Effectuation, Discourse and Multisector Collaboration: A Research Agenda

Objectives

The proposed research seeks to explore the utility of applying the logic of effectuation and an effectuation theoretical perspective to the study of multisector collaborative venture development. Currently effectuation theory, as originally developed and defined by Saras Sarasvathy in her seminal PhD work under the supervision of Herb Simon, is exclusively seen in the entrepreneurship literature as a theoretical basis for entrepreneurial venture creation. However, the objective of my research is to move effectuation theory from the entrepreneurial context to the triple-helix context of multisector collaborative venture creation since these ventures are incredibly creative in bringing together sectors that don't ordinarily talk together towards achieving some real social/societal benefit. This, to me logically links multisector collaborative venture creation processes to entrepreneurial theory. In order to go beyond a discovery-oriented research agenda seeking to uncover the presence of effectual logic, effectuation can also serve to inform actionable outcomes. Too much time is spent trying to predict the unpredictable, assuming resources will expand in order to fit objectives and not acknowledging that success will entail some affordable loss in 'talking entrepreneurial talk'. Effectuation is how triple helix collaboration can actually 'walk the walk' so an additional somewhat more normative objective is to use the findings to suggest that triple helix organizations in the early stages of establishing collaborative efforts, take a more direct effectuation approach. This research will be informed by analyzing the 'talk' or 'discourse' (spoken text) of the academic, industry and government sector members of the Board of Directors of a specific multisector collaborative venture in addition to the 'talk' (as found in participants' verbal accounts) of several members of the initial steering committee established to assess the feasibility of creating such a venture. The results of this research will be valuable to members of all three sectors in that existing frameworks for establishing multisector collaboration can potentially be broadened such that the initiation and ongoing management of these complex collaborations can be better realized. Collaborative ventures have an alarmingly high rate of failure so practical, applied research such as what is being proposed can have an immediate impact on solving this particular real world problem.

In developing novel theory of multisector collaborative venture creation, the proposed research will support the development of a new stream of research on the use of a discourse analytic perspective in assessing the role that effectuation plays in the development and management of collaboration in the triple helix of academia, government and industry interorganizational relations. It will build on my PhD research on multisector collaboration by taking a new theoretical and methodological approach in the form of effectuation theory and critical

discourse analysis. In realizing the objective above, the proposed research seeks to explore the value of 'borrowing' entrepreneurship theory and assessing its utility through discourse analysis of participants engaged in multisector collaboration. The proposed project will lead to the development of an integrated literature base and the reconceptualization of the framework that I developed in my PhD research. The proposed study will also draw upon the "triple helix" model in framing linkages between organizations.

Context

Through my recent experiences in having joined our University's Technology Innovation Management (TIM) council combined with the TIM Program initiative to explore the Born Global Entrepreneurship phenomenon, this has prompted me to pursue aspects of this as a formal stream of research. In becoming better-informed about entrepreneurship and venture creation, I was led to the literature on entrepreneurial decision-making and effectuation, in particular. Sarasvathy (2004, p. 524) defines effectuation as "a set of nonpredictive control strategies that are primarily means-driven, where goals emerge as a consequence of stakeholder acquisition, rather than vice versa". Based on what effectuation is, I see tremendous potential for introducing it as a theoretical perspective to the study of multisector collaboration and collaborative venture creation, in particular. The focus of the proposed research has the partners in a multi-sector collaborative venture as the unit of analysis as opposed to the venture itself.

In looking at the venture creation literature, entrepreneurs are described as pursuing a rational, goal-driven, deliberate model of decision making and opportunity identification referred to as the causation model (Bird, 1989; Chandler et al 2011; Gabrielsson and Politis, 2011; Harms and Schiele, 2012). When an entrepreneur uses causal logic, they begin with a given goal, focus on expected returns, emphasize competitive analyses, exploit pre-existing knowledge, and try to predict (in order to control) an ncertain future (Bird, 1989). In contrast, Sarasvathy (2001; 2004), Read, Song and Smit (2009), Perry, Chandler and Markoval (2012) argue that entrepreneurs also employ effectuation processes when pursuing (or creating) entrepreneurial opportunities when they start with a generalized aspiration and then attempt to satisfy that aspiration using the resources they have at their immediate disposal (i.e., who they are, what they know, and who they know). This appraisal facilitates them then contemplating 'what can I do?' The overall objective is not clearly envisioned at the beginning, and those entrepreneurs using effectuation processes remain flexible, take advantage of environmental contingencies as they arise, and learn as they go in beginning with a given set of means, a focus on affordable loss, emphasizing the creation and management of networks of strategic and collaborative partnerships and seeking to enhance means in the present rather than predict (and control) the

