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Stakeholder Collaboration and Innovation: A Study of Public Policy Initiation at the State Level

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A field study was conducted to determine whether diverse, competing stakeholders in a domain can use collaboration to intentionally initiate innovative public policy affecting that domain. The subjects consisted of 61 participants representing 24 stakeholder groups gathered by a U.S. governor that met regularly from 1985 to 1987 to develop a "visionary proposal" for the state's public education. The authors sought to differentiate the substance of collaboration from its result and devised a sociological concept of collaboration with five elements: transmutational purpose, explicit and voluntary membership, organization, interactive process, and temporal property. The results reveal that the stakeholders did collaborate to initiate public policy. The results also show that the collaboration was associated with innovation as hypothesized and that this innovation was incremental rather than radical in nature.

A common assumption has been that public policy innovation is mostly a function of the executive branch (Polsby, 1984, pp. 1-5). For example, Lindblom (1968) credits executive leadership with the initiation of new policies, noting that "perhaps 80 percent of bills enacted into law originate in the executive branch" (p. 86). Other

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researchers proclaim that Congress is the principal initiator of new policies (Johannes, 1972; Moe & Teel, 1970; Sundquist, 1981) or that congressional staffers and administrators are "policy entrepreneurs" who specialize in identifying problems and finding innovative solutions (Murphy, 1971; Price, 1971). Polsby (1984), however, argues that "policy innovations tend to belong to people who take an interest in them" (p. 172) and that these individuals are not the decision makers or politicians but rather are usually "relatively quiet figures" who "think deeply about problems, who search for and invent alternatives, and who keep alternative solutions alive and available to decision-makers" (p. 174).

The question arises as to whether it is possible to *intentionally* assemble a *group* of interested policy actors for the express purpose of initiating innovative public policy.[1] Can group members representing competing and diverse stakeholder interests work together to develop innovative policy recommendations for decision makers?[2] Is *stakeholder collaboration* an appropriate and practical means for generating innovative public policy?

The investigation of stakeholder collaboration as a means for initiating policy innovation is important for several reasons. First, a class of policy issues has been identified for which stakeholder collaboration may provide an effective mechanism for problem resolution (Gray, 1989). Characterized as "messes" (Ackoff, 1974) and "problematiques" (Trist, 1979), these issues are technically complex, scientifically uncertain, and ill defined. Multiple stakeholders have a vested interest in their solution, yet different perspectives on the problems and their solutions often lead to adversarial relations (Gray, 1989).

Second, existing social means for solving these messes are often inadequate and in some cases may even exacerbate the problems. Reliance on party politics, a passive electorate, and centrally formed policies in technocratic bureaucracies often have resulted in fragmented problem definitions and piecemeal solutions implemented without regard to the diversity of concerns and interests of all but a few stakeholders. As a consequence, some analysts have viewed these as less acceptable mechanisms for problem solving (Emery, 1977; Trist, 1979; Vickers, 1977). Dissatisfaction with the ability of unilateral approaches and the adversarial legal process to resolve such complex multiparty problems has been growing (Fisher & Ury, 1981; Gray, 1989; Susskind & Cruikshank, 1987), leading some policy analysts (Bozeman & Straussman, 1990; Heymann, 1987; Luke, 1984) to advocate more cooperation and collaboration among stakeholder groups in the formulation and implementation of public policy.

Numerous benefits of collaboration for mediating stakeholder interactions have been postulated (Carpenter & Kennedy, 1988; Gray, 1989). Of particular interest for this article is Gray's hypothesis that collaboration enhances the potential to discover novel, innovative solutions. Gray defines collaboration as "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is

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possible" (Gray, 1989, p. 5). The process leads to a shared "richer, more comprehensive" understanding of a problem that enables the participants to find new solutions that no one party could have envisioned or enacted alone (Gray, 1989, p. 5). Some evidence supporting the relationship between collaboration and innovation also comes from research on business (Dimancescu & Botkin, 1986; Hallisey, Sanabria, & Salter, 1987) and public-private partnerships (Austrom & Patterson, 1989), and from a study of policy change in New Zealand (Bradley & Levett, 1973).

