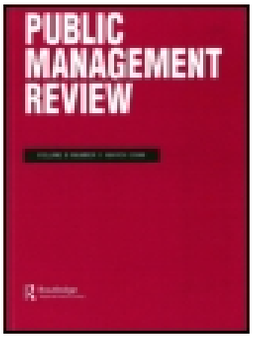

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Collaborative networks and the need for a new management language

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ABSTRACT
Language is a key element for the formation of social identity and cohesion and is important for setting the tone for the way that people behave with and to each other. The aim of this paper is to highlight the need for a distinct language that better describes and shapes the thinking and practice of collaborative networks and collaboration generally. We argue that development of a specialized language for collaborative networks is necessary to better reflect their distinctive characteristics and operating logic, including higher levels of cohesion, communication and collective action. Using two collaborative case examples we specifically focus on how this new language engenders changed, more collaborative practice and relates to the unique way management and leadership are practiced in collaborative networks.

KEYWORDS Collaboration; networks; language; collective identity

Introduction

This paper is not about changing the language used when referring to networks in general. Instead, it is about changing the language used when referring to a specific type of network: collaborative networks. Collaborative networks are most appropriate for the resolution of many of the ongoing and emergent complex social and public problems confronting governments and society more generally. Core to their success is that collaborative networks not only bring together a diverse set of people (which occurs in all networks) but also mould these people and their resources into a different functioning entity underpinned by new ways of thinking, talking and behaving.

Forging this 'new whole' (Innes and Booher 2010) relies on the ability of members to communicate – to share ideas and interests to better understand and appreciate others' perspectives and interdependencies as the basis of creating new shared meanings and directions. Collaboration and collaborative practice is clearly not business as usual, and therefore requires its own language: one that reflects, facilitates and leverages these relationships, interconnections and interdependencies. In this paper we argue that, in general, the current language used in the literature on networks does not adequately reflect or explain the distinctive workings of collaborative

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networks, nor does it provide sufficient emphasis on the relational aspects of these entities. Instead it remains largely focused on the narrow transactions between organizations in the network to secure scares resources and the need for management strategies that protect boundaries, buffer dependency and treat relationships as resources in order to gain competitive advantage.

In arguing for a new language specifically for collaborative networks this paper explores the impact of language on the processes that occur within these types of networks – especially those that relate to the formation of a cohesive unit (or whole) which is one of the key characteristics of an effective collaborative network. Specifically, paper examines the contribution of managers and leaders in creating the conditions for collaborative networks to operate and thrive.

We proceed by outlining the role of language in establishing collective processes. Second, we explain how collaborative networks differ from other types of networks and why a specific language that relates to these types of networks is needed. Two case studies are used to illuminate these issues. Finally, we focus on and build this new language in terms of the functioning of collaborative networks, particularly with regard to the implications for management and leadership.

The importance of language

Language is recognized as a core device for socialization and the cooperation of humans (Pink, Koch and Lockwood 2010). Lauring (2008, 348) states that language

> [is] a symbolic tool in the formation of collective communities. It functions to create bonds and/or divide individuals and groups because the roles and social relations available in the greater community or organization are transmitted and internalized through language. (Mueller 1973 cited in Lauring 2008, 347–348)

Anklam (2007, 297) indicates that language affords a collective act of sense-making that contributes to the richness of the shared vision and individuals' commitment to the common goals within networks. Similarly, Eisman (cited in Nilsson n.d., 13), speaking about web-based networks (but equally relevant to other network entities), notes that language and the information it distributes produces '… artefacts that support shared goals and projects and sustains the dynamic social interactions of networks'. Language therefore has an important role in facilitating better understandings, trust and mutual respect – key elements in the effectiveness of all networks but, most specifically, in collaborative networks. The notion of 'collective understanding' arising from shared meanings and language has also been identified as a core feature of successful collaborative networks (Keast et al. 2004). Importantly, it can also have a polarizing effect, depending on the context as well as leadership and management capacities.

