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An Introduction

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Making Interorganizational Relationships Work: An Introduction

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It has been said that success is a double edged sword. The success of the 2004 special issue of *M@n@gement* (vol. 7, n. 3), on interorganizational collaborations and alliances caused the journal website to crash due to the unexpected high number of paper downloads. Given that success, and upgrades to the journal server, we at the Innovative Collaborations, Alliances and Networks Research (ICAN) Centre at the University of Technology, Sydney and the *M@n@gement* journal decided to team up for another special issue on interorganizational alliances and networks. The response to the call for papers in July 2005 was immense with 51 papers submitted. Of the 51 papers submitted, 12 were rejected before the double-blind review stage, and of those that made it to the review stage 12 authors were asked to resubmit papers for review. In the end, the seven papers in this special issue made the long and arduous journey to publication.

Each paper presented in this special issue was perceived by the reviewers as offering novel and interesting insights into the nature of interorganizational and network relationships. An underlying concern in all the papers in this special issue is “what makes interorganizational relationships work?” The responses are varied.

Paul Hibbert and Aidan McQuade build a strong case for tradition and its dynamic interplay within culture in building identity in collaboration. Hibbert and McQuade’s contribution causes us to reflect on issues of tradition and how traditions can often cause problems in creating effective interorganizational relationships. They offer advice on how the concern for tradition allows participants to develop useful language that supports more effective and reflective practice in collaborative arrangements.

In his article, Alfons van Marrewijk concerns himself with control and commitment in complex forms of projects, or mega-projects. Van Marrewijk’s paper makes an important contribution to public-private partnerships —an increasingly popular approach to the construction of public infrastructure projects. One of the central themes of inter-orga-

nizational cooperation in project-based alliances is the control-versus-commitment dilemma. Government and private industry organizations are distinct; however, government organizations enter relationships with statutory and regulatory expectations sometimes not conducive to interorganizational relationships. For van Marrewijk, the tension in collaborations comes by way of getting the balance between control and commitment right. He shows how dominant control involves risks of partners losing commitment to the project.

Miri Levin-Rozalis and Dorit Tubin introduce us to the concept of "double rules and multiple roles" in interorganizational relationships. The authors argue for the complexity of the actors' multiple roles in decision-making processes across multiple levels of the interorganizational collaboration. As such, they offer a particular example of interorganizational cooperation enabling collaborations to function towards goal achievement. Levin-Rozalis' and Tubin's contribution comes by illustrating that for every individual within an interorganizational collaborative partnership there are several formal decision-making positions occurring at different structural levels. The authors cause one to reflect on how one might best design interorganizational collaborative arrangements that account for the complex nature of "doing" collaboration.

Alan O'Sullivan's paper also poses an important question: where organizations work together to execute highly interdependent tasks, over many years, what is the likely fundamental basis to effectively organizing inter-firm exchanges? Rather than concentrating on the issue of trust as the primary factor in maintaining long-term interorganizational collaboration, O'Sullivan focuses on the issue of power. Specifically, he argues that power imbalances provide a fundamental and unavoidable basis for interorganizational collaboration. The extent to which trusting relations arise will be a response to how power is configured and used in the network. Power and power imbalance affects trust and therefore the long-term viability of collaborative relationships.

Desirée Knoppen and Ellen Christiaanse focus on an important form of interorganizational collaboration, supply chain partnerships. Such partnerships are seen as a form of organizing that help organizations deal with increasing environmental uncertainty and change. Despite the growth in such forms of interorganizational relationships they argue empirical failures still outweigh the theoretical promises of these partnerships. Taking issue with the burgeoning body of literature in the area, Knoppen and Christiaanse develop a multidisciplinary lens for understanding supply chain partnerships as a form of interorganizational collaboration. By drawing from the organizational change literature, they argue that their lens accounts for the transformational and temporal nature necessary for making sense of supply chain partnerships. The authors integrate various bodies of literature by pointing out their specific change perspective as well as the transition zones between the underlying assumptions made in that literature. They argue that the result is a transformational lens that contributes to a better understanding of supply chain partnerships by facilitating a more fluid, temporal, and comprehensive picture of such partnerships.

Where Knoppen and Christiaanse are concerned with change in the supply chains, Franck Brulhart's key concern is the interplay between "experience" and alliance success and failure in logistic partnerships. For Brulhart, the collaboration is constituted by the accumulation of diverse experiences; be it the experience of a partner, alliance management or so on. Supply chain management alliances aim to optimise the vertical and horizontal links which exist between their value chain and that of their partners. As with Knoppen and Christiaanse, Brulhart asserts that while the use of supply chain partnerships is growing, so to is the failure rate. Brulhart focuses his lens on "experience". He argues that the lack of research on the determinants of logistic alliance performance should cause us to question the critical factors of these particular partnerships. In specific, Brulhart argues that the respective role and impact of different types of experience should be the key concern. Brulhart seeks to address a number of key issues centred on "experience": does experience actually matter? Can companies learn from past or present experience? Does accumulation of experience improve alliance performance? Using organizational learning theory Brulhart makes an important contribution in seeking to address such questions.

Finally, Cristina Boari, Luciano Fratocchi, and Manuela Presutti examine how social capital works as an important success factor in interorganizational networks. Specifically, they concern themselves with knowledge required for the internationalisation of high-tech start-ups. Boari and her colleagues show how lack of knowledge about foreign markets is the main obstacle for the international growth of start-ups. Contemporary start-ups seem to pursue global markets quite rapidly compared to "older" forms of start-ups, where entry into international markets was quite slow. Thus knowledge and experience gained through international expertise is a form of social capital, and a critical success factor in modern start-ups. Drawing from structural, relational and cognitive dimensions of social capital theory the authors examine whether knowledge acquired from external relationships becomes the most important factor in facilitating the foreign development of high-tech start-ups. Interestingly, a start-up firm's international customers might be an invaluable source of the knowledge acquisition process abroad, and thus expediting success in international markets. Most importantly, the authors emphasise the need for a greater recognition of social capital as a multifaceted concept with differing impacts on knowledge management of a start-up abroad.

After reading the papers in this special issue one may be able to recognise the complexity in thinking about interorganizational collaborations. Notice we have avoided defining collaboration in this introduction. Each paper has a different conception of interorganizational collaboration, be it a project alliance, a supply-chain, an international network or so on. More importantly, underlying the seven papers chosen here is the fact that interorganizational collaborations occur under conditions of high uncertainty and ambiguity. While such organizational arrangements offer, at face value, a respite from the uncertain-

ty and ambiguity of today's world, the process of collaborating comes with its own complexity and ambiguity. As such, collaboration can be an even more complex mode of organizing. Issues such as tradition and identity, control and commitment, roles, power, level of experience and knowledge, and social capital all are important aspects of collaborative success.

In the end, we trust that the articles in this special issue raise your interest on aspects of interorganizational collaborations that you may have not previously thought about, or resonate the things you have thought about.

Tyrone, Emmanuel, Stewart, and Martin

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