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

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ABSTRACT

There have been a number of recent publications offering different descriptions of relationships among and between organizations of all types working together to address shared interests. Whether these collaborative arrangements are framed in terms of strategic alignments (Jamali, Yianni, & Abdallah, 2011), collective impact (Kania & Kramer, 2011), learning networks (Romano & Secundo, 2009), or some other descriptive terminology; all champion the message that collaboration is a good thing with the potential to achieve better outcomes than if organizations worked individually. Indeed much of this work provides examples of how collective effort pays off, and all point to a similar set of obstacles and challenges to group work. What’s missing however, is insight to the underlying decision-making dynamics that influence the governance process. This paper uses five group theories: optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991; Brewer & Gardner, 1996), exchange theory (Emerson, 1986), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), group polarization theory (Zhu, 2013), and information sampling theory (Baron & Kerr, 2003) to develop a set of testable hypotheses that can be used to better understand the difficulties of collective action, thereby adding depth and perspective to both the benefits and challenges associated with governing collaborative arrangements.