Language also has the potential to form collective *identity*, the sense of belonging to a communal group greater than any individual. There are strong links between negotiation and the construction of social identity, in which individual roles are negotiated and defined with respect to the group and their significance within the social structure (Stets and Burke 2000, 227; Ashforth and Mael 1989). Within organizations language is used to define the roles and hierarchy of the social structure, the processes and relationships that constitute the interactions between members, and the relationship between members and the entity that is the

organizational construct, embodied by the values, vision, mission statements and goals of the organization (Ochs 1993; Ran and Duimering 2007; Phillips and Oswick 2012), all of which serve to align the interests of members with that of the organization. The negotiation of these roles and processes has significant outcomes on the organizational culture; organizations with clearly defined, well-articulated roles, processes and goals are better able to form a sense of collective identity among its members.

Collaborations are heavily reliant on the ability of members to effectively communicate with each other. Hardy, Lawrence and Grant (2005) argue collective identity arises out of discourse and is essential to effective collaboration:

> Conversations are important in understanding the role of language in organizations: consequential action is not so much the result of disconnected utterances or isolated texts but, rather, is produced through ongoing linguistic exchanges among actors that draw on broader discourses and produce discursive objects that act as resources for action and for further conversations. (Hardy, Lawrence, and Grant 2005, 60)

One of the significant difficulties faced in inter-organizational collaboration is the conflict between an existing collective identity, formed with formerly autonomous organizations, and the need for a new collective identity involving interdependent organizations working towards mutual goals. Conversation and language are the tools through which these new collective identities are negotiated, and successful collaboration is achieved.

Collaborative networks and the language of relationships

The concept of inter-organizational (IOR) networks and their government equivalents inter-governmental relations (IGR) networks (Gage and Mandell 1990) focused attention on the properties and overall pattern of relationships between organizations pursuing mutual interests while at the same time remaining independent and autonomous in their interests and actions (Cropper, Ebers, and Huxham 2008, 9) and, therefore, focused on the need to control uncertainties, protect boundaries and adopt bridging strategies (Oliver and Ebers 1998). In this way IOR and IGR networks use the language of exchanges and transactions to describe and prescribe interactions, as well as shape their respective frameworks for action. As demonstrated below, although applicable to most networks, a transaction-based language is largely incompatible with the higher-level, interdependent relationships that exist within collaborative networks. The emphasis in collaborative networks, instead of being on securing resources while protecting organizational boundaries, is on breaking down boundaries through enhancing trusting relationships and realizing that each organization is only one piece of a new entity (Innes and Booher 2010).

Much has been written about the role and importance of networks (see for example, Agranoff 2003, 2006; McGuire and Agranoff 2011; Isett et al. 2011; Provan and Milward 1995; Provan and Lemaire 2012). Yet, despite the growing understanding of networks, including the differentiation of network types (6 et al. 2006; Keast, Brown, and Mandell 2007; Agranoff 2006) and the long-held distinct definition of collaboration (Gray 1989; Himmelman 2002; Keast et al. 2004, 2007; O'Flynn 2009), there remains both in the literature and practice a tendency to refer loosely to all networks as 'collaborations' (O'Leary and Bingham 2009; Agranoff 2006;). It has been argued that an undifferentiated

treatment of collaborative networks undermines the unique capacity of these forms and problematizes their formation and operation (Gray 1989; O'Flynn 2009). The 3Cs network typology (Keast, Brown, and Mandell 2007) is used below to further isolate and contrast the specific characteristics of collaborative networks:

A *cooperative* network occurs in a variety of settings and involves only a sharing of information and/or expertise. There are relatively few, if any, risks involved. Each participant remains independent and interacts only when necessary to harmonize efforts. Examples of these types of networks include groups of social workers sharing information about their clients or Australia's Medicare network of insurers, doctors and hospitals.

