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article

Using a design approach to create collaborative governance

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In complex, shared-power settings, policymakers, administrators and other kinds of decision makers increasingly must engage in collaborative inter-organisational efforts to effectively address challenging public issues. These collaborations must be governed effectively if they are to achieve their public purposes. A design approach to the governance of collaborations can help, especially if it explicitly focuses on the design and use of formal and informal settings for dialogue and deliberation (forums), decision making (arenas) and resolution of residual disputes (courts). The success of a design approach will depend on many things, but especially on leaders and leadership and careful attention to the design and use of forums, arenas and courts and the effective use of power. The argument is illustrated by examining the emergence and governance of a collaboration designed to cope with the fragmented policy field of minority business support.

key words collaboration • collaborative governance • policy design • design science • leadership • organisational change • power • structuration

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Introduction

In complex, shared-power settings, policymakers, administrators and many other decision makers increasingly must engage in collaborative governance in order to effectively address challenging public issues that cannot be handled by single public organisations alone, or even by single sectors (Gray and Purdy, 2018; Innes and Booher, 2018). These collaborations must be governed effectively if their public purposes are to be achieved. This paper makes three contributions toward improving the governance of collaborations: first, we argue that a design approach to the governance of collaborations offers several benefits – both for designing a process for developing and guiding collaborations and for creating specific governance designs. Second, we enrich the theoretical and practical understanding of the nature and elements of collaborative governance by drawing on Crosby and Bryson's (2005)

'triple three-dimensional view of power' to argue that the design and use of forums for dialogue and deliberation, arenas for decision making and courts for resolving residual disputes and reinforcing underlying norms are crucial to creating effective collaboration processes and governance regimes. And third, we illustrate our argument by examining the emergence of a collaboration designed to cope with the fragmented field of minority business support in order to foster greater racial equity in income and wealth.

Collaboration in this case means the linking or sharing of information, resources, activities and capabilities by organisations to achieve jointly an outcome they could not achieve alone (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Definitions of collaborative governance vary (Gash, 2016). We adapt Emerson and Nabatchi's argument (2015: 18) to say it encompasses 'the processes and structures of public policy – and policy-related [added] – decision making and management that engage people across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government and/or the public, private, and civic spheres to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished'.

Our argument proceeds in several sections. First, we review what a design approach might add to collaborative governance literature. Second, we reprise Crosby and Bryson's (2005) 'triple three-dimensional view of power' and their forums, arenas and courts framework and adapt it to the challenge of designing and realising effective collaborative governance. Third, we review relevant lacunae in the theory of collaborative governance. Fourth, we analyse a case illustrating how a collaboration and collaborative governance approach were designed to improve minority business support in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, USA. Finally, we present a number of conclusions regarding the promise of a design approach to collaborative governance.

The design approach

Herbert Simon (1996:111) famously said, 'Everyone designs who devises a course of action aimed at changing existing conditions into desired ones.' Designing as a process and specific designs have typically focused on communication (designed messaging), material objects (products, buildings), activities or services (training, health and social care) and systems (logistics, financial management). Less attention has been paid to designing policy, although that is changing (Bason, 2014; Howlett, 2019). Our concern is with the linked challenges of designing the settings for collaboration and the governance of collaborations. The former involves the creation of collaborations, while the latter concerns the direction setting, policymaking effectiveness and implementation oversight of collaborations.

The literature indicates that designing is an attitude, a process approach and a wide array of tools and techniques. As an attitude, design is open-minded, assumption-challenging, end user-oriented, outcome-focused and innovation-embracing (van Aken et al, 2007; Bason, 2017: 46–50). As an approach, designing favours deep empathic exploration of the problem or challenge space; the generation of alternative scenarios and solutions, often through the engagement of end-users; and the enacting of new practices in an experimental, pragmatic way (Fisher, 2016; Ansell and Torfing, 2014; Bason, 2017: 73–87). The toolkit is extensive and emphasises creativity, active learning, full engagement of the senses and emotions, visualisation and prototyping (Ideo.org, 2015).

A design approach differs from typical problem-solving in that the problem definition is held more tentatively and often changed based on new information; solution development and implementation are not rigidly separated; the process is more bottom-up than top-down; and a far broader array of tools and techniques is brought to bear. Co-labour of various kinds is involved, including co-commissioning, co-designing, co-delivery and co-assessment (Nabatchi, Sancino and Sicilia, 2017). A design approach is therefore more suitable for addressing challenges in complex situations than is problem-solving, which is more suited to stable, technically simple, less feedback-rich situations. As situations requiring governance become more complex, Bason (2017: 50) advocates a design approach to 'governance models'. So far, however, scholars have mostly neglected the role of power in creating effective designs, which is especially problematic when design is applied to governance.

The triple three-dimensional view of power and the design and use of forums, arenas and courts

Crosby and Bryson (2005: 401–426) presented a triple three-dimensional view of power and used it to describe and analyse the basic settings of public action – forums, arenas and courts – in their book *Leadership for the Common Good* and related publications. Their framework was applied to issues of public policy formulation, adoption and implementation. It was not developed to deal with issues of collaborative governance, but its applicability there is clearly justified, since the framework is particularly useful for understanding and shaping shared-power situations where no one is wholly in charge. Collaborations are virtually always shared-power arrangements in which organisations attempt to achieve together what they cannot achieve separately (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015; Gray and Purdy, 2018).

The triple three-dimensional view of power integrates Giddens' (1979; 1984) analytical separations among three kinds of human practices and Lukes' (2005) three dimensions of power (see Figure 1). The three practices are: communication (signification), decision making (linked to domination via asymmetrically distributed resources) and the management of residual disputes and reinforcement of underlying norms (legitimation). The first dimension of power is observable action (Dahl, 1961); the second dimension highlights enablers and barriers to action (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963); and the third dimension comprises the often subtle shaping of felt needs, rights and responsibilities.

