

Triple Helix Conference – Abstract

Authors:

Theme: 7 – Place based innovations

Title: The Policy Shop: Innovation, Partnerships and Capacity-building

Keywords: innovation brokers, third sector organizations

Introduction: The Policy Shop is an innovative organization run by graduate students at the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy at the University of Saskatchewan. It is pro-bono consultancy managed by the students under the guidance of policy faculty. It offers students the opportunity to hone their professional skills by working on problems faced by third sector organizations while allowing those organizations, which typically do not have funding to pay for consulting, access to skills and research they would not otherwise be able to obtain. In this case, the third sector, sometimes called the non-profit or voluntary sector, refers to value-driven organizations that fall outside the domains of industry and government¹. The main argument this paper will present is that the Policy Shop acts as an innovation broker within the Triple Helix space by improving the policy capacity of third sector organizations. Increased policy capacity and competencies enhance relationships between the third sector organization and government, and in some cases, industry.

Theory: Knowledge production is no longer a vertical process involving homogeneous organizations; it is now a horizontal process that requires heterogeneous partners collaborating on specific problems². Triple Helix theory suggests that economic growth depends on developing knowledge in an environment of collaboration between governments, industry, and universities³. Although much of the Triple Helix literature focuses on technology transfer and new business incubators, in a knowledge-based economy, innovation in other sectors also provides important support for growth. In this case, the Policy Shop is an innovation coming from the university sector to build policy capacity in the third sector; when this policy capacity is used to encourage legislative changes, there is spillover to the government and industry sectors.

Innovation brokers act as catalyzing agents in partnerships by providing information and linkages within a network of organizations; brokers within a network of actors to enable other organizations to innovate, rather than focusing on implementing innovations themselves. The main function of innovation brokers is to enable multi-stakeholder interaction and build linkages within innovation systems⁴. From a policy perspective, understanding how fragmented innovation systems can benefit

¹ National Audit Office. n.d. *What is the third sector and its benefits for commissioners*. <http://www.nao.org.uk> (Accessed February 10th, 2013).

² Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P., & Trow, M. 1994. *The new production of knowledge: The dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies*. London: Sage.

³ Etzkowitz, H. 2008. *The Triple Helix: University-Industry-Government Innovation in Action*. London: Routledge.

⁴ Klerkx, L., A. Hall, & C. Leeuwis. 2009. "Strengthening Agricultural Innovation Capacity: Are Innovation Brokers the Answer?" *International Journal of Agricultural Resources, Governance and Ecology* 8(5/6): 409–438.

from different means of innovation brokerage is important, since such mechanisms are context-dependent.

Over the last few decades, the Canadian federal government has shifted towards an alternative service delivery model, which is seen as a means of encouraging innovative program delivery and focusing on new partnerships, while deinstitutionalizing public administration⁵. The third sector has increasingly been called upon to fill gaps in government service delivery and address community needs that fall outside the realm of for-profit industry. However, these organizations frequently run on tight budgets and face ever more burdensome accountability measures in order to access funding. Many do not have the capacity to conduct research or work on governance structures that will help them run more effectively. As such, there is a need for individuals and organizations on the “borders” who can work across institutional lines to encourage collaboration and innovation⁶.

Methodology: The methodology employed in this paper is a case study of the student-run initiative known as the Policy Shop. To the extent of the author’s knowledge, there are not any similar programs run exclusively by students for students at other policy schools in Canada. The first major project tackled by the Policy Shop was completed for the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA), which represents the views of municipal governments in the province and advocates for municipal needs at the provincial level⁷. In response to requests from their members, SUMA asked the Policy Shop to conduct research on current provincial legislation governing municipal long-term debt and whether this legislation was a barrier to economic growth. The province has been experiencing rapid growth, and many municipalities questioned the applicability of including utility debt in long-term debt calculations; they found this criterion restrictive when requesting loans to build key infrastructure in their rapidly-growing communities. The Policy Shop’s research was presented to the SUMA board and other stakeholders, and the final report caught the attention of the provincial Ministry of Intergovernmental Affairs and the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce.

Since the completion of this project the Policy Shop has undertaken work with a diverse group of organizations, including the Children’s Discovery Museum, the Saskatchewan Canola Development Commission, and the Saskatoon Intercultural Association. These projects have encompassed tasks such as conducting an environmental scan of other museums’ governing documents to provide recommendations for improved board governance structures, researching control measures and legislative responsibility for emerging plant diseases, and drawing lessons and strategies for diversifying funding opportunities from similar non-profit organizations. Once these projects are complete, further analysis of their impact will be carried out.

Implications: The third sector offers important services while facing regulatory and financial challenges; the trend of alternative service delivery seems unlikely to change in a climate of budget cuts and government service reductions. As such, the Policy Shop acts as an innovation broker and assists these

⁵ Zussman, D. 2002. “Alternative service delivery.” *The Handbook of Canadian Public Administration*, ed. C. Dunn. Toronto: Oxford University Press.

⁶ Campbell, John L. 2004. *Institutional Change and Globalization*. Oxford & Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁷ Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association. *About us*. <http://suma.org/> (Accessed February 10th, 2013).

organizations with demand articulation, network composition and innovation process management⁸ that allows them to complete their work more effectively, while improving their relationships with government, university, and industry.

⁸ Klerkx, L., A. Hall, & C. Leeuwis. 2009. "Strengthening Agricultural Innovation Capacity: Are Innovation Brokers the Answer?" *International Journal of Agricultural Resources, Governance and Ecology* 8(5/6): 409–438.