

Collaboration for Public Private Partnerships: In Support of an Entrepreneurial Ethos?

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Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to examine entrepreneurial traits, values and characteristics of public private partnerships in striving for a distinctive kind of ethos supportive to their operational efficiency. In doing so it employs the notion of collaboration as a theory vehicle for achieving policy and organisational goals. Methodology-wise it relies upon qualitative research that took place in Nigeria earlier this year. The main tool of investigation is semi-structured interviewing of key policy individuals. The paper investigates the capacity by public private partnerships to integrate entrepreneurial ethos as a way for efficient performance and management. Despite the fact that empirical evidence justifies existence of this ethos in terms of innovative interventions, partnership transformation, partnership efficiency, effective management and value creation, this comes at a cost: evidence of corruption and societal protest about increase of toll tax have been two of the most noted pieces of evidence of the public's response to partnership work outcomes.

Keywords: collaboration, public private partnerships, entrepreneurial ethos, Nigeria

1. Introduction

It has been widely argued that entrepreneurial ethos can be integrated in organisational operation by applying a pragmatic, action oriented approach to the moral arena for sustaining innovation and value creation (Surie and Ashley, 2008). This is perhaps more evident into today's collaborative world of organisations. Collaborative activities have become more prominent and extensive in many countries around the world (Appuhami, Perera and Perera, 2011; Selsky and Parker, 2005; Berger *et al*, 2004), especially when it concerns collaborations around local regeneration issues (de Bettignies and Ross, 2009; Muir, 2004; Ball, Le Ny and Maginn, 2004). Gray (1996: 58) defines collaboration as a "*logical and necessary response to turbulent conditions under which organisations become interdependent with each other and offer solutions by building a collective capacity to respond to these conditions*". Due to economic and technological changes, and shrinking of financial revenues, governments around the world have responded to socio-economic revitalisation by delegating economic powers upward to global and downward to local institutions (Harding 1994; Gore 1991).

Public-private partnerships (PPPs) then as an institutional expression of collaborative efforts seem to have the capacity in representing arenas in which entrepreneurial ethos could thrive. This is what this paper argues about taking as context of empirical research the case of local regeneration partnerships in Nigeria. Evidence is based upon primary collection of data that it is envisaged to be confirmed by further qualitative research findings to be collected in the autumn 2014.

2. Theory 1: Collaboration as an approach for achieving entrepreneurial ethos

What is Collaboration?

Despite the fact that collaboration can be an integral part of an organisational structure it is debateable how accurately someone could define it. According to Sullivan and Skelcher (2002), collaboration can take different forms such as: policy networks, principal-agent relationships, social networks, community-led initiatives. In the light of this, it is perhaps worthwhile to begin with a description of collaboration as an outcome of network action. According to Hall (2000), networks refer to the development of linkages between actors (organisations and individuals) in which the relationships become more formalised upon establishing and maintaining mutual interests. In this respect, the nature of these linkages can range from 'loose' formations to more lasting organisational structures and relationships. Mandell (1999; cited by Hall, 2000) identifies a continuum of such collaborative efforts starting from interactive contacts between two or more actors up to a collective or network structure where there is a broad mission and joint interdependent action. Such arrangements take on board tasks that reach beyond the concurrent actions of individual operators.

Based on the above Mattessich and Monsey identify collaboration as a more

...durable and persuasive relationship; it brings previously separate organisations into a structure with full commitment to a common mission; the sustainability of these relationships is dependent upon planning and well defined reliable communication channels operating on many levels; authority is determined by the collaboration structures and risk is much greater because each participant contributes reputation and owned resources; the latter are pooled jointly and secured for a longer term effort that is managed by the collaborative structure; product outcomes are shared and more accomplished jointly than could have individually

(Mattessich and Monsey, 1992: cited by Greer, 2001)

As Huxham argues, an essential move is to agree about the purpose of creating a collaborative scheme. In view of this, persuasions for collaborators to ensure that they have 'concrete, attainable goals' (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992; cited by Eden and Huxham, 2001: 374), 'to identify and appreciate a common sense of purpose' (Gray, 1985; cited by Eden and Huxham, 2001: 374), to involve the community (Barr and Huxham, 1996) and to create 'a positive, purposeful relationship' (Cropper, 1996: 82) are common between researchers as well as practitioners. In addition, arguments about having clarity of purpose (Hardy et al, 1992; cited by Eden and Huxham, 2001) and long term goals in which the relationship plays a clear role (Kanter, 1994) can perhaps give a broader picture of what is needed in order to achieve collaboration. Having said this, circumstances for attaining collaboration vary. For example, modest, low risk, collaborative arrangements are the only way forward when the environment is hostile. On the contrary, large-scale, big risk collaborative projects are needed in cases in which collaboration has previously failed.