The third dimension is comprised of what Giddens and Lukes call deep structures Giddens (1979; 1984) and Lukes (2005). Deep structures provide the rules and resources, broadly defined, that are drawn upon to create action in the first dimension. That action, however, is shaped by the ideas, rules, modes, media and methods of the second dimension (Bachrach and Baratz, 1963). The constituting elements of the second-dimension biases attention toward some matters – meaning issues, decisions, conflicts and policy preferences – and away from others, which become non-issues, non-decisions and suppressed conflicts and policy preferences. Action in the first dimension then creates, recreates and reshapes the rules, resources and transformation relations of the second and third dimensions – a process Giddens refers to as *structuration*. Action, in other words, reproduces the rules, resources and transformation relations that make it possible, but also can reshape those rules and resources.

Crosby and Brysons (2005)argue that in shared-power situations, the three dimensions of power show up in common sense and often easily recognisable ways as: formal and informal forums, for the creation and communication of meaning; formal and informal arenas, where policy and related decisions are made and implemented; and formal and informal courts, wherein residual disputes are settled and underlying norms are enforced. Their analytic framework is both positive and normative. The categories are analytic, but they use the framework and relevant literature to develop propositions that fit with design science principles for helping create what does not yet exist (Romme, 2003;Van Aken and Romme, 2012).

Forums

In keeping with Lukes (2005), Crosby and Bryson found that leaders and committed followers have the most impact via shaping or taking advantage of the ideas, rules, modes, media and methods in the second level of power. In forums, the most important of these are: communicative capability, interpretive schemes, relevance, norms of pragmatic communication, modes of argument and access rules.

Communicative capability is simply the capacity to create and communicate meaning. This can include, for example, rhetorical skill, the ability to use various communications media, or the ability to assemble an audience when needed. Interpretive schemes are intersubjective organising frameworks we humans use to structure cognitions, interpretations, or understandings of events in ways that are meaningful and that allow us to articulate and evaluate what we experience. An individual's and group's set of interpretive schemes is structured by a set of relevances determined by his or her concerns (Schutz, 1967: 78–86). Inside forums, competing, conflicting, or contradictory interpretive schemes must be at least partially mediated for concerted action to emerge. Designing as an approach is itself a kind of meta-interpretive scheme that features framing and reframing (Dorst, 2015).

Norms of social (not just personal) relevance and of pragmatic communication, as well as modes of argumentation and access rules, help mediate among schemes. Norms of pragmatic communication include four practical criteria for judging speech aimed at influencing action: Actors are expected to speak comprehensibly, sincerely, appropriately in context and accurately (Forester, 1989; Habermas, 1981).

Argumentation is another important aspect of the mediation of differing interpretive schemes. Designing does this via idea and artifact creation and testing as part of developing persuasive problem frames and solutions. The design and use of forums influences which claims will be made, based on which information and which kinds of arguments, and what weight will be given to the claim and arguments backing it up. Last, rules governing access to participation in forums strongly influence who speaks what, where, when, why and how and who listens. In doing so, they strongly influence which decisions, issues, conflicts and policy preferences get discussed.

The design and use of forums in particular circumstances does two things. First, it establishes the structural (collective) basis of a potential list of decisions, issues, conflicts and policy preferences which might be debated. And second, it mediates the transformation of that list into the actual decisions, issues, conflicts and policy preferences that will be addressed, on the one hand and those items that will not be discussed, on the other hand. Examples of forums include meetings, debates, journals and print and electronic media.

Arenas

In arenas the most important ideas, rules, modes, media and methods in the second level of power include decision-making capabilities; domains; agendas; and planning, budgeting, decision making and implementation methods. We would add design methods, too. These strongly affect how differing, contesting, or conflicting capabilities are at least partially mediated in arenas. In addition, rules governing access to participation in the arenas affect which persons, groups, organisations and capabilities are admitted to arenas and thus influence which conflicts, issues and policy preferences will be considered as part of the decision-making process.

The decision-making capabilities that actors have available to influence a sequence of decision-making interactions depend on the rules and resources they can use (Pfeffer, 2010). These capabilities can range from verbal skill, to the ability to hire and fire, to budgetary control, all of which can affect decision outcomes through drawing on rules, resources and transformation relations that offer advantage. Decision making refers to the actual application of some or all of those capabilities in interaction. Actors' differential capabilities will strongly influence which decisions, issues, conflicts and policy preferences count in particular circumstances.

Arenas may be primarily economic, political, or organisational. In our case, we are interested in inter-organisational decision-making arenas and how they are governed. The chief function of arenas is distribution and redistribution of access to decision making, which helps to maintain or change organisational, political and economic relations. Astute designers understand the ways that new or existing arenas can affect the success of their efforts.

Courts

In courts the most important ideas, rules, modes, media and methods in the second level of power are conflict-management and sanctioning capabilities, norms, jurisdiction, conflict management methods and access rules. These second-dimension components strongly influence which residual conflicts get resolved and how and with what consequences for underlying norms in the system.

Courts are associated with laws (or norms, principles, policies, rules and standards) and modes of sanctioning (ways of rewarding or punishing conduct). Courts are used to evaluate decisions or conduct in relation to laws or norms, usually in order to settle disputes and to enforce underlying norms in the system. Courts distribute and redistribute access to legitimacy and thereby help to maintain or change laws or other modes of sanctioning conduct. While courts are popularly associated with law enforcement, perhaps the most important court is the informal court of public opinion, which operates via norms. Courts that lie between the formal courts and the informal court of public opinion include regulatory bodies hearing conflicting views before rendering a decision and a host of alternative dispute resolution approaches.

The Crosby–Bryson framework leads to three observations crucial for understanding collaborative governance as the design and use of forums, arenas and courts. First, forums, arenas and courts and the way they are assembled into collaborative governance arrangements, or 'regimes' (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015), are a product of design, although the process may be iterative and messy. Second, the ideas, rules, modes, media and methods that constitute the second dimension of forums, arenas and courts are both enablers of some things and constraints on others. Third, in situations

in which no one is wholly in charge, typically the most effective way of influencing action and outcomes is *indirection* – that is, by shaping the ideas, rules, modes, media and methods that strongly influence what will emerge as action and what will not (Crosby and Bryson, 2005). Indeed, that is what governance systems do; they shape what emerges and what does not.

