the County of Antigonish: a municipal government stakeholder that, despite not participating in the collaboration as a partner, benefitted from the interaction between their sustainability coordinator and the executive director of Antigonish

Sustainable Development. These achievements, while at a scale much smaller than that of the following case in the City of Montreal, highlight what is possible in a resource-limited community through the use of successful cross-sector social partnerships. They also highlight the validity of using a collaborative strategic management conceptual model to explain this case.

Case 2: Montreal Sustainable Development Strategy

Context / Partnership Formation:

Montreal, located in the province of Quebec, has a population of 1,620,693, according to Statistics Canada's 2006 census (Statistics Canada, 2010). The City of Montreal teamed up with two other lead organizations that were committed to promoting sustainable development in the metropolitan region (Ville de Montréal, 2005a, p. 1). These were the Conférence régionale des élus, which is comprised of elected officials from the City of Montreal (and from de-merged towns on the island of Montreal), provincial elected officials with their constituencies in Montreal, and other socio-economic organizations (a total of 146 members, including businesses), and the Conseil régional de l'environnement de Montréal, a network of non-profit organizations, institutions and companies (130-member organizations). In this case, the partnership employed a committee structure as its form.

Collaborative Strategic Plan Formulation:

The Steering Committee (*Comité de directeurs*) was composed of "16 representatives from the public, private, and educational sectors and associations" (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2009); and its members participated in the formulation of the strategic plan, a process which took place from May 2003 until April 2005. A separate Partners Committee,

whose membership consisted of all the partner organizations, provided input on the content (Comités des partenaires, 2003). In April 2005, *Montreal's First Strategic Plan for Sustainable Development* was adopted. The strategy had four key principles and ten topic areas which were associated with specific objectives and actions. Of these, the partners identified four priority topics. The five-year strategy was developed with the intention of two implementation phases: a start-up phase from 2005-2006 and a second phase from 2007-2009.

Deliberate and Emergent Collaborative Strategy Implementation by the Partnership:

The Steering Committee, from the strategic plan formulation phase, evolved into a new committee called the Liaison Committee during the implementation phase (Ville de Montréal, 2005b). Its purpose was to liaise between the Partners Committee and the secretariat in order to follow the implementation and to make feedback if necessary. At the partnership level, the purpose of the secretariat was to facilitate and monitor implementation by individual organizations. The Exchange Network on sustainable development was established and resulted in a number of activities including: nine issues of a newsletter called *Domino;* fact sheets for sustainability actions that could be implemented by partners; luncheon talks on specific topics; express memos with reminders of related events; an annual gala to which all partners were invited; and a virtual forum. In addition, a website was established; annual progress reports on action implementation were created; and bi-annual 'state of the environment' indicator reports were produced.

Deliberate and Emergent Collaborative Strategy Implementation per Organization:

The tactics of the collaborative strategy involved specific actions involving the individual organization level; actions designed to be implemented by partner organizations. Depending on the type of organization, some actions were more relevant to a larger number of partner organizations than others. For example, Action 1.3 (anti-idling) related to a wide diversity of partners, while Action 1.9 (buying eco-efficient vehicles) was only relevant for some larger organizations. Partners were asked to commit to at least three actions for the first phase and at least five actions in the second phase of the implementation. By June 2008, there were 125 partners committed to implementing actions from the collaborative strategy (Comités des partenaires, 2008). As the Associate VP University Services at McGill University explained, the City "didn't ask the partners to share in every priority; they allowed partners to identify where they had the most control, the most opportunity for change" and commit to those actions. Many of these organizations already had their own sustainability initiatives. The Environmental Management Counsellor at Cirque du Soleil explained that sometimes they have been given ideas by being a partner, and other times they would put their existing action ideas into the frame of their collaborative strategy commitments.

Realized Collaborative Strategy Implementation Outcomes:

Of the different types of outcomes, plan-centric outcomes are based on progress on the issue being addressed. An example in this case is the City of Montreal's 'state of the environment' reports which show progress on the amount of protected area, the usage of active transportation, the reduction in water consumption, and access by people to the Saint Lawrence River, but noted that not all areas are improving (Ville de Montréal, 2005c, 2008). An example of a process-centric outcome is the actions taken by the collaboration and its partners to enhance regional

sustainability initiatives. In Montreal, these actions were monitored and reported on annually (e.g., Ville de Montréal, 2007), which served to improve the process via the use of feedback loops, while also enhancing the progress of the collaboration on their sustainability initiatives. Another evident, process-centric outcome is the formation of a Work Committee (*Comité de travail*), a new entity recently created as a subset of the Liaison Committee, that is now considering the development of the next five-year strategy for 2010-2015. Learning that has arisen in the course of formulating and implementing this collaboration has led to process-centric outcomes for the collaboration; partner-specific outcomes for member organizations; outside stakeholder-centric outcomes for non-participating stakeholders; and, potentially, environmental-centric outcomes not related to the plan content. However, while implementation initiatives exist in Montreal to encourage learning, the results are not monitored as such.