Attributes of Collaboration

Defining relevant attributes is significant, as it can help exploring the concept of collaboration even further. This would be more explicit if it could fit into particular approaches such as when preconditions of issue-setting, direction-setting and implementation-setting occur. If these preconditions do not occur then it might be difficult to identify if collaboration has been established. In an attempt to describe collaboration and its properties Huxham (1991) argues about four characteristics which are significant for the potential success of a collaborative project. The first characteristic is commitment to collaboration and the role of the representatives of each participating group involved. If the representative to the collaborative scheme has an individualistic perspective then it is difficult to be committed to the values of collaboration. The second characteristic is linked with the successful agreement over an issue. Each of the organisations involved, although having something in common with the others, has its own particular remit and mission. In this way there is a tendency by some of the participants to become quite quickly disturbed because they feel that certain short term problems are not being resolved. As a result, a minimum agreement over the collaborative potential is considered as essential (ibid.). A third characteristic (Huxham, 1991) is about the fruitful agreement over the participating actors. It could be suggested that participating groups do not have the same level of interest in collaboration. Moreover, they tend to be quite different in terms of size, power and financial resources. As a consequence, each participating group has a different level of ability to contribute to collaboration. Finally, the expectations of the participating groups in order for the collaborative group to flourish constitute another characteristic. This gives expression to the need for the participants to see their expectations fulfilled (Huxham, 1991). In this way tensions can be balanced by interested parties (Barr and Huxham, 1996). However, the way of seeing the potential of the collaborative scheme may vary significantly as there is not necessarily an authority relationship between the participating groups. All the about would need a certain degree of organisational ethos in order to be applied to the case of entrepreneurial activities. This could be achievable, as we can see in the next section.

Collaboration for Achieving Entrepreneurial Ethos

It has been argued that entrepreneurship can be seen as a "societal phenomenon", which draws attention to results of entrepreneurial behaviour that ultimately defines the heterogeneity of environmental conditions (Fuller et al, 2007). In this respect, we might want to take a social constructionist view under consideration of how entrepreneurship operates so that a distinctive moral space would be allowed to interfere (Anderson and Smith, 2008). Having said this, Llewellyn et al (2007) argue that there seem to exist two different types of entrepreneurs regarding the development of ethos throughout the years: an older one based upon the Weberian proposition that described the ethical character of the entrepreneur as firmly oriented in protestant temperance and reliability, shrewdness and devotion to family and business; and a contemporary one about

an entrepreneur ascribed as a human being of obsession with danger and risk taking, of preoccupation with breaking rules. Perhaps the latter just suggests life norms that society goes through today in which an entrepreneur of this type would not be characterised as a persona-non-grata but quite the opposite.

On the contrary, while individualism and free market rules might be useful in acquiring efficiency, the need for intervention to receive equity and access can be proof of the failure of the price system. Additionally, values are intrinsically determined by the economic system, which deals with the allocation of resources to satisfy individuals' preferences (Surie and Ashley, 2008). Moreover, it has been accepted that the logic of governing ethics in entrepreneurial firms is philosophically different from that in operationally hierarchical firms. The latter, because of their emphasis on specialisation of labour, centralisation, and conformance with authority, offer little in the way of opportunities for role-taking or responsibility for the consequences of their decisions. On the other hand, entrepreneurial organisations require continual interaction with others. In this way, relationships within and between groups focus on mutual trust, interdependence, broad dispersal of control and responsibility, and conflict resolution via bargaining and mutual problem-solving (Solymossy and Masters, 2002).

