

Foundations and collective action in nonprofit fields – Re-engineering fields or catching waves?

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Draft – Not for quotation or circulation

Introduction

This paper explores efforts to construct collective action in nonprofit organizational fields, supported by philanthropic foundations. As is illustrated below, in the wider nonprofit practice literature, aligning available resources to address social problems is often assumed to be desirable. Nonprofit fields that address social challenges (e.g. poverty, international development, health) often seek to bring about significant social change with limited financial resources. It is sometimes assumed that the financial resources of foundations translate into the potential to intervene in fields to construct collective action.

The paper contributes to a very active, current discussion in philanthropic practice on the role that foundations play in encouraging and brokering the construction of interorganizational collective action. Using a rigorous analysis of 5 cases of efforts to create strategic alignments a more constrained and nuanced perspective on the role of foundations in supporting collective action is developed. As the title of the paper suggests image of foundation as a central, driving actor, popular in some current practice literature (e.g. Kania & Kramer, 2011; Porter & Kramer, 1999) is contrasted with a more reactive role where opportunities change are influenced by the institutional context of the field.

The following section briefly introduces the relevant literature on nonprofit strategic alignment as context and then moves into discussing the relevant practice literature on foundation on collective action which emanates mainly from the strategic management domain. The literature on foundation operating within institutional contexts is then outlined and the relevant insights of this research is briefly summarized. The organizational 2 fields and the foundation which encouraged collective action in these fields are introduced. 5

specific efforts to create collective action in these 2 fields are then briefly outlined. The specific data sources and grounded approach that is used in analyse them are then described. A cross-case analysis of the 5 is then carried out and the main themes on how the nonprofit leaders interpreted and reacted to efforts to construct collective action are outlined. These findings are discussed in the context of the current literature and the main conclusions and implications for practice are presented.

Theoretical perspectives

Strategic alignment in nonprofit fields

Nonprofit fields provide interesting sites for studying collective action as that they have objectives which ostensibly overlap, given the scale and challenging nature of the problems they address (Hardy, Phillips, & Lawrence, 2003; Trist, 1983). There are often efforts to instigate collaboration amongst nonprofit organizations, motivated by desires to see alignment amongst available resources to address social problems (e.g. (Austin, 2000; Bailey & McNally Koney, 2000; Mandell & Keast, 2008; Pietroburgo & Wernet, 2004), avoid duplication and reduce costs as available funding contracts (Campbell, 2009; Golensky & DeRuiter, 1999) and/or enhance control over available resources to increase the power of the organization (Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998; Steinberg, 1993; Tsasis, 2009). The structural forms which this collaboration can take vary from affiliations to full structural integration through mergers between organizations (Bailey & McNally Koney, 2000). Some argue that what motivates nonprofit organizations is similar to their for profit counterparts and that they compete for funding and are driven, in part by resource enhancement (Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998) and that this desire to enhance and control resources can trump the public benefit goals which they espouse (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1974).

The nonprofit strategic management practice literature often assumes that an increased level of collaboration is required to solve intractable social problems (Margerum, 2011). Austin (2000:1), for example claims that “the twenty-first century will be the age of alliances”. What unites studies of nonprofit alliances or collaboration from the strategic management perspective is the focus on the rational choices which the organizations make to enhance their impact (Arsenault, 1998; Austin, 2000; Benton & Austin, 2010; Margerum, 2011). In Bailey

& McNally Koney's (2000) approach, the institutional environment is seen as a one potential motivation for collaborating (e.g. to achieve legitimacy in a domain) but the ways the institutional environment enables and constrains these choices are not explored. Often there is a heavy emphasis on convening all of the groups that have an interest or a stake in the issue (Susskind & Cruikshank, 1987) and a bias towards inclusion in terms of selecting stakeholders often with an impartial convenor favoured as the actor who convenes the group (Carlson, 1999). Margerum (2011) claims that cultural difference can increase the extent to which people will perceive problems in different ways which in turn can reduce the chances of successful collaboration. He believes that the challenges of convening actors from different cultural beliefs will be more likely to overcome when groups reach a “hurting stalemate” where the potential benefits of collective action outweigh the costs (Margerum, 2011: 52). Others place more of an emphasis on reframing approaches for instigating collective solutions to social problems, where collective action can be instigated by facilitative techniques such as scenario planning (Kahane, 2004, 2010). The primary focus in these approaches is on processes which involve convening groups of stakeholders, usually broadly defined to construct and implement collective action through a variety of facilitative techniques.

The specific role of foundations in instigating strategic alignments

Previous overviews of existing philanthropic research by Fleishman, (2009) Heydemann & Hammack (2009) have highlighted a dearth of case research on foundations as organizations and their influences on organizational fields. During the 1990s some foundations became more interventionist in nonprofit fields (Frumkin, 2006; Healy & Donnelly-Cox, 2016). The perceived need for funder intervention was based on an assumption that there was an objective social mission that could be maximized through greater alignment (Porter & Kramer, 1999). Funders started to directly tie the adoption of business models to funding and to start taking seats on the boards of nonprofits (Frumkin, 2003). What has become known as “venture philanthropy” became popular, adopting “control” approaches from venture capital organizations with some foundations taking seats on nonprofit boards as a condition of providing funding (Frumkin, 2003, 2006; LaFrance & Latham, 2008). More traditional foundations were urged to become more aggressive in seeking value (Letts, Ryan, & Grossman, 1997).