A *coordinative* network forms when people more closely integrate the delivery of their individual services to increase their individual efficiency. Those involved in this type of network do more than just share information; they interact and plan with each other about the ways to better align what they are already doing. In this mode participants are willing to take some risks in terms of working more closely with others, but they are only willing to make changes in how they align their existing services with those of others. They remain independent organizations and continue to operate in their usual manner. Most of the examples in the literature are of these types of networks, exemplified in the extensive work of Provan and Milward (1995, 2001) on service delivery networks in the field of mental health.

For both cooperative and coordinative networks the language of IGR/IOR is appropriate. In both forms the organizations represented in the network remain focused on retaining their independence and primarily undertake joint work only insofar as the rewards will benefit their own organization. This is not the case for collaborative networks.

Collaborative networks are most appropriate when systems change or innovation is required. They are particularly apt when new approaches are required to address complex problems that cannot be solved by the usual operations of any of the organizations involved by themselves, or even by coordinating their existing modes of operation (Gray 1989; Mandell 1999; Cigler 2001). Members of a collaborative network recognize that they are interdependent and not just dependent on each other: that is, for the actions of one to be effective they must rely on the actions of others. From this interdependence there arises a mutual commitment to working in new ways with the other members of the network to effect systems changes. Thus, rather than individual organizations trying to meet their goals by developing linkages with each other in a network, the emphasis is on the importance of the network itself in successful programme implementation. In other words:

> [w]hen a service can be successfully implemented only through the joint actions of multiple organizations, then *the network itself* becomes critical and a focus on individual organizations is relevant only for understanding how and why each organization contributes to the overall implementation of the service. (Provan and Milward 1989, 4, as cited in Mandell 1994; emphasis added)

In essence, the network itself is conceived as a management tool and management techniques that make the use of the network are utilized, rather than techniques that just try to manipulate, coordinate and/or otherwise manoeuvre through individual organizations (Mandell 1994).

Incorporating the sense of interdependence to create the collective whole necessary for systems change is based on the new and strengthened relationships that are developed. These relationships are initiated, nurtured and maintained through members' contribution to a shared project with time, expertise, contacts and information. Collective benefit is attained through the pooling of expertise, access and resources, while at the same time respecting diverse views, mandates and institutional priorities. Put simply, the structure and processes of collaborative networks come from the relationships formed between people – not the transactions between entities.

Church et al. (2003) suggest that a language of flows and movement be employed to represent and facilitate this shift in thinking and practice. Re-enforcing the need for a special language *Health Knowledge Executive* (n.d.) argue that wicked issues require a language that reflects relationships, interconnections and interdependencies; that is, holistic thinking. These examples make it clear that a new type of language is needed in order to find a way to talk about how trust, values, activities, structure and people interact in a way that is useful to us in these types of networks.

Given its importance in networks generally and collaborative networks particularly, it is interesting to note that language has not been a major focus of network research or theorizing. In addition, although the language used to describe management and leadership is quite extensive and generally applies to cooperative and coordinative networks, it does not get at the intricacies of collaborative networks; nor therefore does it reflect the type of management and leadership needed in these types of networks.

Research approach

We analysed the secondary data of two identified collaborative networks: the Sacramento Water Forum and the Services Integration Project. These two cases were purposefully selected as both are acknowledged as exemplars of successful collaboration (Connick 2006; Innes and Booher 2010; Boorman and Woolcock 2002; Keast et al. 2004; Muirhead and Woolcock 2008). The original cases were constructed from interviews and focus groups, as well as from extensive documentation such as project reports, negotiation agreements, internal correspondence, minutes from meetings and other published material (e.g. Connick 2003, 2006; Innes and Booher 2010; Innes et al. 2006; Boorman and Woolcock 2002; Woolcock and Boorman 2003; Keast 2004). The two data sets (interviews and documentation) offered opportunities to explore language issues that, while broadly aligned with the original studies, were not the direct focus (Heaton 1998; White 2010). Specifically, we sought supplementary insights into the way in which language was used to shape network actions as well as distil related management and leadership roles. Following the recommendations of Heaton (1998, 2004) and others (White 2010; Bishop 2006) the authors had either direct involvement in the original research design, data collection and analysis of one case, or were able to draw on the considerable set of information made available for the second case, including website material. Thematic analysis was used to isolate how language was formed, used and applied in practice (Denzin 1984); in particular the analysis focused on instances where new language was introduced, and where existing terminology was modified, proved inadequate or produced confusion and conflict between partners. A conventional process was adopted with initial basic coding of raw material around key

