

Do public sector clients have to collaborate with contractors?

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PM CONGRESS 2019

RESEARCH MEETS PRACTICE:
TOWARDS PROJECT MANAGEMENT 3.0



PM CONGRESS 2019
Conference Papers

REFLECTIONS ON THE PM CONGRESS 2019:

RESEARCH MEETS PRACTICE: TOWARDS PROJECT MANAGEMENT 3.0

Delft University of Technology, the International Project Management and the Project Management Institute (PMI) Netherlands Chapter were delighted to host the international Project Management Congress "ADAPT or DIE" on Thursday 11 April and Friday 12 April 2019.

The Project Management Congress 2019 revolved around the theme of 'Research Meets Practice'. A Congress is about 'walking together', and there was indeed a lot of walking (and not just talking) together over the two days of the PM Congress.

There was a rich array of activities planned, including keynote presentations that got participants to reflect on the importance of people, knowledge, and innovating through projects, workshops on promising practices, conversations about story-telling, discussions about a future research agenda, and a packed programme of cutting-edge research presentations in the field of project management.

Collaboration and engagement between researchers and practitioners form the key thrust in the deliberations during the PM Congress.

There is more still that can be (and needs to be) done. The opening keynotes pushed participants to think about ways in which we can move beyond the boundaries of academic research and industry practice, and to find new and simple ways of translating complex theoretical models into practicable outcomes, not just on how to do projects but more crucially also on how to build effective project teams.

To create and sustain a thriving community of practitioners in project management, there is a need to move away from our silos and reach out across organisations and between disciplines. As the congress theme highlights, adapt to this clarion call to build critical friendships for exploring intersections between theory and practice or risk a dying profession.

The PM Congress 2019 is definitely a starting point for this ongoing adaptation and transformation in the field of project management.



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Do public sector clients have to collaborate with contractors?

Key words: collaboration, public sector, construction sector, procurement

Purpose, scope, and conclusions (Abstract)

Recently in the Netherlands collaboration emerged as the proposed best way of working together. Clients and contractors are promoting collaboration, and they also prescribe collaboration in their future visions on the construction sector. We challenge this automatism by which collaboration is chosen as the most effective and efficient way. We did an extensive qualitative literature review in order to answer the research question: how can public clients and private contractors work together effective and efficient? At first a definition of collaboration is constructed, and the characteristics of the public sector in the Netherlands are discussed along three themes: power, resources, and procurement. The definition of collaboration and public sector construction project characteristics are then compared to show how collaboration is not suitable for all projects, and other forms of working together are discussed.

Abstract

Recently in the Netherlands collaboration emerged as the proposed best way of working together. Clients and contractors are promoting collaboration, and they also prescribe collaboration in their future visions on the construction sector. We challenge this automatism by which collaboration is chosen as the most effective and efficient way. We did an extensive qualitative literature review in order to answer the research question: how can public clients and private contractors work together effective and efficient? At first a definition of collaboration is constructed, and the characteristics of the public sector in the Netherlands are discussed along three themes: power, resources, and procurement. The definition of collaboration and public sector construction project characteristics are then compared to show how collaboration is not suitable for all projects, and other forms of working together are discussed.

Introduction

This paper is about effective client contractor relations in construction projects in the Dutch context. How can public clients work together with private contractors in a way that benefits project result? Recently in the Netherlands collaboration emerged as the proposed best way of working together. Clients and contractors are promoting collaboration, and they also prescribe collaboration in their future visions on the construction sector (Unie_van_Waterschappen, 2016). But is collaboration the best way forward? We challenge this automatism by which collaboration is chosen as the most effective and efficient way of shaping the relationship between public clients and private contractors.

First the elements of collaboration are used to construct a definition of collaboration. Then the characteristics of the Dutch public client related to construction projects are described. The

specific elements of the public sector are highlighted to emphasize that collaboration does not always fit, these elements are presented along three themes: (state)power, resources, and procurement. The question is then answered: in which cases is collaboration the most effective and efficient way of working together, and which other ways of working together are there for situations where collaboration does not fit?