Some of the leading lights in the strategic management arena started to take an interest in the role of foundations in promoting strategic alignment within fields. Michael Porter co-authored an article on foundation strategy in 1999, which drew on his work on competition and strategy (Porter and Kramer, 1999). The authors presented a framework for thinking systematically about how foundations create value and how the various approaches to value creation can be deployed within the context of an overarching strategy. Hirschhorn & Gilmore (2004) suggest ways for funders to think about a portfolio of grants as an investment strategy to affect the evolution of a field. Heifetz, Kania and Kramer (2004) outline ways that foundations can be more ambitious in stimulating bold action amongst the organizations that they fund.

The ability of private foundations to focus resources on specific issues, work collaboratively with other funders, build the capacity of grantees and strengthen the level of knowledge and practice within fields is seen within the nonprofit strategic management literature as the comparative advantage of philanthropic organizations (Kania & Kramer, 2011; Porter & Kramer, 1999). In particular, foundations are seen as having a field-level perspective and the power to create pressure for actors to work collaboratively and the legitimacy to become closely involved in the processes of constructing collective action (Heifetz, Kania, & Kramer, 2004; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Porter & Kramer, 1999). According to Porter & Kramer (1999: 124), foundations can multiply the impact of their giving by more than 1000% by focusing on influencing practices and ideas at the level of the field rather than emphasising the selection of individual grantees. More recently there has been a series of meetings and publications to promote a concept of “collective impact” amongst foundations.

“This requires a fundamental change in how funders see their role, from funding organizations to leading a long-term process of social change. It is no longer enough to fund an innovative solution created by a single nonprofit or to build that organization’s capacity. Instead, funders must help create and sustain the collective processes, measurement reporting systems, and community leadership that enable cross-sector coalitions to arise and thrive.” (Kania & Kramer, 2011: 41)

This article by Kania & Kramer (2011) on collective impact is one of the most downloaded article from the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Despite the widespread discussion of the need for funders to adopt a more assertive role and the continued dominance of the strategic management frame, there are few rigorous case studies of foundations’ attempts to construct collective action in fields within the nonprofit management literature (Blumenthal, 2003; Patrizi & Thompson, 2011). A number of recent studies from the practice literature, based on evaluations of interventions by foundations have questioned whether the funder should

assume a leading role in designing collective action responses to social problems. Easterting (2011) highlights that funders designing and coordinating collective action can result in time and effort being spent on meetings and monitoring processes at the expense of actual collective action work. According to Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, & Dewar (2010) foundations forcing the pace of alignment amongst organizations can result in frustration with progress, disappointing outcomes and a weaker field. Kimball & Kopell (2011:37) argue that foundations need to “let go”, specify broader focus areas and stop micro-managing social change initiatives in dynamic environments. Easterting (2011) proposes that interorganizational collective action instigated by foundations should start gradually and grow in a more emergent fashion.

Insights from prior institutional research on the influence of foundations in organizational fields

The early insights from an institutional diffusion perspective suggested that a dominant funder in a nonprofit field would lead to greater isomorphic pressure to conform with the wishes of this funder (e.g. Oliver, 1991) and that this will lead to alignment around the logics of the funder (Smith & Lipsky, 1993). For some institutional researchers, interorganizational collective action is a potential source of institutionalized collaboration, where over time the collective action becomes an ingrained as a way of working (Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002).

More recently, however authors drawing on analyses of funder interactions with fields have suggested that funders’ influence is less deterministic and that institutional logics within nonprofit fields are more durable than the diffusion perspective would suggest (Aksartova, 2009; Binder, 2007; Heydemann & Hammack, 2009; Swidler, 2009). For Bartley (2007) the power of foundations derives primarily from their ability to channel support over the long-term to organizations which constitute or at least underpin social movements. Studies of efforts of US foundations to “project” their institutional logic into fields of organizations in other countries (e.g. Aksartova, 2009; Swidler, 2009) or within nonprofit organizations (e.g. Binder, 2007) suggest that institutional logics are far more durable and less plastic than the above strategic management or indeed institutional diffusion perspectives suggest.

Overview of the two fields studied and the foundation

2 fields of nonprofit organizations provide the research settings for this paper; the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) organizational field in South Africa and the Ageing field in the Republic of Ireland. Within these fields, efforts to construct collective action across these two fields instigated by a philanthropic foundation provide 5 cases which are analysed.

Ageing field in the Republic of Ireland - The ageing organizations advocating for the welfare and right of older adults are relatively newly established compared to other elements of the Irish nonprofit sector (Acheson & Harvey, 2009; O'Shea, 2003). Many of the organizations originated from a voluntary desire to provide local services at a community level and vary in their goals from piloting services targeted at vulnerable older adults, to promoting the civic involvement of older adults to campaigning for the social welfare rights and entitlements of older adults. The study focused on those organizations that were engaged in representing ageing issues or organising older adults at a national level. Seven organizations were significantly involved in these efforts. Leaders of these organizations were interviewed along with funders and people who chaired or facilitated efforts to convene these organizations to discuss areas of possible collective action. Five of these organizations provided voluntary services and had a small professional core staff. Two of the organizations were larger charities, focused primarily on issues of concern to older adults.