Another opportunity to examine the relationship between stakeholder collaboration and innovation occurred recently in the public policy domain and is discussed in this article. A diverse group of stakeholders were called together by a U.S. governor to develop a "visionary proposal" for state public education. This strategic opportunity enabled the researchers to structure a study addressing three important questions:

- To what extent does evidence of stakeholder interaction suggest that collaboration actually occurred?
- To what extent does evidence suggest that the stakeholders' interactions produced innovation?
- To the extent that evidence shows that collaboration and/or innovation occurred, what general knowledge can be gained about the relationship between collaboration and innovation?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Collaboration

The term *collaboration*, introduced by Emery and Trist (1973) and elaborated further by Trist (1983), has not enjoyed wide currency among social scientists. Carpenter and Kennedy (1988) and Susskind and Cruikshank (1987) recently have addressed the concept in their work on multiparty negotiation and conflict resolution but do not actually use the term themselves.[3] Indeed, Gray's (1989) work not only offers what appears to be the only comprehensive discussion of the terms but (by necessity) stands as the point of departure for the research reported in this article. Yet, although her concept is useful for applied settings, it has several limitations that render it less effective as a research tool.[4] To build a concept of collaboration that has greater utility for research, we must capture the term's core meaning.[5]

Derived from the French verb *collaborer* (*col* means "together," and *laborare* "to work"), *collaboration* is defined as "work in combination with . . . especially at literary or artistic (or scientific) production" (Fowler & Fowler, 1964, p. 234; *Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 1971, p. 464). The application of the word to "literary, artistic, (or scientific) production" highlights collaboration's purposeful, creative, and productive elements (Bradley, 1982). What this means can be clarified further by referring to the term *elaboration*, which is defined as "the process of producing or developing from crude materials . . . the process of working out in detail, developing, perfecting (an invention, a theory, a literary work), etc." (*Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, 1971, p. 839). Thus the purposeful, creative, and

productive elements of collaboration involve a process of working with raw materials to transmute them into a developed product.[6] These core elements may be translated into the sociological concept presented next.

Sociological Elements

The first element of collaboration is a *transmutational purpose*: shared, goal-directed activity among the participants to fashion a set of raw materials (objects, ideas, or social relations) into a developed product.

The second element is *explicit and voluntary membership* whereby the parties freely participate, knowing and agreeing on who is involved and in what capacity.

The third element is *organization*. Because work is complex and elaborate, involving a creative, transmutational process, planning and coordinating task-specialized activities is required. Mutual interdependence necessitates joint decision making and an agreed-upon set of norms and rules to determine direction, organization, and action.

The fourth element is an *interactive process*—that is, sustained reflexive (self-critical) interaction among the participants. Because the joint project is a creative endeavor fraught with inevitable and unanticipated technical, organizational, and process difficulties, virtually all aspects of the process are open to constant reexamination and reevaluation.

The final element is a *temporal property* (time). Collaboration is a temporary social form specific to a singular common end. Once the joint project has accomplished its goal, the collaboration is dissolved by the participants. Insofar as an arrangement becomes transformed into an ongoing endeavor, it has evolved beyond collaboration into a more permanent organizational form.

Combining these elements (summarized in Appendix A), the following concept of collaboration is constructed:

> Collaboration is a temporary social arrangement in which two or more social actors work together toward a singular common end requiring the transmutation of materials, ideas, and/or social relations to achieve that end.[7]

Innovation

Innovation is defined as the generation, translation, and implementation of new ideas into practice (Van de Ven, Angle, & Poole, 1989; Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbek, 1973). Unlike routine action, innovation is a disjuncture from past activity. Innovation is something—either a product or process—that is unique and new to a particular context and involves a change in the standard operating procedures and routines in that context.

In terms of the *degree of change* involved or implied by an innovation, a basic distinction can be made between two types of innovations: *incremental innovation* and *radical innovation*. This distinction is discussed further later with respect to our investigation of the relationship between collaboration and innovation.

Relative to established normative frameworks (Argyris & Schon, 1978), incremental innovation represents a first-order change (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). The novelty it brings to practice in a particular context involves only modifications,

refinements, or marginal improvements readily interpreted within the existing normative order. In contrast, radical innovation represents a break with established ways of thinking and acting. It involves a second-order change, a qualitative alteration to the normative order (Hage, 1980; Watzlawick et al., 1974).

In the domain of public policy, innovation has been defined as the process of introducing new ideas into public sector practice (Polsby, 1984). Researchers have found it an extremely complex process involving multiple, highly interrelated elements and reflexive processes (Bradley & Levett, 1973; Gans, 1968; Moynihan, 1970). Yet researchers have also generally agreed that distinctive stages can be identified as part of the process: policy initiation, agenda setting, choice, implementation, and institutionalization (Kingdon, 1984; Polsby, 1984; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Yin, 1979).

In our research, we focused on the policy initiation phase during which a new idea is generated. Advocates view the new idea as a means of solving a problem or filling a need and present it in the form of a proposal to an appropriate governing authority (Polsby, 1984).

THE STUDY

Methods

The field study of stakeholder collaboration reported in this article was embedded within a larger 5-year longitudinal study of policy entrepreneurship conducted from 1983 to 1988.[8] Data collection for the field study began in June 1985 with the governor's call for a "visionary proposal" for state education.