The literature on collaborative governance

We briefly review key contributions on the governance of collaborations, including Bryson et al (2006; 2015), Ansell and Gash (2008; 2018), Provan and Kenis (2008), Emerson and Nabatchi (2015), Gray and Purdy (2018), Innes and Booher (2018) and Romzek et al (2013). The Crosby and Bryson conceptualisation adds to each explicit attention to the three dimensions of power (action, structure and their dynamic linkages); the settings (forums, arenas and courts) that shape what emerges as action, issues, conflict and policy preferences; and interconnections of these settings as part of an effective governance approach.

Bryson et al (2006) emphasise the importance of trust, norms and values in developing collaborative governance and then draw on an early version of Provan and Kenis' (2008) work to incorporate three governance structures: self-governing, lead organisation and network administrative organisation. Their 2015 update again does not explicitly differentiate among the levels of power, but it does highlight the importance of forums for strategy formulation. In our terms, Provan and Kenis are describing different kinds of arenas and their evolution over time, as well as contingencies affecting the choice of arena.

Ansell and Gash's (2008) collaborative governance model focuses on forums and the 'institutional design rules that set the basic ground rules under which collaboration takes place' (p 549). That said, distinctions among forums, arenas and courts are elided, except for attention to formal arenas as a source of mandates and formal courts as the setting for certain kinds of conflict management. Most of the focus is on the first dimension of power, along with implicit attention to the second dimension of power in the emphasis on the need for trust, shared understanding, clear ground rules, transparency, inclusion and commitment.

The same observations can be made about Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2012), with important additions. They consider the broader system context and structures within which collaboration takes place, pay more attention to outcomes and emphasise the creation of collaborative governance 'regimes'. Their conception of regimes draws on Krasner's (1983: 2) definition of a regime as 'sets of implicit and explicit principles, rules, norms and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area'. (The idea of regime, in our view, is an integrated set of forums, arenas and courts.) Emerson and Nabatch'i (2015) book extends and deepens their earlier argument and provides many illustrative examples.

Ansell and Gash (2018) see collaborative platforms as an important potential element of collaborative governance. They define collaborative platforms as 'an organization or programme with dedicated competencies, institutions and resources for facilitating the creation, adaptation and success of multiple or ongoing collaborative projects or networks' (p 20). They envision these platforms as a kind of network administrative organisation designed to help govern multiple collaborations. Their discussion elides the distinctions among kinds of setting and the dimensions of power.

Gray and Purdy (2018) provides perhaps the fullest conception of collaboration as a process. Special features of the book include the detailed attention to the micro-dynamics of creating shared understanding, power and conflict dynamics and cross-level dynamics. They draw explicitly on Giddens (1984) and structuration and pay attention to the second dimension of power without naming it as such. They do not distinguish very explicitly among forums, arenas and courts as settings.

Innes and Booher (2018) provide perhaps the richest discussion of what we mean by the design and use of forums, thereby implicitly attending to the second dimension of power. They do not distinguish clearly among forums, arenas and courts; indeed, in their chapter on collaborative governance they refer to all three as forums.

Finally, Romzek et al (2013) richly elaborate how what we would call informal courts operate as mechanisms for ensuring accountability. They pay a great deal of attention to the importance of norms, one of the constituting elements of courts and the rewards and sanctions designed to enforce those norms.

Applying the Crosby and Bryson framework to the case of Synergy

In this section we demonstrate the usefulness of a design approach to collaborative governance and the usefulness of the Crosby–Bryson framework. Specifically, we explore the design and use of forums, arenas and courts as part of the process of creating a collaboration and a specific design for its governance. Our example is Synergy, a collaboration of seven nonprofit organisations in the Twin Cities of Minnesota USA, whose purpose is to support minority-owned businesses. Note that the case illustration is not a test of the framework, but is instead a kind of proof of concept – or, in terms of the design literature, a human-centred and theory-informed prototype of how the framework can help with the design of a collaboration process and specific governance design. We begin with a brief overview of the context and our methodology, and then move to the case.

The public challenges posed by racial inequality in income and wealth

Racial income and wealth inequalities have been one of the most serious, persistent problems in Minnesota. Meanwhile, a bright spot has been minority-owned business growth in Minnesota and the Twin Cities, which is higher percentage-wise than white-owned business growth, although minority-owned businesses have on average fewer sales and less capitalisation. Minority-owned businesses can have significant impact on reducing racial inequality (Bradford, 2014).

Public policies that support minority-owned businesses and minority entrepreneurs have, however, not functioned as effectively as they might. The lack of coordination among different policies and programmes has produced major gaps in support, caused confusion and resulted in limited impact on the growth of minority-owned businesses (Accenture, 2015; Association for Economic Opportunity, 2017). Some of the most important public policies and programmes are outlined in Table 1 (see Table 1 in the online appendix).

Because of fragmented public policies, local-level, bottom-up collaboration can be a promising remedy, meaning it can help coordinate and integrate the efforts of organisations that are separated by the flows of authority and resources in existing 'policy fields' (Stone and Sandfort, 2009; Ansell et al, 2017). Synergy

grew out of a growing realisation among organisations supporting minority entrepreneurs that they would be able to truly increase their impact only if they pooled their expertise and access to different types of entrepreneurs. The effort has been spearheaded by the Minority Business Development Association (MBDA) and especially its CEO.