LGBTI organizational field in South Africa - The LGBTI organizational field under apartheid comprised organizations whose members and leaders were mainly middle-class, gay men focused on providing social outlets in different urban areas. Post-apartheid, a number of LGBTI activists emerged from the anti-apartheid movement. The wider group of LGBTI organizations varied from organizations that worked in specific geographic areas and combined the rights agenda with the social and health agenda, organizations that advocated for the rights of gay and lesbian people, worked with gay men on health issues, promoted tolerance amongst religions, gay film festivals or that provided health, legal and social supports to specific groups such as transgender or intersex people. 11 current and past nonprofit organizational leaders were interviewed and the organizations involved in the study ranged from small single person organizations to service provision organizations with in excess of 20 professional staff. A Joint Working Group was established by the organizations in 2002 to formalize this collaboration amongst the groups.

The foundation – The foundation is a large international funder which adopted an approach to its grantmaking which was influenced by the rise of strategic management thinking described above. At one point it was the largest private funder in both fields. Even in the early stages of the grantmaking programmes it sought to bring together grantee organizations in both fields to enhance the impact of their work by aligning available resources on shared goals and to discuss and reflect on emerging lessons and opportunities. These meetings were often externally facilitated and used a variety of facilitative approaches including scenario planning and more traditional strategic planning. In both fields, the foundation had the explicit strategic objective of encouraging greater organization alignment. In addition, it supported a number of significant initiatives to promote greater collaboration amongst the organizations. In South Africa in the LGBTI field, the foundation provide a number of grants to support the Joint Working Group. In the Republic of Ireland Ageing field a number of grants were made to support structures to encourage greater collective action, including an initiative to enhance the collective advocacy efforts to influence government on the development of a national ageing strategy.

Overview of the 5 cases of efforts to support interorganizational collective action

Within the context of these two fields in South Africa and Ireland, five distinct cases of efforts by the foundation to support collective action were analysed.

The gay marriage campaign in South Africa - The campaign for gay marriage was one of the primary efforts to construct collective action and it involved coordinated legal and public mobilisation strategies. In 2002 a lesbian couple who had been living together applied to the High Court to have their union recognised as marriage. The court ruled that the exclusion of LGBTI people from marriage was discriminatory. The case was then sent directly to the Constitutional Court. In December 2005 the Constitutional Court ruled that both the common law definition of marriage and the Marriage Act of 1961 were unconstitutional. The ruling was suspended for twelve months to enable parliament to correct the defects in the law which discriminated against lesbian and gay people (Judge, Manion, & de Waal, 2009).

The campaign then focused on parliament and the drafting of the Civil Union Act. A core group of activists worked on these lobbying activities, coordinated with the wider human

rights organizations and attempted to recast much of the negative discourse in the media (Vilakazi, 2008). Facing opposition from traditional, religious and conservative organizations, the LGBTI organizations orchestrated a campaign which sought to prevent any rowing back from the instruction of the Constitutional Court to ensure non-discrimination in the institution of marriage and to frame this again as a human rights issue rather than an LGBTI issue. The organizations managed to mobilize constituents to participate in the public hearings across much of South Africa and successfully fought draft proposals to establish civil partnerships for gay and lesbian people rather than full civil unions. In November 2006 the Civil Union Act was passed which accorded the status of marriage to unions between gay and lesbian couples.

For some actors, however within the LGBTI organizational field the notion of marriage was problematic. They felt that marriage is a hetero-normative institution that should be challenged as a patriarchal form of oppression rather than extended to the LGBTI community. Those that did not support the prioritisation of marriage did not actively oppose the campaign once the decision had been taken to proceed with the legal cases and they adopted the interpretation that this was not about marriage per se but was about equality and human rights. In terms of mobilising and aligning the organizations around a common campaign, a relatively small group of activists worked across the organizations to ensure that the diversity of the LGBTI goals and identities did not inhibit a disciplined campaign. This involved allowing a certain amount of ambiguity to exist between those with different positions and emphasizing the shared history of using public interest litigation to achieve social change under the apartheid regime.

The role of the foundation in this campaign was perceived by the nonprofit leaders' as one of a responsive funder. The foundation staff and other funders described how they responded quickly to emerging issues. Whilst the foundation did participate in strategic discussions with activists and other funders, it did not seek to direct the strategies or the structure around which the groups organized. It had funded, instigated and encouraged the work of the Joint Working Group but it did not seek to force the pace of this collaboration. It funded the costs of some of the core group of activists who explained the need for collective action across the organizations. When one of the organizations encountered serious internal leadership challenges which employed one of the key activists for example, the foundation quickly switched support to another organization to employ the same person. The programme officer

was seen by the nonprofit leaders as someone who knew both the organizational, cultural and personal dynamics of the field and had a close working relationship with some of the core group of activists who drove the campaign.

Violence against LGBTI people in South Africa - After this successful campaign for gay marriage in 2006, the Joint Working Group began to discuss what issues the LGBTI organizations should address next. One issue that gained prominence, both within South Africa and internationally, was the level of homophobic attacks, particularly on LGBTI people living in townships.