The Governor's Discussion Group (GDG) was convened by the commissioner of education in August 1985. The GDG comprised 61 participants representing 24 stakeholder groups and organizations from within the state. The stakeholder groups had on average 2.5 participating members, with group size ranging from three stakeholder groups with only a single participant each to one stakeholder group with six participants. Each stakeholder group formally designated a "representative," and groups with multiple members each designated an "alternate."

The GDG met regularly (at least monthly), and by February 1987 had held a total of 22 meetings. Meetings were generally 2 hours long but increased to 3 hours as the deadline to complete the proposal approached in December 1986.

The data were collected from multiple sources, using various research methods: interviews, archival records (e.g., GDG records, correspondence, meeting agenda, minutes), newspaper reports, field notes based on observations of the GDG, and written comments from a survey of the 61 GDG participants conducted in the summer of 1987.

The two field-workers conducting this research were granted free access to all formal meetings, deliberations, and activities of the GDG (including one daylong retreat and three daylong meetings). They were also able to gather additional information from GDG members through informal conversations, telephone calls, and follow-up interviews.

In addition to these data, we obtained meeting notes from one stakeholder participant, research papers on the GDG from two academic colleagues, and access to another scholar's field notes from 19 interviews with GDG participants.

Two characteristics of this research site made fieldwork difficult and may have created limitations for the results of the study. First, the large number of participants constrained the two field-workers' ability to observe all details of the proceedings. Second, the field-workers could not possibly interview each participant at each meeting. Although we made every effort we could to avoid bias and to contact all the participants over the course of the GDG, we likely missed some relevant details. In addition, another limitation stems from our access to stakeholders' interactions outside the GDG meetings. That is, at various points in the process some of the participants contacted and met with one another informally, which may have influenced activities within the GDG. Lacking direct access to information about these external interactions, we have difficulty assessing how they may have influenced the GDG.

Summary of Events

In January 1985, a state governor unveiled his "Access to Excellence" educational program as part of his proposed legislative package. Central to this program was the concept of "choice," whereby students would have the opportunity to leave schools in their own districts to attend other public schools they considered better suited to their educational needs. Enrollment would be "open" because students no longer would be bound by district boundaries, as long as they chose programs in public institutions.

"Access to Excellence" initiated an intense debate among various stakeholders on the merits of open enrollment and choice. Legislators were reluctant to introduce, sponsor, and endorse the bill. Teachers' unions, school board members, and superintendents vigorously opposed the proposal, whereas other administrative groups – such as secondary and primary school principals – were skeptical of its merit. Opinion polls showed little support by the public when the innovative policy was initially introduced.

Arguments against choice typically focused on its "radicalness." The choice alternative was a "market mechanism" intended to force a restructuring of the schools. Critics charged that because the state's educational dollars would be allocated to schools based on the number of students they attracted, some schools would benefit and others would lose money. Opponents further complained that, in the extreme, some schools could face a mass exodus of students, potential school closure or state receivership, the elimination of teachers and jobs, and a degraded education for the remaining students.

Educators opposed the governor's initiative for other reasons. The state had consistently ranked among the best in the nation in terms of its students' achievement, percentage of high school graduates, and reputation for innovative programs. The state's public school system was considered one of the finest in the country. Although it could be improved, the system did not clearly seem to be facing a crisis warranting the radical solution of choice.

The governor persisted in promoting his proposal. In his view, the key issue was that instead of giving more money to schools, schools should be restructured so that the money they got would be spent more effectively. Believing that *all* students should

have the right to choice, he took the debate public, waging an intense campaign in the news media to enlist support.

Joining the governor in his fight were a group of "policy entrepreneurs" who had developed the ideas about choice and introduced them to the governor in the fall of 1984, the state commissioner of education (a well-known proponent of change and the governor's appointee), key members of the business community who endorsed the proposal, various special interest groups formed to advance educational change, and legislators who would carry the governor's bill in the legislature (Roberts & King, 1989a, 1989b).

Despite this coalition's large investment of time and resources, only one element of the governor's educational bill was passed into law in June of 1985: the Post Secondary Enrollment Options Act allowing all high school juniors and seniors to attend any postsecondary institution in the state and thereby receive both college and high school credit at state expense.

In a state known for its consensual politics, the debate over choice was unusually adversarial. Name calling and personal attacks appeared in the press, and some groups threatened to withdraw their future support for the governor and his programs. Hoping to restore dialogue on the question of educational innovation, the governor charged his commissioner of education with convening a group to develop a "visionary proposal" for state education. Assuming that the group could reach agreement and that he would support their position, the governor's goal was to introduce the group's proposal in the next legislative session. All interested parties would have the chance to participate, especially those who felt they had been bypassed in 1985. Those who did not like the governor's new ideas for state education were being given a chance to come up with some innovative ideas of their own.