future (Dew, Read, Sarasvathy and Wiltbank, 2009). A key principle of effectuation is that an entrepreneur begins not with a precise product, service, or venture in mind, but with a set of means that can be used to address a good idea (Fisher, 2012). Means are idiosyncratic to the entrepreneur and encompass his or her skills, resources, and people who could help address the area of interest. For example, a person interested in a social issue would begin by considering the means he or she had available to do something about the issue (Read, Dew, Sarasvathy and Wiltbank, 2009). In further contrast to the causation model, effectuating entrepreneurs are molders and creators of their immediate environment rather than predictors of and reactors to events in the world (Sarasvathy, 2001) and it has more recently been argued that effectual logic is required in the organizational design that occurs in the interface between organizational founders and the ventures they design (Sarasvathy, Dew, Read and Wiltbank, 2008). Entrepreneurs, thus, attempt to shape and create a workable solution to a perceived need rather than divine a normatively ideal way to meet the need (Sarasvathy, 2001). In the case of social value creation, effectuating entrepreneurs would try to shape and create a solution to a social need based on resources at hand rather than trying to predict what the ideal solution would be and assemble resources to manifest it. Effectuation processes thus seem to include the very creation of entrepreneurial opportunities since the entrepreneur combines means to enact one of many outcomes made possible by the unique combination of means at his or her disposal at a given point in time (Venkataraman, Sarasvathy, Dew and Forster, 2012). As such, the opportunities that do emerge in time are created, not found or discovered. Also, effectuation highlights interactive processes that can involve intense negotiation among the entrepreneur and various stakeholders within the effectuation approach (Sarasvathy, Dew, Velamuri and Venkataraman, 2003). Who comes on board to join the venture determines what its goals and outcomes will be (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2008). Again, we see an implicit reflection of effectuation in social entrepreneurship (SE) research when authors describe how a social entrepreneur must enact an opportunity through championing it (Thompson, 2002) and how SE opportunities are a function of the idiosyncrasies of the entrepreneur, especially his or her relationships (Robinson, 2006). In yet another contrast with the rational/economic approach to entrepreneurship, effectuation envisions the entrepreneurial process as actor-dependent not outcome dependent. In effectuation, outcomes do not hover independently from the entrepreneur out there in society waiting to be found or discovered. Instead, outcomes are shaped and enacted by entrepreneurs through imagination and aspiration (Sarasvathy, 2001).

Studying effectuation is important since it appears to be a frequently-used cognitive approach by experienced entrepreneurs early in venture formation in highly uncertain environments but it has not been explored in the context of multisector collaborative venture formation and management of a non-entrepreneurial nature. In the case of multisector collaborative ventures, those representatives on the venture's Board of Directors are accustomed to different organizational cultures and management philosophies and they also will have differing levels of

experience in these roles; so an additional objective of the proposed research is to compare the extent to which multisector collaborative partners (based on their multisector collaborative experience) draw upon effectual logic in their discourse since Read, Dew, Sarasvathy, Song and Wiltbank (2009) have shown that it is expert entrepreneurs that tend to use effectual logic versus novice entrepreneurs' use of predictive/causal logic when faced with uncertainty. Thus, when people from different sectors are interacting with one another, their talk can be very revealing in terms of the 'discourse' they draw upon in framing what they want to achieve and how to achieve it. I will use an approach called Discourse Analysis that will help me deconstruct how various participants from the three sectors talk and how this discourse might be influencing the extent to which they use effectual logic in their decision-making and its impact on how the collaboration is working and possibly how it could be conducted differently to lead to better collaboration. This research will provide insight as to how best to initiate and then manage complex triple helix collaboration efforts on an ongoing basis. In essence, the long-term intended research program involves examining whether effectual thinking in triple helix collaboration can improve outcomes.

The 'triple helix' refers to the multiple reciprocal relationships among institutional sectors (public, private and academic) at different points in the knowledge capitalization process, consisting of the sets of political, industrial and academic institutions that, by design or unintended consequence, work to improve the local conditions for innovation through (1) wealth generation (industry), (2) novelty production (academia), and (3) public control (government) (Leydesdorff and Meyer, 2006). The Triple Helix model of university-industry-government relations provides a heuristic for studying these complex dynamics in relation to developments in growth and innovation and the institutional networks among the three sectors. Given the emerging forms of growth and innovation in Canada as various organizations within the three institutional sectors interact more intensively (Belkhodja and Landry, 2007), additional objectives include exploring the discourse around the tensions, complementarities, and conflicts of interest between the academic, industry, and government partners that the triple helix model implies in their collaborative efforts.