The foundation increased its support to the Joint Working Group and funded a staff position to help facilitate collaboration and covered travel costs for meetings. Whilst interviewees found this increased level of support helpful in terms of facilitating coordination they also described an increasing level of perception that the Joint Working Group was becoming a foundation initiative. The foundation was also becoming more explicit in its desire to see greater collaboration and representation of marginalized groups in the Joint Working Group.

On the 7th of July, 2007, two black lesbians Sizakele Sigasa and Salome Masooa were abducted, tortured and murdered and their bodies left in a field outside Soweto. The Joint Working Group initiated a campaign called the Triple Seven Campaign (or 070707 in reference to the date of the murders) to counter violence against LGBTI people. The campaign took its name from the date on which the women were murdered and used this high profile and well-publicised crime to draw attention to the issue of violence.

Although this issue was framed as a matter of life and death by many of the actors in the sector, they were unable to agree on a common interpretation of the problem to be addressed or how it should be addressed. There were many debates within the Joint Working Group but there were sharp divisions on how the issue should be understood and addressed. Those that believed strongly that the root cause of the problem was patriarchy and a wider epidemic of violence in South Africa rejected the frame of LGBTI as vulnerable. The Joint Working Group was unable to organize a coordinated campaign and there were intense conflicts during the efforts to develop a clear integrated strategy. Many of the activists and the foundation were frustrated and confused about the inability to develop a collective response, particularly

as all believed that this was a critical issue and the desire for collective action was widespread and supported by the foundation.

A series of meetings to discuss greater collaboration and integration amongst the LGBTI organizations as the foundation exited— The foundation had signalled its intention in 2011 to exit South Africa by 2013. The foundation convened meetings to discuss the future for this field of organizations and paid for professional facilitators, conference venues and travel costs. These meetings focused on the immediate issues of funding as well as the future shape of the LGBTI field, what principles should underpin their work going forward and what areas should be prioritized for collective action. Two meetings took place in hotels over two-day periods with the activists all travelling to participate and staying overnight. The first meeting took place in 2009 and the second in 2010. Consultants spoke with the activists in advance and attempted to theme up views in documents in advance of the meetings. The meetings sought to explore common agendas and to reach clarity on how the organization could integrate their activities more successfully. The first meeting took place in 2009 and the second in 2010. The meetings used scenario planning to explore how the actors perceived the priority opportunities and threats in the environment and to assess how well positioned the organizations were to respond to these. In addition there were facilitated discussions on how the organizations might collaborate more effectively.

The foundation was seen by the nonprofit leaders as driving this process. Whilst it was not seen as a directive process and the meetings were very open and facilitative, the organizational leaders recognized that greater integration and collective action was desired by the foundation, given the shrinking resources and scale of the challenges faced by the LGBTI community. The foundation staff participated in some of the discussions and debates but space was also left for the leaders to talk without funders in the room. The foundation funded all the accommodation, facilitation and travel costs. It also commissioned the evaluation and strategy papers to help theme up the context, the challenges and the views of the participants on the emerging opportunities and threats and the future of the field.

These efforts to achieve strategic clarity around the future direction of the LGBTI organizational field, resulted in intense debates. The actors within the LGBTI organizations had a range of views on the priority issues, which the organization field should be focusing on going forward. For some activists, primarily involved in service delivery to men with

HIV/AIDS or providing outreach work for LGBTI communities there was a view that the organizations should be focusing on the issues which were of particular concern to LGBTI organizations such as HIV prevention and treatment and hate crimes. Others eschewed this frame of the LGBTI community as vulnerable and in need and rather prioritized wider injustices within society as the "root causes" (e.g. patriarchy, racism, capitalism). These activists felt the LGBTI field should be building alliances with other social movements to bring about fundamental social change.

These attempts to produce strategic alignment did not produce a shared vision for the future of the LGBTI field. Many said that they had not found the sessions useful beyond networking and that the attempts to achieve clarity around a common agendas had resulted in a combination of passive-aggressive and open conflict during the sessions. Some said that there had been attempts to impress the funder rather than deal with the real underlying issues and many felt that this was due to a combination of organizational competition and the ideological differences described above.

A joint advocacy initiative in the Republic of Ireland- Initially, Ageing Advocacy¹ was set up in 2006 as a campaign by five ageing organizations convened by the foundation to lobby for a commitment to national strategy on positive ageing in the Republic of Ireland. The campaign was successful in persuading the incoming government to include a reference to a Positive Ageing Strategy in its 2007 Programme for Government. The campaign was carried out primarily by communications consultants funded by the foundation and was seen at that stage as a temporary coming together of organizations. After this initial first phase, the organizations engaged in a planning process with a management consultant to plan out future work. As a result of this exercise funding was successfully sought from the foundation for a grant to develop a core staff and to create an organization that would facilitate joint advocacy work on a permanent basis. In 2008 Ageing Advocacy hired two full-time staff funded by the foundation and established a Board of directors, constituted from staff of the ageing organizations and became incorporated as a company limited by guarantee. Ageing Advocacy also set about recruiting a campaigns researcher and policy and campaigns officer as temporary staff on three year fixed contracts. It set out in the next phase of its work to influence the design and implementation of the National Ageing strategy and campaigned to

¹ This is a pseudonym

defend the state pension (in the context of cutbacks to most other welfare payments during the Irish financial crisis), campaign on other specific entitlements for older adults in the annual budgets and to influence policy in relation to caring for older adults in their homes. It was broadly perceived as successful in this work and an external evaluation found strong evidence that the Ageing Advocacy had achieved significant impact on its stated goals.

