Painting the Governance Landscape:
Culture and Power at the Public-Nonprofit Intersection

Carrie M Duncan
University of Missouri

Abstract

This paper explores nonprofit organizational identity, culture, and governance. Nonprofit organizations are a vital part of the governance landscape. Their relationship with public agencies can have significant benefits for public service delivery and public policies; however, public-private partnerships can be risky for nonprofit organizations. Those risks include loss of identity and unintended consequences to organizational culture. For nonprofit organizations, identity loss can mean losing touch with those in society who benefit the most from the services that they provide. The unintended consequences to organizational culture can include shifts in values and mission. Risks to identity and culture can be linked to the power differentials inherent in public-private partnerships and have implications for governance. I develop a framework for examining how public governance structures affect nonprofit organizations. This framework integrates governance and organizational theories, focusing on power and organizational culture. The framework promotes critical thinking about the nature of public-private partnerships. My aim is to provide a framework that promotes reflective governance practices in the complex environment of public-private partnerships.