



Integrative public leadership: Catalyzing collaboration to create public value

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ABSTRACT

Integrative public leadership is a process of developing partnerships across organizational, sectoral and/or jurisdictional boundaries that create public value. This paper explores the concept in the context of the literature and illustrates some salient features of integrative public leadership through three cases involving extensive multi-sector collaboration in the western (Smoky Mountain) region of North Carolina. The cases are different in subject matter—sewer lines to a rural community, broadband infrastructure across a network of rural schools and colleges, and a major environmental preservation effort—but they all share some key elements. Leadership in each case is enacted through structure, process, and people. Boundary organizations provide a structural context for partnership development; boundary experiences and boundary objects serve to bridge differences and create a common purpose; and boundary spanners exhibit entrepreneurial qualities and leverage relationship capital in order to facilitate integration.

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1. Introduction and overview

In recent years the “collaborative advantage” (Huxham & Vangen, 2005) has become somewhat of a phenomenon across all sectors of society (business, public, and nonprofit). Both in academic studies and popular rhetoric we find numerous appeals to the potential benefits of partnerships “across organizational boundaries” in order to achieve some “positive end” that could not otherwise be achieved by a single organization (Huxham & Vangen, 2005, pp. 3–4). In public administration and related fields, the benefits of collaboration “across boundaries,” and “boundary crossing” leadership (Peirce & Johnson, 1997; Linden, 2002; Sullivan & Skelcher, 2002) are widely viewed as key components to accomplishing important *public goals*. The challenges facing public service organizations¹ today are so complex that no single agency can adequately address them. Now more than ever, solving public problems or otherwise creating public value occurs primarily through boundary-crossing partnerships (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Luke, 1998; Linden, 2002).

It is this context within which we explore the meaning of integrative public leadership. Is this concept the same as what is commonly understood as collaborative leadership? What does it mean to add “integrative” and “public” in front of “leadership?” Perhaps *integrative public leadership* can become a broad umbrella term to describe boundary-crossing leadership and serve as a unifying, interdisciplinary framework for reflection and action into the future. “Integrative” is a particularly appropriate adjective for boundary-crossing leadership because the process of integration lies at the heart of successful cross-sector collaboration.

This article seeks to contribute to our understanding of integrative public leadership in three primary ways, and is organized accordingly. First, integrative public leadership is examined with respect to relevant existing literature. Particular attention is given to the concept of public value, along with the lens of Follett’s work on integration and social process. An analogy of chemistry is employed to further aid in understanding the nature of integration and integrative leadership. Also, the nascent literature on boundary organizations is reviewed and offered as an important, if largely unexplored, contributor to our understanding of integrative public leadership.

After reviewing the literature, three cases of cross-sector collaboration in the Smoky Mountains of North Carolina are offered as illustrations of integrative public leadership in action. These rich, contemporary cases are examples of significant public value created

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¹ “Public service organizations,” for the purposes of this paper, refer to both government and not-for-profit organizations.

through cross-sector partnerships. The third aim of the article is to use the cases to draw out and explore some key features of integrative public leadership identified in the literature review. This exploration leads to a richer understanding of integrative public leadership through structures, processes, and people.

2. Integrative public leadership

2.1. *Integration and collaboration*

As mentioned above, there is a large and growing literature on interorganizational collaboration generally, and in the public service fields specifically we find a strong interest in collaboration and collaborative governance.² Much has been learned about the components of collaborative processes (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Gray, 1989) and the actions and competencies of collaborative leaders (Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Getha-Taylor, 2008; Linden, 2002; Luke, 1998; Morse, 2008; Williams, 2002). Many cross-cutting themes emerge in this literature, including the importance of trust, engaging stakeholders, framing issues, and negotiation skills. While there is a lot of theorizing an overarching theory or model of collaboration remains elusive. This is as it should be. Given the complexities involved it seems foolish to speak of a *theory* or *definitive model* of collaborative practice.

Huxham and Vangen's (2005, p. 41) substantial work does speak of a "theory of collaborative advantage," but rather than present straightforward variables and relationships, they offer a set of "conceptual handles" for enabling "reflective action". This seems most appropriate for research on collaboration and partnerships. Therefore, the brief review that follows offers some conceptual handles based on literature that seems particularly relevant to conceptual development around integrative public leadership, but that heretofore have been by-and-large neglected. The first has to do with the nature of integration itself. It may be that integration is a more appropriate descriptor than collaboration—as an ideal type—for the kinds of partnerships that are in focus here. Next we turn to the idea of leadership, and again, drawing on the work of Huxham and Vangen, consider examining not only individual actors, but also process and structure. Here the literature on boundary spanners, boundary objects, and boundary organizations are viewed as underutilized contributions.

2.1.1. *Integration and the work of Mary Follett*

The starting point for understanding integrative leadership lies with the idea of integration itself. To integrate means to bring together and combine or incorporate different components into a whole. Mary Follett's work centered on integration as a social process (1918; 1924). Follett explained that integration is the uniting of difference (points of view, interests, or ways of knowing) into something new that satisfies all interests without compromise or capitulation. It is the process of *E pluribus unum*. A genuine democratic community, according to Follett, integrates difference into a new whole. The "I" becomes "we" in such a way that preserves the integrity of the individual while at the same time creating a "collective idea" or common will that is qualitatively better than the individual pieces that came together to form it (Follett, 1918, 1924). The collective idea is more than an abstract idea, it is a common purpose, a common vision that unites those that created it and motivates them to act together to achieve it.

Integration, in its ideal form, is more than cooperating in order to meet one's own ends. It represents a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Since Follett's time, the core idea behind integration has gained currency in popular conceptions of management and leadership. The notions "win/win" and "synergy," for example, are very much rooted in Follett's formulation of integration (see Covey, 2004). Indeed, most partnerships never reach their full potential because they fail to achieve "partnership synergy" (Lasker, Weiss, & Miller, 2001), a concept that captures quite well what integration looks like in practice.³

An analogy can be made between the process of integration and a chemical reaction. Chemical reactions involve substances, usually called reactants, being combined and transformed to create a new product that has different properties than the individual reactants. The new product is made up of its component reactants, yet it is more than just a mixture of them. It is a new substance. For example, when sodium and chlorine atoms are transformed into sodium chloride, the resulting substance—salt—is something altogether different than the reactants that were united to create it.⁴

The substances or reactants in social integration are the different actors in a potential partnership. They each represent different "ways of knowing" due to the boundaries that they must traverse in order to work together. These include organizational, jurisdictional, and sectoral boundaries (Feldman et al., 2006), in addition to interpersonal boundaries created by different worldviews and life experiences. As actors work across those boundaries and integrate differences into shared understandings and common purposes, new possibilities are created.

2.2. *Integrative leadership and catalysis*

If integration is like a chemical reaction, then integrative leadership (leadership that facilitates integration) is like catalysis. Catalysis is the process of "causing or accelerating a chemical change by the addition of a catalyst." A catalyst is a substance, "usually

² See, for example, the special issue on "collaborative public management" in *Public Administration Review*, volume 66 (2006), as well as Ansell and Gash, 2008, for reviews of this literature.

³ Lasker et al. (2001) operationalize partnership synergy as "a product of the group interaction." Synergy is reflected in such aspects as "goals that are widely understood and supported" and incorporation of "the perspectives and priorities of community stakeholders" (pp. 187–188).

⁴ It should be noted that the reverse is true as well. Compounds can be broken apart or disintegrated. In the social world, shared understandings and purposes (integrations) can be created, but they are often fragile and subject to being broken apart or gradually disintegrated.

used in small amounts relative to the reactants, that modifies and increases the rate of a reaction without being consumed in the process" (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed., Houghton Mifflin, 2004). In other words, catalysts enable or speed up chemical reactions. They reduce energy barriers that would stop or slow down potential reactions. They are facilitators of integration.