Despite the agreement that significant progress had been made at the outset in 2011 significant tensions began to emerge between most of the organizations on the board of Ageing Advocacy. The leaders began to resent the efforts by the executive of the Ageing Advocacy to develop a strategy which they felt they had to fall in with rather than having Ageing Advocacy facilitate the organizations to achieve their advocacy goals. From the perspective of the Ageing Advocacy executive there was a need to have disciplined, focused campaigns and it had demonstrated an effective track record of achieving results. Ageing Advocacy began seek to negotiate funding independently from the foundation and to see itself as an independent entity. The board, which was constituted mainly of staff of the other organizations in the field objected to this and asserted its control over Ageing Advocacy. On the back of a number of disagreements, the organization was formally wound up in 2013.

Most of the nonprofit leaders recognised the progress that had been made in the early stages but felt that once Ageing Advocacy started to attempt to become an independent entity that conflict was inevitable. The foundation was disappointed in this outcome also. It had hoped that Ageing Advocacy would be an umbrella initiative which the organisations themselves would support over time to enhance their advocacy efforts.

Efforts to develop greater collaboration and integration amongst the existing ageing organizations - A series of facilitated meetings took place between the leaders of the organizations over the 2008 and 2009 period to explore areas in which the organizations might collaborate and how they might do this, sponsored by a philanthropic funder. This involved an initial "visioning" exercise, which was then followed by more practical discussions of how the organizations might save on more functional costs. This became known as the collaboration initiative. In terms of the framing of the organizational field, there was a widespread articulation of the need for greater alignment of the available resources although there was little agreement on how this could be achieved. There was a shared perception that the organizational field was fragmented, underfunded and lacked a shared

advocacy voice. Despite the fact that this exercise concluded in 2009 with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the organizations, in the interviews people struggled to recall what had been agreed and generally there was a perception that this had not resulted in either an ambitious vision for the sector or concrete proposals on how organizations could share costs bases. Following on from this, a Commission was formally established in January 2011 comprising four leading actors from the ageing organizations, an academic with expertise in ageing and chaired by a leading change management consultant. The Commission was funded and promoted by the same philanthropic foundation and was intended to generate fresh thinking. Its purpose was "to identify and assess the system and civic society changes that will be required if the vision of Ireland as one of the best countries for all of us to grow old in is to be realized."

It issued its report in June 2011 with recommendations but there was consensus amongst the interviewees that little had happened directly as a result of the Ageing Commission process and many of the participants and facilitators reported that it had been a frustrating exercise. The plan committed the organizations to engage in exploring the potential for creating a social movement amongst older adults and developing umbrella structures to integrate the field but there was a sense amongst the participants that this did not represent a shared agenda that the organizations were passionate about pursuing.

In terms of framing the types of organizational changes which the incumbent actors within the field wanted to see, whilst radical changes like mergers were discussed these did not progress beyond the discussion phase. This was often to the frustration of the newer entrants, consultants and funders who often framed the need for more radical change, based on more 'blue skies' type approaches. A smaller group of three organizations did develop a closer relationship on the back of these discussions. This was something which was instigated by these three and which developed out of their shared interests in specific, overlapping programs of work and there was a desire to ensure that this did not threaten each other's organizations.

Data Analysis and Research Methods

39 interviews with nonprofit leaders, foundation staff and consultants were carried out. These interviews were transcribed and evaluation reports, meeting minutes and archival documents were analysed and coded in NVIVO 11, using a grounded approach to develop key themes

from the perceptions expressed on the interactions to create collective action (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Three cycles of coding were conducted. This coding process moved from open codes to meta-themes outlining the main factors which influenced these efforts to construct collective action and how the influence of the foundation on these efforts was perceived. A separate, more theoretical paper was also developed from the data which focuses deriving the institutional logics in the fields and exploring how activists were influenced by these multiple logics.

19 interviews took place in South Africa and 16 in the Republic of Ireland. All of the interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. Table 1 sets out the geographic location and professional backgrounds of the interviewees and Table 2 sets out the meeting minutes and the evaluation materials coded.

Table 1 – Interviewees by research setting and by primary role

	Nonprofit leaders	Foundation Staff	Other foundation staff	Consultants	Total
Republic of Ireland - Ageing	7	4	0	5	16
South Africa - LGBTI	11	1	5	2	19

The interviewees were comprised of the people who had been central to the efforts to construct collective action. Most of the nonprofit actors interviewed were organizational leaders, consultants or staff within funding agencies. In both South Africa and Ireland, consultants were interviewed who facilitated collective action processes or who had been involved in evaluating these efforts. The consultants had a mixture of background in management consulting and evaluation and all had previous experience of working in nonprofit fields in the relevant countries.

As DiMaggio (1991) illustrates, documentation can provide valuable insights into interactions within fields overtime. The documents that were analysed and coded related directly to efforts to construct collective action such as externally commissioned evaluations of collective action efforts and meeting minutes.