concepts, including their frequency and over-lap, followed by the generation of higher-level themes drawn from identified patterns and explanations that are used to shape understandings (Boyatzis 1998).

Cases

The following two case studies were examined to elucidate the use of language used within collaborative networks, particularly the impact of language in creating cohesion within these types of networks, as well as highlighting how this language led to the different style of management/leadership adopted.

The Sacramento water forum

The Water Forum (WF) was convened by the Sacramento, California, City–County Office of Metropolitan Water Planning to negotiate an agreement on how to manage the deteriorating water supply for the northern region of California as well as to preserve the habitat. The initial meetings were held in 1993 and included the City and County of Sacramento, environmentalists, businesses, agricultural leaders and citizen groups, representing around fifteen stakeholder groups. A process for agreement was needed because there was a history of conflict in the region around water and previous regional water planning attempts had failed. In fact, many of the parties had brought lawsuits against each other over a number of years (Connick 2003, 2006; Innes and Booher 2010; Sacramento Area Water Forum 1996).

To move forward the city and county sought to join forces and develop a new regional plan. It was anticipated that a consensus process could succeed where legislation and litigation had previously failed. Interest-based negotiation (Fisher, Ury, and Patton 1991) was adopted by the consultant engaged to implement the project (Connick 2006; Innes and Booher 2010). Interest-based or principled negotiation is based on understanding the difference between presenting positions; that is, what you have decided needs to happen, and the interests that caused you to come to that decision (Daniels and Walker 1996). The basis of interest-based negotiation is to seek information from each other about underlying beliefs, goals, desires and preferences to get at real interests in order to find common ground. This integration is done through dialogue focused on information-seeking and persuasion (Lewicki, Saunders, and Barry 2006).

As a start the consultant conducted a series of interviews to determine if the conditions were favourable for the interest-based process and to identify the various stakeholders involved in the conflict. Her aim was to bring to the table 'those who are affected by the issue, those who could make changes happen and those who could block change' (Connick 2006, 1). In addition, an extensive training programme was conducted in the interest-based negotiation process, which involved self and group education to help participating stakeholders to better understand one another and one another's interests.

Following the principles of inter-based or integrative negotiation participants spent the first year learning about each other and how to deal with each. They did this through both informal meetings and social gatherings that allowed for more personal communication and sharing as well as more structured events. To guide the formal discussions experts were brought in on particularly challenging issues

to present the facts. This process helped participants to move from positions that may not have been founded in fact to discovering interests that could unite them. The language of interest-based negotiation, was central to this learning process (Connick 2006, 31), as it is grounded in the search for collective win/win results over individual outcomes. Of central importance was the ability of the participants to look at what were '"the best available alternatives to a negotiated agreement," or BAATNAs' (Connick 2006, 31). This process allowed all participants to be confident that they were all acting in good faith and that they all agreed that a negotiated agreement would be the best alternative for any of the issues to be discussed.

One interviewee indicated that the key is that influential members are those who understand and listen to others and try to work out ways to address all of the interests involved. According to this participant, at times some members tried to exert power or 'clout', but much more influential was a kind of discourse that resulted in participants reaching agreements (Innes and Booher 2010). In her seminal case study Connick (2006, 47) provides examples of how participants used an alternative language to adjust the mood and expectations of the initiative and generate agreement. For example, she noted that instead of generating narrow solutions members

> floated 'trial balloons,' identified 'zones of agreement,' worked around 'sticking points,'. Further signalling the change in behaviour expected was the notion that members were now engaged in 'mature conversations' and 'disciplined discussions.' Through these communicative processes they learnt the patience needed to arrive at agreements 'in the fullness of time,' and develop 'agreements-in-principle'.