The analogue to the social world is instructive. The domains of public value creation are made up of complex webs of actors. These different parts of the system are like the reactants in a potential chemical reaction. There exists latent potential for integration among those actors. So the question becomes why in some cases does a reaction occur (integration; partnerships that create public value), whereas in other cases it does not? The answer lies in the presence of a catalyst or catalysts. Catalysts are those parts of the system that enable a reaction, or in other words, bring together the different pieces at the right time. What is produced in the reaction is integration, the creation of a new whole made up of the parts. The catalysts are critical intervening variables that make things happen, yet are not "consumed" in the process. In other words, we would expect (following the analogy) that catalysts facilitate integration in different ways and at different times in a variety of domains.

What is described here as integration involves many important variables. Bryson, Crosby, and Stone's framework for understanding cross-sector collaboration highlights many important features of collaborative processes and offers propositions as to the effect of those variables in collaborative situations. The authors describe the interrelationships among initial conditions, processes, structures, contingencies and constraints, and how they combine and feed into outcomes (ideally, outcomes infused with public value). Those components might also be thought of as potential reactants. But how is it that those different components come into contact in the first place? What is it that enables the different parts to come together to form a whole? How are outcomes achieved in the absence of hierarchical power and control? The answer is leadership. The nature of that leadership is catalytic (Luke, 1998).

The majority of leadership theories focus on formal leaders eliciting followers to do something different (Northouse, 2004). These theories rest on hierarchical assumptions and a leader–follower dynamic that breaks down in a collaborative context. Huxham and Vangen (2005) find that mainstream leadership theories do not translate well in a context of collaboration. Their approach to leadership for collaboration is to look at "what makes things happen in a collaboration" (2005, p. 202). They argue that leadership is enacted through three interconnected media: structures, processes, and participants (people). This represents a more holistic view of leadership with serious implications for practice. We turn now, briefly, to each of these three media, and then explore them in more detail through the cases and discussion that follow in the next two sections.

2.2.1. Structural catalysts

Huxham and Vangen (2005, p. 203) find that formal and informal structural interconnections between organizations represent "a key driver of the way agendas are shaped and implemented". Indeed, much of the literature on interorganizational collaboration (e.g. Alter & Hage, 1993), as well as the more specific literature on public sector networks (Provan & Kenis, 2008), emphasizes the critical role of structural arrangements. These structures are an important component of leadership (thinking of leadership as what "makes things happen") in that "they determine such key factors as who may have an influence on shaping a partnership agenda, who may have power to act and what resources may be tapped" (Huxham & Vangen, 2005, p. 204).

For the most part, however, discussions of structure focus on the structure of relationships that define a partnership or series of partnerships. Another element of structure that deserves at least as much attention—which perhaps corresponds even more with the notion of leadership as catalysis—is pre-existing structural arrangements that enable collaborative action in the first place. Bryson et al. (2006) point to the importance of "brokering organizations" that act as conveners, as well as "prior relationships or existing networks" as antecedent conditions, or what Waddock (1986) refers to as "linking mechanisms," that impact the likelihood of partnership formation. So the question is, in a given system, are there formal or informal relational structures that facilitate the creation of new partnerships (and collaborative structures)?

In social studies of science, *boundary organizations* represent formal relational structures that link the domains of science and non-science (Guston, 2001). Carr and Wilinson (2005) describe boundary organizations as forums "where multiple perspectives participate and multiple knowledge systems converge." While research on boundary work and boundary organizations has primarily been about the boundary between science and non-science, it is being extended as a way to understand cross-scale and cross-level interactions (Cash et al., 2006). Scales, in this sense, include jurisdictional, spatial, and temporal, while level refers to levels within each scale (e.g., for jurisdictional scale we have localities, states, nations). Boundary organizations "play an intermediary role between different arenas, levels, or scales and facilitate the co-production of knowledge" (Cash et al., 2006).

Cash et al. (2006) explain that whether as formal organizations specifically charged to play such intermediary roles, or as organizations that have "broader roles and responsibilities," these boundary organizations have several important characteristics and institutional functions that enable boundary work:

- (1) accountability to both sides of the boundary;
- (2) the use of "boundary objects" such as maps, reports, and forecasts that are co-produced by actors on different sides of the boundary;
- (3) participation across the boundary;
- (4) convening;
- (5) translation;
- (6) coordination and complementary expertise; and
- (7) mediation.

Boundary organizations are structures that exist prior to the formation of new partnerships and give rise to boundary work that often results in the formation of new partnerships.⁵ Boundary organizations may therefore be viewed as *structural or institutional catalysts*.

To date, little attention has been given to boundary organizations outside of the realm of bridging knowledge across the boundary of science and non-science. One group of scholars in public administration has recently linked the boundary organization literature with the issue of bridging different ways of knowing in policy arenas. They see boundary organizations as “collections of actors who are drawn together from different ways of knowing or bases of expertise for the purpose of coproducing boundary actions.” In this sense, boundary organizations include “coordinating committees, study commission, centers, networks, and other similar entities that are charged with reflecting diverse information and intelligence in the service of some task or action that is not possible for one actor or perspective to perform alone” (Feldman et al., 2006, p. 95). Such organizations “offer sites for collaboration, the formation of new relationships, the infusion of research and scientific information into policy, and the exercise of innovative leadership. They have the potential for creating new ways of knowing the problem that may lead to better solutions than any of the institutions would have reached acting alone” (Schneider, 2009, p. 61).

2.2.2. Process catalysts

Huxham and Vangen (2005, p. 205) also explain how leadership is enacted through process, meaning “the formal and informal instruments—such as committees, workshops, seminars, telephone, fax and e-mail—through which the collaboration’s communications take place.” Some processes are intentionally designed while others are shaped by external forces outside of participants’ control. In thinking about how process might play a catalytic role in enabling integration and collaborative action to take place, we draw special attention here to *boundary experiences*. Boundary experiences are “shared or joint activities that create a sense of community and an ability to transcend boundaries among participants” (Feldman et al., 2006, p. 94). Boundary experiences often involve *boundary objects* “that engage participants in joint deliberation” (Schneider, 2009, p. 61).

Much has been written elsewhere regarding the power of dialogue and deliberation to create “common ground for action” (Mathews & McAfee, 2003). Other descriptions of these processes include “collaborative learning” (Daniels & Walker, 1996), the creation of “public knowledge” (Yankelovich, 1991), and “mutual learning” (Luke, 1998). The common thread is the idea that different perspectives are brought together and in the process new, mutual understandings are created, and that those shared ideas then form the basis of collaborative action. In other words, these processes catalyze integration.

2.2.3. Individual catalysts

Of course, integrative leadership is also enacted through individual actors. Jeffrey Luke (1998) first introduced the notion of non-hierarchical, boundary-crossing leadership for the common good as being “catalytic.” In the introduction of *Catalytic Leadership* (1998), Luke explains that “we live in a world of complex interconnections in which take-charge leaders are less successful than individuals and groups who provide the spark or catalyst that truly makes a difference” (p. 4). The emphasis of his book was on the specific catalytic tasks of leaders seeking to solve public problems and create lasting public value. This leadership is catalytic in nature, being more about enabling or facilitating collaboration, or leading from the middle rather than leading from the top.

Of course Luke (1998) was not the first to identify the importance of individual actors in successful interorganizational partnerships. Ever since interorganizational relations have been studied, “boundary spanners” have been recognized as “key agents managing within interorganizational theaters” (Williams, 2002, p. 103). Boundary spanners are “individuals who engage in networking tasks and employ methods of coordination and task integration across organizational boundaries” (Alter & Hage, 1993, p.46; see also Aldrich, 1979). Other labels that have been applied include “boundary crossers” (Peirce & Johnson, 1997), “multilateral brokers” (Mandell, 1988), and of course, catalysts (Luke, 1998).

Luke (1998) and many others (such as Chrislip, 2002; Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Getha-Taylor, 2008; Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Linden, 2002; Morse, 2008; Williams, 2002) identify the practices and characteristics of what we refer to here as individual catalysts. Crosby and Bryson (2005), for example, identify eight primary leadership capabilities that span multiple levels; from personal leadership, to leading teams and organizations, to influencing the political arena. Some identify specific leadership tasks such as identifying and involving the right stakeholders (Huxham & Vangen, 2005; Luke, 1998), while others look to personal characteristics and competencies (Getha-Taylor, 2008; Morse, 2008; Williams, 2002). Two of the most prominent themes revolve around trust (or relationship development) and entrepreneurship. These are explored in greater detail in the discussion of the cases.