Discussion

There are a number of similarities between the two case studies, and both were comprehensively explained using the process model proposed in this article. In both examples, the grandness of the objectives exceeded the capacity of any singular organization to achieve. In response, collaborative partnerships were formed with key organizations in the public, private and non-profit sectors. Collaborative strategic plans were developed that influenced, and were influenced by, the partners. The implementation of the collaborative strategic plan involved both deliberately intended tactics, as well as tactics that were emergent in response to feedback from partners and other external entities. In both cases, implementation occurred at the level of both the collaboration, as well as the level of individual organizations, with the majority of the implementation conducted by the latter. Oversight was similar in each case study, with both

examples having an ongoing collaborative entity to oversee the process. During the implementation phases of the process model, individual partner organizations experienced distinct differences between the deliberate strategy implementation of the collaboration and the desire to adapt those tactics to suit their individual organizational needs, though these are intertwined. In both case studies, aspects of the collaborative strategic objectives were achieved, but, most notably, the benefits accruing to any one partner organization varied due to differences in the level of commitment, human and physical resource constraints, and partner organization-specific goals and objectives.

There were also some differences between the cases. Antigonish Sustainable Development was a newly created organization with some partners serving as members of their board of directors and others involved in the cohorts focused on organizational implementation, while in Montreal, a multiple committee structure was employed. In both cases, an 'opt-in' approach to implementation was pursued; the Montreal case used the same approach for all organizational types (private, public, education, non-profit, etc.) but allowed each organization to choose which actions they wished to pursue; whereas, Antigonish Sustainable Development modified their approach to implementation depending on the financial capacity of the stakeholder partner organization. The cross-case comparison of the two cases is described in Table 4. The findings show that the collaborative strategic management model is useful in describing both cases, and possess the scalability to address the scale, scope, complexity and demographic differences which influence the activities in each stage of the model. This discussion section outlines the unique features of this model and study in relation to existing literature, including the application

of the two levels of implementation, different types of outcomes, and the inclusion of feedback loops.

<INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE>

Two Levels of Implementation

The "form" at the full partnership level is the collaboration, the specific inter-organizational framework that, while often but not necessarily formalized, is used to orchestrate the ongoing involvement of all the partners (Hood et al., 1993). Most of the collaboration literature focuses on the partnership formation and formulation stages. By the time partners reach the implementation phase, they will already have created an administrative form (Waddell and Brown, 1997). The appropriate administrative form at the full partnership level depends on the purpose of the partnership; more formal arrangements suit partnerships which focus on implementing predetermined policies and programs (Brinkerhoff, 1999). When choosing a form, assigning responsibility is an important decision because "even when it appears simpler in the short term to have one partner take primary responsibility for implementation, that decision encourages other partners to drop out or become passive in the long run" (Waddell & Brown, 1997: 23).

Huxham (1993) argues that arrangements at the full partnership level do not exist in isolation, but must be considered in conjunction with the administrative form(s) (i.e., arrangements, used by individual partners to implement the collaborative strategy as well). Similarly, recent literature also draws attention to two levels of analysis relevant to understanding inter-organizational relations: the full partnership level and the individual partner(s) level (Cropper et

al., 2008). Typically, the relationship between a partner organization and the partnership of which it is part is not hierarchical; instead, the organization generally retains autonomy. Some collaborative goals are reached through "internal" implementation within a given partner organization, through efforts that are not inter-organizational, though they may be assisted by the pooling or transferring of resources (Hardy et al., 2003), such as when funds are allocated to a partner organization for producing a collaborative report. In other words, during implementation, partner organizations often use their own respective capacities to contribute to the implementation of the collaborative strategic plan; "this means participating organizations may have to change policies, reallocate resources, or organize new ones" (Waddell and Brown, 1997: 17). The partner organization's (internal) implementation of the collaborative strategy may involve changes affecting the whole organization, a single or numerous ongoing projects, or shorter projects occurring at different points in time as the collaborative strategy is implemented. Huxham (1993) argues that reliance upon implementation through individual organizations is most appropriate when there is less detail in the strategic plan. The process model offered in this article ensures that these two levels of implementation are more fully considered.

