



## Civic capacity: Building on transformational leadership to explain successful integrative public leadership

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### ABSTRACT

An emerging stream of work has been investigating the leadership processes necessary to guide public multi-sector collaborations. This stream of work argues that new leadership theory about integrative public leadership is needed because the context is different from that traditionally investigated by leadership researchers. In this paper, we advance the study of integrative public leadership by arguing that transformational leadership theory does apply to multi-sector collaborations, but needs to be augmented with an additional construct called “civic capacity.” We elaborate on this construct and suggest that it consists of three components: civic drive, civic connections, and civic pragmatism.

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Many of the major public problems and challenges plaguing modern society, such as achieving environmental sustainability, reducing poverty, improving community wellbeing, and alleviating global health problems, cannot be solved by any single actor or organization. Instead, effectively addressing such public problems requires the collaboration of organizations from multiple sectors, including governmental organizations, not-for-profit organizations, businesses, and community groups. Such multi-sector collaborations entail the involvement of multiple leaders drawn from the collaborating organizations who have no formal authority over each other. The leadership processes involved in guiding such multi-sector collaborations have been the focus of an emerging literature stream (Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Crosby & Bryson, 2010b; Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Morse, 2010; Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Silvia & McGuire, 2010), including a special issue of the *Leadership Quarterly* published in 2010. Such leadership has been variously labeled as integrative public leadership (Crosby & Bryson, 2010b), collaborative leadership (Alexander, Comfort, Weiner, & Bogue, 2001; Umble et al., 2005; Vangen & Huxham, 2003), network leadership (Harmaakorpi & Niukkanen, 2007), inter-organizational leadership (Connelly, 2007), and collaborative governance (Page, 2010).

In this article we use the label integrative public leadership, defined as leadership necessary to bring “diverse groups and organizations together in semi-permanent ways, and typically across sector boundaries, to remedy complex public problems and achieve the common good” (Crosby & Bryson, 2010b, p. 211). The “common good” or “public good” refers to the public value that integrative public leadership seeks to create by attempting to solve complex public problems (Morse, 2010). Often, such complex problems arise because of failures of government, businesses, or other societal entities (Crosby & Bryson, 2010b). Therefore, addressing such complex public problems requires the engagement of not only governmental bodies, but multiple societal actors (Crosby & Bryson, 2010b).

Leaders in multi-sector collaborations typically face unique challenges. Consider, for example, the leadership challenges encountered in the interagency process of the United States National Security Council (NSC). The NSC acts as an “institutional

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guardian” in the process of drafting the National Security Strategy (NSS) (Doyle, 2007, p. 626). To accomplish its mission, the NSC must develop close working relations with businesses (e.g., airlines), for-profit security firms, and not-for-profit think tanks. In addition, the process of drafting the NSS also requires collaboration among multiple federal government agencies such as the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the Department of Homeland Security. There have been many recognized difficulties in trying to reconcile the different interests, outlooks, and capabilities of these diverse actors (Doyle, 2007; GAO-10-822T, 2010). Yet the reconciliation of these differences is crucial to developing the common good of national security. Another example illustrating this type of multi-sector collaboration is the Western North Carolina Education Network (WNC EdNET). The intent of WNC EdNET was to bring broadband to a network of local schools and colleges in order to create learning opportunities for students that were currently not available to them. This partnership involved the “six westernmost counties in North Carolina, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians (EBCI), two community colleges, a four-year college, two regional quasi-governmental agencies, and several grant-making organizations” (Morse, 2010, p. 236). The results of this successful multi-sector collaboration were of significant public value. In collaborative networks such as those involved in the NSC and the WNC EdNET, “leaders and managers ... face the need (not only) to inspire, mobilize, and sustain their own agencies, but also to engage numerous other partners in their problem-solving efforts” (Crosby & Bryson, 2010b, p. 211).