The GDG began meeting in August 1985. By December 1986, the group had submitted its visionary proposal. Its recommendations were similar to the governor's earlier initiatives that had failed to gain legislative approval in June 1985. The governor incorporated two elements of the GDG's proposal into his legislative package for the 1987 session: choice for "at-risk" students (those who had dropped out of school or were doing poorly enough to be in danger of dropping out) and the expansion of voluntary open enrollment to all schools.

RESULTS

The Question of Collaboration

To determine the extent to which interaction in the GDG was consistent with the five elements of the concept of collaboration identified earlier, examine the data shown in Appendix B.

Transmutational Purpose

Directed toward a singular, common transmutational end. According to the initiative of the governor, the GDG was constituted to develop a visionary proposal for state

education. Our observations suggest that the stakeholders shared this goal and were committed to its realization because they saw it as an opportunity to directly influence the future of state education. One participant described the GDG as follows:

> It is the only experience where small groups and large [have] the opportunity to be heard and have their issues discussed openly. Otherwise the policies are determined solely by the groups that have the most political clout – and PAC money – in the legislative setting.

The various participants, however, had different interpretations of the term *visionary*. For some stakeholders (e.g., the School Board Association and the teachers' unions) it meant improvements to the existing educational system: more money for teachers, better facilities and equipment, better educational technology. For others (the change agents and policy entrepreneurs), visionary meant something innovative, something beyond "improvements" in the current mode of school operations. Despite these differences, our data suggest that, in general, the stakeholders approached their task willing to hear other points of view. By sharing information about the condition of education, they modified their ideas as a result of their interactions and began to build a shared perspective. This common understanding was quite a contrast to the hostility and stereotypes generated during the heated legislative debates on the issue (Roberts & King, 1989a).

Membership

Explicit, voluntary, mutually agreed-upon membership of two or more social actors. Open to "all interested parties in the state," membership in the GDG was voluntary. Following the governor's instructions, the commissioner of education communicated through news media channels, wrote letters, and spoke at meetings to solicit participation. Knowledgeable about stakeholder management, she also used a list of educational groups generated during a stakeholder audit conducted during her first year in office (Roberts & King, 1989c). Ultimately, a total of 24 stakeholder groups agreed to participate.[9]

The first meeting of the GDG started with 15 stakeholder groups in attendance, and by the third meeting 5 more groups had joined. Despite the explicit ground rule that membership in the GDG was open to "all interested parties," the involvement of certain stakeholders drew some debate during the initial meetings. Not all members acknowledged the change-oriented stakeholder groups' right to participate in the GDG. Said one, "the education group representatives felt defensive and outnumbered. Together we represent thousands of people and grass roots positions. Some others [change agents] only represent themselves." Although this issue was never settled to the complete satisfaction of all participants, all invited stakeholder groups continued to participate throughout the process.

Another issue related to membership was that the attendance of individual representatives was not constant from meeting to meeting. Some stakeholder groups sent different representatives to the meetings, others added new representatives over time, and two stakeholder groups changed their status from that of active participant to that

of observer. With such turnover and change, membership was difficult to determine on a month-to-month basis. This lack of continuity had the effect of "slowing the process," according to one member. Another felt the GDG was hampered because members did not know whether they "were attending as individuals or as organizational representatives."

Organization

Planned, coordinated, task-specialized action regulated through agreed-upon rules and norms and joint decision making. Regular meetings were held to plan, direct, and organize the GDG's activities. The commissioner of education was responsible for chairing and staffing these meetings and had two Department of Education staff members assist her in these duties. The commissioner also had the ultimate responsibility for constructing and mailing out the agenda for each meeting, for which she actively solicited items of interest. Even so, some complaints about the agenda-setting process arose. According to one participant, the "agenda was set by subgroups, without involvement of [the] whole group." Another wrote that the process was "dominated by four or five individuals."

At their first meetings, the GDG divided the substance of its task into nine major topic areas. A "planning model," which included group process procedures and technical guidelines for preparing a policy document, was introduced later to facilitate a "more structured approach" to the GDG's work.

Several formal positions were established: stakeholder group member (representatives and alternatives), convener, staff person, facilitator, and observer. Despite the group's acknowledgment of the differences among these positions, we found evidence of ambiguity concerning the commissioner's position and actions. It was not always clear whether she was acting as a facilitator, convener, or leader.

Tasks assigned to the members ranged from reading various materials and papers, examining data and reports, working together in small subgroups to prepare position papers on topics of interest to the group as a whole, gathering data, and making oral reports of their findings.

Mutually accepted norms and rules generally governed the participants' behaviors. For example, the group often expressed a preference to work together collectively and resisted suggestions that it split into independent subgroups. Whenever subgroups were formed to address a particular issue, they reported on their work to the entire GDG at the next meeting. These norms were occasionally violated, however. For example, in the final meeting items were added to the visionary proposal to accommodate one member, even though the group had already voted to close the discussion.

