

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly

<http://nvs.sagepub.com/>

Book Review: Working Across Boundaries: Making Collaboration Work in Government and Nonprofit Organizations

Heather Getha-Taylor

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly 2004 33: 748

DOI: 10.1177/0899764004269429

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://nvs.sagepub.com/content/33/4/748.citation>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



[Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action](http://www.arnova.org)

Additional services and information for *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://nvs.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://nvs.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

>> [Version of Record](#) - Nov 2, 2004

[What is This?](#)

as nonprofit organizations? Religious doctrine and practices have significant nonrivalry and nonexcludability attributes, and their provision requires substantial trust on the part of adherents to a religion. These are key elements of products that are provided in the modern economy by nonprofit organizations because of various failures of for-profit firms (see my comment on Schmidtchen and Mayer).

References

- Arrow, K. (1963). Uncertainty and the welfare economics of medical care. *American Economic Review*, 53(5), 941-973.
- Ben-Ner, A. (1994). Who benefits from the nonprofit sector? Reforming law and public policy towards nonprofit organizations. *Yale Law Journal*, 104(3), 731-762.
- Ben-Ner, A. (2004). *For-profit, state, and nonprofit: How to cut the pie?* (Working Paper, Industrial Relations Center, Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota). Retrieved from <http://authors.repec.org/pro/pbe150/>
- Bilodeau, M., & Steinberg, R. (in press). Donative nonprofit organizations. In S-C. Kolm & J. Mercier-Ythier (Eds.), *The handbook on the economics of giving, reciprocity, and altruism*. New York: North Holland-Elsevier.
- Hansmann, H. (1990). Why do universities have endowments? *Journal of Legal Studies*, 19, 3-42.
- Schmidtchen, D., & Mayer, A. (1997). Established clergy, friars and the pope: Some institutional economics of the medieval church (with comment by Avner Ben-Ner). *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics*, 153(1), 122-158.
- Steinberg, R. (2003). Economic theories of nonprofit organizations: An evaluation. In H. Anheier & A. Ben-Ner (Eds.), *The study of the nonprofit enterprise: Theories and approaches* (pp. 277-309). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.

Avner Ben-Ner is a professor and the director of the Industrial Relations Center and chair of the Department of Human Resources and Industrial Relations at the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. His current research focuses on (a) the effects of individual characteristics, family background, and identity on trust, giving, and workplace behavior, (b) the effects of organizational structure on performance, and (c) the place of the nonprofit sector in the changing market economy.

Heather Getha-Taylor

Working Across Boundaries: Making Collaboration Work in Government and Nonprofit Organizations, by Russell M. Linden. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002. 302 pp. \$28.00 (cloth).

DOI: 10.1177/0899764004269429

Successful collaboration is an elusive goal; it attracts decision makers with its alluring promises, but often is more myth than miracle. Linden's own experiences with botched collaboration efforts inspired *Working Across Boundaries: Making Collaboration Work in Government and Nonprofit Organizations*. In an era when working together is often required, how to do so is often not so clear. As Linden mentions, "there is far more talk about collaboration than actual collaboration" (p. xvii). Perhaps the most important question to ask is, Why is collaboration so important? Linden sums it up succinctly in the preface of the book when he references the complex and important problems facing multiple

sectors. "Working across boundaries, many leaders are proving that collaborative solutions to these and other problems are both possible and powerful" (p. xxii).

In the first chapter, Linden offers a variety of reasons supporting increased interest in collaborative action. Organizationally advantageous reasons include cost savings, higher quality, opportunity for learning, and the ability to achieve important outcomes. However, there are additional influences driving this trend. According to Linden, there are six prime reasons that organizations and individuals are calling for more and better collaboration between the government and nonprofit sectors: (a) the complexity of the major challenges facing our society, (b) the blurring of many organizational boundaries, (c) the networked nature of our organizational world, (d) the increasing diffusion of authority, (e) the rapid advances in technology, and (f) a public that is increasingly unwilling to accept and fund poor performance (p. 9).

Before providing examples of successful collaboration, Linden cautions readers. First, collaboration is not a cure-all. "It isn't the only way, and it isn't for everyone" (p. 17). Second, successful collaboration does not require lengthy formulas or sophisticated theoretical knowledge. "You know more than you think," says Linden. Last, barriers to successful collaboration often have more to do with sage than sector. "Larger still are the barriers *in our minds*—fear of loss, the need for autonomy and control, hierarchical thinking, and the like" (p. 18).

Linden introduces his theoretical collaboration framework in chapter 4. This model includes relationship and environmental factors, but rests on a set of "basics" such as shared purpose, credible process, and the presence of individuals who act as champions for the collaboration. Chapters 5 through 9 offer in-depth treatments for each segment of the framework: getting the basics right, forming open and trusting relationships, developing high stakes, creating a constituency for collaboration, and building collaborative leadership. Descriptive accounts of nonprofit and governmental collaboration illustrate each segment. Linden collected the data for the accounts from multiple sources including practitioner and scholarly literature, more than 80 interviews, and 22 case studies. Each chapter presents profiles in successful collaboration alongside illustrative diagrams and tables. Hurdles to collaboration are clearly described, and lessons learned from each case provide guidelines for organizations facing similar challenges.