Method

The selection of literature was done using the keywords collaboration and public client through multiple literature databases such as JSTOR, Science direct, EBSCO host, and SCOPUS. Additionally the method of 'snowball sampling' of using references from previously identified and selected literature was applied if deemed relevant. Especially the form backward snowballing, in which citations were found in a paper and led to a next scientific article. The examined literature then led to other search queries, collaboration literature led to keywords such as: cooperation, coordination, and governance. And public client literature led to key words such as: procurement, client-contractor, and buyer-supplier.

For the definition of collaboration as constructed in this paper 30 articles were reviewed. The articles were selected for their timeliness (16 articles <5 years) and the studies had to cover collaboration and (public)procurement. The articles were closely examined for definitions or descriptions of collaboration. The articles were then coded, similar to open coding as a qualitative research method. The elements (codes) of collaboration were then compared between articles, this way of axial coding led to nine categories as presented below in table 1. As a last step selective coding was applied, by reviewing the articles again with the categories as a framework in mind. The nine elements are ranked according to how many of the 30 articles used the elements in their description of collaboration.

Collaboration

Collaboration is often mentioned in literature, but different authors use different definitions.

In most literature collaboration is not even defined at all, but collaboration is used as a general notion of “working together”. To define ‘collaboration’ we reviewed 30 articles. Below in table 1. the elements of collaboration are presented. The elements are ranked according to how many times the elements were used in the reviewed articles. The number of articles (out of 30 articles) which used the elements is presented in the most right column.

Table 1. elements of collaboration.

rank	Element	Nr. of articles
1	Interdependence / resources	24
2	Goal alignment / mutual beneficial	24
3	Learning / knowledge co-creation / innovation	23
4	Collective / joint production (coordination)	22
5	performance	21
6	trust	20
7	Uncertainty avoidance / risk sharing	19
8	commitment	17
9	Solve problems together	16

Elements of collaboration

Alam, Kabir, and Chaudhri (2014)

Ansell and Gash (2008)

Armistead and Pettigrew (2008)

Bresnen and Marshall (2000)

Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2015)

Burgess, Singh, and Koroglu (2006)

Dormady (2013)

Edelenbos and Klijn (2007)

Graaff Randolph (2016)

HakemZadeh and Baba (2016)

Head (2008)

Kache and Seuring (2014)

Klijn and Teisman (2003)

Koolwijk, Van Oel, Wamelink, and Vrijhoef (2018)

Lawrence, Hardy, and Phillips (2002)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Alam, Kabir, and Chaudhri (2014)	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Ansell and Gash (2008)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Armistead and Pettigrew (2008)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Bresnen and Marshall (2000)		x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2015)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Burgess, Singh, and Koroglu (2006)					x	x		x	
Dormady (2013)	x	x					x		x
Edelenbos and Klijn (2007)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Graaff Randolph (2016)	x	x		x	x	x		x	
HakemZadeh and Baba (2016)		x	x		x				
Head (2008)	x		x		x				
Kache and Seuring (2014)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Klijn and Teisman (2003)	x	x		x			x		x
Koolwijk, Van Oel, Wamelink, and Vrijhoef (2018)		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Lawrence, Hardy, and Phillips (2002)			x	x					x

Lin, Tsai, and Wu (2014)	x	x	x		x				x
Maciulienė and Skarzauskienė (2016)	x	x	x	x			x		x
McGuire (2006)	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
Mohr (2004)	x		x						x
Öberg (2016)	x	x	x			x		x	
Oliver (1991)	x	x					x		
Qu and Yang (2015)	x		x	x		x	x	x	
Tsou, Cheng, and Hsu (2015)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Volker and Rose (2012)		x		x	x	x	x	x	
G. Wang, Dou, Zhu, and Zhou (2015)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Y. Wang, Wang, Jiang, Yang, and Cui (2016)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Wood and Gray (1991)	x	x		x	x				x
Xu, Cui, Qualls, and Zhang (2017)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Yoojin Oh and Lee (2017)	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Youngmin Oh and Bush (2016)	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