The GDG used various decision-making techniques: consensus (the commissioner's preferred mode) and voting. The commissioner's initial instructions to the group were to avoid debate and focus discussion on developing a consensus on problem definitions. Solutions were to be debated later. After meeting for a while, however, the group found that process problems surfaced and sought help from a group facilitator (only used once). The group also experimented with the nominal group technique.

Yet despite these efforts, evidence shows that the GDG had problems with decision making. For example, one week before the visionary proposal was due to the governor, the group still had not decided what type of decision-making process it would use to make its final recommendations. Such process problems provoked confusion and chaos during the final deliberations. In another instance, after the group had voted to close discussion, it allowed one member to add some new elements to the proposal as a "trade-off" for his signature on the final document. Some members did not know what items had been voted in or out of the proposal. Another member was so angry about the final 10 minutes of the session and its outcomes that he threatened to withhold his signature. A small group of five members had to go with him into another room after the GDG had formally ended to convince him to sign the visionary proposal sent to the governor.

Interactive Process

Reflexive, self-evolving, collective interaction. Despite their initial hostility and suspicion of one another, over time, the GDG members came to explore and discuss their differences, work collectively, and build relationships—which had previously been difficult given their adversarial positions. On an ongoing basis, they evaluated and reexamined what they were doing and how they were doing it. They scheduled retreats and special sessions to assess their progress and questioned their assumptions and "givens." They changed their agenda to reflect evolving interests, while resisting attempts to break up the collectivity into smaller groups.

The group's language during both the group meetings and interviews indicated this evolution. Midway through the GDG, former adversaries began to speak of the group in terms of "we" rather than "us" and "them." Participants began to describe their efforts in terms of "building relationships" and "building trust." One member described "school [people]" as becoming more "flexible" while the "business people" were becoming "better informed of the magnitude and complexity of managing public education." Another member characterized the participation in the GDG as a "growth experience."

Temporal Property

Temporary organizational form dissolved upon achievement of the common end. A social arrangement among 24 stakeholders explicitly established to produce a specific set of policy ideas, the GDG was set up to be a temporary organization. Once the GDG accomplished its shared objective in February 1987, the joint project was terminated. The conclusion was marked by a formal meeting to approve the final version of the visionary proposal. Congratulations from the governor and the commissioner also signaled task completion. Despite this formal ending, some stakeholders continued to meet under the title of "GDG." They did, however, develop a new charge and agenda and expanded their numbers to include a new set of stakeholders.

The Question of Innovation

An analysis comparing the governor's 1985 "Access to Excellence" plan and the GDG's 1987 visionary proposal revealed that the former was far more comprehensive.

The governor's plan for choice plan applied to all students in the state's public schools; the GDG's proposal limited choice to a subset of students: those at risk of dropping out of school. The governor's plan would make choice mandatory for all state school districts; the GDG's proposal would make choice voluntary for the school districts. According to one of his staff members, the governor was surprised with the GDG's proposal. He wanted something visionary and instead received a limited version of his original proposal. He reportedly responded to it by saying, "This is it?!"

Apparently of a similar opinion, one legislator labeled the visionary proposal the "double vision plan." He felt that the outcome of the GDG was more a reflection of the governor's ideas than something new the GDG had independently generated.

The GDG participants had mixed opinions as to whether the visionary proposal represented an innovation. One respondent wrote, "To the extent that much of the material had been discussed in the 'idea' stage before, it was not particularly innovative. To the extent that much of it had not actually been tried in [state], it was innovative."

Another commented that the visionary proposal "did not indicate innovative education policy. It represented a compromise between those who wanted radical change and those representatives of the 'system' who want[ed] slow and incremental change."

Follow-up discussions further clarified that many respondents viewed the *process* as the real innovation. For example, the commissioner noted "this is the first time that the major education organizations, [state] business, higher education and broad-based citizens' organizations have agreed to a common agenda prior to a major legislative session."

DISCUSSION

Before addressing the question of the relationship between collaboration and innovation, we present a final interpretation of the data with respect to the definitions of these two concepts. We begin with our interpretation of the data on collaboration.

In constructing our concept of collaboration, we explicitly separated the outcome of a joint endeavor from the joint endeavor's nature and structure, to avoid confounding the two. That is, we did not want to define collaboration as a joint endeavor with a successful outcome. The issue is not whether the evidence shows that the GDG was a successful project and on that basis provides an example of collaboration. Rather, the issue is whether the evidence shows that the organization of the GDG was generally consistent with the five elements constituting our concept of collaboration (see Appendix A). The data are summarized in relation to these elements in Appendix B.