2.3. Creating public value

We include “public” before “leadership” here to clearly indicate that the “partnerships involving government, business, nonprofits and philanthropies, communities, and/or the public as a whole” (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 44) are partnerships that integrate or unite the different knowledge, abilities and perspectives of the partners *around the creation of public value*. Public value is used here as a near synonym of the common good or the public interest. It is ultimately a social construct. Public value creation may include efforts to solve or at least mitigate public problems; improve the efficiency, effectiveness, or fairness of public services; create or enhance a public

⁵ In some cases new partnerships may themselves constitute boundary organizations, but this is certainly not always the case. Partnerships take many forms (Provan & Kenis, 2008); some involve creating formal governance structures that function as boundary organizations while others never reach that level of formality and permanence. Also, some partnerships are short-term or project-specific, while others are long-term.

service; or respond to public sentiment in some way (Moore, 1995). As an ideal type, integration as cross-sector partnerships represents collaboration centered on creating public value.

Integrative public leadership then is not about private ends being met through collaboration, nor is it about the public sector co-opting other actors to achieve organizational goals. Rather, it is about the process through which multiple actors with multiple interests create a common vision of, and work together to create, public value (i.e., the common good, or public interest). It is about catalyzing such integrations.⁶ Different actors come together and create a common purpose that unites them enough to act together to create something of public value (something for the common good). The product of this “creative experience” (Follett, 1924) is something that could not be achieved by any of the actors alone, and, in a normative sense, is better than what could be achieved by any of the actors alone.

3. Three cases of integrative public leadership

3.1. Context of the cases

The following three cases illustrate significant creations of public value through integration across sectors. The cases have in common a shared geographical location of the far western portion of North Carolina, in the Smoky Mountains. They also are linked by the presence of a particular integrative leader, though at the same time they all demonstrate that collaborative processes usually have multiple actors acting as catalysts (or leaders) at different times.

The cases are introduced briefly in narrative form. They are drawn from a broader research effort to capture accounts of cross-sector, regional collaboration in North Carolina that create public value. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups, participant observation, document analysis, and newspaper accounts were all used to construct narrative accounts of the partnerships. The framework for understanding cross-sector collaborations developed by Bryson et al. (2006) served as a guide for the interviews and other data gathering. Specifically, questions and other research sought to discover initial conditions, processes, structures, contingencies and constraints, and outcomes and accountabilities related to each case.

While the three cases share the same geographic region as well as the presence of one key actor, they are from three very different policy domains and vary in terms of the nature of public value creation. They are not meant to represent the entire range of collaborative possibilities nor are they used here as subjects for comparative case analysis. Rather, they are used as illustrations; they illustrate how in one region, the integrative process is manifest in a variety of arenas. They also illustrate the specific elements of integrative public leadership that merit more attention in the literature. After brief overviews of the three cases, the specific elements of integrative public leadership identified above are explicated in greater detail, using examples from the cases.

3.2. WNC EdNET

The Western North Carolina Education Network (WNC EdNET) is a partnership made up of the six westernmost counties in North Carolina, the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Indians (EBCI), two community colleges, a four-year college, two regional quasi-governmental agencies, and several grant-making organizations, to bring broadband access to the 70 schools in the region. The broadband network, and the interorganizational network supporting its development and use, will help level the playing field for local students and “open up learning opportunities not currently available or imagined” (WNC EdNET, 2007). It is a prime example of a broad, regional, multi-sector collaboration that creates significant public value.

The project was initiated when Bill Gibson, executive director of the Southwestern Commission,⁷ learned of an initiative by the Golden LEAF Foundation⁸ to support technology in schools and, being familiar with other technology-related initiatives in the area, saw the potential for collaboration. In other words, a longstanding problem (lack of broadband access in rural schools) might have a potential solution because of a granting agency’s interest in the issue.

The first partnership formed was between the Southwestern Commission and the Western Region Education Service Alliance⁹ (WRESA)—two regional organizations serving local governments and school districts (respectively). In the spring of 2005, Gibson

⁶ The term catalyst connotes a certain degree of agency or purposeful action whereas the language of “leadership media” connotes the opposite (a means or instrument through which a result is produced). I suggest that leadership enacted through structures, processes, and people can be both purposeful and non-purposeful. On the one hand, we typically think of people as purposeful actors, but structures and processes can also be fashioned purposefully to catalyze integration. Boundary organizations, by definition, are created to play that role. Likewise, actors can consciously choose processes that are designed to facilitate mutual learning. On the other hand, people can sometimes be media, not realizing their actions are playing a catalytic role. Organizations that are not intended to have a boundary crossing function may still operate as such. And more often than not, communication processes are not the result of purposeful action but nevertheless act as important media through which leadership occurs.

⁷ The Southwestern North Carolina Planning and Economic Development Commission (Southwestern Commission for short), also known as “Region A” (referring to its designation within the state system of Regional Councils of Government) “was created in November 1965 by concurrent, joint resolution of the county commissioners of Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon and Swain Counties, and the 14 (now 16) city councils therein.” The Southwestern Commission assists member units in obtaining state and federal money, by facilitating regional planning, and actively working within the region to support and sustain collaboration. See www.regiona.org/commission/history.htm and www.ncregions.org/aboutus.htm.

⁸ From the Golden LEAF website: “The Golden LEAF Foundation, a nonprofit corporation, was created in 1999 to receive one-half of the funds coming to North Carolina from the master settlement agreement with cigarette manufacturers. In turn, the Foundation is helping North Carolinians make the transition from a tobacco-dependent economy through grants and investments that will positively affect the long-term economic advancement of the state. It gives priority in its grant-making to tobacco-dependent and economically distressed counties.” (<http://goldenleaf.org>, accessed June 6, 2008).

⁹ Like the Southwestern Commission, WRESA is a regional public service organization. Whereas the Southwestern Commission is made up of member counties and municipalities, WRESA is made up of 19 member school districts (covering the western portion of North Carolina). See <http://www.wresa.org/>.

and his counterpart at WRESA, Roger Metcalf, saw the potential for such a project and got together to explore next steps. Gibson and Metcalf had worked together on other efforts before and both brought significant skills and professional networks to the table.

An indispensable precondition that made the EdNET idea even possible was the recent (in 2003) formation of BalsamWest FiberNET, LLC, a public/private partnership formed by Drake Enterprises Ltd. and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) to develop a fiber optic backbone connecting the six westernmost counties of the state. Drake and EBCI initially invested \$14 million in BalsamWest with the idea of leveraging those funds with additional private and public investments in the future. But the costs of connecting specific locales to a backbone are often a major barrier, particularly in rural areas (the so-called ‘middle mile’ problem). With Golden LEAF expressing interest in helping enhance technology in rural schools, plus potential for other funding sources, Gibson and his colleagues at WRESA saw an opportunity and provided the spark necessary to bring the relevant stakeholders together to take the next steps.

The school superintendents, technology coordinators, and representatives from the three area colleges were brought in early on. By October of 2005 the first grant was awarded by the Golden LEAF foundation, \$2 million to get WNC EdNET started; the majority of the funds went toward fiber infrastructure and equipment to start connecting schools. The initial Golden LEAF grant was then leveraged to obtain several additional grants (Byrd, 2007).

From the early stages of the effort, the group recognized the need to not only procure the infrastructure, but to also form a network that would assist educators in using it. This recognition of developing two types of networks (broadband and interorganizational) is reflected in the stated objectives of the project which include establishing a partnership “for the purpose of collaboratively enhancing the development and use of technology as a tool for improving learning opportunities” and facilitating “capacity building and use of broadband technology for the enhancement of teaching and learning” (WNC EdNET, 2007). In the three years since the initiation of the project there has been a great deal of progress toward these objectives, due in large part to the strength of the collaboration and the level of support from funding agencies.