So what does this mean, and what is the function of these elements? Trust and commitment are often mentioned together as the prerequisites for collaboration, risk sharing and interdependency are most likely drivers for collaboration, and maintaining goal alignment is important to ensure collaboration over a longer period of time. We noticed that with regard to public procurement, a clear definition of collaboration is missing in literature. Therefore out of the elements that emerged out of the literature review, we constructed a definition of inter-organizational collaboration:

Inter-organizational collaboration is about joint production by two or more interdependent organizations, which is mutual beneficial through uncertainty reduction or performance improvement. Collaborations exists under conditions of trust and commitment, and by collaborating organizations improve mutual learning, innovation, and problem solving.

With this constructed definition of collaboration, we compared collaboration characteristics with public sector construction project characteristics. In this way judgements can be made about the fit of collaboration to project.

Public sector

The term public sector is widely used, but is rarely well defined. Despite the public sector being multifaceted and layered, we seem to accept that whenever government is involved, the name public sector is applicable. Next the specific elements for Dutch public sector construction projects are presented along three themes: power, resources, and procurement.

Power

As in most countries the Netherlands uses the state model “separation of powers”. This means that there are three powers of state: the legislative power (parliament), the judiciary power (court), and the executive power (cabinet). There is also a fourth informal element which is called “the fourth power”, this refers to the power civil servants poses. A well-known work on the latter is that of Lipsky (1980) about street-level bureaucrats.

The state has power that is not available to private actors. Traditionally it is also assumed that buyers have power over their suppliers (Y. Wang et al., 2016). Buyer power is known under several names such as: buying power, monopsony power, countervailing power, and bargaining power (Chen, 2008). Regardless the name of the power, the state as a public client has both state power and buyer power. This is sometimes referred to as the purchasing power of the state (Edler & Georghiou, 2007), power imbalance (Grandinetti, 2017), and even the

coercive power of the state (Fortin-Rittberger, 2014). Another stream in literature argues that power could also lie at the supplier side. Research on corporate social responsibility (CSR) even claims that the traditional roles of state and business have eroded, with the state losing power and business gaining power (Schrempf-Stirling, 2018). To evaluate the power between buyers and suppliers Cox and Ireland (2002) present a power matrix, also considering elements such as switching costs, and information asymmetry advantage.

A popular phrase is: with great power comes great responsibility, this is particularly true for the state. Being a public actor means looking after the rights and interests of the companies and citizens you work with. This is even legally laid down in public law. Another challenge is that of the tension between national and international law. In the Netherlands the public sector also has to comply with European regulation, for instance to European procurement law.

How do all these different interests and regulations translate to a single policy, or a coherent programme of policies? (Kingdon, 1995). Which policies the state should implement depend on which political view you adopt. Either way there are some responsibilities that are typical for the state (Hoogerwerf & Herweijer, 2008). One of those is that the state has the monopoly on violence and therefore guarantees safety to its citizens. Another typical responsibility of the state is market regulation, for instance imposing rules and regulations to improve health and safety. Market regulation also includes the distribution of scarce goods, and the provision of collective goods. Examples are the construction and maintenance of roads and bridges, public transportation, and specific for the Dutch context: protection against the water by building dikes.