In gathering data, we used a longitudinal case study method (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2017). Our study so far covers four-plus years from August 2014 through to December 2018. Our case analysis combines multiple sources of evidence: (1) Archival documents, including meeting documents, email communications regarding important decisions and strategic plans, annual reports, newsletters and media coverage of each participating organisation; (2) In-depth, semi-structured, longitudinal interviews with the key participants, including monthly interviews of MBDA's CEO since August 2015, other participating organisations' CEOs quarterly since 2017 and key staff and external consultants since 2015; there are a total of more than 107 interviews with 20 unduplicated interviewees over four-plus years; (3) Participant observation, including more than 67 hours of observation in meetings and events, along with detailed field notes. We have anonymised the names of the participants and the collaboration.

Synergy started as an idea in 2015 and has developed through overlapping stages, including pre-collaboration, a 'cohort' phase and a formal collaboration. We argue that a design approach has permeated the endeavour. Links to design as an attitude, approach and toolkit will be noted in italics as we describe the case.

The pre-collaboration phase

In 2014, the MBDA board hired a new CEO and charged him with making a 'transformational change' and taking MBDA to the next level. The chief design focus at this stage for the new CEO and people working with him was understanding MBDA's situation and what was needed to take MBDA 'to the next level' (see Table 2 in the online appendix). Additionally, they focused on redesign of MBDA and developing strategic partnerships and securing funding. Key design choices were whether or not to engage outside analysts and facilitators, how to redesign MBDA and whether and how to pursue strategic partnerships.

Design and use of forums

The CEO initiated a series of analyses of MBDA and the broader field of support for minority-owned businesses. The approach accorded with design's emphasis on deep engagement with the problematic situation, including understanding the system producing the problems.

Multiple types of meetings with internal and external stakeholders were crucial forums for information gathering, deliberation and gaining allies. Also important were various consultations conducted by outside analysts and their reports. These helped the CEO see how the positive growth cycle of MBDA was limited by various 'balancing loops', for example, its shortage of business advisors (Senge, 2006). The crucial communicative ability was the CEO's verbal skill, but also his related approachableness, legitimacy, relationships, interpersonal skill in various settings, openness to change and commitment to better outcomes (design attitude).

The analyses revealed that several interpretive schemes were at work. The first was that the nonprofits supporting minority businesses were viewed as charities,

meaning that they should be supported by grants, gifts and volunteers. The CEO decided it made sense to help contributors (foundations and corporations) see that they were making investments, not just charitable donations. The other interpretive scheme he began pushing was the need to think beyond individual minority support organisations and to think instead about the ecosystem of support for minority businesses (reframing). The analyses indicated that the policy field was highly fragmented and that a focus on the whole ecosystem was necessary in order to have significant impacts on minority-owned businesses across the entrepreneurial lifecycle. Also relevant were interpretive schemes highlighting racial equity and socioeconomic wellbeing. The common relevance among all these schemes was the link to support for minority entrepreneurs and businesses and to the Twin Cities (reframing, synthesis).

Early on, the CEO, MBDA staff and the MBDA board were expected to observe the norms of pragmatic communication in their pursuit of increasing the organisation's impact on minority entrepreneurs. They also had to be sensitive to the differing cultural contexts of minority groups, as well as the business, banking and foundation communities. The modes of argument emphasised data-gathering and analysis. Grant applications were also important vehicles for transmitting persuasive arguments about the need for change and protoyping potential solutions. By giving many stakeholders access to forums at this stage, the CEO ensured that he heard diverse perspectives, built or reinforced relationships and gained new insights about MBDA's situation (design approach and attitude).

Design and use of arenas

In the pre-collaboration stage, the CEO had considerable capability, including authority and leeway, to make decisions on behalf of MBDA, as long as he stayed within the bounds set by the board of directors. In terms of domain, he was mainly confined to MBDA's management, but he also began to cultivate a number of external relations that would directly or indirectly affect future decision making. The agenda was initially focused on MBDA and how to shape its direction, alignments, operations and funding. The agenda began to expand beyond MBDA when the outside analysts' report indicated that strategic partnerships with similar organisations could help magnify MBDA's impact. The CEO strove to ensure that MBDA's planning, budgeting, decision making and implementation methods helped MBDA become more mission-focused, better aligned, more efficient and more effective.

The design and use of courts

The operation of formal and informal courts was not particularly apparent in the pre-collaboration stages. MBDA's CEO was committed to helping it move to the next level and there were some conflicts around shifting organisational norms. He sought to change the MBDA culture, especially via shifting the organisation's norms regarding aspirations, productivity and performance (reframing). The idea was to build a court of public opinion within MBDA that endorsed having a higher standard of excellence and far greater impact.

Effects of design and use of forums, arenas and courts in the pre-collaboration stage

The MBDA CEO and consultants developed a fuller picture of MBDA's situation. They identified the feedback loops and limits to growth in MBDA's current operating

mode and recognised the need to tackle limiting loops and build on positive loops (Senge, 2006). MBDA staff and programmes were reorganised to achieve mission alignment. Dominant interpretive schemes began shifting toward the investment and ecosystem perspectives.

The intermediate collaboration phase

This stage involved continued attention to strengthening MBDA's focus and developing a collaboration among organisations supporting minority entrepreneurs (see Table 3 in the online appendix). The design focus was on continued organisational redesign and transformation at MBDA as well as on the process of forming and funding a full-fledged collaboration. Key design choices were which MBDA programmes should be dropped or added and whether to move MBDA offices. Additionally, MBDA's CEO and his advisers needed to make choices about proceeding with collaboration: How to use consultants, which organisations to include as partners and whether to use developmental evaluation (Patton, 2011).

The CEOs of seven organisations, including MBDA, decided to form a 'Cohort' to explore further what collaboration might accomplish. As the CEOs got to know each other, they became clearer about what they wanted (co-labour and emergent goals and solutions). They established work groups tasked with developing a common IT platform and intake process, a shared and much larger capital lending pool, joint branding and marketing strategies and uniform impact measures to be used by all members of the cohort (prototyping).