The project leaders continually reached out to relevant business and nonprofit organizations and used them to help develop the technical plans. This enabled the group to not only come up with better plans; it also formed and strengthened important linkages that are crucial to successfully accomplishing the objectives set forth at the beginning. The collaboration on the EdNET effort has been extensive, both on the “implementation side,” through the various school districts, colleges, regional and state agencies, nonprofits, and for-profit vendors, but also on the “funding source side,” meaning the many different “funding agencies have worked together in a rational and sequential manner to insure coverage, quality, and consistency in the WNC EdNET resource procurement process” (Byrd, 2007, p. 5). All told, approximately \$5.7 million has been secured thus far in grants, with an additional \$1 million-plus donated in in-kind services and cash donations from local sources and non-disclosed discount from Cisco.

Although the network is quite new when one considers the initial exploratory meeting was held in August, 2005, it represents a strong example of the public value that can be created through regional partnerships that span many organizations and sectors. Schools across the network are already benefiting from the new technology, though building capacity to fully realize the potential across all schools is clearly seen as a primary objective of the partnership for the foreseeable future (Byrd, Clapsaddle, & George, 2008). The network will continue to develop and undoubtedly continue to adapt to changing needs and circumstances. WNC EdNET recently incorporated as a 501c3 (nonprofit) organization and is realizing the potential to become a “major collaborative, coordinating body” in the region (Byrd, 2008, p. 22).

3.3. Whittier Sewer Project

Whittier, North Carolina is a small, unincorporated rural community located in the Smoky Mountains, straddling Jackson and Swain Counties, and immediately adjacent to the EBCI Reservation. Like many rural communities, Whittier has been un-sewered, a situation that presents environmental and public health problems and is an impediment to growth. Whittier’s many failing septic systems (and even some residences with no septic tank, sending sewage directly into the river) are a source of contamination of the Tuckasee River which runs through the heart of the community.

The lack of sewer infrastructure was also a problem for the neighboring campus of the Church of God’s Western NC Assembly, which had plans to significantly expand its campus for summer programs contingent upon having sewer service. The nearby Smoky Mountain Elementary School likewise was in dire need for sewer service, having surpassed the capacity of its septic system years ago. Finally, the EBCI owns several hundred acres of property, including a recreation facility, in the Whittier area. EBCI has long expressed interest in developing a portion of its property in the area with a golf course and dozens of housing units. But these plans, again, would require sewer service.

So there were clearly several stakeholders in the Whittier community with a strong interest in sewer service, including the Sanitary District, the EBCI, Jackson County (with its Elementary School as well as the Jackson County Industrial Park), the Church of God, and, of course, the residents, who had an interest in healthy living conditions and a clean environment. The Economic Development Commission (EDC) of Jackson County also participated in early discussions since their industrial park in the Whittier area already had a sewer discharge permit, had room to locate a treatment facility, and would benefit from the increased capacity as well. Finally, another stakeholder was the Tuckasee Water and Sewer Authority (TWSA), serving Jackson County. But a project like developing a sewer treatment facility and running sewer lines in a small, sparsely populated, rural community was not economically feasible for the County or the EBCI.

In early 2000 the Southwestern Commission initiated a process of exploring options for getting a sewer treatment facility in Whittier. A feasibility study was conducted and a parcel in the industrial park (owned by the EDC) was eventually chosen as the

location of the would-be treatment plant. In time, with most of the necessary pieces in place, a grant application was developed by Southwestern Commission staff. In early 2001, the NC Rural Economic Development Center awarded \$3.0 million to the Whittier Sanitary District for development of a new sewer plant. Jackson County, the EBCE, and TWSA also agreed to contribute a total of \$40,000 toward the project. With the funds secured, the permitting process commenced, but soon the sewer project was facing major roadblocks.

The permitting process ended up taking two years to complete. There were environmental issues with threatened species in the river as well as the discovery of a Native American archeological site on the proposed location of the plant. By the time the permitting process was complete, the total cost of the project had increased by about one million dollars. It was now early 2003 and the project was completely bogged down with significant additional resources needed for mitigation. For three years the project was essentially in a holding pattern.

During that time Gibson (acting on behalf of the partners) sought additional funds and was able to make up part of the difference with new grants from the Appalachian Regional Commission (\$200,000), USDA (\$99,000), and the Cherokee Preservation Foundation (\$45,000). That still left about \$750,000 to complete the project. The EBCE, recognizing its significant interest in seeing the project move forward, agreed first to contribute additionally to the project, with Jackson County following and then the Church of God agreeing to fund about one-third of the deficit.

With those commitments in hand, the project finally went out to bid in September 2006. The result was another setback—the lowest bid showed a cost overrun (from the budgeted amount) of close to \$1.3 million. With some adjustments in the budget, the overrun was brought down to just under \$1 million. After seemingly tapping all available sources, even to the point of getting the main partners, including the church, to contribute over \$250,000 each, the future of the project was again in question. The NC Rural Center agreed to an additional \$200,000, for a total commitment of \$3.2 million, and gave an August 2006 deadline to have all additional funds raised and long-term operating costs secured, or the plug would be pulled from the project altogether. Gibson again returned to the primary stakeholders “with his hand out” in search of funds to fill the funding overrun gap (B. Gibson, personal communication, July 3, 2008).

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners agreed to increase the county's portion another \$250,000 and underwrite a portion of expected operating losses for the first three years. The EBCE quickly matched Jackson County's additional commitment of capital and operations funds. Finally, the Church of God returned to the table with an equal \$250,000 additional commitment. With Jackson County, the EBCE, and the Church now invested at \$1,500,000, or approximately \$500,000 each, and with the County and EBCE agreeing to underwrite expected initial operating losses, the project went forward.

Providing sanitary sewer service in the Whittier area is another example of public value being created through collaboration. The positive impacts of the project extend beyond the immediate community to the EBCE and Jackson and Swain Counties. EBCE leaders feel like they are not only opening up new development opportunities, but also building better relationships with their neighbors. Vice-chief Larry Blythe explains the cooperative sentiment best, “If we're able to spend the dollars we're making to help [our] neighbor [with] their needs, it's only going to help us too. We're all in this together” (interview with author, July 23, 2007).

3.4. *Preservation of the Needmore Tract*

The final case represents one of the great success stories of land preservation in the Appalachian Region. The 4500 ac Needmore Tract (12 mi of river upstream of the Fontana reservoir) includes 26 mi of pristine Little Tennessee River frontage, and an additional 37 mi of tributary stream frontage. This tract of land is referred to as the “Noah's Ark of Blue Ridge Rivers.” In it are “all the species that were thought to have been there when European Settlement started....The Tennessee River system is the most species-rich river system outside of the tropics on earth, [and this section] is the most ecologically intact region of the Tennessee River system” (P. Carlson, interview with author, July 23, 2007).

The area has been known as Needmore since the first settlements in the 1820s. In the early 20th Century, Alcoa, through a subsidiary power company, Tallassee, began buying up and consolidating tracts of land in this area during the heyday of its development of hydro-electric utilities to power aluminum processing factories. The consolidation of Needmore lands by Alcoa continued through the years and the ownership eventually was transferred to Nantahala Power and Light (NP&L). NP&L continued to buy properties to add to the Needmore Tract to reach its current size of 4500 ac. Through all this time a majority of the land was in use in farm leases.

A dam was never built, “but the rumors of one being built and the subsequent flooding of the area have persisted” since that time, and were revived in 1988, when Duke Power acquired NP&L (Ellison, 1990). At that time, Duke auctioned off many of the properties it held, but it retained the Needmore Tract. The prospect of a Needmore Dam was always on the table, particularly in the fears of residents, until a transaction in 1999 put into motion what would become a complex four-year process that culminated in another transaction that placed the Needmore in public trust.

In December 1999, NP&L announced that it was transferring the Needmore Tract to Crescent Resources, the property management arm of Duke. Though Crescent Resources' expertise was in development, it made clear from the outset that it was sensitive to the long history of traditional uses of the Needmore as well its ecological value (Alexander, 1999). Nevertheless, news of the transaction quickly became a source of public concern for local people. The transfer to Crescent took the threat of a dam off the table permanently, but replaced that fear with one of development of the Needmore Tract.