Another example of the deliberate use of language occurred when members were able to reframe anxieties regarding their ability to know and control future events. Connick (2006, 68) notes: 'Perhaps the most important assurance the Water Forum developed was that for dealing with unforeseen events in the future, which in the language of the Water Forum came to be known as "changed conditions"'. According to another participant one of the best things about the forum was how flexible it was. They developed dialogue groups that encompassed whoever needed to be at the table to solve the problem. Sometimes they brought in groups who were not part of the forum but had additional knowledge. The neutral consultant was also central to the changes achieved, as according to several participants, without the consultant in the process, the forum would have gone nowhere as it would have been 'stuck in old positions'.

For interviewees, a direct result of the WF was the development of trust and new or deepened relationships among members, in large part enabled by the use of different language and approach. There was evidence of a greater willingness to cross jurisdictional borders, improved interaction and mutual respect, including a wide range of communication in non-forum issues (Connick 2003, 2006). Although the initial process took over a year and negotiations went on for over 5 years, as a result of using interest-based negotiation and building stronger relationships in the process the participants were able to sign a memorandum of understanding agreeing to not only work together for 30 years, but also to change the way their organizations operate (systems change). That agreement is still in effect and guides actions on numerous water issues in the region (Innes and Booher 2010).

Service integration project

The Service Integration Project (SIP) was formed in response to a tragic event that brought into sharp relief the fragmented nature of service delivery in a regional Australian district and highlighted the escalating social problems and the failure of agencies to solve them. There was growing pressure for the responsible agencies to do something different in order to prevent similar tragedies. In particular, there were strong demands for the agencies to move outside of their 'siloed' service models to form a collaborative networked response, strongly embedded within the local community (Boorman and Woolcock 2002; Keast 2004).

One of the distinguishing features of SIP was the early recognition of the need for significant change in the existing systems and processes to unite this diverse set of service providers into a coherent unit. An enhanced emphasis on relationship building was identified as the most appropriate way forward. As one SIP member noted: 'It was recognized that we had to change the way we were working: we had to develop stronger, more collegiate relations' (SIP Focus Group 1 2001). It was acknowledged this would not be an easy task:

> At the beginning it must have been difficult. All these departments were trying to work together and the dynamics were really awful – there was no trust and no relationships. There was no testing of assumptions … there was just an assumption that the problem was caused by others. (SIP Interview 14 2001)

As the above highlights, the early meetings were fraught with tensions over competing positions and expectations which sought to assign 'blame' elsewhere, and this was compounded by the different professional languages and ways of presenting problems.

> The demarcations between departments … present real difficulties … One is pursuing 'harm minimisation strategy' and the other 'zero tolerance'. How do you reconcile the two stances and still go forward in a coherent way? (SIP Interview 19 2001)

Problems associated with this diversity in approach and goals and scepticism were quickly addressed by the initial project sponsor [leader] who put forward the neutral aim of 'working better together' which smoothed over the rough edges of the different positions and provided a shared objective around which everyone could coalesce. In this way it was argued that SIP, rather than working from different texts and languages would 'write its own book' for integrated service provision (Muirhead and Woolcock 2008, 13).