Table 2 - Reports and documentation analysed and coded in NVIVO

	Evaluations of collective action efforts	Minutes/transcriptions of meetings to discuss collective action	Other reports of collective action efforts	Total
Republic of Ireland - Ageing	1	7	1	9
South Africa - LGBTI	4	1	1	6

In addition to the documents that were coded in NVIVO, there was a large body of material reviewed as background information, including annual reports and strategic plans. Also, a number of published field histories and publicly available archival materials were analysed which provided important historical insights into the development of the fields and institutional contexts within which the efforts to construct collective action took place.

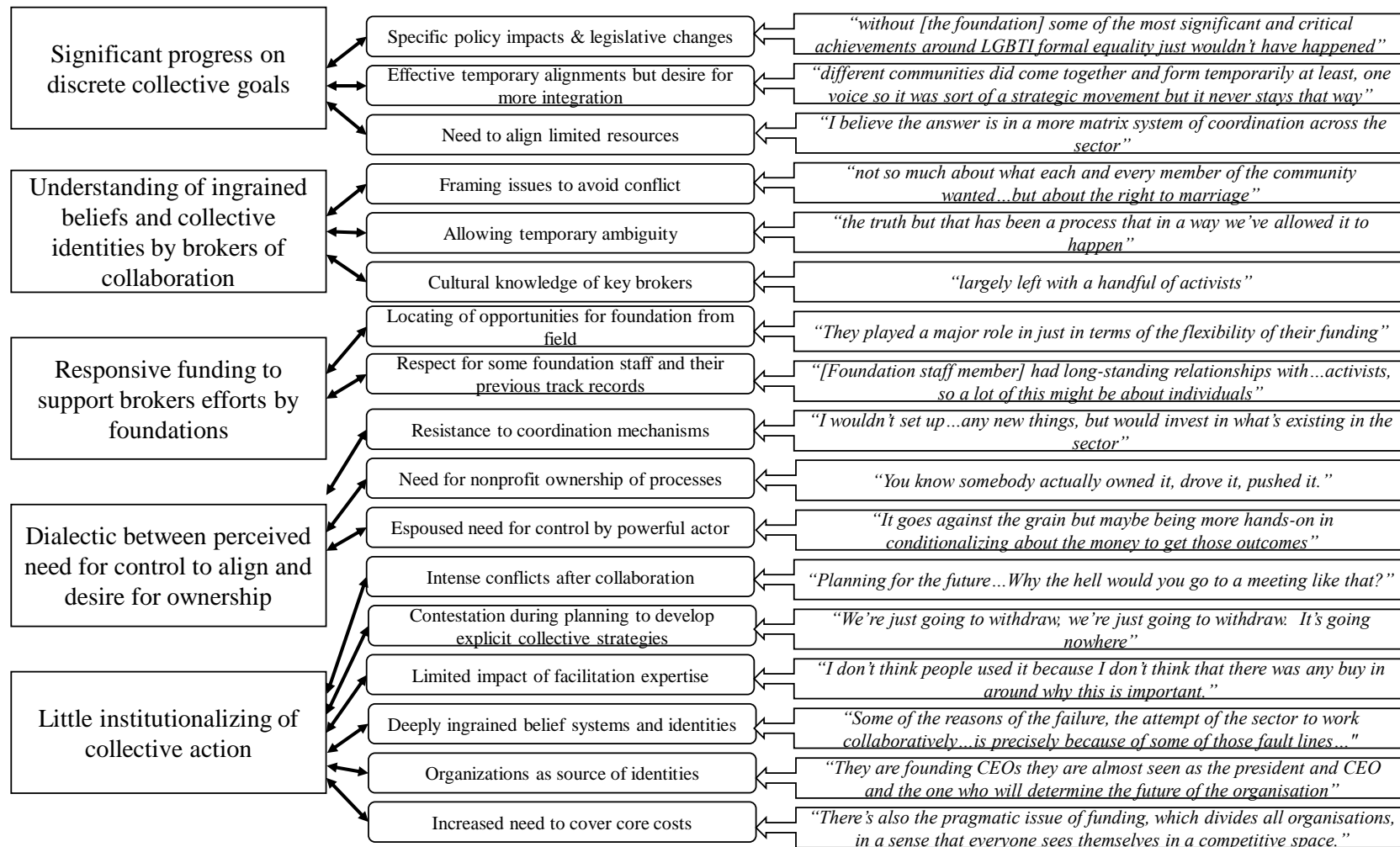
The author was employed in an evaluation and strategy role within the foundation which features in this study. This study was part of a PhD which was completed mostly after leaving the foundation. This provided privileged access to interviewees and documentation but required intensive efforts on reflexivity to be aware of how prior personal experiences of these fields influenced the author's interpretations (similar to Mair & Hehenberger (2014)). In all cases, interviewees were briefed that the author was leaving or had left the foundation and assurances were given around the confidentiality of the research process.