While the notion of development was threatening to those traditional users of the Needmore (meaning farmers, hunters, and fisherman), it is important to note that most people in Swain and Macon counties have historically been very pro-growth. Nearly half of Macon County is in federal ownership, and 87% of Swain County is either federal or tribal lands. So for many, the release of

the 4500 ac of the Needmore to Crescent Resources for development quite logically signified a potential boost in the tax base for the respective counties.

Naturally, the environmental community immediately called for complete preservation of the land. Many others voiced similar sentiments and the stage seemed to be set for a clash between pro and no development advocates.

The residents of Needmore, many of whom were descendants of the original families who owned the tracts that were purchased by the power company, were very ambivalent about the prospect for development. Cheryl Taylor, a woman in her thirties and a lifelong resident of Needmore, became a vocal advocate early on of “see[ing] the land remain just the way it is.” Thus early on the environmental advocates found common cause, at least to some extent, with the local residents who lived, worked, and played on the Needmore Tract.

By February of 2000, less than two months after the transfer was announced, Crescent Resources announced that it would embark on a two year study period to “gather and review ideas for the Needmore Property” (Redman, 2000). This announcement came after consultation with the Nature Conservancy and the Land Trust for the Little Tennessee (LTLT). Katherine Skinner, director of the North Carolina Nature Conservancy, explained that the Little Tennessee was a high priority for their organization, and that “securing conservation of the Little Tennessee while meeting local needs is a good place to start” (Ostendorff, 2000).

At this same time, Macon County Commission Chair Harold Corbin had decided that conservation of the Needmore was the way to go. This flew in the face of the prevailing pro-growth view of the community and board of commissioners, and even his own earlier position supporting development. However, as someone who had hunted and fished in that area a lot, he came to feel that preservation outweighed the importance of development to grow the tax base. He decided to present a pro-conservation resolution with assistance from Paul Carlson (LTLT) for conservation of the Needmore and thought “if I could sell this to [my colleagues on] the board of commissioners, we could go from there” (interview with author, July 23, 2007). He was able to convince his fellow board members, and to the surprise of many, the board put forth a unanimous resolution stating “the conservation of the Needmore Tract in Macon County represents the best opportunity this county will ever have to protect floodplain, farmland and open space” (Corbin, 2000).

The Macon Board of Commissioners had now weighed in on the process in favor of conservation, but it remained to be seen what Swain County would do (with only 13% of the county not federal or tribal lands, i.e., on the tax rolls). Throughout the rest of the year several other strong, public arguments in favor of conservation were put forth by people in the environmental community. Meanwhile, the Swain County Commission Chair, Jim Douthit, had discussions with Corbin. The Swain commissioners also held a public forum in late August, 2000 to hear public sentiment on the issue. Taylor attended the meeting and suggested that a citizen's committee be established to open up citizen involvement and dialogue on the topic. By this point she had become a strong voice for the Needmore residents, a voice in favor of preserving traditional use of the land and against development.

The scientific community was also weighing in, culminating in a meeting of over 30 scientists with Crescent Resources representatives. The group demonstrated the incredible ecological value of the area, but the Crescent representative reiterated that the firm envisioned some kind of balance between conservation and “responsible development” (Hendershot, 2000).

By the end of 2000, Crescent Resources, working with the Nature Conservancy, had held several meetings with local environmental groups, government leaders, and the public to get input on the future of Needmore. Although a private corporation, Crescent was involving the public in much the same way a government agency would in planning exercises. Although Crescent wasn't bound to do so, company representatives were proactive in keeping communication lines open and being open to feedback. However, Taylor and other residents were still unsatisfied with the process and were formally organizing themselves. By the end of January, 2001, the group formally announced themselves as “Mountain Neighbors for Needmore Preservation” (hereafter referred to as Neighbors for Needmore) and held their first public meeting on January 30 at the local community college. Meeting participants started a petition asking Crescent Resources to abandon any considerations for development of the land and to see that it “remain as it has been, a public use land.”

With Neighbors for Needmore organized, Macon County formally supporting conservation, and the environmental community strongly advocating preservation, most of the pieces were in place to point toward a conservation solution. But there was still the question of Swain County's Board of Commissioners. In March and April of 2001, the Swain County Board, working collaboratively with Macon County's Board, gave a major boost for the preservation of Needmore by passing a resolution similar to the one Macon County passed a year before. It called for 100% preservation of Needmore and supported using the property for public purposes in the future consistent with traditional use (farming, fishing, hunting, etc.). At the same time, like Macon County, Swain County appointed Southwestern Commission director Bill Gibson to represent the county in the process of seeking a solution consistent with the interests expressed in the resolutions (Douthit, 2001). At that point, Gibson worked in an official capacity, as the counties' agent, with the relevant stakeholders to develop a workable solution for the Needmore Tract. The pieces were falling into place, at least on the community's side, for the Needmore to be preserved.

Having a broad consensus was a major first step, but there would have to be enough funds to purchase the land from Crescent. Agreements would also need to be reached to place the land in public trust, while still allowing for farming, fishing, hunting, and so on. At this stage the process shifted from a public consensus building effort to one of negotiation. This is where the experience, expertise, and relationships of Gibson and Carlson (LTLT) were indispensable. Grant applications were prepared by the stakeholders for the Clean Water Management Trust Fund¹⁰ (CWMTF), the Natural Heritage Trust Fund and several other grant sources, but were not finalized until Crescent decided on a price for the tract. Of course, Crescent still had the option of not selling the entire tract, but only offering part of it, retaining the rest for development. The proposal from the community stakeholders was

¹⁰ From 1996 to 2006, the CWMTF awarded over \$800 million in grants. The funding comes from a state appropriation.

to purchase the entire tract and have the land managed by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC). During this time Crescent continued to consult with Skinner (Nature Conservancy), who at this stage become another key actor as the closest advisor to Crescent about the decision whether to sell the entire tract, and if so, at what price.

Negotiations continued through the next year and eventually, toward the end of 2002, a deal was struck between Crescent Resources and the Nature Conservancy to purchase the entire tract for \$19 million. At that time, the plan was for the CWMTF to contribute \$13 million, with the balance coming from other agencies and grant sources. About this same time the state government was entering into a serious budget crisis, which affected the CWMTF appropriation and dropped its commitment to less than half. Gibson, Carlson, Skinner and their colleagues, again, through their expertise in negotiations, grant writing, and simply through connections that had been built up over time, were able to cobble together a large portion of the \$19 million from a variety of sources. Adding to the \$6 million from the CWMTF, was another \$7.5 million from the North Carolina Department of Transportation Ecosystem Enhancement Fund, \$2 million from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and \$1.5 million from the North Carolina Natural Heritage Trust (Hendershot, 2003). That left about \$2 million that needed to be raised privately. By December of 2003, several private donors contributed large sums of money, including \$1 million matching challenge grant from a conservation-minded couple in Salisbury, NC. The LTLT came up with \$450,000 (which in turn came from many different private philanthropies), and several other individuals donated the balance.

On January 15, 2004, the purchase was made official and the property was transferred from Crescent Resources to the NC WRC. The NC WRC had agreed to manage it for public use, continuing the farm leases, hunting, fishing, paddling, and other traditional uses. A public event was held to celebrate the transaction. The *Smoky Mountain News* noted that “up to 10 different organizations and individuals played a key role in the effort that led to the Needmore purchase. Many others worked in peripheral roles” (McLeod, 2004).

The Needmore story does not end with the purchase in January of 2004. Carlson, Gibson, and Taylor and her associates from Neighbors for Needmore are working through a lot of red tape with the WRC to develop a campground on-site. This will be a unique venture as the WRC does not operate facilities. Neighbors for Needmore are now a 501c3 designated nonprofit, and will manage the campground in partnership with the WRC. The planning and negotiations and collaboration involved in getting the campground completed and operating is another story itself. But the arrangement that has been made only underscores the deeply collaborative effort that went into preserving, and now managing, this tract of land that is an ecological and cultural treasure.