The Triple Helix network of University-Industry-Government (U-I-G) interactive relations is gaining increasing recognition in policy, academic and industrial circles as a dynamic institutional and innovative basis for wealth creation and sustainable development through the generation of knowledge and its effective application, however it is not without its challenges in the Canadian context (Langford, Hall, Josty, Matos and Jacobson, 2006). Inter-organizational collaboration can be difficult – especially when organizations from three different sectors seek to work together, and it is well established that joint ventures are notorious for their high failure rates (Nielsen, 2012; Park and Ungson, 2001). Ten years ago, I completed my PhD where I conducted an in-depth study of one such multisector collaborative initiative. The major

contribution of that research had been the development of a conceptual framework for multisector collaboration that sought to identify the issues that needed to be addressed in establishing and managing such collaborative efforts – in effect, a 'success factor checklist' (Rod and Paliwoda, 2003). As such, using a stakeholder theoretical approach, the list of factors thought to influence the success of collaborative ventures was augmented through the identification of additional factors. However, this original research had assumed a more traditional case-study approach with simple coding/analysis of transcribed interviews. More recently, I have become interested in the use of language by managers involved in interorganizational relations (Ellis, Rod, Beal and Lindsay, 2012). In writing an article on my experiences in conducting my doctoral research (Rod, 2011), I began to think about this use of language by the various participants in my research. Understanding the use of language is key to exploring inter-organizational relationships since they involve 'problems of understanding', emanating from the fact that participants may be (and certainly are in the case of multisector participants) accustomed to different organizational cultures, terminologies and management philosophies (Vlaar, Van den Bosch and Volberda, 2006). In an attempt to remain sensitive to these potential differences, discourse analysis refuses to take meanings for granted (Musson, Cohen and Tietze, 2007). Thus, language is viewed as more than merely representational; it is also seen as constructive (or performative). Discourse analysis is helpful to 'unpack' the linguistic constructions of participants in relationships and to appreciate how this talk may help to perform collaboration.

Through collaboration, organizations are able to achieve objectives that would otherwise be impossible through the implementation of collaborative 'meta strategies' (Huxham and McDonald, 1992; Huxham, 1993) that can lead to the realization of higher level, societal goals or 'meta objectives'. However, multisector collaboration presents significant managerial challenges, since participants are required to work together despite the fact that they are representatives of organizations that may have different and potentially contradictory objectives and philosophies (Hardy, Lawrence and Phillips, 2006). Previous research by myself and others has looked at how organizations from academia, industry, and government view the collaborative process when, through their collaborative efforts, a large, societal 'meta-objective' has been tackled. The aim of this work had been to look at what the various collaborating/interacting organizations felt was critical to achieving this overall, meta-objective and a number of possible factors for optimizing collaborative success were identified (Rod and Paliwoda, 2003; Rod, 2006) but the proposed research seeks to go beyond the identification of 'success factors' through a detailed analysis of what collaborating partners are actually saying about collaboration and the extent to which effectual logic is being employed in their decision-making since knowing what contributes to collaborative success doesn't necessarily translate into success. So a research question is what does effectuation and the discourse around

multisector collaboration offer those looking to optimize success in the initiation and ongoing management of these collaborative efforts?

Multisector collaboration poses a significant challenge for partners as a result of two key tensions. First, multisector initiatives bring together partners from organizations with different backgrounds, approaches and goals (Waddock, 1989; Westley and Vredenburg, 1991). The second tension involves the interorganizational domain or field (Gray, 1989; Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence, 2004). Collaboration typically focuses on a single issue, or a subset of the wider issues that concern stakeholders, and usually includes only a subset of the potential stakeholders that might be affected by it. Thus, tensions arise between the goals of the collaboration and the needs of the broader constituencies affected by it. Since much cross-sectoral collaboration is designed to tackle complex social problems, these broader influences are critical. These tensions must be effectively managed if the collaboration is to enable members of different sectors to work together towards the meta-objective. Since collaboration is enacted in a series of conversations between people, representing a variety of organizations, around a particular issue (Hardy, Lawrence and Grant, 2005), if the conversations break down so, too, does the collaboration. Accordingly, in addition to looking at the use of effectuation by collaborating partners, the proposed research aims to critically analyze the discourse among partners involved in interorganizational multisector collaboration. Previous research has shown that to maximize the potential for collaboration, the conversations must address the inherent tension between collaborators' obligations to the constituency or organization that they represent and their obligations to their collaborative partners (Hardy, 1994; Hardy and Phillips, 1999; Lawrence and Phillips, 2004; Lawrence, Phillips and Hardy, 1999; Phillips and Hardy, 1997). In addition, there is a great deal of interest in the entrepreneurship literature regarding the role of language in relation to opportunity recognition/creation (Sarasvathy, 2004) and Sarasvathy herself, in communication with me, strongly supports the use of a discourse analytic approach in examining how stakeholder relationships are structured - how collaborators perceive what is within their control and what is predictable and unpredictable in order to "dive into more fine-grained and nuanced themes within the pre-commitment, stakeholder partnering aspect of effectuation". More recent work in an entrepreneurial context by Phillips (Phillips, Tracey and Karra, 2013) has shown that venture development is underpinned by an entrepreneur strategically constructing strong ties with like-minded individuals through a form of shared identity narrative work; thus justifying the use of a discourse analytic perspective in the proposed research.