For four of the five elements (purpose, membership, interactional process, and temporal property) the data are consistent with the requirements for these elements. The 24 GDG members shared the objective of working together to produce a visionary proposal and understood that this required developing and fashioning their individual ideas into a shared, coherent product. Membership was voluntary and open to all interested stakeholders, and despite the early attempt by some members to change these initially agreed-upon terms of membership, all members eventually settled down and accepted one another's presence. Although the GDG's process had many problems, the data suggest nonetheless that it was a reflexive process involving ongoing

efforts to reevaluate and reexamine effort and progress. In addition, we found a general openness and willingness to experiment with group process and decision making, and strong norms were present to guide collective interaction. The evidence also suggests that the GDG evolved from an aggregation of individual stakeholder representatives into a body having a collective identity as a group in its own right. Finally, the GDG was a temporary arrangement and disbanded in February 1987 after it had completed its assigned task.

Concerning the element of organization, the evidence is somewhat mixed. In a general sense, the GDG meetings and activities were planned and coordinated, and specific roles and tasks were assigned to members. A general set of norms existed that, for most meetings and activities, the members followed in their conduct and relations with one another. And although the specific mechanisms were not always explicit and clear, the members were committed to making collective decisions.

Yet the data also show many ongoing problems and difficulties with the GDG's organization. The commissioner's role appeared to be ambiguous, and the roles of "leader" versus "convener" versus "facilitator" were never explicitly clarified. Also, violations in the group's decision-making process (e.g., at the final meeting) almost caused one member to withdraw from the GDG. Clearly, we found much evidence of problematic organization.

On balance, however, our opinion is that the overall weight of the evidence for the GDG is broadly consistent with the concept of collaboration presented in the first part of this article. Certainly the GDG's effort at collaboration could have been improved in many ways—that is, it could have been made more successful. But our inquiry focused on how closely the data conform to the model of collaboration we have proposed. On that score, despite the GDG's problems, we find a relatively good fit.

Our interpretation of the data on innovation is somewhat more straightforward. In our conceptual framework, innovation was defined as the generation, translation, and implementation of a new idea into practice in a particular social context. Using the social context as a frame of reference, we distinguished two types of innovation. Incremental innovation involves novel ideas representing a refinement or modification of a given social context; it is a change in degree. In contrast, radical innovation is a change in kind involving new ideas representing discontinuity in a social context; it is a qualitative departure from existing practice.

Viewing the governor's challenge to the GDG in this light, our opinion is that he wanted a radical innovation in policy—a visionary proposal for the complete restructuring of education in his state—and not something merely incremental in scope. But the GDG's proposal was not a radical departure from existing policy. Choice already had been introduced to the school system in 1985, when high school juniors and seniors were allowed to choose to attend colleges and receive high school and college credit. With respect to choice, the GDG's proposal was *not* a radical departure from the established institutional activity; by extending choice to at-risk students, the GDG's proposal represented a change in *degree*. Because it modified and refined the previous legislation by *extending* choice to the *new* group of students, the innovation was incremental.

For the collaboration to have produced radical innovation, the stakeholder representatives would have needed to be free agents not bound or limited by their asso-

ciations' points of view. They would have required the necessary intellectual freedom and support from their institutions to engage in the creative process that innovation necessarily entails, to entertain new ideas beyond what was currently acceptable, and to risk the disruptive consequences that the new order would inevitably bring as it displaced the old.

Despite their desire to work together and produce a visionary proposal, most GDG members were constrained by the political orientations and viewpoints of their associations. As leaders of their groups, they represented their groups' points of view and were reluctant, in this public forum, to challenge or change these. Limited in what they could and could not advocate, they had less freedom to engage in "conceptual blockbusting" and explore alternative ways of thinking—requisites for creativity and innovation (Adams, 1974, 1986; Brookfield, 1987). In going beyond the confines of what was considered acceptable practice they would have risked alienating their constituencies and the established order, which reduced their willingness to explore options.

The exceptions were the policy entrepreneurs and reformers, who occupied positions outside the boundaries of the educational system and therefore had more freedom to go beyond what they called the "givens" of acceptable practice. Limited only by their conceptual abilities to envision a new educational order, they had the latitude to challenge the old order, to seek a discontinuous shift in the current framwork in the pursuit of radical change.

For most GDG stakeholders, however, radical innovation was never really a practical possibility. A proposal to fundamentally change the state's educational system would have unleashed many concomitant, unpredictable changes, including some that might have undermined the stakeholders' own positions. In short, radical innovation is likely to be spawned in small, unconstrained, close-knit groups working on the margins of an established institutional order (Bradley & Levett, 1973). Collaboration among a diverse group involving stakeholders from the established order is most unlikely to yield radically innovative public policy.