4. Elements of leadership

These three cases offer snapshots of integrative public leadership in action. Although they share roughly the same locale, they vary greatly in the nature of public value creation. The WNC EdNET case involves a longstanding, well understood public problem (lack of broadband access in area schools) that was addressed via a unique and complex public–private partnership. In Whittier the problem, for the most part, was also generally agreed upon (lack of sewer infrastructure), but stakeholders initially had not even conceived of the possibility of remedying the problem. It was jointly seeing a new possibility that provided the spark for the partnership to form. Once stakeholders developed a common vision for what could be, they worked through many ups and downs to make it happen. Finally, in the case of Needmore, a community went from conflict over the problem definition (some feared growth as it would threaten traditional use of the land, others feared environmental degradation, while others feared missing a growth opportunity), to developing over time a remarkably strong and consistent understanding of the problem and solution (preserve it all, while allowing traditional uses).

The cases featured a good deal of integrative leadership enacted through structures, processes, and people (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). Bryson et al. (2006) “framework for understanding cross-sector collaborations” is used to organize and summarize many key features of the cases. As the cases were organized along those lines, it became apparent that the three leadership media of structures, processes, and people mesh well with the Bryson et al. (2006) framework. Specifically, structural and individual catalysts seem to stand out as key antecedents or initial conditions. Process catalysts, specifically boundary experiences and the development of boundary objects, correspond with the framework’s process component. Table 1 summarizes the cases along the meta-categories from Bryson et al. (2006) overlaid with instances of the three leadership media discussed in Huxham and Vangen (2005). The following analysis highlights aspects of the three leadership media particularly worthy of note.

4.1. Enabling structures and institutions

Research on the structural features of collaboration almost exclusively focuses on collaborative structures, or rather, how relationships are structured in collaborative partnerships. When attention is turned to the role of leadership *through* structures, particularly in partnership development, we discover another critical institutional or structural feature to consider. Boundary organizations are intermediary structures that serve to bring together actors across boundaries in order to facilitate the co-production of knowledge and boundary actions (Cash et al., 2006; Feldman et al., 2006). In the Smoky Mountain cases we see several examples of boundary organizations established to span jurisdictional boundaries and the catalytic effect they had in various policy arenas. Likewise, we also see in each case the impact of grant-making organizations that function in interesting boundary-crossing ways.

4.1.1. Boundary organizations

As mentioned above, the literature on boundary organizations has primarily been in the sciences and natural resources realm. There has been considerable interest in examining organizations that bridge different ways of knowing, such as cooperative

Table 1

Summary of cases by meta-categories* from Bryson et al. (2006) and leadership media+ from Huxham and Vangen (2005).

Component	Whittier Sewer Project	WNC EdNET	Needmore Preservation
*Initial conditions	Environmental problems due to no sewer Multiple stakeholders with shared interest in sewer Funds for unsewered communities	Creation of BalsamWest Schools without broadband access	Threat of land development No single organization with enough resources to purchase tract
+ Structural catalysts <i>Boundary organizations</i> <i>Grant-making agencies</i>	Granting agencies Southwestern Commission	Granting agencies Southwestern Commission WRESA	Conservation funding agencies Southwestern Commission
+ Individual catalysts <i>Boundary spanners</i>	Gibson	Gibson, Metcalf, Winchester, funding agency representatives	Carlson, Gibson, Taylor, Skinner, Alexander
*Process + Process catalysts <i>Boundary experiences</i>	Meetings of potential partners, facilitated by Gibson	Instructional Technology Awareness Conference Committee meetings	Public meetings Stakeholder meetings Negotiations
<i>Boundary objects</i>	Feasibility study	Memorandum of Understanding Goals, brochure, website	River inventory Joint resolutions
*Structure and governance	Ad-hoc partnership	Committees established As network matured, incorporated as 501c3 organization Regional organizations' staff serve as network managers	Loose coalition; no formal structure Citizen's group incorporates as 501c3 organization
*Contingencies and constraints	Permitting process unearths multiple obstacles Cost of project balloons	Denied grant applications	Need to raise \$19 million, including eventually \$2 million from local sources
*Outcomes and accountabilities	Sanitary sewer in Whittier Partners' problems resolved Strengthened relationships between partners	Granting agencies' expectations and accountability mechanisms Schools' access to technology Expanded educational opportunities Stronger regional relationships	Ecological treasure preserved Local residents continue traditional use Culture change regarding conservation Civic involvement of residents Citizen's group works with WRC to plan and manage campsite

extension, which bridges boundaries between farmers and researchers (Carr & Wilinon, 2005). In public administration, scholars have more recently identified these boundary organizations as “sites for collaboration, the formation of new relationships, the infusion of research and scientific information into policy, and the exercise of innovative leadership” (Schneider, 2009, p.61). Thus the purpose of boundary organizations is to facilitate integration across boundaries (boundaries of sector, jurisdiction, and so on)—integration that will lead to “boundary actions” (Feldman et al., 2006, p. 95).

Organizations at the center of the cases here are prime examples of boundary organizations. Regional councils of government bridge boundaries of jurisdiction to enable member local governments to think and act regionally (Lindstrom, 1998). WRESA serves a similar function for schools. The organizations not only play an intermediary role, facilitating communication across boundaries; they also provide expertise in terms of both content and process. In each of the cases above, the boundary organizations were indispensable in that they provided structure and management for the partnerships as well as technical expertise in identifying and securing external funding resources (and eventually managing those grants).

In citing factors critical to the success of WNC EdNET, Leonard Winchester (a school technology coordinator who was one of the project leaders) mentioned specifically “the networking that we’ve had going on for a very long time” prior to development of the EdNET project, as being indispensable when the (organizational) network was being developed. WRESA, for example, convenes and facilitates regular meetings of superintendents “where they get together to talk about problems and how to deal with them.” Additionally, “our technology people, they meet regularly [at WRESA].... [we] get together to share experiences, problems, solutions, all that stuff, that’s been going on for years. And those are well attended... Almost everybody makes all the meetings. And that’s what provides the basis for the communication and the trust is they had those networking experiences” (interview with

author, July 23, 2007). WRESA, the Southwestern Commission, and other organizations like them enable that kind of networking that creates a climate for integration to be possible. They also provide a professional home for catalysts like Gibson and Metcalf. It would be hard to overstate the value of individuals whose very job description involves the kind of boundary-crossing, catalytic work that is the focus here.

4.1.2. Grant-making organizations

Another important category of structural or institutional leadership for collaboration is grant-making agencies, including both government agencies and private philanthropies. These organizations might be thought of as a special category of boundary organization. They play important convening roles in the integrative leadership process. And as is evident in the three cases discussed here, beyond initial convening, the grant-making organizations to a large extent provided leadership by setting deadlines, clarifying roles and expectations, establishing accountability, and so forth.

Grant-making organizations place a high value on funding efforts that have strong local commitment. They like to know that their investment will produce second and third order impacts and not just be a (for lack of a better term) handout. In other words, they like to see their investment as seed money that, although it might fund a specific thing in space and time, will also contribute to generating public value into the future.¹¹ Grant-making organizations often take the long-view and are concerned about capacity building and therefore can have an important catalytic effect within collaborative processes.

The literature on collaboration and partnerships in the public sector has historically paid little attention to the influential role of grant-making agencies in the process. It seems reasonable to assume that these three cases are not outliers in receiving significant external funding. Rather, they are likely the norm; and if most collaborative efforts do involve external support (financial or otherwise), then it seems reasonable to suggest that the role of those organizations in the process of integrative leadership is one that merits further study.

4.2. The process of integration

4.2.1. Creating a common purpose

Leadership is also enacted through process. One of the prominent themes running through the cases is the idea of integration as described above. Integration, the joining of different perspectives and ideas into one common purpose, or rather, one common goal or desired outcome, facilitates the alignment of the different elements of collaboration (see Table 1). In an article on the topic of leadership, Follett describes “the leadership quality” as “the ability to organize all the forces there are in an enterprise and make them serve a common purpose.” This process creates “a group power rather than [an expression of] personal power” (Follett in Graham, 1995, p. 168). Follett goes on to say that the integrative process creates a situation where those that we think of as “leaders” along with those that we might think of as “followers” together follow “the invisible leader—the common purpose.” The best leaders (we might call them integrative leaders) “put this common purpose clearly before their group... [so] that common purpose becomes the leader” (Follett in Graham, 1995, p. 172).