The design and use of forums

Important initial forums were MBDA board and staff meetings, client and funder conversations and 'reconnaissance' meetings with potential collaboration members. The MBDA CEO also organised some new forums – such as leadership team retreats for executive staff and mid-level directors – that helped staff feel included in deliberations about MBDA's direction and operations. The MBDA CEO used a number of forums (email exchanges, one-on-one and group meetings) to persuade CEOs of other local nonprofits supporting minority entrepreneurs to join MBDA as partners. Later forums included meetings of the Cohort and its workgroups.

Communicative capabilities in this stage included especially the MBDA CEO's assets and consultants' facilitation skills. Also, the CEO realised that MBDA's physical office space was making a significant symbolic statement. Specifically, he decided it conveyed an image of a shabby nonprofit. He and staff members then decided to remodel the office in a more businesslike style that would convey high standards. Additionally, the office was located in downtown Minneapolis, while the bulk of MBDA clients were based in North Minneapolis. MBDA thus began planning for a move to North Minneapolis to convey more forcefully its link to minority entrepreneurs (visualisation, artifacts).

The CEO used his communicative capability to make speeches and organise conversations to give the issue of support for minority business more visibility at the local to national levels. Some staff used their communicative capability to convey their feeling of being overworked and skepticism about changes. The CEO's communicative capability was supplemented by two consultants who were adept at planning and

facilitating meetings among the CEOs who agreed to join the Cohort. The consultants' written scope of work also was a form of virtual prototyping.

As for interpretive schemes, the intermediate stage marked a stronger shift toward seeing MBDA and similar organisations as embedded in an ecosystem of policies, practices and multisector organisations (reframing). Cohort members bought into the idea of having 'one front door' for minority entrepreneurs who sought help with financing, business planning and certification (reframing). At the same time, the MBDA CEO detected what he called 'small-N nationalism', within MBDA and the other partners. Small-N nationalism was the label he put on organisations' tendency to think foremost about their own interests rather than the mutual interests of the Cohort members.

An additional significant interpretive scheme at this juncture was the understanding on the part of the CEOs and their staffs that the collaborative effort was an emergent, developmental process (reframing). The developmental evaluators helped Cohort members understand that collaboration was not an easy answer to hard problems, but was in fact a hard-to-achieve answer to hard problems. This helped foster provisional patience among Cohort members and make them willing to endorse a developmental approach to their joint work (design approach).

Meanwhile, within MBDA, its CEO strove to emphasise the interpretive scheme 'One MBDA', which helped staff and board make sense of decisions to prune some programmes and initiate new ones. Staff realised that programming directly relevant to assisting minority entrepreneurs should continue and other programming should be dropped. When the Cohort set up workgroups, the members agreed to group titles that signaled what was relevant to each group.

Honouring the norms of pragmatic communication is evident in one example each from MBDA and the Cohort. In deciding to first remodel MBDA offices and then planning to move to North Minneapolis, MBDA's CEO demonstrated awareness of communication in context. In the example from the Cohort, the members charged each workgroup with developing objectives, identifying deliverables and making specific plans.

Formal analyses continued to be important modes of argument. The remodelling of MBDA's offices and the planned move were supported by analyses of the existing office space and of MBDA's clients. MBDA's CEO and consultants also used assigned readings and a focus on core values to help MBDC members develop shared understanding and commitments. By organising a learning tour to visit an ecosystem change effort in Memphis, the MBDA CEO helped make the idea of ecosystem change very real. Cohort members began to 'think big' (visioning). The group authorised a developmental evaluation (Patton, 2011) effort, involving two of the authors, to gather information about how the collaboration was working and to make recommendations for improvement.

Access rules within MBDA were altered. Some new staff with needed skills, attitudes and energy were hired and some old staff moved on to other employment. (The CEO was careful to manage staff departures gracefully, ensuring that neither informal nor formal courts would react adversely to employees' treatment.) The addition of the leadership retreats also gave senior staff members more access to each other's thinking and concerns. Access to Cohort meetings was initially confined to CEOs and facilitators, but later some staff and the evaluators were invited.

The design and use of arenas

Key arenas at this stage were senior staff meetings, CEO and board deliberations and funders' grant-making venues. The Cohort also had some decision-making authority – chiefly concerning the decisions about whether to become a full-blown collaboration and what the contours of that collaboration might be.

Policymaking and implementation capabilities expanded inside and outside MBDA. The CEO began to share more authority with staff once he felt that he had a strong top team in place. He also attempted to influence national foundations' priorities and analyses. For example, a foundation's decision makers were inspired by his speeches and concept papers on the ecosystem work and created a new grant programme to help female entrepreneurs and minority entrepreneurs achieve higher rates of success. MBDA's CEO was invited to help design the grant process. In the end, he was able obtain grants for building the Cohort from various foundations and banks.

The domain of the change effort also expanded. MBDA's CEO attended to the decision-making domain of the government programmes and nonprofits that he hoped would accept the spinoff of programmes not central to MBDA's mission. He began working with funders whose domain was national while continuing to seek resources from funders in Minnesota, including garnering funding for the move to North Minneapolis. The Cohort members effectively expanded their domain to a broader client base. Additionally, the CEOs of potential partner organisations had capabilities to negotiate their organisations' participation in the Cohort.

Within MBDA, the decision agenda focused on adding projects such as a partnership with Junior Achievement to support entrepreneurial education and behaviour on the part of high school students and the MBDA-sponsored 'mini-MBA' to educate budding and more established entrepreneurs. The CEO eliminated programmes that did not align with the organisation's mission. Top staff also put raising grant funds high on their agendas. The top items on the Cohort agenda included decisions about the Cohort's future and raising more capital.

Within MBDA, planning, budgeting, decision making and implementation methods became more participatory during this stage. The Cohort operated by consensus, a process formalised via separate MOUs between MBDA and each of the other members.

Access to Cohort meetings expanded incrementally. In order to be a part of the Cohort, partners had to show a willingness to work with each other and focus on the joint aim of helping minority entrepreneurs, even if particular organisations focused on a specific type of minority entrepreneur. Initially, only the CEOs and facilitators attended Cohort meetings, but some staff were invited to participate by the fourth meeting and the evaluation team gained access by the seventh meeting.