For incremental innovation, the prognosis is more optimistic. When this is the goal, we expect stakeholder collaboration to work. Indeed, this type of innovation emerged from the work of the GDG. Except for the coalition of change agents and policy entrepreneurs, the GDG members preferred improvements in the existing system to a radical shift to something new. The members with this goal—primarily educators—referred to themselves as operating in the "improvement mode." They sought educational change "on the margin," which the change agents referred to as "tinkering around the edges." The educators did not see any value in eliminating the existing educational system; they were basically content with its fundamental features. More money and some experimental programs on a pilot basis were acceptable to them, not a fundamental restructuring of state education.

CONCLUSION

In closing this article, we offer some thoughts on the concept of collaboration used in our research and explore its implications for innovation more generally.

To overcome the research limitations pertaining to conceptions of collaboration employed for managing multiparty problems, we sought to construct a concept with general utility for empirical investigations of the phenomenon. In doing this, we attempted to differentiate and separate the *substance* of the collaborative relationship from its product or *result*. We identified five sociological elements to capture the substantive essence of collaboration and to characterize its form as a distinctive pattern of social organization. Two of the five elements (transmutational purpose and reflexive, self-evolving interaction) deserve further discussion, for these two elements have a direct bearing on innovation.

We developed the notion of transmutational purpose to capture an essential property of collaboration: the idea that in working together the parties involved are endeavoring to take a set of raw materials (objects, ideas, or social relations) and refashion them into a developed product. As long as the five elements in our concept of collaboration are present in a social situation, it does not matter whether the joint endeavor actually succeeds in transmuting the raw materials into a developed product. The goal itself—purposeful transmutation—is sufficient.

The type of transmutation sought in a given collaboration, however, can determine the collaborative effort's potential for producing an innovation. If, with respect to the social context, the desired transmutation is not to build some novel entity from the raw materials, then innovation is unlikely to be an intended outcome. If, however, the desired transmutation is to create a new product, innovation is more probable. Following this reasoning, we conclude that even when collaboration is a necessary condition for innovation, collaboration alone is not a sufficient conduction to ensure this outcome.

At this point, the factors that Gray (1989) has identified become relevant to situations in which innovation is a goal. If the desired common end is a *novel* transmutational purpose, then the probability of an innovative outcome is likely to be greatly increased—all other factors being equal—to the extent that a given collaboration uses the interactional strategies and tactics that Gray has identified in her three-phase model of the collaborative process (see Gray, 1989, chap. 3).

The other element in our concept of collaboration that warrants further elaboration is the notion that collaboration has a reflexive, self-critical property. To some extent, this reflects collaboration's inherent creative propensity. Coming together to attempt to accomplish something that no single party can achieve alone requires readjustments and changes, at the least to ensure that joint work on the product is coordinated. In situations involving a complex common end and/or diverse multiple parties, much more self-reflexive interaction is required to develop common understandings, identify and solve problems, build elaborate technologies, and so forth. The implication of this reflexive social process is that the social structure of the collaboration will evolve into a mode more akin to an open-ended, self-organizing system in which the structure itself may undergo one or more social transmutations (Jantsch, 1980; Morgan, 1986). Under these circumstances, innovation is more likely to result—not only in terms of an innovative product but also in terms of social innovations related to the collaborative process itself.

APPENDIX A
Collaboration as an Organizational Form: Necessary and Sufficient Elements

Definition

A temporary organizational form in which two or more social actors work together toward a singular common end that requires transmutation of materials, ideas, and/or social relations to achieve that end.

Necessary elements

Purpose

- Goal-directed toward a singular, common transmutational end

Membership

- Explicit, voluntary, mutually agreed-upon membership of two or more social actors

Organization

- Planned, coordinated, task-specialized action regulated through agreed-upon rules and norms, and joint decision making

Sufficient elements

Interactional process

- Reflexive, self-evolving collective interaction

Temporal property

- Temporary organizational form dissolved on achievement of common end

APPENDIX B
Summary of the Data Related to the Elements Necessary for Collaboration

Necessary elements

Purpose

- The GDG shared the goal of developing a visionary proposal for state education.
- The GDG agreed to work together to fashion divergent stakeholder ideas into a cohesive proposal to the governor.

Membership

- Twenty-four stakeholder groups participated in the GDG and were identified on the membership list.
- Membership was voluntary, not coerced.
- Membership was open to all "interested parties." Although some objected to this "open-door" policy, the commissioner permitted all who were interested to attend. Membership was by mutual agreement in that no participant was forced to leave the GDG and all participants eventually accepted the governor's terms.

Organization

- Planned meetings were held on a regular basis with prepared agenda and items for future action.
- The following specialized tasks were assigned and performed: gathering data, reading materials, preparing position papers, presenting findings and recommendations, and work in subgroups.