In all three cases the partners were able to define a common purpose and it was that common purpose that helped them overcome setbacks, and in some cases significant conflict, to succeed in their collaborative effort. The common purpose was not a precondition in any of the cases. Even in the Whittier Sewer case one of the key partners, the TWSA, did not see owning and maintaining a system in Whittier as in its interest. In fact, the board had originally told the new director to “steer clear” of any such entanglements and associated risk that would certainly go with it.

Leonard Winchester, in speaking about WNC EdNET, explains that “we have clear goals, we have shared goals, and our goals are our goals. We don’t have a stated goal where somebody else has got some other kind of motive; that’s not part of the package. Our written, stated goals are our goals; they’re clear, and everybody has committed to them” (interview with author, July 24, 2007). The partners in WNC EdNET all share a desired outcome of schools in the region that are ahead of the technology curve and students that are able to leverage broadband resources to compete globally. The vision and goals represent a true integration and it appears that the common vision and set of goals are what drive the effort at this point. This is an important contrast from thinking about how individual leaders lead followers.

However, the process of integration does not mean everyone agrees with each other all the time. Winchester notes that “every decision we’ve made has been unanimous, and that sounds real good. But you know when we met to discuss these things it was not unanimous. I mean we’ve had some really hot and heavy debates, [but] at the same time we have a lot of respect for each other, and when somebody disagrees we listen to them and want to hear them out and question them to see about why they think what they do. And as we go through this stuff we just stay with it and we don’t necessarily know how it’s going to end up, but we have always ended up unanimous on all of the decisions that we’ve had to make” (interview with author, July 24, 2007).

The process of integration was also a key catalyst in the preservation of the Needmore Tract. While the different stakeholders had varying reasons for supporting conservation, there was a consensus around the desired outcome of preservation. That consensus was noted by many participants as a truly remarkable thing. Taylor explained at the June 2nd meeting that she is “not a tree hugger... but we want to protect our mountain heritage.” State representative Phil Haire noted that the effort is “a wonderful example of a local community coming together... [and] a shift in attitudes of local communities—realizing the tremendous assets in the natural beauty of the region and the desire to protect it” (Hendershot, 2001). Paul Carlson (LTLT) believes that this period of

¹¹ Drawn from comments by Mark Sorrells, Senior Vice President, Golden LEAF Foundation, and Susan Jenkins, Executive Director, Cherokee Preservation Foundation, at lunch meeting of project leaders with foundation representatives, July 23, 2007.

time really was “a watershed period where the dominant paradigm changed, where the general sense of these mountain counties is we really do need to conserve; we need to think tax base and growth, but we need growth management... things just shifted, and... it's been very exciting” (interview with author, July 23, 2007).

So a key aspect of integrative leadership is helping create the integration or common purpose to begin with and then keeping that common purpose out in front of the group all along the way so that it can be the true leader rather than one or a few persons. In other words, one key to integrative leadership is apparently understanding what integration actually is. In its ideal form, integration represents creating a shared purpose that bridges different ways of knowing and acting; a shared understanding and purpose that becomes the basis for true collaboration.

Perhaps this is a critical difference-maker between partnerships that succeed or fail. It may be that failed efforts rely too much on traditional notions of leadership where an individual or few individuals are able to induce others to follow in order to realize the leaders' vision. On the other hand, it may be that successful partnerships occur when it is the common purpose that becomes the leader, with individuals exercising leadership in a way that develops and sustains the common purpose. This seems to explain the success of the three cases examined here. It is a hypothesis worth examining more broadly.

4.2.2. *Boundary experiences and boundary objects*

Boundary experiences are “shared or joint activities that create a sense of community and an ability to transcend boundaries among participants” (Feldman et al., 2006, p. 94). The numerous stakeholder meetings that took place in all three cases constitute boundary experiences. Formal committee meetings that take place in the WNC EdNET, and even some of the public meetings about the Needmore Tract were boundary experiences. That these meetings helped partners build common purpose is no accident. While no formal process (like a World Café or Future Search) was employed, the presence of experienced facilitators like Gibson and Metcalf made a difference. Gibson definitely acts purposefully as a facilitator in his work as a boundary spanner.

Throughout the many meetings participants engaged different ways of knowing and developed common ground for action. One significant, dramatic demonstration of a purposefully designed boundary experience was the Instructional Technology Awareness Conference held October 12, 2007 at Western Carolina University. The conference, put together by the WNC EdNET (using WRESA staff as its primary agent), was aimed at raising awareness among area teachers of the new technology and potential applications in the classroom. Over 2000 educators attended the conference, representing virtually all instructional personnel from the schools within the service area. It was the largest-ever gathering of educators in the region. Roger Metcalf noted how unusual it is “to get seven school systems to schedule a workday on the same day; that is a major coup in Western North Carolina or anywhere...” He went on to say (talking about the conference), that “it shows the level of commitment [the superintendents] have to this, and the spirit of collaboration” that permeates WNC EdNET.¹²

Boundary experiences often correspond with the creation of boundary objects—tangible manifestations of boundary experiences. Boundary objects bridge “different social worlds” (Guston 2001, p. 300). They are artifacts of integration. The WNC EdNET started off with a feasibility study, conducted by WRESA but in collaboration with local schools. It served as an important boundary object for the many jurisdictions involved. Later participants agreed on goals for the project and created a brochure and website¹³ to share those goals broadly. A Memorandum of Agreement was another important boundary object for the project. The agreement spells out the purpose, service area, and responsibilities for the different components of the project. Specifically, the parties agreed to plan collaboratively to seek funding to procure the broadband connectivity for all of the schools in the service area. This is a critical point. The parties agreed to approach the broadband issue as a *regional network* rather than district-by-district or school-by-school.

The Whittier Sewer Project also benefited from the early creation of a boundary object. Each of the four initial partners—the EDC, the EBCL, Jackson County, and the TWSA—agreed to pay one-fourth of a \$26,000 feasibility study. The study explored potential customers and their needs, possible plant locations, flow and capacity, and projected growth in the area. Having a tangible boundary object such as a feasibility study helped create a common understanding among the principals and paved the way for more boundary experiences and creation of other boundary objects such as the grant application to the Rural Center.

In Needmore, a river inventory study was an important boundary object for the many diverse stakeholders. It bridged scientific and local understanding and provided shared picture of reality that aided in the development of the consensus vision of preservation. Similarly, the joint resolutions by Macon and Swain counties became important boundary objects and represented a turning point in the public consciousness on the issue.

In identifying various boundary experiences and boundary objects across these cases, we see that those experiences and objects play a crucial role in the development of common purpose, or rather, in achieving something close to true integration. It is also evident that in all of these cases, the boundary objects were made possible because of the boundary organizations. It is hard to imagine the outcomes of these three cases being the same in the absence of any of the boundary organizations. The personal leadership of individuals can only go so far.

4.3. *Individual catalysts*

The catalytic role of individuals certainly stands out in all three cases. Indeed, individuals such as Gibson and Metcalf exemplify the notion that certain boundary spanners in the system are “key agents” in the integrative process (Williams, 2002). They truly

¹² Roger Metcalf (WRES), at lunch meeting of project leaders with foundation representatives, July 23, 2007.

¹³ <http://www.wresa.org/wncednet/wncednetinfo.htm>.

act as catalysts in such a way that it is hard to imagine partnership success without their involvement. Gibson led “from the middle” and at different points in each case played the role of “multilateral broker” (Mandell, 1988; Luke, 1998). Recall the definition of catalyst, “a substance, usually used in small amounts relative to the reactants, that modifies and increases the rate of a reaction without being consumed in the process” (*The American heritage® dictionary of the english language*, Fourth Ed., Houghton Mifflin, 2004). In none of the three cases was Gibson the visible leader, rather, his interventions were “in small amounts” relative to some of the primary partners. Yet time after time it was those small, often behind-the-scenes actions that had such a large influence on the outcome (the “reaction”).