To further overcome these initial 'entrenched positions' of organizations and capitalize on the collective capacities that could be generated a Graduate Certificate in Inter-Professional Development was created. The rationale for the adoption of a formalized training programme focused on building widespread collaborative practice, including the formation of a new language as a foundational element (SIP Interview 8 2001). This goal was encapsulated by one interviewee:

> There was a wide range of players – many of whom did not share a common language, common training or even common experiences … It was vital to develop a skill set, a language and common experience for them to move forward as one. (SIP Interview 4 2001)

In this course SIP participants spent 16 days over two semesters learning new theories, unlearning old behaviours, developing a shared language, building trust

and a new skill set to help them break down silo barriers and change 'old' ways of working:

> The different professional backgrounds we have mitigated against us working cooperatively before. Through the Graduate Certificate and the facilitated network meetings, we have been able to gain a more holistic picture of each other and our departments and their needs and limitations. This helped us break down the barriers of the silos. (Focus Group 3 2002)

The Graduate Certificate was tailored to engender the sense of collective identity crucial to successful collaboration, to instil a common language which bridged organizational differences, and brought clarity to communication – both in terms of their different disciplines and experiences. For most SIP members, participation in the Graduate Certificate course was the defining aspect of their experience and was central to progressing the collaborative mode of working to which they aspired: 'Having been in the trenches together, learning a shared language and sharing the same experiences – we were more than colleagues – we had gone way beyond that – we had become a new single entity' (SIP Interview 18 2002).

Importantly, through the Graduate Certificate exercises all SIP members participated in the shaping of this new language, they were all involved in the formation of this shared language: 'we sat amongst ourselves and crafted the protocol and it was documented as part of our guidelines' (SIP Focus Group 1 2001).

As well as providing a collective basis for the SIP action language was also used as a vehicle to set the tone for interactions. For example, there was a conscious effort to use words that reflected collegiate practice: 'And for me it was important that we did not use directive language, that we modelled our commitment to collaborative action through our words as well as our deeds' (SIP Interview 12 2002). This respondent went on to explain that meetings were re-conceptualized as being about dialogue and meeting rules became 'terms of agreement'. Other language artefacts, for example storytelling, played an important role in orientating and socializing new members to the 'SIP way of working' (Keast 2004). Indeed, a key outcome of the project were the 'Learning Stories' derived from twenty-five project cases within the project (Woolcock and Boorman 2003). Through these stories, reproduced verbally as well as through publications, members were able to translate and transfer their individual experiences of being and working in the network to others.

By developing a common language members were able to build a collective commitment to joint action. Further, it was contended that such an intense interpersonal experience focused on learning and language 'short circuited' the relationship building process and enabled the network to move more quickly into genuine collaborative action. In the case of SIP, learning and implementing a new way to communicate and developing a new language resulted in a long-lasting ability to deal with each other in a more effective way on future issues (Woolcock and Boorman 2003).

Analysis and implications

As the above cases have demonstrated, organizations in both cases recognized the need to fundamentally change the way that they interacted and worked together and language was a central element in this behavioural shift. The analysis of the cases identified three inter-related themes related to the use of language: (1) building cohesion, (2) forging collaborative ways forward and (3) supportive social infrastructures.

Building cohesion

Both cases drew heavily on language as a key mechanism for establishing the initial connection between members and the problem space. The WF borrowed heavily from the language of interest-based or principled negotiation to signal a shift from 'adversarial or litigation' type words (Connick 2006) to those focused on bridging disparate positions, smoothing over tensions and finding common interests; that is, the *argy bargy* style of holding back information was replaced by words that implied candour and willingness to share information and work together towards a common outcome. Alongside the adoption of interest-based negotiation language the WF also used language symbolism to neutralize tensions and build agreements (Connick 2006). For SIP the initial approach also centred on smoothing over the presenting tensions arising from the perceived differences by introducing an overarching motherhood statement on which consensus was quickly reached. Tannen (1990) argues that the words we choose can shape our interactions, proposing the use of 'softer' words to defuse our argumentative nature.

Alternative language was thus applied in each case, initially as a way to neutralize the tensions caused by diverse perspectives and experiences of the problem as well as different expectations of what solutions might look like. Such reframing, by way of more neutral terms or words, helped to change the tone of the interactions from one of individuality and antagonism, exemplified by 'blaming', to an appreciation of a shared problem, and therefore the need for collective effect towards possible shared solutions. It could be argued that building of a sense of cohesion or togetherness through common language and symbolism helped to 'groom' members towards the next step of collaborative action.