The design and use of courts

All the Cohort organisations had to comply with legal requirements for nonprofits and had to help clients comply with requirements for participating in government programmes. MBDA and the Cohort gained local and national legitimacy in the informal court of public opinion by obtaining grants from major foundations. Toward the end of this stage, the group began discussing the need for and content of a set of guiding principles, which were adopted in the next stage.

Effects of design and use of forums, arenas and courts in the intermediate collaboration stage

The interaction of forums, arenas and courts in this stage helped MBDA staff become more aligned with and committed to the vision of One MBDA. At times, the staff were confused by internal changes but were cheered by the success of new projects and infusions of revenue and prepared for a move to a better physical location. MBDA stakeholders could see that the organisation was becoming more sophisticated. The Cohort, meanwhile, developed a shared understanding of the ecosystem of support for minority business and built trust among partners as well as a sense of direction and shared ways of working together.

The Later Collaboration Phase

In this stage the Cohort moved to full-fledged collaboration. The workgroups and consultants conducted extensive market research (deep engagement with the problematic situation and possible solutions). Cohort members recognised the need for a new name – Synergy – and adopted a joint MOU to formalise governance arrangements. The MOU included an agreed mission; set of guiding principles; decision-making rules; a commitment to shared leadership, joint fund raising and other joint work; and methods for resolving conflicts (see Table 4 in the online appendix).

Design and use of forums

In cohort meetings, participants considered multiple possibilities for naming their collaboration and settled on Synergy (reframing and prototyping). Drafts of the MOU were reviewed and reworked (prototyping). Workgroups continued meeting and made progress reports. The developmental evaluation team conducted quarterly interviews with CEOs and participating staff. Synergy members, facilitators and evaluators had many design-oriented conversations about the MOU and accompanying case for funding, meant to convince funders to increase the capital loan and investment pool for minority business support. Successful 'mixers' apprised local stakeholders of the new collaboration and built support among lenders, government officials, foundation officers and others for transforming the ecosystem of support for minority business (coalition building).

Synergy CEOs drew on their communicative capability to argue within the group for their vision of what collaboration might look like and accomplish. MBDA grant writers used their skill to craft successful grant proposals. A branding expert was hired to aid in developing a compelling identity for the collaboration. The emphasis on the ecosystem view and on support for minority business as a smart investment were dominant interpretive schemes in this stage. The MBDA CEO remained concerned about the evidence of 'small-N nationalism' among partners as well as MBDA staff.

The national context became more relevant, as Synergy members began making the case for funding that would help them nurture similar collaborations in other cities. The idea of a national focus developed for several reasons. First, foundations outside of Minnesota were more interested in what Synergy was doing than local foundations. National foundations wanted to see the work expanded to other cities because they could see its potential significance for addressing racial income and wealth disparities. Second, gaining resources for expanding the approach elsewhere would also add capacity locally to do the work. Third, more loan and investment capital

was available nationally than in Minnesota. Finally, building successful collaborations in multiple cities would build support for a more coordinated set of federal and state policies in support of minority-owned businesses. In other words, an effective advocacy coalition might be built (Jenkins-Smith et al, 2015).

Synergy members honoured norms of pragmatic communication as they sought to brand the collaboration so that its mission could be easily understood by multiple audiences. The name and logo signified an understanding that the partners sought to catalyse change rather than somehow accomplishing it all themselves. The logo's circle of seven multicoloured dots signaled the distinctiveness of each collaborating organisation and their shared decision-making model (artifacts).

Results and analysis of brainstorming sessions, the draft MOU, progress reports, a second learning trip (this time to New Orleans), developmental evaluation reports and a draft case for funding all were important modes of argument in this phase. The evaluation consultants, in particular, urged Synergy members to adopt a set of guiding principles that would be the heart of the joint MOU. The circulation of draft principles and draft MOU gave the members a chance to have their ideas included. Consultant feedback helped members understand their mutual work better and also heightened attention to the capacity gap among partners. The final MOU incorporated the agreed mission and guiding principles that recognised the need to strengthen the partnership as well as provide a unified, more effective support system for minority business.

Synergy CEOs, some staff and consultants had access to Synergy meetings. Consultants held meetings among themselves, with MBDA's CEO and separately with the other CEOs and some staff. The mixers were by invitation to a select group of clients, people from organisations that worked with Synergy members and funders.

The design and use of arenas

The Synergy MOU codified the guiding principles, decision-making process and rules and allocations of formal authority, thus establishing Synergy as a formal governance arena. The MOU gave lead agency status (Provan and Kenis, 2008) to MBDA, specifically to act as the collaborative's project manager. Working groups made important decisions about vendors to develop a single IT platform for minority entrepreneurs and to conduct market research. The IT platform is intended to be a 'marketplace', essentially a matchmaking service bringing together entrepreneurs, lenders, investors and technical service providers (Parker et al, 2016; Ansell and Gash, 2018).

The workgroups extended their policy-making and implementation capabilities by selecting consultants to carry out major tasks. The MOU gave policy-making authority to Synergy and day-to-day project management responsibility to MBDA – both moves aimed at increasing Synergy's governance, management and implementation capabilities.

The MOU makes clear that Synergy's central domain is minority business support in Minnesota. Still, the group seeks to have greater impact by helping build similar approaches in other metropolitan areas; additionally, some Synergy members are engaged in national efforts to dramatically increase pools of lending and credit resources. During this stage, agreement on the MOU and the investment case were high on Synergy's agenda. The work groups also helped keep the IT platform, market research and capital development on the group's agenda.

The Synergy partners became more specific about planning, budgeting, decision making and implementation methods. In this stage, Synergy members directed attention to the significant differences in member organisations' capacity to engage in the Synergy work. MBDA and another organisation had much larger staffs than the other five and therefore more ability to write grants, participate in work groups and handle other Synergy-related tasks. The MOU made clear that building the capacity of member organisations was to be an important part of Synergy's purpose. The MOU also specified that each member organisation would have one vote on Synergy matters and it included details about the voting process. Additionally, members committed to developing an annual work plan and accompanying budget that identified outputs, outcomes and member responsibilities. The MOU also included access rules via requirements for adding new members and permitting existing members to leave.