Nevertheless, someone will have to accept the suggestions that bringing people together can be seen as an important aspect of creating an entrepreneurial ethos in an organisation. As Vangen and Huxham argue (2003) helping people communicate, for example in a face-to-face interaction is key for empowering them. This is because such ethos can pursue the continuing dialogue of action and interaction entrepreneurial processes really need in order to survive and flourish as it explained in the case of public-private partnerships in Nigeria in the next section.

3. Theory 2: Collaboration in developing and sustaining entrepreneurial ethos for public private partnerships

Table 1: Collaboration criteria that indicate entrepreneurial ethos and potential implications they produce (Osikhuemhe Okwilagwe, 2014, an adapted version of a model she has been utilising for her PhD studies)

Collaboration Criteria	Potential Implications for Public-Private Partnerships that Indicate Entrepreneurial Ethos
Clarity and Realism of Purpose Goals Resource Sharing Information Sharing	<i>Innovative Interventions</i>
Commitment and Ownership Resource Sharing Information Sharing Collaborative Communications	<i>Partnership Transformation</i>
Collaborative Communications Developing Confidence and Maintaining Trust	<i>Partnership's Efficiency</i>
Developing Confidence and Maintaining Trust Engaging Community Collaborative Governing Engaging Community Participation	<i>Effective Management of Partnerships and Sustainable Improvement of the Local Community</i>
Clarity and Realism of Purpose Goals Resource Sharing Information Sharing Collaborative Communications Developing Confidence and Maintaining Trust	<i>Creating Value</i>

The number of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in both developed and developing countries has increased significantly in the last twenty years (Appuhami, Perera and Perera, 2011; Selsky and Parker, 2005). Pioneered in the United Kingdom, the concept of PPPs emerged from a government point of view as being fundamental to its public sector reform programme across wide areas of public policy (Couch *et al*, 2010). In recent years, the variety and extent of PPPs have widened from international partnerships to include local and national concerns (Beauregard, 1998; Selsky and Parker, 2005). In these PPPs, individual organisations collaborate to

address challenges facing various sectors such as education, transportation, health care, infrastructure, environmental sustainability and local regeneration (de Bettignies and Ross. 2009).

In an attempt to identify patterns that could promote and sustain entrepreneurial ethos the model in Table 1 is used. It offers a range of criteria that could be regarded as collaborative policy and operation elements. These elements strongly indicate that collaboration can offer differentiated ethos to normal hierarchy structures, as it was explained in section 2.

4. Methodology

This paper refers to the dissemination of a pilot study's findings and in this respect it can/should be linked with further research. The findings came up from 14 interviews that were conducted in Nigeria between February and April 2014. Via an on-going correspondence and snowballing technique applied in three organisations 7 further interviews were conducted outside the prearranged 7 ones. Of the 7 organisations contacted, 3 were from the public sector (this included government institutions, external experts and consultants) and 4 from the private sector (this included top management from financial institutions and other external advisors). The interviews were conducted on the premises of each organisation and they varied between 42 and 125 minutes.

Although the primary purpose of this investigation was to justify collaboration as the core element in the life cycle of a public-private partnerships the research findings offer the opportunity to detect importance of having entrepreneurial ethos as part of this process too. As Denscombe (2010) asserts interviewing should be aware of opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences as well as that some issues are more sensitive and rather personal than others. Issues of this kind seem to have applied to the actual interviewing process that took place when a member of the authoring team met PPP officials in Nigeria. In addition, a significant part of findings especially the ones referring to the policy context of partnership development in Nigeria are based upon secondary data collection.

5. Collaboration and entrepreneurial ethos in Nigeria

The perceived need for PPPs in Nigeria reflects (amongst others) local regeneration reforms. Nigeria is recognised as the second largest economy in Africa and the largest in sub-Saharan Africa, in spite of this, the mismanagement of the country's resources has greatly constrained the country's economic growth and development (Olaseni and Alade, 2012). This has led to insufficient funding by both the federal and state governments in maintaining local infrastructure and service provision (Adedeji *et al*, 2005). With responsibilities for addressing local regeneration issues passed from federal to state level and with the states each year expected to do more with less financial funding some of them have been looking to include partners from other sectors closest to these issues in the design and implementation of solutions (Lasker *et al*. 2001). Moreover, the beginning of the "*third world debt crisis*" raised significant concern for United Nations financial donors such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as well as the Organisation of Economic and Cooperation Development (OECD) (Miraftab, 2004). When policy makers in a country are faced with a new crisis, there is usually the trend to use or adopt solutions that have been implemented in the past or implemented in another country (Couch *et al*, 2010). The prescribed solution for governments in developing countries has been to initiate certain economic adjustments such as public expenditure cutbacks, decentralisation, privatisation, and public-private partnerships (The World Bank 1990; USAID 2013). Regarding the latter option their use for policy implementation has been seen as paramount.