Forging collaborative ways forward

Extending the above, was the deliberate leveraging of language to actively mobilize members to work together to achieve common goals. This was achieved in two ways. First, members created new language to better reflect the way they wanted the network to function and the type of outcomes to be achieved. Here, particular attention was paid to reframing or renaming regular activities to signal this shift and make clear the type of behaviour needed to match collaborative working. This action was described as 'setting the tone for the network', which Weeks (2001, 71) notes includes 'intonation, facial expressions, conscious and unconscious language'. In both cases, the development of a new shared language, mostly constructed by the members themselves, helped overcome confusion from lack of shared meaning, as well as bottlenecks and breakdowns arising from multiple professional languages, jargon and expectations.

Second was the harnessing of language to build collective action by forging agreements on the scope of actions and securing commitment to go forward together. Language here was used as a way of mobilizing members (Agranoff and McGuire 2003), by promoting interactions to build support and make sure all members are on board and committed to a shared goal. It was largely left to the managers/leaders to implement the shift in language as well as and the change in actions required for collaboration to occur and thrive. The shared use of the alternative term of 'process minder' to replace traditional manager/leaders roles across the cases exemplified this

shift in language and action. A 'process-minder' concentrates on monitoring actions and institutional arrangements, such as language to ensure they facilitate relationships (Innes and Booher 2010; Thompson and Perry 2006). Supplementing the process minder role, SIP added the 'driver' function, signifying the need to simultaneously nurture and sustain relational levels, while keeping network members on track and working towards directed action and collective outcomes (Keast 2004, 141). In SIP the dual roles where shared by two core members, while in WF they were undertaken by the facilitator; with both arrangements considered central to the success of the project (Boorman and Woolcock 2002; Connick 2006). Together, the terms adjusted the tone of managerial/leadership roles from authoritative functions in which a centralized individual is invested with authority (a potential area of conflict in inter-organizational relationships), to one in which the roles were focused on enabling collective action by attending to both groupware and task roles (Agranoff and McGuire 2001).

Supportive social infrastructures

The third theme distilled centred on the social structures and processes used within the cases to create and embed language into their operations. Training, either through the interest-based negotiation or Graduate Certificate presented as the key venue for the shaping of language and its application. Furthermore, the activity of training together and building their own language was an aid for members as they established and entrenched a culture of working together with clear expectations about how they would behave towards each other. The cases also showed that processes, such as 'check-back systems', personal dinners and facilitated meetings were established that enabled and encouraged members to practice the use of collaborative language and, in particular, be deliberate in how these words were used. Institutional arrangements such as these helped members to safety practice new skills and have greater confidence in each other and the collaborative process. Further, as SIP members noted these processes built stronger relationships, where they were prepared to 'go the extra mile' (SIP Focus Group 3 2002).

These findings have particular implications for those charged with managing and/or leading collaborative networks. First, language presents as important, but often underestimated tool that can be harnessed to cohesion, collective effort. However, to be most effective time must be invested to craft a language which best suits the needs and aspirations of the network and its members. Failing to do so can lead to confusion and, worse, contested views and actions. Furthermore, it should be remembered that language is not just for conveying information and articulating ideas, it has a powerful role in making and sustaining interactions.

Second, the dual functions of process-minder and driver identified as vital for the successful functioning of the network cases build on and extend many of the existing management/leadership models currently available in the literature (for example, Huxham and Vangen 2005; Chrislip and Larson 1994; Bryson and Crosby 1992), pointing to the need for managers/leaders to both promote and leverage relationships. The notion of process catalyst/strategic leveraging model outlined by Mandell and Keast (2009, 2014) begins to capture the intertwined nature of these two functions. The concept of a process catalyst-type leader points to the need not just to manage but to be actively involved in the process of

building relationships. This is coupled with the concept of strategic leveraging, which highlights the need for deliberative network action in collaborative networks to leverage the synergistic relationships to achieve outcomes. It is argued that changing the terminology is a strong gesture towards adopting a different style of management and leadership.