Design and use of courts

Some provisions of the MOU envisioned Synergy serving as a court for resolving residual conflicts and sanctioning conduct of its members. The conflict management and sanctioning capabilities will reside in the group as a whole. The norms that seem prominent in the relevant MOU provisions are fairness and due process. The jurisdiction would be disagreements among members or actions of members that impeded Synergy's progress. The MOU prescribes 'cooperative resolution' as the conflict management method for disagreements among members. The MOU essentially outlines a focused, yet informal approach to accountability (Romzek et al, 2013).

Effects of design and use of forums, arenas and courts in the later collaboration stage

The formation of Synergy as an organisation bound by a clear purpose, guiding principles, norms and decision-making rules is the most important outcome of this stage. As Thomson and Perry (2006) have observed, the governance of collaborations typically emerges through frequent, structured exchanges that develop network-level values, norms and trust, which enable coordination and monitoring of behaviour. Synergy has been no exception and has now added structural and processual features to formalise governance. The interpretive scheme of a collaborative approach to ecosystem change is firmly in place among Synergy members. Tangible products include the joint MOU and branding. Others, such as the case for funding, are close to completion. Some partners are struggling to participate fully, but the collaborative governance system for Synergy specifies their equality in policymaking and commits all members to building the capacity of each.

Conclusions

Gash (2016: 455–456), in a recent review of the collaborative governance literature, asserts, 'Overall, [collaboration as a] demand-driven approach to policy problems is marked more by procedural elasticity than by fixed policy structures or procedures. The primary goal is, through a unified front of diverse interests that collectively diagnose and address policy shortfalls, to develop a set of problem-driven solutions with sustainable benefits.' This statement captures the Synergy approach to overcoming the fragmentation in the policy field of support for minority-owned businesses. Synergy's move to formal collaborative governance arrangements has been an emergent process

in which clarification of the group's ends, means and approach to governance has developed over time. As is evident in our case analysis, design choices nested within a developmental process of designing and using forums, arenas and courts for each stage provided a platform for the next stage.

The approach of the MBDA CEO and staff, the consultants and the developmental evaluation team has been design-oriented and become more collaborative over time. The approach has encompassed the design of the collaboration process, the settings within which that work has occurred, the objects produced by the process (for example, guiding principles, MOU, IT platform prototype and marketing approach) and the outputs and desired outcomes to be produced (for example, ecosystem change and significantly increased minority business success). The approach has mirrored the practice of how successful designers think and engage with clients by actively exploring the interplay of possible ends and means and, in situations involving substantial political and cultural dimensions, gradually gaining clarity about purposes and how they might be achieved (van Aken et al, 2007; Cross, 2011).

Consistent with design science characteristics, the approach has been driven by purposes (that can change over time) to 'produce systems that do not yet exist – that is, change existing organisational [and inter-organisational] systems and situations into desired ones' (Romme, 2003: 559). The approach has been emergent, pragmatic and reliant on systems thinking, participation and discourse. The objects that have been the focus of design work have been 'artificial' in the sense that they did not yet exist (for example, a collaboration process, new settings, the IT platform, the MOU). Finally, the design and development of the process, settings and products have moved beyond the boundaries of the initial definition of the situation and the existing knowledge of the participants (Cross, 2011; Bason, 2017). At this stage, Synergy's governance approach enables the collaboration to better address the fragmentation in the minority-business support field that policies of governments, foundations and businesses helped create.

The illustrative case highlights the importance of leaders and leadership in the design and use of a collaboration process and governance structure, along with other collaboration products, so that agreed directions, alignments and commitments are achieved (Drath et al, 2008). The MBDA CEO's role as a collaboration sponsor and champion has been particularly important, but all of the CEOs have made a difference, as have some key MBDA staff, the consultants and developmental evaluation team. This finding concurs with virtually all of the collaboration literature (for example, Gray and Purdy, 2018; Innes and Booher, 2018).

This paper adds to the literature on collaborative governance in its explicit attention to the three dimensions of power (action, structure and their dynamic linkages); the settings that shape and guide what emerges as action, issues, conflict and policy preferences (forums, arenas and courts); and the settings' interconnections as part of a governance approach that may or may not work well. Previous work (for example, Bryson et al, 2006; 2015; Ansell and Gash, 2008; 2018; Provan and Kenis, 2008; Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015; Gray and Purdy, 2018; Innes and Booher, 2018; and Romzek et al, 2013) makes important contributions, but none is as explicit or comprehensive in addressing the dimensions, settings and their interconnections as part of a governance approach. In other words, whatever the governance design created for specific circumstances, it must pay attention to how forums, arenas and courts, plus their constituting elements and their interrelationships, are designed, if it is to be effective.