The last decades have shown a strong development in how the public sector delivers on her responsibilities. From the 1970s the public sector saw a shift towards effective and efficient organisation under the name of new public management (NPM) (Alam et al., 2014). A much used NPM approach is given by Osborne and Gaebler (1993) in their book “reinventing government”, with elements such as results-oriented government, and market-oriented government. This market-oriented approach led to an increase in outsourcing of public services. The traditional argument is that the public sector is inefficient and costly. A more positive rationale for outsourcing public services is the access to flexible capacity, knowledge, and skills of the private sector (Watson, 2003). Recently there is also another side of the debate emerging, claiming that outsourcing and privatization not always deliver the promised better services and lower costs (Hodge, Greve, & Biygautane, 2018). This calls for a careful examination of which services to outsource, and how this can be done best.

Resources

Public clients and private contractors both exist for a purpose, and regardless their individual purpose they organize in order to reach their goals, also known as organizational strategy. Strategy is ambiguous and contains multiple paradoxes, as many scholars have acknowledged (Wit & Meyer, 2014). A classical observation in the field of organizational strategy came from Kirkland and Chandler (1962) who stated: “structure follows strategy”. Multiple organizational studies subsequently led to the “strategy-structure-performance” (SSP) paradigm, which means that organizational performance is positively influenced if the organizations strategy and structure are congruent (Child, 2015). Another element of organization theory is the dilemma of (vertical) integration versus diversification. Simply put, diversification is entering a market other than one's own, and integration is when a firm acquires another firm involved in their production process (for instance a supplier). So from

an organizational theory perspective, strategy determines which elements to integrate into the organization and which resources need to be externally purchased. Related to the topic of this paper, most western societies are pushing for small government, which leads to the privatization of former state businesses and the outsourcing of public services. This in turn increasingly leads governments to act as a public client. In this capacity public clients are resource dependent on private contractors.

As noticed before, there is a stream in political economy and in public administration literature, which explains the shift from the 1970s towards the use of business methods in public management, and to the outsourcing of public services to the private sector. A well-accepted stream in literature is the resource-based view (RBV). RBV is about the firms internal resources such as human capital, technology, and knowledge. These capabilities can be seen as the firms competitive advantage. Where the RBV has an internal focus, other researchers argue that a firms competitive advantage is to be found in the way they deal with their external resources, this is known as the resource dependency theory (RDT) (Weele & Raaij, 2014). According to RDT there are three elements which determine the dependence of a buyer on its suppliers: the importance of the resource, the discretion over the resource, and the concentration of resource control (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Through RDT client-contractor relations can be explained as public clients being dependent on private contractors for their resources.

Procurement

When organizations need resources they do not poses themselves, they need to purchase them. As Chandler (1962) stated that structure should follow strategy, other authors state that also

purchasing should follow strategy (Gelderman & Albronda, 2013). The strategy of the organization determines what kind of value should be delivered, and therefore also what should be purchased (Treacy & Wiersema, 1995). Therefore over the years purchasing developed from an administrative to a strategical function within the organization (Hartmann, Kerkfeld, & Henke, 2012). As the purchasing function is related to so many factors, purchasing can have several positions within an organization (Burt, Petcavage, & Pinkerton, 2012). Van Echtelt, Wynstra, Van Weele, and Duysters (2008) describe four dimensions of the purchasing function: administrative, technical, logistical, and commercial. Different products also lead to different purchasing strategies, a widely recognized model is the Kraljic (1983) purchasing product portfolio approach. Kraljic (1983) introduces four kinds of products with related strategies: routine products, leverage products, bottleneck products, and strategic products. The purchasing function of an organization can have different positions, with different strategies, related to the organizations strategy and structure. This also means that the relations between buyers and suppliers differs. Some authors provided recommendations on supplier relations based upon the Kraljic (1983) matrix. Lakemond, Berggren, and Van Weele (2006) even describe a supplier coordination typology. Another division is that of formal (contracts) and informal (relationships) mechanisms for interactions with suppliers (Sjoerdsma & van Weele, 2015).