Different Types of Outcomes

Most studies of collaboration are limited to "the process of collaboration, its stages, or its success components. Few studies discuss the actual outcomes..." (Turcotte and Pasquero, 2001: 448). This study explores the types of outcomes considered relevant to cross-sector collaborative strategic management within each of the two cases. In the Montreal case, the much larger community size gave rise to a greater number of interested and affected stakeholders and the need for a more extensive governance system. This system of governance evolved over time,

along with the function of various committees, in order to advance the partnership's sustainability agenda. By describing this, we are highlighting process outcomes from this case. In the Montreal case, two types of reporting allowed for a much better understanding of plan-centric and process-centric outcomes. The 'state of the environment' report showed progress on plan outcomes. Additionally, a separate annual progress report showed how many partners had committed to each action and how many had implemented within their organizations, thus showing progress on process outcomes. Having such a structured monitoring system for the collaborative strategy makes the outcomes much easier to assess and may contribute to improved decision-making concerning process adaptations. Other types of outcomes were not documented in the Antigonish and Montreal cases as part of this study, though they were definitely realized by the individual partners.

Feedback Loops

Each phase of the development process can be influenced by external factors (McCann, 1983), thus the feedback loops were added to the conceptual model and emergent strategies included within the implementation stages. The cases highlight the need for these features. For example, Antigonish Sustainable Development adapted their strategic plan on a number of occasions, thus showing a feedback loop between the implementation and the formulation. Montreal adapted their partnership form prior to each reformulation, thus showing a feedback loop between the implementation and the partnership formation. Antigonish Sustainable Development, in particular, allowed for emergent strategies as part of their implementation.

Implications for Researchers

This article provides three noteworthy implications for researchers. First, a generic process model for collaborative strategic management has been developed and validated within the context of collaborative regional sustainable development strategies. This conceptual model provides a framework for studying collaborative strategic management and, in particular, highlights the importance of considering two distinct but related levels of implementation, different types of outcomes, and continual feedback throughout the strategic formulation and implementation process. Second, this article demonstrates that implementation of the collaboration is independent of, and operates in parallel to, organizational implementation by the partners, thus highlighting the need for the two levels of analysis. Third, the use of in situ case studies enables a deeper understanding of emergent and realized strategies for implementing both the collaborative strategy and the strategies of the partner organizations. These implications should enable a more systematic analysis of collaborative strategies and, in particular, those formulated in co-operation by social partnerships.

Implications for Practitioners

In terms of practical contributions, both the model and the case studies support the contention that deliberately specified objectives are unlikely to be realized without process adaptation, both at the level of the collaboration, in interactions with partners, and within individual partner organizations. However, the use of process adaptation produces emergent strategies that, in combination with intended strategies, can lead to the realization of both deliberate objectives as well as a myriad of unintended outcomes, both positive and negative. Our research has demonstrated clearly that in terms of co-operative social partnerships, consistency of application at the organizational partner level by different partners is very difficult to achieve. The

conceptual process model also provides guidance for practitioners interested in pursuing the formulation of a collaborative strategic plan, thereby enhancing the management of the subsequent implementation stage.

Limitations

There are some pre-conditions which may limit the generalizability of the collaborative strategic management model: these are issues of co-operation between partners, shared ideology by partners, and the joint formulation of a deliberate strategic plan. In addition, the similarity of the cases used to validate the model in this article limits what generalizable claims can be made.

In the two case studies, both of which involve community sustainable development initiatives, the collaborative process was largely co-operative. Variations among partner organizations represented differences in degrees of conformity with respect to shared interests, rather than differences in the kinds of interests. While acknowledging that these case studies involved co-operative collaborative strategies, future research is necessary to determine the applicability of the model to collaborative situations that do not address ecological issues, and/or involve competing organizations as partners. One requirement for the model to be applicable is that the partnership formulates a deliberate collaborative strategic plan as part of their collaborative strategic management.

Secondly, the extent to which the model may be scaled beyond a regional municipal context requires additional examination. Both cases involved collaborative regional sustainable development strategies. While it is likely that this model is applicable for social partnerships in

differing contexts (e.g., to health care partnerships), and at different scales (e.g., for international sustainable development partnerships), this has not been studied in this article.