Table 3 – Data Structure

Key Themes

Open Codes

Illustrative quotes



Findings

Sense-making work required to advance on collective action goals- There were significant social changes and advancements arising from some of the collective efforts engaged in by the nonprofit activists which were supported by the foundation. This ranged from successful advocacy efforts to introduce a national ageing strategy to an effective campaign to introduce gay marriage in South Africa. The collaboration across the organizations and consistent framing of issues was seen as crucial to delivering these advancements for the field. Carefully choreographed actions were carried out over the period of these campaign which a small group of central actors designed. In the successful efforts the organizations were willing to cede some control and profile. Importantly, this was made sense to them by nonprofit leaders whom they respected and who also knew how to frame issues in ways which did not bring the potentially conflictual aspects of the collective action to the fore. A lot of effort was put into presenting the collective action as wide joint effort, whereas often there was a core group of activists driving the campaign. The role of the foundation in these successful processes was primarily to respond to the opportunities with funding for actors who could bridge the cleavages within the fields. These were specific opportunities for progress that could be “made sense of” across the different organizations. This can be contrasted with the broader, unsuccessful efforts by the foundation to encourage organizations to engage in strategic planning at field level.

“There have been a lot of political differences amongst the organizations. But having said that I think there have been areas where organizations have come together strategically under a more unified banner. Same sex marriage is one example of that. I think there was a very broader alliance of organizations, even though they were kicking and screaming at times, did in fact converge around the same sex marriage campaign in quite a meaningful way.”

Enduring, deeply ingrained beliefs and practices within the fields – Knowledge of the fields and in particular the ability to navigate the deeply ingrained beliefs about how social change should happen and the reality of organizational rivalries was seen as crucial to the successful funding of these initiatives. These institutionalized beliefs and practices were not malleable or readily understood to newcomers to the field. When the opportunities emerged the foundation was able to target resources to activists with deep knowledge of the logics of the fields to exploit the opportunities and facilitate rapid, lasting progress in terms of the goals of the fields referred to above. In other cases these deeply held beliefs were the source of intense conflicts when the different logics were brought into direct tension, often by activists being

convened to debate and clarify appropriate strategies. This tended to provoke arguments where the other positions was seen as wrong-headed

“It was always a complexifying of things. It’s not just “take this cup and put it there”. It’s always “Who are you to need to say the cup?” and “what is the ideological position of the cup” and why...I don’t know”

In the case of the effort to construct a campaign against violence targeted at the LGBTI community for example, deep divisions emerged about the most appropriate way to organize to address this issue which were brought into conflict when the leaders attempted to engage in planning discussions. For example, one activist described the intense debates that emerged around the attempts to frame violence against lesbians as a hate crime

“Are we saying the rape of a black woman is not as important and a gang rape of a black woman who is not lesbian shouldn’t be getting as severe a sentence? And what are we doing to the women’s rights movement when we start separating ourselves and saying a lesbian woman that’s raped should have this kind of sentence versus a black woman that’s raped.”

Windows of progress but lack of lasting collective alignments – The organizational fields were places where nonprofit leaders sought sometimes to jointly advance social objectives, other times conflicted deeply about what the field should prioritize and competed frequently for resources and profile. The nonprofit leaders interviewed did not believe that significant lasting collective alignments between organizations had resulted from the successful campaigns in the two fields over the period studied, quite the opposite. Across the five cases studied the conscious efforts to facilitate collective action and greater integration of resources and capacities did not result in greater co-ordination in the fields over the period studied. In both fields, periods of dispute and disagreement followed after periods of significant progress towards achieving collective goals. This was a source of frustration for both the nonprofit leaders and the funder. That is not to say that the goals achieved from the successful collective action dissipated, but the organizational field did not radically alter as a result of these successes. The collaboration and alignments across the organizations did not become institutionalized as a way of working in the fields over the period studied after successful collective organizing. The efforts to directly clarify collective strategic agendas by convening groups of organizations did not result in ambitious visions

“It seems so irrelevant now. Nothing has come out of it. A bit of a talking shop. Now at the time it was terribly difficult...We had so many meetings and all the paperwork hopefully did it has gone into the ether. I couldn’t even tell you now what we agreed.”

Dialectic between desire for aligned collective action directed by a funder and resistance of funder driven initiatives – An interesting feature of the research is that nearly all of the nonprofit leaders interviewed espoused a desire for greater alignment within their fields. Many saw division and conflict as a natural state which required a directive influence to bring about greater co-ordination of scarce resources. The foundation was identified as having the potential to do this. Despite this, as this theme was further discussed there was a contradictory desire for collective action to emerge from the bottom up and for the funder not to direct or even support the facilitation of these collective process. Some highlighted that the more funders were perceived as facilitating the collective action, the less actors in the field felt a sense of ownership over it and tended to decouple from it.

“Your ticket to this meeting is not coming out of your precious resources and so if the meeting doesn’t come to agreement well it’s not a huge loss. So I think the Joint Working Group is an interesting example how funding can actually pull apart a network rather than strengthen the network.”

Even where sophisticated, organizational development techniques were used by highly experienced facilitators, concrete plans with action items did not result from these processes. Sometimes, even in circumstances where groups of organizations stood to financially gain and where they recognized the need for greater alignment, they could not jointly develop compelling collective action plans.

“I have a passion and then what I start identifying in this organisation is me. So if you attack the organisation, you’re attacking me. It is difficult letting go”

In both fields there was some resistance to efforts to create new entities to facilitate co-ordination.

“I mean this is the whole question about a foundation changing the landscape...so ultimately who decides. That’s social engineering...just because you’ve money...is that the sufficient authority to change a whole sector?”

