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Collaboration between philanthropic foundations and government

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to examine collaboration between the government and philanthropic foundations in the age of new governance. This focuses on analysing the relationship that was formed between PFs and the government in Israel during the development and operation of two joint projects initiated by PFs, which aimed to promote collaboration between the two sectors in the fields of children at risk and the public education system.

Design/methodology/approach – Qualitative, thematic content analysis was used to study the relationships that emerged between the PFs and the government. Data were collected from an examination of documented materials and interviews with key participants in the two projects from both parties.

Findings – The article presents the interface between government and philanthropic foundations in the age of new governance. Several major factors that shape these relations in collaborative projects emerged from the comparative analysis of the two case studies and are relevant to public sector management: the different perceptions of government and philanthropic foundations that guide the collaborations, the politics of collaboration and the power relations between PFs and government.

Research limitations/implications – Further research might examine other examples of collaboration between PFs and government, since the research reported here comprises only two case studies.

Originality/value – As collaborations between government and philanthropic foundations are expanding in many countries as part of new-governance structures, the article presents a valuable insight for both academics and practitioners about relationships between these two sectors, and especially collaboration that involves actors from the New Philanthropy.

Keywords Philanthropy, Partnership, Government, Cross-sector collaboration, Non-profit organisations, Policy-making

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the past 20 years, philanthropic foundations (PFs) have begun playing a key role in governance (Ball and Junemann, 2011; Hess, 2005; Schuyt, 2010). The global economic downturn; the uneven increase in global wealth; ideas of new governance, the growing popularity of corporate social responsibility and the perceived demise of the welfare state have contributed to renewed governmental interest in collaborating with these organisations (Eikenberry, 2006; Harrow and Jung, 2011).



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Nonetheless, scholarly work on the interface between these sectors is lacking (Schuyt, 2010). To date, empirical knowledge of the practical reality of these relations is limited (Thumler, 2011). Furthermore, despite the extensive research conducted on partnerships and collaboration between non-profit organisations and government (Gazley, 2008; Huxham, 2003), few have dealt with such cross-sector partnerships (Ball and Junemann, 2011; Knott and McCarthy, 2007; Ramiah and Reich, 2006; Thumler, 2011).

In an era of new governance that involves a “catalysing of all sectors – public, private and voluntary – into action to solve their community problems” (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992, p. 20) and where the state is dependent on a wide range of state and non-state policy actors (Ball, 2008), PFs and government are often considered partners that complement each other particularly well: foundations offer the flexibility, creativity and assets for innovation that government lacks (Leat, 2005) while the public sector provides the resources, technologies and licence to diffuse innovative approaches and to make them sustainable. However, PFs frequently are criticised for interfering illegitimately in matters of public concern, and for tending to pursue the interests of a small social elite under the guise of furthering the common good (Eikenberry, 2006).

To better understand the government-philanthropy nexus as part of the new governance, the article presents a comparative study that used qualitative, thematic content analysis to examine collaboration between the Israeli government and PFs. It focuses on analysing the relationship that formed between the two sectors during the development and operation of two joint PF-initiated projects –that aimed to promote their collaboration regarding children at risk (the Yaniv Project) and the public education system (the Avney-Rosha Project). The Yaniv Project (presented and analysed in detail elsewhere: Almog-Bar and Zychlinski, 2012) is used here in comparison with the Avney-Rosha Project, to advance understanding of the relations between philanthropy and government. The article sheds light on significant factors shaping these inter-relations; the conflicting perceptions guiding such collaborations, the politics of collaboration and the power relations between the two sectors. Finally, we discuss the implications of such relations for public sector management.

Relationships between PFs and Government

In the 1990 s, a new style of philanthropy developed in the West. The enormous profits accruing to this sector through the 1990s and early twenty-first century have generated both a “philanthropic surplus” and a need to demonstrate some social and moral responsibility (Ball and Junemann, 2011). The new generation of philanthropists focuses on innovation, looking for high impact and accountability. Its main distinction from traditional philanthropy is the direct relation of “giving” to “outcomes” and donors’ direct involvement in philanthropic action and policy communities (Ball and Junemann, 2011). These philanthropists fund programs and networks that utilise the language of the market for social exchanges, and deploy business strategies and methods – particularly those of venture capitalism – *vis-à-vis* social problems (Scott, 2009). Donors normally expect to see a clear return on their investment (Schuyt, 2010). They function like a *de facto* advocacy coalition that aims to influence governmental agendas for change. They are powerful in that they are key, active drivers of policy-making, research and advocacy (Scott, 2009).