This research investigated PPPs for local regeneration in Nigeria that have been pioneered by the Lagos State government and Federal Capital Territory Abuja (The World Bank, 2011). Furthermore, the country's Minister of Finance announced in the 2013 budget that there was a need for more investment in regeneration projects. He indicated that the national government recognised that Nigeria's local regeneration projects deficit remains one of the binding constraints to growth in the economy (The Budget Office, 2013). Okonjo-Iweala (2013), states that the strategy is to prioritise regeneration projects investments in the budget, and also to leverage additional external financing for these investments in the country. There are also plans to expand the use of PPPs which will attract co-investors from home and abroad such as pension's funds.

From the discussion above, the importance of having public-private partnerships in place in Nigeria is very evident. The core issue is to investigate, analyse and explain to what extent partnership operation allows for

development of a relevant entrepreneurial ethos that can shape their performance. Research findings support this, as it can be seen in Table 2. Collection of primary data was held from a major PPP project in Lagos State (the construction of the Phases I, II and III of the Lekki - Epe Toll Road) which has been the first of its kind at this level. In this respect, interview participants were extensively involved in the development of contractual arrangements and in the operations of the PPP and played various roles in decision making. It was an accident then that a number of interviewees declined to respond to particular questions, or go into details and preferred instead to give superficial answers. It can be argued though that despite these incidents data collection was generally well-completed.

Table 2: Collaboration criteria and findings that indicate entrepreneurial ethos within public-private partnership work in Nigeria

Collaboration Criteria	Potential Implications for Public-Private Partnerships that Indicate Entrepreneurial Ethos – Findings from the Pilot study in Nigeria
Clarity and Realism of Purpose Goals Resource Sharing Information Sharing	<i>Innovative Interventions: The importance (sanctity as it was noted) of the arrangement</i>
Commitment and Ownership Resource Sharing Information Sharing Collaborative Communications	<i>Partnership Transformation: Participants to have necessary collaborative capabilities</i>
Collaborative Communications Developing Confidence and Maintaining Trust	<i>Partnership's Efficiency: Deliverability and delivery as outcome matter a lot</i>
Developing Confidence and Maintaining Trust Engaging Community Collaborative Governing Engaging Community Participation	<i>Effective Management of Partnerships and Sustainable Improvement of the Local Community: Investors attempt to recoup the costs and make returns ALTHOUGH... ...local residents seek improvement of their day-to-day lives</i>
Clarity and Realism of Purpose Goals Resource Sharing Information Sharing Collaborative Communications Developing Confidence and Maintaining Trust	<i>Creating Value: Serve not only the shareholders' value but also the whole society BUT corruption is a major concern</i>

According to findings PPP ownership in Nigeria typically rests with the government. Having said this, regulations give the right to a private investor of applying for a form of lease. Typically then while the government would retain the responsibility for issues like social settlements and risk of work construction it is up to the private investor to maintain the actual project and receive the consequent financial benefits so that they become responsible for the project's management. As a private sector consultant contended "*there is a major consideration beyond profits beyond money; the respect for the agreement that has been reached, so for me those are the two key issues: Profitability and [most importantly] sanctity of the deal*".

