A Group Dynamics Approach to Understanding Governance in Multi-organizational Alliances

Complications & Conundrums:
The New Era of Research on Nonprofit Governance and the Work of Boards

Judith L. Millesen
Voinovich School of Leadership & Public Affairs
Ohio University
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Explicit recognition of the complexity of intractable social problems that defy sectoral boundaries and require collective action through:

- Strategic Alignments
- Funders Collaboratives
- Collective Impact
- Learning Networks
- Strategic Co-funding
- Catalytic Philanthropy
- Public-Private Partnerships
The Context…

- Desire for strengthened commitment to and authentic engagement in governance work
- Interest in reaping the benefits of diversity
- Commitment to promoting practices and creating a culture that values inclusion
- Hope that collective efforts will be effectively promoted
- Need to promote positive and productive group dynamics
So why not rely on some of the work that examines group processes and decision-making?

Common attributes that present opportunities and pose challenges
- Interdependence
- Shared outcomes
- Common identity
- Parallel social structures
Relevant Theoretical Perspectives

- Social Identity Theory – self image and esteem are closely tied to the groups we belong
- Social Exchange Theory – focus on the costs and benefits of social relationships
- Optimal Distinctiveness Theory – people seek to balance the need to be similar with the need to be different
- Group Polarization Theory – useful in explaining extreme decisions
- Information Sampling Theory – why we tend to dwell on shared information
Self image and self esteem are closely tied to the groups we belong. People tend to exhibit a favorable bias to those they perceive to be similar; while those perceived to be dissimilar may be marginalized.

H1: When perceptions of social risk are high, those holding opposing viewpoints are less likely to dissent.

H2: Those expressing minority viewpoints are likely to experience lower levels of group cohesion and perceive higher levels of conflict.
Social Exchange Theory

- Useful in explaining how multiple kinds of resources are exchanged following certain rules and how these exchanges can engender high-quality relationships
- H3: Individuals are more likely to participate and engage in those activities that have the potential to produce the greatest gains for their individual investments
- H4: Individuals are more likely to pursue those options that they perceive to be fair (i.e., socially acceptable for such a relationship).
Individuals strive to attain an optimal balance of assimilation (the need to be similar) and distinction (the need to be different)

H5: When perceptions of social risk are high, scapegoating or naysaying tactics are used to express dissenting opinions
Group Polarization Theory

Useful in explaining the amplification of previously held viewpoints even after discussion of presumably diverse perspectives

H6: Group polarization is more likely to occur when those in the group share similar thoughts about how to proceed

H7: Group polarization is more likely to occur when there is a dominant leader who asserts a preference for a particular course of action early in the discussion

H8: Demographic homogeneity among members of the group is likely reduce the incidence of group polarization

H9: Group polarization affects are likely to be reduced by expertise
Information Sampling Theory

- Used to explain why groups tend to be preoccupied with commonly held information rather than pool unshared information in ways that would consider the intellectual merits of a balanced information flow.
- H10: As the number of shared facts grows among members of the group, there will be a tendency to focus on that commonly held information.
- H11: A bias for shared information is also likely to occur when it conforms to a prevailing position within the group.
Social Identity Theory underscores the importance of social acceptance and validates the significance of group norms.

Social Exchange Theory highlights the need to promote the benefits of collective (group) work.

Optimal Distinctiveness Theory helps us to understand individual motives impact the navigation of group memberships.

Group Polarization Theory emphasizes the importance of sharing information, expressing dissent, and introducing expert opinion.

Information Sampling Theory helps refocus attention from a preoccupation with commonly held information to what might be achieved by capitalizing on the diverse perspectives in the group.

Summing it Up