Chapters 10 through 13 address broad collaboration issues such as phasing, enhancing collaboration within a single organization, and building an organizational culture that embraces collaboration. Finally, the text offers a resource section that offers a mix of material for multiple audiences. For practitioners, there are detailed descriptions of particular methods mentioned in the case descriptions as well as a collaborative assessment tool. The question-and-answer section seems well suited for students, whereas the section that explains the sampling and data sources is well suited to answer the methodology questions posed by academic readers.

Working Across Boundaries provides a good mix of perspectives: individual and group perspectives as well as tales of collaboration within an organization and collaboration among various entities. The book successfully integrates scholarly theory and research (McClelland's primary motivations, e.g., p. 38) alongside practitioner concepts such as WIIFM (what's in it for me?). The mix of these two languages allows for an end result that is both meaty and flavorful. If I continue with a food metaphor, I could compare Linden's book to a glossy cookbook. Each picture of collaboration success indicates that if organizations follow the recipe, they will have a perfect end result. And perhaps that is the most troubling aspect of this book. I am just waiting for the soufflé to fall. What are missing are the stories where collaboration just did not work. Certainly, there are lessons that can be learned when the recipe was not just right or when the "cooks" were burned in the process.

For instance, in chapter 3, readers learn that there are multiple challenges for successful collaboration on both the individual and organizational levels, including individual need for power, fear of losing control, lack of trust, turf concerns, differing goals, low reward, different cultures, and funding issues. To overcome these obstacles every time (as illustrated by the examples) seems to be more than just the right people at the right place at the right time with the right attitudes—it seems miraculous. Perhaps Linden already considered this criticism. The author notes in the resource section of the book that he did profile two cases in which collaboration was not successful. And although he mentions the merits of learning from such failed efforts, those lessons are not in this book.

Linden selected the text's cases based on the fact that they serve as examples of successful collaboration. However, I am not convinced that there is a clear definition of collaborative success that can be gleaned from the book that will apply to all organizations or situations. The lessons that are learned from each case certainly support segments of Linden's framework, but it seems that an overarching explanatory theory is missing. And maybe that is the point. Linden's accounts offer a starting point for additional research.

And as research on collaboration continues, scholars and practitioners alike will benefit from Linden's account of the complexity of the process. But instead of trying to make the process even more complicated, Linden ultimately calls for more simplicity. He notes that many nonprofits may find difficulty collaborating with government entities due to the verbal or written divide known as "bureaucratese." Breaking down the walls between organizations may mean creating a shared language that can transcend sectors, or maybe just finding new and creative ways to connect on a personal level. Linden references the Forest Service's (p. 101) weekly chowder meetings to discuss business matters between distanced leadership teams. These informal sessions helped establish relationships, which in turn helped build trust and cooperation.

This example and others, perhaps unexpectedly, speak to crumbling social capital, the loosening of social obligations, and the subsequent effects on collaboration. Linden refers to sociologist Steve Nock, who notes that social obligations are “both debt and promise.” These unspoken agreements exist “only in the past and future, not in the present” (p. 240). Just as in personal relationships, Linden notes that professional collaborative relationships will undoubtedly suffer in the absence of shared obligation and trust.

Finally, this book presents a golden nugget of hope for even the most dismal collaborative situations: the power of positive thinking. Linden quotes Pascal: “It is easier to act ourselves into a better mode of thinking than to think ourselves into a better mode of acting.” What seems most important in terms of collaborating successfully is the belief that parties with different values, goals, and cultures *can* work together—despite the hurdles and challenges that would make them think otherwise.

Heather Getha-Taylor is a Ph.D. student at Syracuse University in the Department of Public Administration. Her studies include human resource management, organization theory, and leadership development.

Laura Tuennerman-Kaplan

Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History, edited by Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004. 467 pp. £18.99 (paperback).

DOI: 10.1177/0899764004269426

In the small but growing field of the history of philanthropy, *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility* is a massive book, not only in terms of size—467 pages—but also in terms of the scope of the book and the task it undertakes. As a volume offering a view of the current “state of the field,” this work is arguably the most important historical study of philanthropy to be published in recent years. Editors and authors Friedman and McGarvie, along with 17 additional contributors, have put together a collection of essays that chronicle American philanthropy over the course of 400 years, from 1601 until 2001. Rather than conceptualizing this work as a collection of essays, however, the editors have aimed for something more comprehensive and synthetic. To a great extent, they have succeeded in this endeavor, offering an enhanced historical understanding of the American philanthropic tradition by tying the essays together through the highlighting of eight themes reflecting the nature of American philanthropy. These themes, discussed most directly in an introduction by Friedman, “Philanthropy in America: Historicism and Its Discontents,” reveal the shared beliefs of the authors. Put another way, these themes highlight conclusions drawn from a large amount of historical research produced by multiple authors about the nature of philanthropy in the United States.