Methodology

The research will involve interpreting collected discourse excerpts from interviews between the principal investigator and various (industry, university, and government) members involved in multisector collaborative initiatives. A discourse analytic approach can shed light on how participants use of effectual logic in their decision-making, noting how they discursively construct meaning in patterned ways. Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy (2004) suggest that collaboration is a communicative, discursive phenomenon which encourages the use of discourse analysis. Adopting the methodological approach to interorganizational relationships outlined by Ellis and Hopkinson (2010), the concept of the 'interpretive repertoire' facilitates the study of discursive agency and constraint on the part of collaborating partners. Repertoires are recurrently used systems of terms that speakers use strategically in explaining, justifying, excusing, etc. (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). They effectively function as 'scripts' (cf. Welch and Wilkinson, 2002) that can facilitate and/or restrict partners' sense-making. Repertoires can be identified through the examination of certain words, metaphors, figures of speech and grammar. They are facilitated by drawing upon a variety macro discourses, such as 'collaboration', that prescribe what a partner 'should' do within the context of a collaborative inter-organizational relationship. I will identify how repertoires are being used by identifying the various discursive forms of any one repertoire and exploring who uses such forms, when and with reference to what. These steps will be facilitated by NVivo software which will allow for a high degree of transparency. Consistent coding of text to repertoire 'nodes' will be guided in part, on the appropriate literature, but also on the emic responses of managers (cf. Ellis & Hopkinson 2010). In this way, I hope to have captured some of the subjective perceptions of the collaborating partners (Zhu et al. 2005). I will also endeavour to ensure that any analytical claims can be depended upon because they will be derived from accountable procedures that are systematic. They are credible because they are logical and evidence-based. Demonstrating this involves showing how the interpretations of individual segments of talk, as well as overall claims, are grounded in the data (Wood & Kroger 2000).

Little, if anything, is known about how partners draw upon effectual logic in negotiating the process of multisector collaboration. How does effectuation manifest in the discourse of collaborating partners in an effort to optimize their collaborative efforts? The proposed research will have two parts:

1. The first phase involves a thorough review of the relevant literatures subsequent to the completion of my PhD in order to commence the process of conceptual framework refinement/development and to then use a discourse analytic lens to further refine the conceptual framework by illustrating any use of effectual logic on the part of collaborating partners through the analysis of existing transcribed interviews with individuals from academia,

industry and government who were engaged in the initial stages of the major multisector collaborative venture that served as the focus of my PhD (the Board of Directors of the Institute of Health Economics and the original Steering Committee established to assess its feasibility and comprised of various university and government agency personnel). 2. The second phase will involve interviewing the current Board of Directors of the Institute of Health Economics and using discourse analysis to assess the extent to which effectual logic is being employed in their 'talk' about multisector collaboration and how it might differ from evidence of effectuation in the 'talk' of the original Board of Directors and Steering Committee during the initial stages of the collaboration since in the entrepreneurial new venture creation context, effectuation occurs in venture creation but less so after establishment of the venture when more causal decision-making approaches are employed.

Originally, the multisector collaborative venture involved the participation of 2 universities, 5 government agencies (federal and provincial) as well as 8 multinational pharmaceutical firms but it is now a venture with partners from 4 provincial government departments, 2 universities (a 3rd university was keen to join the collaborative effort but was declined – so an analysis of effectuation in the discourse around the decision to exclude this university could also be enlightening) and 5 pharmaceutical firms; so gaining perspectives from current stakeholders enables this to effectively be a longitudinal case study of over fifteen years. Such longitudinal case studies are extremely rare.

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