Strategic philanthropy – a further aspect of the new philanthropy – presents donors with an opportunity to interest governments in innovative projects. In light of this development, Hess (2005) argues that PFs no longer consist of private citizens making a private contribution: they are now important actors in the public arena who should be examined as carefully as any policy actor.

In Israel during the last two decades there has been a move towards network governance: the state has become one of many authorities and players in the field of social policy (Bar and Gidron, 2009). One of the more prominent actors in this new structure is the philanthropic sector, which comprises 6,400 PFs – most of them operating in the social policy field. This new generation of Israeli philanthropists no longer follows the old corporatist model, which raised funds for activities that the government chose and approved. Like their counterparts elsewhere, they now seek to attain more control over the destination of their donations, and have sought to be more involved in policy-making (Rudich, 2007). The Israeli government made an historic decision in 2008, officially recognising for the first time the non-profit sector – including philanthropy, its vast contribution to Israeli society and seeking to encourage partnerships between the public, voluntary and business sectors (Bar and Gidron, 2009). However, in the prevailing view of the national government, PFs are seen more as convenient funding sources for replenishing public budgets and less as partners in policy-making and the delivery of services (Bar and Gidron, 2009).

Although research dealing with the relationship between PFs and government, and PFs' involvement in governance, has increased in recent years, the field is still new. Ball and Junemann (2011) present the growing philanthropic engagement with education policy networks in Britain in the form of sponsorship, partnership, contracting, representation and joint and matched funding. Philanthropists' increasingly significant participation in these networks has introduced new players, new ideas, and new energy into the state education system by using forms of enterprise and investment. These networks are now moving towards a more interactive, fragmented form of policy-making. The three sectors are converging and their margins blurring, with a resulting mix in the matrix of governance involving "complex relations of reciprocal interdependence" (Jessop, 2002, p. 52).

However, the state's commitment to the new ways of policy-making and the delivery of service with philanthropy should not be over-estimated. While elements of the state look for new ways of opening up and de-concentrating decision-making, others continue to be committed to older forms of centralised government (Ball and Junemann, 2011).

Other researchers have presented a more critical view of the relations between philanthropy and government in the age of new governance (Eikenberry, 2006; Nickell and Eikenberry, 2010; Scott, 2009), arguing that philanthropists' actions enable them to modify meanings, mobilise assets, generate new technologies and exert pressure on – or even decide – the direction of policy in specific contexts. This is seen as a direct, disproportionate intervention in policy-making and democracy (Saltman, 2010). In many ways, and especially within an environment of network governance, philanthropists have taken on the role of the state – essentially setting and implementing policy through their independent funding choices. Such philanthropists have huge wealth to give away: that so many celebrate this hides the fact that the system creating a need for extreme philanthropy is one that also creates extreme poverty (Nickel and Eikenberry, 2010).

Thus, wealth that is largely the result of favourable public policies is directed into mostly tax-exempt foundations, where philanthropists directly shape public policy for the poor, without the public deliberative process that might have functioned, were that money in the public coffers (Scott, 2009).

Research method

The study examined the relationships between PFs and government during the development and operation of two collaborative projects, using a qualitative research method. This provided a basis for examining the subjective perceptions and experiences of participants in the collaborative process, providing comprehensive insights into the activities and relationships among these organisations (Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Van-Evera, 1997).

We collected data from November 2008 to July 2009 through 20 semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted with senior staff members and key figures in the participating PFs and government representatives. Each participant played a significant, active role in the decision-making processes related to one of the projects. We identified the key players after analysing documents related to the policy-making process and consulting with key figures in the PFs who initiated the projects. Our interview protocol consisted of 15 open-ended questions about the activities of the PFs and governmental agencies, and the interactions between them in the policy-making process. We recorded the interviews, each one-two hours long, producing verbatim transcripts from each audiotape. Scanning each transcript, we extracted and coded meaningful statements and clustered similarly-coded statements by themes (Gerring, 2007). We also analysed the content of relevant documents: minutes of meetings, correspondence between the parties, various reports published while the projects were being conducted and relevant media coverage.

The limitation of our study is that, as it presents only two cases of collaboration between PFs and government, its representativeness is restricted. This also affects the feasibility of generalising our findings, which also need to be understood in terms of the specific context in which each collaboration took place. A further possible limitation is that self-reporting may have introduced social acceptability bias. However, despite these limitations, the study examines a little-studied phenomenon, offering further understanding of the relations between collaborating philanthropy and government.