With regard to how partnership transformation can be achieved a public sector partner argued that:

"I said one of the ways you ensure delivery is that the people you bring to do the delivery have the capability, which comes from a lot of things such as the delivery of policy or that people are happy every time to support your service. When you get that, your sense of integrity would also ensure that you [the partnership] also are self regulating [and not the government]"

Deliverability that would consequently bring actual delivery of outcomes comes up as a main issue for partnership efficiency according to the findings. In this respect, participants argued that partnership structure as well as allocation of risk constitutes issues that matter significantly. Additionally, allocation of responsibility between the different partners is an element that can promote a great sense of entrepreneurial ethos. Moreover, it is the attribute of partnership management that can warrant sustainability of partnership work in long-term. Participants emphasised on the fact that "*there is usually a maintenance period, over which the investors seek to recoup the cost and make a reasonable return... reaching a point where they would have the asset back... the guarantor in this case must likely a public entity in this case or government or otherwise*".

Notwithstanding, things do not work as such every time as: *"The erroneous believe that where people used to spend 3 hrs on the road, they would now spend 30mins then they would be happy and they would be willing to pay the toll fare"* although *"some protested about the toll fares. Due to that protest the government was forced on the one hand to slash down d rate by almost 50% and this [of course] led to revenue reduction"*. The entrepreneurial ethos cannot be sustained all the time, accordingly.

In discussing the Lekki - Epe Toll Road project, participants compared it with other past and current PPP arrangements. A range of issues were raised more importantly regarding the need for a more cohesive and comprehensive regulatory and legal framework, transparency in the selection of partners, accountability of the PPP to general public, importance of guarantees and the huge reliance on contractual and memorandum of agreements to cover issues relating to ownership and commitment, trust and conflicts. Moreover, they suggested that a number of issues tend to reoccur such as: need for having private sector participation in place; the growing need for more PPP projects in areas of infrastructure development and local regeneration; necessity for the government to seek and engage more expert advice in terms of PPP arrangements; need for better community engagement and participation; better clarity of roles and responsibilities of individual partners; issues around corruption and self-interest; better monitoring procedures throughout the lifecycle of a PPP.

"Ultimately we believe it is a model that would help to serve our purposes as well as the nation's purposes. Of course there is another very important thing as well, it is not just about doing projects to optimise share holders' value. As an organisation we are very committed to making our own decent contribution to the society, in ways we believe we can assist African societies, including Nigeria... [as] infrastructure helps to promote economic development and growth" (from a participant from the private sector).

The latter statement emphasises on the ability of partnerships to create value and therefore potentially significant entrepreneurial ethos, one that can change the way organisations work in Nigeria. Nonetheless, endemic problems keep being in place such as corruption because it is *"anything that boxes the system, something that is at the low end of the spectrum as opposed to best practices"*.

At the end of the day, it might be that *"we have to put more resources into doing research, to find out from the communities, as opinions were sought but not comprehensively enough. If partnership arrangements were done properly they would have been able to uncover some of the issues that propped up later...[for example] there must be another road local road that people must pass as an option, you cannot force people to pass our toll road, like it is done in developed countries"*. The last phrase by a private sector consultant perhaps epitomises the significance of having a new ethos in place, one that can support development of innovation through partnership work one that should also take into account the specific Nigerian political and social settings.

6. Conclusions

Further discussion is probably necessary in order to establish a holistic view about the meaning of the encountered findings. In brief, these findings can be presented as: a) Ownership of partnership arrangements in Nigeria typically rests with the government and this consequently creates restrictions into the scope and ability of other sector participants; b) Deliverability of policies comes up as a main issue for partnership efficiency; c) There exists an expressed ability of partnerships to create value and therefore potentially significant entrepreneurial ethos however this would need to be enhanced further.

The latter questions the steady existence of entrepreneurial ethos in partnership work, the core element of this investigation. The complexity of issues that shape entrepreneurial organisations require continual interaction with others can impact of the continuity of this particular ethos. Nevertheless, entrepreneurial ethos applied via partnership work is a very "flexible" notion to be regarded as a normative value.

Regarding future steps a potential research would look for themes that could include: need for private sector participation and for the government to seek and engage more expert advice in terms of partnership arrangements; need for a further enhanced community engagement and participation; clarification of roles and responsibilities of individual partners; issues around corruption and self-interest;

When it comes to the real question about the actual value of having partnerships in place it is encouraging to mention what a private sector partner said that:

"I think they [partnerships] have a future, as there is no other choice: that is the good thing. ...The bottom line is that the financial requirements of infrastructural development in Nigeria vis a vis the resources available means that whether the government likes or not they would have to continue to consider PPPs".

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