Online appendix

Table 1: Policies for minority-owned businesses in Minnesota

Target	*Programme*	*Operating organisation*	*Description*	*Contribution to policy field and ecosystem fragmentation*
Minority-owned businesses	Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)	Federal US Department of Transportation	• Requires any state and local transportation agencies that benefit from DOT federal financial assistance, or participate in DOT-assisted contracts, to establish goals for the participation of disadvantaged entrepreneurs.	Use of multiple different certification systems despite the similarity of the two programmes Lack of information on which certification provides what benefits
	Targeted Group (TG) and Economically Disadvantaged (ED) Small Business Procurement Programme	Minnesota Department of Administration	• Supports disadvantaged businesses by offering them price preferences in selling their products or services, or in bidding on construction projects for the State of Minnesota. • Very similar to the DBE programme except that it is operated by the Materials Management Division (MMD) in the Minnesota Department of Administration.	
	Community Reinvestment Act (CRA)	Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council	• Encourages commercial banks and savings associations to address the needs of borrowers in their communities, and especially those in low- and moderate-income neighbourhoods. • Requires all banking institutions that receive Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) insurance to be evaluated by federal banking agencies to determine if the bank offers credit in safe and sound ways in all communities, including low- and moderate-income communities, in which they are chartered to do business.	Implementation by individual financial institutions without coordination
Organisations that provide support services to minority-owned businesses	Community Advantage (CA)	Small Business Administration	• Provides access to loans from mission-oriented lenders, primarily nonprofit financial intermediaries focused on economic development to meet the needs of small businesses in underserved markets.	Most funding is one-time spending that usually lasts for one or two years, which is detrimental to the sustainability or continuity of the programmes run by the service organisations Different streams of short-term funding resulting in confusion
	A variety of initiatives and funding from state and local governments	State and local governments	• Example: in March 2016, the governor of Minnesota announced a $100 million programme to reduce economic and racial disparities. As a part of the programme, some organisations that provide service to minority-owned businesses received grants from the state.	

Table 2: Development of collaborative governance: forums, arenas, and courts in the early stage, 2014–2015

Design focus and key design choices	*Forums*	*Arenas*	*Courts*	*Effects of design and the use of forums, arenas, and courts*
Design focus: • Understanding the situation MBDA faced and what can be done about it • Organisational redesign • Process of forming 'strategic partnerships' and gaining funding Key design choices: • Engage outside analysts or not? • How to redesign MBDA's structures and processes? • MBDA to go it alone or pursue 'strategic partnerships'?	One-on-one board and staff meetings Meetings with auditors, attorneys, existing consultants Meetings with clients and funders Staff did trend analysis Accenture meetings and report Meetings with potential partners Staff meetings aimed at mutual understanding	MBDA CEO and board make key decisions Redesign of leadership team changes decision-making approach • More delegation New organisational design in response to lack of clear staff roles, responsibilities	City, state, federal policies in place that legitimised support for minority-owned business Informal court of public opinion at MBDA in need of change MBDA CEO worked legitimately within his authority Collaboration legitimisation – as a form and process – aided by MBDA CEO's reputation for integrity and effectiveness	Picture of organisation began to emerge • Limits to growth • Need to tackle limiting loops, build on positive loops Identification of 'identity crisis' Staffing reorganised; this remedied misalignment between MBDA staff skills/positions and what it needed via clarification of roles, responsibilities; helped change shared mental models Stage set for implementing Accenture recommendations Move from charity frame to investment frame initiated Focus on ecosystem • Fragmentation • Lack of capital and capacity

Table 3: Development of collaborative governance: forums, arenas, and courts in the intermediate (Cohort) stage, 2016–mid-2017

Design focus and key design choices	*Forums*	*Arenas*	*Courts*	*Effects of design and the use of forums, arenas, and courts*
Design focus: • Continued organisational redesign and transformation at MBDA • Process of forming a collaboration and funding it Key design choices; • What MBDA programmes to drop and which to add? • Should MBDA move from downtown Minneapolis? • How to pursue collaboration? • Use consultants to manage development? • Which organisations to include? • Build in a developmental evaluation?	Feedback that staff overworked, questioning changes Internal inclusion Office redesign, planning for move as way to shake up culture, connect with clients MBDA CEO works to increase the awareness of the ecosystem issue and garner support Consulting staff holds reconnaissance meetings with potential collaboration partners Cohort meetings • CEOs agree to meet and explore collaboration • Work programme created • Work group meetings • Learning tour • Understanding desirability of developmental evaluation • Welcoming evaluators	Adding projects (Junior Achievement Fellows, MBDA Mini-MBA) Ending programmes by transferring to other organisations More participatory decision making, internally and externally Local corporation agreed to support MBDA's move to new and better facility Foundation funders make favourable decisions Cohort as decision maker about work plans and how to proceed, including decision to be Catalyst. Lending institutions' decisions often apparently affected by institutional racism	National and local legitimacy fostered by obtaining grants from major foundations Progress on forming new norm favouring collaboration and ecosystem change in MBDA and partners	Staff confusion, but growing appreciation of and pleasure in the success of projects More sophisticated operation visible internally and externally Possibility of move adds to change momentum 'One MBDA' boosted by ending programmes that were not central Learning tour builds hope, team ties Cohort gels, that is, trust built along with shared understanding of the ecosystem and direction

Table 4: Development of collaborative governance: forums, arenas, and courts in the later (Synergy) stage, mid-2017–mid-2018

Stage and design focus	*Forums*	*Arenas*	*Courts*	*Effects of design and the use of forums, arenas, and courts*
Design focus: • Further growth of the collaboration • IT platform development and marketing study • Development of agreed approach to collaborative governance • Development of agreed approach to joint fundraising Key design choices: • How to pursue marketing study? • How to pursue IT, platform development? • Which consultants? • Project management approach? • Integration with other systems? • Content of MOU? • Content of joint case for funding?	Work groups continue meeting Formation of Synergy • brainstorming meeting to determine name Progress reports at Synergy meetings New Orleans learning trip Developmental evaluators interviews of CEOs, staff and consultants; reveals: • increasing consensus on hopes and concerns • some worries about power imbalances • frustration with capacity gap • frustration with pace of progress Discussions among evaluators, consultants, and MBDA CEO regarding how best to help the collaboration make progress	Technology and Intake group choose vendor to design and build IT platform; groups plays interactive role in design of platform Decisions made to integrate Synergy IT platform with some existing platforms Marketing study completed Synergy MOU outlines details of approach to collaborative governance Case for joint funding progress	Court of public opinion increasingly favors collaboration and ecosystem change MBDA guiding principles identify norms to guide direction of work and how to work together Guiding principles included in MOU and case for joint funding	Advances change in interpretive schemes in favour of deeper collaboration and ecosystem change Progress made on tangible products, for example, IT platform, new financial instruments, Synergy branding Struggles of some partners to participate fully are clarified Formalisation of collaborative governance arrangements

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