The projects

The study examined two collaborative projects of philanthropic foundations and the Israeli government. The Yaniv Project, launched by new PFs in 2003, aimed to promote a new, general national policy scheme for children- and youth-at-risk in Israel. The project ended in 2007, following the government's decision not to recognise it as a national project. (For a detailed description of the project, see Almog-Bar and Zychlinski, 2012, pp. 800-802).

The Avney-Rosha Project was launched in the early 2000s. Several PFs (two new-style and one traditional) began to explore the possibility of improving the Israeli public school system, and especially the management and administrative capabilities of school principals. The foundations requested government co-operation, committing themselves to raising approximately USD20 million over five years, with the understanding that the government would match this amount. Despite harsh criticism

from the teachers' union and academics, who saw the initiative as a privatisation of the public school system, the Education Minister supported it. In August 2008, the Avney-Rosha Institute was established as a joint initiative of a PF and the Ministry of Education. The Minister of Education chairs its board of directors; a PF representative is the vice-chair.

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Findings

Conflicting perceptions regarding the role of Government and PFs, and their legitimacy in governance

Relationships between non-profit organisations and government, and those between different actors in policy-making processes, are based on each party's perceptions of the other's role (Coston, 1998). Therefore, in order to understand the relations between collaborating philanthropy and government, it is crucial to examine their respective perceptions regarding their roles in governance. In the two projects studied, the findings revealed conflicting perceptions.

The government representatives involved in both projects – mainly public managers – believed that PFs play many roles in the development and implementation of services, including increasing funding and offering new ideas that can contribute to improving or developing services. Nonetheless, they felt that the PFs should not 'interfere' in the process of setting policy. An Education Ministry representative in the Avney-Rosha Project stressed: "It was very important for us to make it very clear that the policy cannot be expropriated from the Ministry of Education."

The philanthropists perceived their role differently. The Yaniv Project PFs emphasised their right to set the policy agenda and lead the project, especially in light of the government's failure to do so. The Avney-Rosha Project PFs tended to help the government lead and develop new policy, rather than lead in its stead. One philanthropist explained: "We need to be like a pin that irritates the elephant, but never to replace the elephant . . . We will show you that there is another way, and we will help you to build it, but you are responsible for the road."

However, philanthropists in both projects stressed the importance of their role as policy actors in governmental policy-making processes. This was the main conceptual difference between the philanthropists and government. The latter perceived PFs as illegitimate actors in the arena of policy-setting, whereas the philanthropists perceived themselves as legitimate, crucial actors, contributing new ideas and knowledge to policy-making.

Such conflicting perceptions formed the basis for the relationships between the two sectors, significantly affecting the definitions of collaboration that each sector attempted to establish.

The politics of collaboration

Definition of collaboration: While the participants from both sectors perceived the relationship that developed in the projects as collaboration, their perceptions differed regarding the roles of each party in governance.

The government representatives considered this collaboration asymmetrical. While the collaborative project could be developed and implemented jointly, the philanthropists were never to take the lead. The government had the right to veto decisions, and choose the time and place for philanthropic involvement, its

representatives viewing this as an opportunity to promote issues and projects on their agenda. One stated: "I even see a blessing in the collaboration with philanthropy, but only on the condition that the collaboration is coordinated with complete understanding of our needs."

The philanthropists on both projects viewed the collaboration differently. The Yaniv Project PFs viewed it as an interaction between equal partners, the relationship remaining symmetrical at all stages of the policy-making process: the government did not have to lead. While seeking to participate actively in the decision-making process, the Avney-Rosha Project PFs respected the government's desire to lead the collaboration as its public duty. One argued:

We do not know better, it's certainly not our responsibility or our role ... The correct way is to study together the research being carried around the world, see what is suitable for Israel ... and to understand the reality, and always give the reins to the Ministry of Education.

This readiness to view the government as the leading partner in the policy-making process in the Avney-Rosha Project allowed the collaboration to advance. By contrast, the intention of the Yaniv Project PFs to establish a symmetrical relationship inhibited the development of the policy-making process.

One of the main differences between the two projects that the interviews revealed was the lack of discourse regarding the collaboration content and structure, in the Yaniv Project versus the constant dialogue in the Avney-Rosha Project. The situation in the former caused withdrawal, defensiveness and distrust between the partners. A PF representative explained: "The government and the foundations worked separately. There was no system for working together." This led to the adoption of two main defensive patterns of behaviour by the two sectors: nominal, symbolic collaboration, and each partner seeking to control the partnership. They felt they had been drawn into collaboration out of necessity. As gaining control over the process would enable them to achieve their goals, each party tried to utilise the partnership as a means to this end. This source of constant conflict ultimately harmed the project (Almog-Bar and Zychlinski, 2012).