Discussion

As was outlined earlier, a number of prominent strands of philanthropic practice literature exhort foundations to be more involved in leading or instigating alignments of nonprofit organizations (e.g. Heifetz et al., 2004; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Porter & Kramer, 1999). A number of early articles on the venture philanthropy movement also encouraged a greater degree of control to be exercise by funders in organizational fields. The Collective Impact approach has in particular become very topical in foundation circles. The above findings raise

significant questions about how broadly Collective Impact or similar funder led approaches should be applied in nonprofit fields.

Funders pushing for clarity when developing a common strategic agenda – It is recommended in much of the practice literature that efforts be invested in clarifying and specifying collective strategy in advance of engaging in campaigns and that this process should be led by funders (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Whilst this would seem an obvious important step when planning collective action, the above analysis highlights also the importance of retaining some ambiguity so as to ensure that different ideologies and collective identities do not overtly clash during interactions. Whilst there above findings reaffirm the importance of planning and developing strategy, it does highlight that explicating all of the underlying assumptions underlying the belief systems of individual can lead to unproductive, intense clashes. In particular, there is a need for activists from within fields to ‘make sense’ of issues to others in ways which preserve enough room to allow slightly different interpretations of events, whilst at the same time achieving alignments so as the campaign can benefit from the strengths of the different organizations. This finding ties in with an emerging strand of literature on the importance of maintaining a degree of ambiguity in interorganizational alignments. The efforts to convene activists to have discussions in the abstract about the future of fields did not lead to productive, collective action but to passive-aggressive and overt clashes. The collective action tended instead to develop more adaptively from activists seeking to exploit opportunities and making sense of these opportunities to each other in ways that were acceptable to each other, with the foundation supporting these efforts.

Alignment of activities and scarce resources by foundations– As is outlined above, there is a functionalist strain from strategic management theory in nonprofit literature more broadly and specifically in the philanthropic practice literature. Kania & Kramer (2011: 40) speaks of the need during collective action to encourage

“...each participant to undertake the specific set of activities at which it excels in a way that supports and is coordinated with the actions of others.”

The above cases though highlight the challenges of funders overtly encouraging alignment amongst organization. The cases studied highlight that the more the foundation sought to actively and visibly encourage alignment, never mind direct, the more the nonprofit leaders

disengaged and decoupled from the collective action processes. Even amongst those activists who advocated for greater donor direction to produce alignment, most felt that this was actually impractical and that ownership needed to be vested in the nonprofit organizations.

Foundation funded coordinating structures – The Collective Impact literature speaks to the need for an organizational structure to drive the collaboration with a “backbone” organization. As we can see from the above analysis, these types of coordinating structures are extremely problematic to introduce into organizational fields. The issue goes far beyond simply competition for resources, although this issue was frequently cited. As we have seen, the identities of the incumbent leaders were often intertwined with the existing organizational structures and the need to promote their own organization was often a taken for granted goal. Even in cases where the organizations stood to financially gain more by working with a new structure instigated by the foundation, the organizations often resisted the new player and were sensitive about any of their peers being elevated. The organizational structures became infused with a value beyond their technical purpose and became enmeshed with the identities and goals of activists.

Institutionalized systems of practices and beliefs – The research supported the findings of other researchers who have studied the durability of pre-existing institutional logics (Aksartova, 2009; Binder, 2007; Heydemann & Hammack, 2009; Swidler, 2009). This paper points to the need to understand the logics that are salient in the field and the limitations which these impose on the extent to which foundations can influence collective action. The importance of working with activists who have good cultural insights into the logics that are salient within fields was also found to be important. In the above cases, these ingrained beliefs about organizing and a taken for granted need to promote their own organizations were structures within which collective action happened. There is a need for much more research on how institutional logics enable and constrain foundations’ work as they interact with organizations in fields. Whilst there is a burgeoning literature on institutional logics (for overviews see Besharov & Smith, 2014; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) we still know very little about how multiple institutional context influence actors over the short-term.

Conclusions

One of the key lessons that emerges from closely studying how efforts to produce greater collective action in fields is the need for foundations to be realistic about what they can influence and what they cannot over the lifetime of a foundation programme of work.

Organizational fields often have multiple deeply institutionalized systems of beliefs, identities and practices. It is important that the foundation staff are aware of the extent to which these logics constrain and enable collective action and that they do not equate financial resources with the ability to re-engineer organization fields, particularly over time periods of ten years or so. The above analysis suggests that the most effective role foundations can play in supporting collective action, is by being responsive to opportunities and working closely with activists who have the desire and the cultural understanding to work across these logics.

This is very different from the role accorded to foundations in much of the philanthropic practice literature, where significant influence is accorded to foundations to align activists and scarce resources to maximize impact. This more functionalist approach to working with organizations vests the foundation with a capacity to act as a central figure in aligning organizations around shared objectives akin to an engineering process. The key considerations according to this approach relate to clarifying strategic intent and then building shared structures and processes to deliver changes.

The image of a foundation that emerges from detailed analysis of the 5 cases of collective action, is more of a surfer rather than an engineer. It is important for foundations to understand the logics of the fields they operate in and to be curious about the emerging opportunities. This understanding of context and the need to identify organizations and activists who can successfully navigate these institutionalized beliefs and practices seems to be critically important for foundations to be effective in funding collective action. This is a more responsive, adaptive and inquisitive approach than that recommended in the much of the strategic management focused practice literature.

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