Although this new way of managing and leading was developed within these two cases this is not always the case and will take some adjustment. Participants must be aware that the way they communicate and use language is likely to make a difference in the collaborative network's outcomes. Care must be taken to use the language as intended and resist the temptation for dilution through overuse. Anklam (2007, 241) reiterates this need to use this language and words accurately, stating the need to be 'intentional about how you weave them into sentences. Use them as if they matter'.

The cases also highlight the need to rethink how participants and others learn about collaborative networks and what actions are needed to be effective in them. The continuing reliance on traditional IOR literature when teaching students or modelling behaviour in collaborative networks is problematic and should be replaced or extended by literature that uses language specifically relevant to collaborative networks (Mandell and Keast 2008). On this, Taylor (2000, 6 cited in; Church et al. 2003, 23); calls for a more sophisticated 'relationship' vocabulary to 'enable us to talk about how we are in relationships'. As an example, the term 'boundary spanning' could be replaced by 'boundaryless' to signal a move from separate organizations and their boundaries to meshed situations where the demarcations between organizations are highly porous, allowing for deeper engagements and the development of new forms of operation. This type of language refocuses attention on the more critical issue of exclusion and inclusion in collaborative networks, rather than focusing on how to protect the boundaries of individual organizations. In this way IOR and IGR language could be extended and strengthened by reflecting on the dynamics of working *within* collaborative networks and the various dynamics of deliberative action.

The difficulty arises in the time and effort it takes to develop this new way of speaking to each other. As the case studies indicate, learning to speak *to* each other and not *around* each other can take from one to two or more years. Most collaborative networks are set up in a political environment in which it is expected that outcomes will be achieved in the first or, at the outside, second year of operation. If we recognize the critical importance of language in collaborative networks then these expectations will have to be changed or, at the least, reconsidered (Keast et al. 2004). In some cases, those setting up networks to solve complex problems have already reflected on the importance of taking the time to better understand each other and have changed their expectations as to the time needed to reach innovative solutions (Annie E. Casey Foundation 1993; Keast et al. 2004). As the importance of generating a new language for the development of effective collaborative networks comes to the fore this change in thinking will need to become more widespread.

Conclusion

When diverse sets of participants get together they often speak at cross purposes. It is therefore no surprise that collaborative networks are often not as successful as they could be. This paper has shown that collaborative networks generate their own distinctive languages, which are important to build cohesion in collaborative networks. This is the language of multiple relationships, flows and different ways of thinking and doing, as distinct from transactions. And facilitating this shift, new expressions are being introduced, while others have been adopted from associated fields such as negotiation. The original move to the language of IGR/IOR required a change in our thinking from single organizations to analyses of transactions between fields of organizations. The same move is now required when leading and managing collaborative networks. We suggest that reframing the management/leadership role, to emphasize both nurturing and leveraging function is a useful first step in the development of this language.

Also highlighted was the importance of using training and other techniques to change the language used by network participants, which in turn affects their mind set, perceptions and attitudes. The challenge is to find inclusive language that enables members to create a new collective identity, aligned with the goals of the collaborative entity that does not put them into conflict with their organization. Ultimately, a better understanding of the impact of language can help make collaborative networks a more effective tool in solving our most complex problems. However it emerges, care needs to be taken not to replace this collaboration language with empty meaning or 'fuzz words'.

There is opportunity for expanding on the research presented here, focused as it is on secondary analysis of extant research. Research into both the Sacramento Water forum and the SIP was sensitive to the role of language in forming collaborative bonds, but it was not central to the investigation. The age of the research projects has allowed a more nuanced and longer-term analysis of the outcomes, but could mean that contemporary trends in collaborative discourse have been overlooked. Future research would benefit from a greater focus on the language used to build collaboration, particularly where, and when, it is generated in the collaborative process by members.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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