The opposite behaviour model developed in the Avney-Rosha Project. To achieve their aim of developing the government's readiness to facilitate changes in the system, the PFs initiated various new forums for discussion. They then presented their policy proposal to establish a new institution for training school principals in management. One PF representative claimed:

We conducted a lot of dialogues at many organisational levels: the supervisor; the school principal; the CEO and the minister. We reached every level; we treated with the whole political level. You can't come to the minister and neglect the others, this is a mistake; you must not neglect the civil servants, and you must build confidence.

This strategy helped to set a clear, agreed definition of the problem (Person *et al.*, 2009); nurture the process (Huxham, 2003), maintain the professional status of public managers, and relate to them as a significant resource for policy change (Howlett, 2011). The partners were able to identify the mutual added value of the collaboration, which could not be achieved without the partnership. Added value is one of the most important conditions for encouraging cross-sector collaboration (Person *et al.*, 2009). The PFs viewed the government as a key factor for helping them to formulate, promote and disseminate their initiative on a national level, and also to ensure continuity and

sustainability. The government representatives viewed the PFs as innovators who could help lead new alternatives and lend financial assistance. One government official stated:

The way-in is an extra budget, but not only that: they (PFs) come also with the ability to think differently, from a different viewpoint and they are able to integrate it and suggest new alternatives. I think this contributes to a different type of development, of understanding, and perhaps it creates a different management perception.

The politics of collaboration also involved the personal and organisational dynamics that emerged between the actors. The suspicion and distrust characterising the dynamics in the Yaniv Project between the government representatives and the PFs created an atmosphere that deterred dialogue. In the Avney-Rosha Project, a close relationship developed between the government representatives and one of the representatives of a traditional PF, but not between the government's representatives and the other (new) philanthropists involved. One new philanthropist commented: "They particularly wanted us to leave the leading position... They wished we weren't there because they think that business people are taking over our country." Furthermore, the PFs of the new philanthropy felt patronised by those of the traditional kind: the latter had a history of joint projects and good relations with government, enjoying favourable attitudes. The new-style PFs felt the government partners' distrust and suspicion. For their part, the government representatives felt that the new philanthropists did not respect them as professionals. One government representative explained:

Outside groups that ... support new management concepts create a sense of superiority. They say that we [government officials] do not know how to manage, and we [the new philanthropists], because of our successes in high-tech, know how to manage better and more accurately. We [government officials] see these days how those administrative skills have caused crashes in industry.

As in other policy governance networks, where social, business, philanthropic and political relationships are intertwined and inter-layered (Ball and Junemann, 2011), the PF representatives and the philanthropists involved in both the projects studied utilised their personal, social and political connections and informal access to influential politicians, including government ministers, the Prime Minister, and senior staff of government ministries. The difference between the projects lies in the approach of the PFs to the senior staff members in government (public managers). The Yaniv Project PFs expected their political connections with ministers and the Prime Minister to be sufficient for promoting the initiative. They involved fewer senior staff members and invested fewer resources in working with officials in government ministries. This strategy proved ineffective. The Avney-Rosha Project PFs worked with all levels of government, which proved more successful. The constructive relationships that developed between the PFs and the public managers encouraged the Education Ministry representatives to persuade the Ministry of Finance to find a legal way to establish the collaboration. Public managers played an important role in the period between the dissolution of one government and the formation of the next. They continued to look for solutions that finally allowed the implementation of the project.

Finally, the findings reveal that the absence in Israel of a clear policy regarding the governance of such collaborations and the lack of appropriate legal frameworks for

cross-sector collaboration based on matching-funds was an important obstacle to further development. It clearly was an impediment to the development of the Yaniv Project, but also proved a hurdle for the Avney-Rosha Project. The partners in both projects considered this lack a serious obstacle in their respective relationships. However, the long process of shared deliberations and negotiations that characterised the Avney-Rosha Project enabled them to clearly define the boundaries of the collaboration. The negotiations mainly addressed the issue of shared governance, clearly determining leadership by the Ministry of Education.

Discussion

This study examined the relationships between PFs and government in the process of developing collaboration in social policy. In this section, we focus on the challenges that philanthropy brings to collaborations with government and highlight implications for public sector management.