Scholars writing about integrative public leadership have asserted that traditional leadership theories are inadequate to explain the leadership processes and behavior found in such public contexts involving multi-sector collaboration (e.g., Ospina & Foldy, 2010). These authors point to several differences between these contexts and those traditionally investigated by leadership researchers. In particular, unlike traditional leadership theories that assume a leader–follower relationship (e.g., charismatic leadership, leader–member exchange theory), integrative public leadership generally involves situations where there is no such relationship between the collaborating partners (Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Vangen & Huxham, 2003). Although there may be a lead organization in multi-sector collaborations that is able to dictate timeframes and certain tangible goals (Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Morse, 2010), the integrative leader in such a lead organization does not have hierarchical authority over other collaborating partners. An organization is considered the lead organization because of its structural position in coordinating the multi-sector collaboration, and often provides the most resources for the collaboration (Morse, 2010). In other structural forms of collaboration, there may be a separate policy-making entity. While the leaders within the policy-making entity can greatly influence tangible goals and time frames, they typically still do not have hierarchical authority over collaborating partners. Furthermore, others suggest that unlike the contexts addressed by traditional theories of leadership, in which employees at a focal organization typically have shared goals and objectives, the actors in a multi-sector collaboration often participate for diverse reasons, with each actor focusing on a variety of individual goals and interests that only partially intersect (e.g., Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Ospina & Saz-Carranza, 2010; Page, 2010).

These differences have led scholars to claim that a new leadership theory of integrative public leadership is needed (Crosby & Bryson, 2010a). These scholars have strongly linked integrative public leadership theory to shared or distributed leadership (Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Crosby & Bryson, 2010b), with the difference being the emphasis on multi-sector collaboration. The primary focus of integrative public leadership has been at the collective level, where consideration has been given to social interactions and the interface with systems and structures that are evolved for the multi-sector collaborations. In this paper we take a more individualized approach to integrative public leadership, where we consider the characteristics and behaviors of individual integrative public leaders.

This individualized approach to leadership has been criticized by scholars who claim that it “takes a unitary view ... without sufficient recognition of the plurality of interest and the dynamics of power within any given context” (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Lawler, 2008, p. 30). Instead, theorists have suggested the need to focus on shared responsibilities (Murrell, 1997) and collaborative or shared leadership especially within a multi-sector collaboration context (Bryson & Crosby, 1992; Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Lawler, 2008). While we support research adopting such a perspective, we contend that an individualized approach has merit, and many studies on multi-sector collaboration have adopted such an approach (e.g., Berger, 1997; Galaskiewicz & Shatin, 1981; Redekop, 2010; Shmueli, Warfield, & Kaufman, 2009). Although it is ideal in distributed leadership for every member to be a follower and a leader, studies have shown that leadership tends to be relatively centralized and only a very few emerge as leaders within a group at any point in time (Krackhardt, 1994; Mehra, Smith, Dixon, & Robertson, 2006).

Individuals frequently hold important leadership roles in multi-sector collaborations and can have enormous influence over what happens, whether they are formally appointed as leaders or emerge as dominant players or champions when other participants recognize their abilities and allow them to perform the needed leadership roles. For example, it is not unusual to see an individual from a collaborating organization appointed as a chair or the convener (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Other individuals may be given the legitimacy to lead if they are better able to facilitate action needed at that particular time (Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Mehra et al., 2006). The legitimacy to lead in this context is generally conferred on those who can “make things happen” (Huxham & Vangen, 2000; Morse, 2010). The ability of an individual to emerge (either formally or informally) as a leader in certain situations is what distributed leadership is about (Mehra et al., 2006). Therefore, distributed leadership does not preclude an individual as the leader (Creasy, James, & Mann, 2007; Harris, 2007; Mehra et al., 2006).

In this study, we investigate the role of transformational leadership – the dominant leadership style in the field (Judge, Woolf, Hurst, & Livingston, 2008) – on integrative public leadership. To do so, we discuss how the original conceptualization of transformational leadership by Burns (1978) included a strong civic component that was subsequently omitted from Bass and colleagues’ four-dimensional model. Although much of Burns’s (1978, 2003) original conceptualization of transformational leadership can be explained by that conceptualized by Bass and colleagues, the latter conceptualization misses out on the civic component of the leader which figured prominently in Burns’s work. We develop this aspect of Burns’s original conceptualization

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