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Abstract of Paper

The complexity and intractability of many contemporary public policy problems places a high premium on the ability of decision makers and their organizations to devise and implement innovative, creative and entrepreneurial solutions to secure their amelioration or resolution. The trans-boundary, complex and multi-framed nature of such problems are typically not conducive to single organizations acting independently primarily because they are unable to mobilise sufficient and appropriate action to intervene effectively. Instead, solutions need to be designed and delivered through collaborative forms of working often between a diverse set of actors, interests and organizations representing different policy sectors and levels of governance and sometimes the subject of different spatial and temporal imperatives.

Co-operative strategies offer the potential of learning and knowledge creation developed from a broad understanding and analysis of a problem through the deliberation of different actors and the application of their combined skills and expertise. They have the prospect of generating a diversified, efficient and effective delivery capability enabled through better co-ordination and/or sharing resources. Harnessing the skills, expertise, experience and knowledge of actors from diverse agencies, professions and backgrounds creates the potential for innovation and public entrepreneurship.

The catalysts for this activity can emanate from supportive structural and organizational arrangements that are deliberately designed to stimulate knowledge transfer, innovation and entrepreneurship often associated with the development of 'learning organizations'. However, the central thrust of this paper is that individual actors – referred to as boundary spanners - have a critical and central role in this process. Boundary spanners are those especially talented

actors who thrive within collaborative policy arenas where approaches to management are materially different to those prevailing in other forms of governance, particularly hierarchies. Boundary spanners mobilise a distinct set of competencies - skills, abilities, capabilities, traits and experience – to support a number of key boundary spanning roles. The design and delivery of effective solutions to 'wicked issues' through innovative and entrepreneurial approaches is one such key role, and this paper explores in detail how boundary spanners set about this task, how different permutations of competencies are mobilised to best effect, and what tensions and challenges are encountered in this form of management. Problems of multiple accountabilities, managing/switching between different modes of governance and building sustainable inter-personal relationships based on trust will be highlighted. Empirical evidence will be presented to support the paper from examples of the work of boundary spanners in different public policy areas in Wales.

Although the research and literature on collaboration has steadily been accumulating, it often tends to be pitched at the organizational and whole-system levels, and understates the role and contribution of individual actors in the process. This paper is aimed at redressing this balance and highlights the contribution of boundary spanners in their entrepreneurial role. It concludes with some implications for policy, practice and learning/training.

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