The Impact of Publicness on Organizational Collaborative Behaviors

Abstract

Although collaboration has gained significant attention recently from public administration researchers, its process is still regarded as a “black box.” One way to contribute to collaboration research is, therefore, to identify a specific mechanism of the collaboration process. In this regard, this article examines and tests the factors affecting organizational collaborative behaviors, especially focusing on publicness as a new driving force. Using 2009 American Hospital Association (AHA) data with binary logistic and ordered logistic analysis, this study tests which factors from a multi-dimensional model of publicness lead to hospitals’ collaborative behaviors. To be specific, three dimensions of publicness—regulative, normative (associative), and cultural publicness—as well as a number of control variables are taken into consideration as the factors that affect collaboration. The results generally support the argument that publicness positively affects hospitals’ collaborative behaviors, which calls for attention from researchers to consider publicness as a critical factor in developing collaboration among the actors.

Keywords: collaborative behavior, publicness, multi-dimension, hospital, logistic analysis.
Collaboration has received a great amount of attention from public management scholars. Collaboration refers to 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 visions of what is possible (Gray 1989, 5).” A considerable number of studies have attempted to identify different forms of collaboration (Agranoff 2006; Bryson et al. 2006; McGuire 2006; Murray 1998; Zajac, D’Aunno, and Burns 1993). For example, Murray (1998) categorizes three different forms of collaborative activities including sharing of information, joint delivery of programs, and full partnerships and mergers by the degree of interdependence among the actors. Focusing on the health care industry, Zajac, D’Aunno, and Burns (1993) identify various forms of collaboration with the criteria being the degrees of autonomy, ranging from hospital associations, through alliances, joint programs and ventures, to mergers and acquisitions.

Two main theories that have offered explanations as to why organizations collaborate are resource dependence theory (Pfeffer and Salancik 1978) and transaction cost theory (Williamson 1975; 1985; 1991). The former explains collaboration as a managerial response with external environments, which helps acquire critical resources and reduce uncertainties, while the latter demonstrates that organizations form collaborative relationships to minimize transaction costs and maximize benefits. Although it has been proven that both theories have explanatory power, they have been criticized for disregarding social and contextual factors because the collaboration process is still often regarded as a “black box” (Thompson 2006). Thus, it is necessary to consider other approaches that would give sufficient explanations for collaborative behaviors. Therefore, this article suggests an alternative approach with the introduction of publicness theory.