- A differentiated structure of positions and roles was created, with duties and rights assigned to regular group members and alternates, staff, and facilitators. Role assignment was explicit, although some ambiguity arose over whether the commissioner was the group's facilitator or leader.
- Mutually accepted norms and rules generally governed participants' behaviors, although some norms were occasionally violated. The most critical violation occurred in the final meeting during the last 30 minutes of the group's discussion, when items were added to the visionary proposal to accommodate one member after the group had voted to halt the introduction and discussion of any further materials.
- Decisions affecting direction were made jointly. Various decision rules were used, such as voting and consensus. Sometimes, however, these decision rules were not applied consistently. The most serious infraction occurred during the group's last 30 minutes of deliberations.

Sufficient elements

Interactive Process

- On an ongoing basis, the GDG members collectively evaluated and reexamined what they were doing, and how they were doing it. They scheduled retreats, special sessions, and reviews to assess their work.
- The GDG modified and refined its ideas on an ongoing basis. The participants met when needed and were willing to question their assumptions and "givens." They changed agenda to reflect participant interest.
- The GDG preferred to have all members address each topic as a group. Subgroups did not make decisions but presented reports to the larger group to allow discussion of issues.

Temporal property

- The GDG met for 18 months. The group completed its task in February 1987.

NOTES

1. Groups may naturally form as a byproduct of the innovation process as individuals join forces to affect change (e.g., King, 1988; Polsby, 1984), and problem-solving groups and task forces have also been convened to solve particular policy problems. Stakeholder collaboration differs from task forces in two fundamental ways, however. First, task forces are not formed with the intention of having comprehensive stakeholder representation. Second, although task force recommendations can be incorporated, they tend to be of a general nature and are not intentionally set up to initiate the policy process. Stakeholder policy collaboration, in contrast, brings together groups in cooperation with statutory bodies for the express purpose of initiating innovative public policy.

2. Stakeholders are parties with an interest or stake in a common problem or issue. They include all individuals, groups, or organizations "directly influenced by the actions others take to solve a problem" (Gray, 1989, p. 5; see also Freeman, 1984).

3. The term *collaboration* is not defined in the *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences* (Sills, 1968), and is not listed in Gould and Kolb's (1964) *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences*.

4. One limitation is Gray's notion that collaboration is problem solving, which may lead researchers to exclude instances of collaboration that do *not* focus on obstacles or barriers and thereby restrict our general understanding of the phenomenon. Another limitation is that Gray ultimately defines collaboration in terms of success. When three phases—problem setting, direction setting, and implementation—have been correctly managed, a successful outcome is the result, and therefore collaboration is said to have occurred. This conceptualization creates several problems: First, according to such a post hoc concept, collaboration can be established only *after* the fact of its success, and second, only successful joint endeavors are classified as collaboration. This unnecessarily compromises value neutrality and severely limits the concept's scope.

A third limitation is that adherence to the "three-phase model" does not always guarantee success. Because of the "bounds" on human rationality, success requires more than common problem definition; it also requires realistic knowledge of which problems can and cannot be resolved (see Bradley, 1987, chap. 2).

5. To be considered a valid and empirically useful scientific concept, the concept of collaboration must meet five basic requirements:

- It must capture what is truly essential and distinctive about the reality of the phenomenon.
- It must capture the full range of the phenomenon's variability.
- It must simplify the phenomenon and be abstract.
- It must be as objectively neutral and value free as possible.
- It must be capable of being translated—that is, operationalized—into a measurement construct if it is to be a useful tool for empirical research (Stinchcombe, 1968).

6. Although *cooperation* has a similar meaning—"working together to some end" (Fowler & Fowler, 1964, p. 269)—its definition lacks the transmutational and creative elements; cooperation's root term, *operate*, means simply to "bring about" and "to accomplish" (Fowler & Fowler, 1964, p. 848). These two elements not only indicate collaboration's more complex meaning as a more evolved, elaborated social relationship but provide a basis for a clearer distinction. Thus, sociologically speaking, *cooperation* is more appropriate for denoting a single round of joint (reciprocal) purposeful interaction in the manner of Axelrod's (1984) tit-for-tat conception, whereas *collaboration* is best reserved for the more complex social form conceptualized in this article.

7. In sociological terms, collaboration belongs to the category of instrumental (*gesellschaft*) rather than expressive/affective (*gemeinschaft*) relationships (Tonnies, 1957). In cases involving only a few individuals (e.g., team research in science), however, both types of relationships often are copresent, which may jeopardize the joint project and yield breaches in ethical behavior (Bradley, 1982).

8. For a more complete description of the methodology employed in this larger study, see King (1988) and Roberts and King (1988, 1989b).

9. The only stakeholder groups in the state not included in the GDG were legislators, because they would have the opportunity later to evaluate the merits of the GDG's proposal when and if the governor endorsed it and forwarded it to the legislature.

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