Conclusion

This article makes a contribution to theory and practice in terms of cross-sector social interactions. In particular, it uses strategic management theory, to consider the strategic management conducted by cross-sector social partnerships, and offers a conceptual model of collaborative strategic management. The model was validated through two contextually different cases, and additional findings were also discussed. It is our contention that a collaborative strategic management process model must enable adaptations throughout the process, including at both the collaborative level of the partnership and the individual partner level of implementation. This perspective is not presently captured by extant theories in the literature, and the need for it is clearly established when comparing partnerships that share common issues of concern, but have differing contextual factors, such as scale. In the Antigonish and Montreal case studies, both communities recognized a need to address issues of environmental sustainability, but the tactics each chose would not be suitable for the other community due to the plethora of contextual differences. Indeed, the respective case studies highlighted a need for distinctive emergent strategies that are issue-specific to the particular partnerships, as well as tailored to the needs of individual partners. The process model offered in this paper facilitates these contextual and level of analysis adaptations in a unique and compelling manner.

At least three key issues that are salient for future research can be identified from this article. The first is the extent to which context drives partnership formation and strategy replicability.

Additional research needs to clarify which elements of context serve as better motivators to stimulate the creation of multi-sectoral social partnerships and the means by which the contextual stimuli impact upon the intent to form such partnerships. While research has been conducted on motivations for partners engaging in a partnership, determining which contexts are appropriate for cross-sector social partnerships would help define applicability and where partnerships are likely to succeed. A second research issue, which is particularly practitioner-oriented, involves the development of a decision framework through which lead partners can determine when to adapt key processes and implementation activities to accommodate other stakeholders and when these accommodations should be generalized to a broader range of partners. An improved understanding of these issues will foster the more rapid creation of social partnerships and the better management of these dynamic structures once created. Third, more research is needed on implementation and outcomes in cross-sector social-oriented partnerships. For example, a study on the relationship between implementation structures and outcomes would be informative. The two levels of implementation also deserve further study in terms of the interactions between levels; the benefits of having more collaborative versus more organizational-level implementation; and how does varying the number of partners affect the complexity of interactions between these two levels.

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Table 1: Definitions of Collective Strategy, Collaborative Strategy, and Shared Meta-Strategy

	Astley and Fombrun ~1983	**Huxham ~1993**	**Clarke and Fuller ~ 2010**
Terms Used	Collective Strategy	Shared Meta-Strategy or Collaborative Strategy (interchangeably)	Collaborative Strategy
Definition	"The joint formulation of policy and implementation of action by members of interorganizational collectives" (Astley, 1984: 526).	A statement of direction for the collaborative alliance consisting of a meta-mission and meta-objectives (Huxham 1993).	The joint determination of the vision and long-term collaborative goals for addressing a given social problem, along with the adoption of both organizational and collective courses of action and allocation of resources to carry out these courses of action.
Purpose	The purpose of an organization involving itself in a collaborative response is to absorb the variation presented by its interorganizational environment.	The purpose of an organization involving itself is to solve a common meta-problem.	The purpose of an organization involving itself is to solve a common social problem.

Table 2: Process Models from Strategic Management and Collaboration Literature

Phase/ Author	Assessing the Context	Partnership Formation	Strategic Plan Formulation (Organizational or Collaborative)	Organizational Strategy Implementation (Deliberate + Emergent)	Collaborative Strategy Implementation (Deliberate + Emergent)	Realized Collaborative Strategy Implementation Outcomes
Mintzberg & Waters			Intended strategy	Deliberate + Emergent strategies		Realized strategy
Andrews	External + internal analysis		Functional, business, and corporate strategies	Strategy implementation		
Hood, Logsdon, & Thompson	Environmental + organizational factors	Group interaction factors				Outcomes
McCann then Gray	Problem-setting		Direction-setting			Structuring
Seitanidi & Crane		Partnership Selection	Partnership Design	Partnership Institutionalization		
Waddock	Crystallization	Coalition building	Purpose formation			
Waddell & Brown	Identify preconditions for partnerships	Convening partners	Setting shared directions		Implement action strategies	Institutionalize and/or expand partnership