The findings reveal that, in Israel as in other western countries, philanthropists are increasingly becoming involved in governance and acting as agents for policy change. They initiate policies and promote them through different forms, one of which is collaboration with government. However, the development of effective collaboration in these two cases was hindered on the one hand by the government representatives' perception of philanthropy mainly as a vehicle for replenishing budget cuts, and their lack of respect and knowledge regarding the new philanthropy, and the criticism and attitudes of superiority of the new PFs toward the government, on the other. Conversely, the positive prior familiarity between traditional philanthropists and the government – and government's perception of the traditionalists as less of a threat than the new philanthropy – allowed the Avney-Rosha Project to develop and get underway. It seems, therefore, that the very characteristics of new philanthropy that form the basis for its involvement in governance – its pro-activeness and innovation, strategic intentions and business orientation – pose significant difficulties for governments attempting to develop such collaborations. From the governmental viewpoint, the values of new philanthropy – especially its business-like strategic orientation and its desire to set policy – challenge the values and activity of the public sector. The abundant, diverse resources at the new philanthropists' disposal, their intention to actively participate in policy-setting while challenging traditional power structures governing the relations between government and civil society, and the wide support and legitimacy they receive from the public and the media, threaten government and hinder the development of effective collaborations based on shared governance (Schuyt, 2010; Scott, 2009).

It is important to note, as we have seen in the case of the Yaniv Project, that not all networks or collaborations involving ties between different sectors serve a shared governance function (Ball and Junemann, 2011). Moreover, the findings suggest that while collaboration between government and philanthropy is becoming more common, it may not be an effective strategy for government when dealing with social problems. First, there are enormous difficulties involved in bridging the parties' conflicting perceptions and working through the power relations with philanthropy that require from government significant investments of time, energy and power sharing. Second, while philanthropy may introduce new ideas and can garner much-needed funding, its activity is typically short-term and directed toward causes or issues that may not truly

need to be addressed from the perspective of the public good (Eikenberry, 2006). Finally, as we have seen in the cases analysed here, their enormous wealth, close ties with politicians and high public profile make philanthropists powerful actors who intervene disproportionately in policy-setting and democracy. Thus, government should think carefully about the added value of collaboration with philanthropy and assess its cost-benefits with the public good in mind, before entering into such relationships (Huxham, 2003; Person *et al.*, 2009). Moreover, it seems that in the age of new governance, when there are high expectations from both government and philanthropy to create partnerships, government needs to consider carefully its policy towards cross-sector collaboration, including the development of appropriate legal and administrative frameworks.

Our findings support Ball's assertion that "governance does not mean a 'hollowing out' of the state or involve a giving up by the state of its capacity to steer policy" (Ball, 2008, p. 748). As we have seen with the Avney-Rosha Project, the collaboration became possible when the government (the Education Ministry) took the leading role and the PFs developed their strategy so that it related to the role and form of the public sector. In the case of the Yaniv Project, the collaboration failed when the government felt it had been drawn into the partnership and the philanthropists insisted on leading the project. Thus, far from "hollowing-out" in cross-sector collaborations, government's capacity to lead and steer policy seems to be a crucial factor in creating effective collaboration.

The findings also clearly illuminate the key role that public managers play in governance and collaborations. In both projects studied here, they played an important role and were a significant factor in the success or failure of the ventures. Cross-sector collaboration as a new form of participatory, consultative governance structure has broadened the scope of influence for public managers: exercising their authority no longer occurs only from the top-down, but also influences processes from the bottom-up (Howlett, 2011). They are also in a better position than politicians for dealing with policy issues, and are better protected from the short-term political pressure to win elections or maintain parliamentary coalitions.

The study highlights several implications for public sector management practice. First, it points to the need of public managers interested in developing collaboration to learn more about the values, intentions and modes of operation of the new philanthropy. Second, it indicates a need for ongoing, open dialogue between government and philanthropy in order to work through their differences. Such informed dialogue can enable coordination of expectations and the formulation of common goals that provide a stable basis for collaborative activities (Gazley, 2008). Third, the findings reveal the importance of establishing collaboration based on clear added value for government. When collaboration is perceived as a technical and financial means, it becomes ceremonial and symbolic. Conversely, when a clear added value is recognised, the collaboration is likely to last longer and be more effective.

In conclusion, the increasing involvement of philanthropy in collaboration with government as part of the new governance poses important challenges to the public sector while also presenting opportunities. The comparative analysis of two collaborative projects has shed light on the complexities involved in these relationships. We presented the conflicting perceptions of government and philanthropy regarding collaboration, the politics of collaboration and the power

relations between the two sectors. All are significant factors that shape these relations. Nonetheless, such collaboration – with both its opportunities and its many costs – can be an effective policy tool for social change. However, the government needs to take the lead and steer the policy; to be able to perceive philanthropy as a partner and recognise its added value to policy, and to be able to share some of its authority with philanthropy. As collaborations between government and PFs increase, further research could be conducted into other examples of such partnerships in different national contexts, and especially the extent to which they contribute to the public good.

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