Much could be written—indeed, much has been written—about the personal qualities and skills and behaviors of integrative, boundary-spanning leaders (for example, see Crosby & Bryson, 2005; Luke, 1998; Chrislip, 2002; Linden, 2002; Morse, 2008; Getha-Taylor, 2008; Williams, 2002). Specific tasks and skills are likely to vary from leader to leader, from case to case. So much is context dependent. But there do seem to be two primary defining features of these boundary spanners or integrative leaders that particularly stand out: entrepreneurialism and their ability to cultivate trusting relationships.

4.3.1. *Entrepreneurial nature of integrative leaders*

Integrative leaders are entrepreneurs who create public value. Rather than the business entrepreneur whose success is defined in market terms, integrative leaders are public (or social, or civic) entrepreneurs and as such define success in terms of public value created. This is not a new insight of course, but it seems particularly relevant in developing a theory of integrative leadership.

In these three cases we observed that Gibson, Metcalf, Carlson, and Taylor “ [saw] opportunity, and mobilize[d] others in the community to work toward their collective well-being” (Henton, Melville, & Walesh, 2004, p. 209). Opportunity is a key variable in all three of the cases. Leaders such as Gibson saw in the set of conditions in front of them an opportunity to do something different. They saw an opportunity for integration. This perhaps lies at the core of what it means to be a catalyst. In order for integration (the reaction, the partnership) to even be possible, someone has to imagine the process of coming together to create something new. Thus the vision of public value is often dependent on these individual leaders, the entrepreneurial boundary spanners, unsatisfied with the status quo and willing to take risks to realize something better.

Consider Henton, Melville, and Walesh’s description of civic entrepreneurs: “They are risk takers. They are not afraid of failure. They possess courage born of strong convictions. They are passionate and energetic. They are people of vision and persistence.” In addition to seeing opportunity, catalysts must have the courage and passion to work toward making it happen. Vice-Chief (of the Tribe) Larry Blythe, in discussing the back-and-forth negotiations to get the Whittier Sewer Project accomplished, explained “I’ll be honest with you, Bill and his office have been a major pushing player in this thing... they kept pushing us to get to the table” (interview with author, July 23, 2007). Note, however, that the drive and passion isn’t about getting people to follow (as in traditional conceptions of leadership). Rather, the passion and energy is directed toward getting people to the table, and once there, helping them through the integrative process.

4.3.2. *The role of relationship capital*

Another notable aspect of integrative leadership enacted by individuals throughout the cases is the development and use of “relationship capital.” It is not enough to have the passion for results and vision of possibility. Integration often involves conflicting interests, perspectives, cultures, and values. A key catalytic role, therefore, is to be able to sustain commitment through inevitable conflicts and setbacks. The key, according to Gibson, is what he has come to call “relationship capital.”

As Gibson explains it, relationship capital is accumulated over time and is absolutely critical during those times when people may need to be pushed or challenged in the process (interview with author, July 24, 2007). It is a concept described well in Stephen Covey’s *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (2004) in a chapter titled “Paradigms of Interdependence.” It is relationship capital that, according to TWSA director Joe Cline, factored into his board’s reconsidering playing a larger role in the Whittier Sewer Project. Cline explained that his board of directors initially wanted to “steer clear” of any commitments to the Whittier sewer project. But, he explained, “I ... laid out all the pros and cons of it, and mentioned [Gibson’s] approach to it ... [and] our board has a lot of confidence in Bill.” And that was a factor why the board gave Cline the go-ahead to begin negotiations, because “Bill asked instead of maybe someone else” (interview with author, July 24, 2007).

Leonard Winchester points out that in the context of the WNC EdNET effort, it was this relationship capital—of which Metcalf and Gibson, in particular, had large stores with project partners—that often provided the glue. Speaking of Gibson he commented on “how he treats people and how people trust him and how they can count on him... the gears really spin on that” (interview with author, July 24, 2007). Additionally, it was evident that the funding agencies’ representatives developed relationship capital with EdNET partners, which greatly assisted in keeping things moving forward.

Relationship capital factored into the information sharing that occurred throughout the Needmore effort between Gibson and Fred Alexander, a manager at Duke Energy assigned to work with the community on the Needmore situation. Reflecting back on the four-year process, Alexander noted that he and Gibson often exchanged information that helped both parties (Crescent Resources and the community) be more effective in the negotiation process and ultimately lead to a win/win outcome. He felt that those exchanges were only possible because he “trust[ed] Bill Gibson as much as I trust anyone in this life” (interview with author, July 23, 2007). It is not insignificant that Gibson worked in his role at the Southwestern Commission for over 30 years and throughout those years has accumulated great stores of this relationship capital.

It would be a mistake to say that the leadership process in these three collaborative efforts begins and ends with Gibson and his relationships with a lot of people, however. Rather, in understanding leadership as a process of “aligning initial conditions, processes, structures, governance, contingencies and constraints, outcomes, and accountabilities such that.... public value can be

created” (Bryson et al., 2006, p. 52), we see that there are many leaders involved at different points in time. Indeed, the chairmen of the Macon and Swain County Boards of Commissioners risked their own political capital to take a stand, and convince others to follow, that went against the prevailing paradigm. Taylor decided to not only organize her neighbors but also decided to engage in boundary experiences with others that lead to a community-wide shared vision for 100% preservation when it is easy to imagine a different scenario based on conflict rather than consensus.

5. Conclusion and future research

The cases discussed in this paper are only three examples of many noteworthy collaborative success stories. Indeed, the cases are not exceptional in that we see examples everywhere of innovative, boundary-crossing, integrative work that creates significant public value. The important question to ask is how this kind of integration can happen even more than it does at present. There is an infinite amount of potential integrations, an infinite amount of ways that public value can be created through boundary-crossing, collaborative work. So how can we realize more of those possibilities?

The focus here has been on the leadership dimension of this question. Huxham and Vangen's (2005) recommendation to examine leadership through structure, process, and people seems particularly apt for studying integrative public leadership. In this paper, we have examined three cases that illustrate how structures, processes, and people can catalyze integration across boundaries toward the creation of public value.

We find that boundary organizations serve as institutional catalysts in communities and regions. Councils of government, regional education alliances, and other boundary-crossing groups and organizations were extremely helpful in providing a context for integration in these cases. Similarly, grant-making organizations play a strong catalytic role in convening stakeholders, bridging goals with outcomes and accountability, and also in incentivizing collaboration.

Boundary experiences and boundary objects serve to bridge different ways of knowing (Feldman et al., 2006) and in turn assist in the development of legitimacy and support across stakeholders. Processes that engage stakeholders in authentic dialogue facilitate integration—the creation of shared purpose. Indeed, it may be that the key difference between collaborative success and failure is the level of actualizing true integration around purpose, or not. All the actors in the three cases above seemed, to one degree or another, to come to a point where they shared a common understanding and vision for the future that united them and enabled them to work through setbacks of various sorts to realize that desired outcome. Indeed, integrative leadership is ultimately about achieving real integration, an idea that radically reorients the meaning of leadership from getting others to follow one's fixed goal toward one of assisting diverse groups in creating shared goals that motivate and inspire shared work to reach them.

Finally, people—boundary spanners—play a catalytic role in visualizing potential public value through integrative partnerships. They act in entrepreneurial ways to make that possible, leveraging relationship capital to enable groups to work through conflict and setbacks. The cases here clearly illustrate the value of such individuals.

These observations lend themselves to further empirical investigation. More research is needed to further explore these (and other) dimensions of integrative public leadership. While a universal theory or framework for integrative public leadership is not realistic, we can and should continue to develop the concept, identifying and clarifying conceptual handles as we go. Specifically, future research might examine:

- The nature of public-oriented entrepreneurship versus a private (or individualist) orientation.
- The manner in which relationship capital is accumulated and the extent to which it is a necessary condition.
- What factors influence the relative success of boundary organizations in terms of facilitating integration and boundary work.
- Similarly, what factors make some grant-making agencies more effective than others in terms of facilitating integration and ultimately in realizing important outcomes.
- What processes help groups achieve integration and which are most effective.
- What might be learned from cases of partnership failure? Most cases (including those featured here) are of successful efforts. It seems reasonable to suppose that we might learn as much from failures (which are more numerous than successes).

There is research being done in all of these areas, yet it is the hope of this author that the relevant research efforts themselves will become more integrative in developing the concept of integrative public leadership.

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