Table 3: Comparison of Antigonish and Montreal Communities

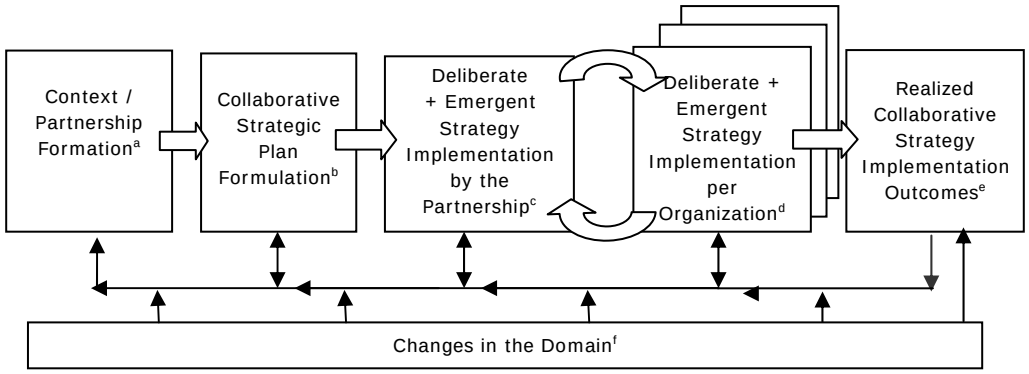
Community	Antigonish	Montreal
Population	18,836	1,620,693
Population density	12.9 persons / km^2	4,438.7 persons / km^2
2001 to 2006 population change	-3.8%	2.3%
Single-detached houses as a % of total occupied private dwellings	71.0%	7.5%
Apartments in buildings with fewer than five stories as a % of total occupied private dwellings	8.5%	58.6%
Apartments in buildings with five or more stories as a % of total occupied private dwellings	0%	12.3%
Median family income (2005)	$57, 234	$49,969
Unemployment rate	9.5%	9.2%
Non-immigrants as a % of the total population	95.3%	67.1%
% of total population whose mother tongue is other than English or French	4.2%	34.3%
% of total population 15 years old and older with post-secondary training or education	54.7%	44.1%
Land area	1,457.82 km^2	365.13 km^2

Source: Statistics Canada, 2009

Table 4: Comparison of Antigonish and Montreal Case Studies

Case Study	Antigonish	Montreal
Context / Partnership Formation	Grassroots organization with governmental, business and not-for-profit partners, spun out of a civic visioning exercise.	A municipal government in partnership with two cross-sector network organizations led the initiative and included more partners through a steering committee and a partners committee.
Collaborative Strategic Plan Formulation	Intra-organizationally formulated by Executive Director and board members, in consultation with community partners.	Inter-organizationally formulated by steering and partners committees.
Deliberate and Emergent Collaborative Strategy Implementation	Process and funding model adaptations with a sectoral approach to strategy implementation. Parts 1 and 3 of the strategy implemented at the partnership level.	Governance adaptation with an opt-in approach to implementation. At the partnership level, the purpose was to facilitate and monitor implementation by individual organizations.
Deliberate and Emergent Strategy Implementation per Organization	Proactive and accommodative tactics with an avoidance of reactive tactics. Part 2 of the strategy used implementation by individual partner organizations.	Individual partner organizations committed to actions and implemented them in their organizations.
Realized Collaborative Strategy Implementation Outcomes	Strategic progress on the process; ecological improvements and other outcome types difficult to assess.	Strategic progress on the process; yet overall ecological improvements on only some collaborative goals. Also, actions taken, and organizational learning,

Figure 1: Process Model of Collaborative Strategic Management



[a] Context which describes the situational considerations and Partnership Formation is the initial partners, their initial form, and their initial communication, and decision-making processes.

[b] Collaborative Strategic Plan Formulation is the strategic plan development by the partnership (for the partnership) and the plan's content.

[c] Deliberate and Emergent Collaborative Strategy Implementation by the Partnership is the actions taken by the partnership to further the collaborative strategic plan goals.

[d] Deliberate and Emergent Collaborative Strategy Implementation Per Organization is the actions taken by the individual partners within their own organizations to further the collaborative strategic plan goals.

[e] Realized Collaborative Strategy Implementation Outcomes are the results – plan, process, partner, person, outside stakeholder, and environment-centric outcomes.

[f] Changes in the Domain refers to changes that occur in the social problem domain that are outside the actions taken by the individual partner organizations or the partnership, yet have an impact on the collaborative strategy implementation outcomes and/or other stages of the process model.