Porter (1985) already in the 1980s stated he preferred the use of procurement over purchasing, because he judged procurement to be more comprehensive. “Procurement embodies procedures as well as technologies for placing orders and interacting with suppliers” (Porter, 1985). But procurement has a longer history, even going back to Coase (1937) who described contracts, contract costs, series of contracts, and cooperation and coordination of contractors. Procurement gained a permanent place in literature through traditional purchasing books

during the 20th century (Lewis, 1948) (Westing, Fine, & Zenz, 1976). Clients also have to choose a suitable delivery method. Multiple definitions and divisions exist, but generally there are three main models: traditional, integrated, and life cycle (Chao-Duivis, Koning, & Ubink, 2013). The best delivery method depends on the type of products or services needed, and that in turn influences the relationship of the client and contractor. With a traditional contract, the client is responsible for the definition of the products needed. For example when office equipment is purchased, the client is responsible for ordering the right amount of desks, and the right colour of the pencils. With integrated contracts, the contractor will be responsible for (a part of) the design. For example when a bridge is designed and constructed by a contractor, the contractor will also be responsible for delivering the required structural integrity. As responsibilities and risks are divided according to the delivery method, also the relationship of the client and contractor is shaped accordingly. As we have seen so far this is yet another of many elements which influence and define the way clients and contractors work together.

Findings

In the introduction of this paper we challenged the automatism by which collaboration is chosen as the most effective and efficient way of shaping the relationship between public clients and private contractors. The question we posed to be answered was: in which cases is collaboration the most effective and efficient way of working together, and which other ways of working together are there for situations where collaboration does not fit?

We constructed a definition of collaboration, and we explored the relevant characteristics of public sector construction projects. Now we can make a comparison between them to make

judgements about the fit of collaboration to (public construction) projects. In the table below the elements are placed side by side.

Table 2. conflicting elements of collaboration and public sector construction projects.

Collaboration	Public sector
Interdependence / resources	Resource dependency / RDT State buyer power / supplier power
Goal alignment / mutual beneficial	Market regulation State responsibilities
Collective / joint production	NPM, outsourcing strategy
Uncertainty avoidance / risk sharing	Traditional versus integrated delivery methods
Solve problems together Learning / knowledge co-creation / innovation	High variety of projects Portfolio approach

There are public sector construction projects where the requirement of interdependence is not met, either because of a clear resource dependency, or power imbalance. Collaborations are supposed to be mutual beneficial, and goal alignment is expected. But the public sector sometimes has opposing interests. For instance compliance with procurement law means ending long term relations, or market regulation could mean that the state stimulates or obstructs market forces. Regarding the state strategy to outsource, there are certainly some projects where there is no collective or joint production. When free market competition is stimulated, or when former state businesses are privatised the state takes a distance. This is also related to project delivery methods. When the state procures a project through a life cycle delivery method, the state is not involved in production. The same goes for risk division, which is particularly different within traditional versus integrated project delivery methods. The last elements in table 2 are purchasing and procurement related to knowledge co-creation and innovation. There are clear examples where this is the case, and collaboration is the best description of the relationship. For instance when new technologies are needed to meet

international standards for sustainable housing projects. But when the state procures a straightforward quay wall, this might as well been done without innovation or knowledge co-creation. The less complex and large the project is, the less there is a fit with collaboration. As shown in table 2 collaboration is not always fit for project. Some projects need other ways of working together.

Discussion

In recent years work has been done to understand the role of collaboration. Collaborative public management has been assessed (McGuire, 2006), and just like we concluded in this paper, others have been questioning collaboration in comparison with other methods of ‘working together’ (O’Flynn, 2009). O’Flynn (2009) stated: “Collaboration is just one way in which organisations might work together”. Based on the work of Mattessich and Monsey (1992) and Himmelman (2002), O’Flynn (2009) makes the distinction between four kinds of ‘working together’: networking, cooperating, coordinating, and collaborating. This adds to our notion that collaboration is not the only way forward.

Another perspective on client-contractor relations is governance. Governance is widely used in different contexts with different meanings. For instance governance as a way of supervising organizational structures, or governance as a code of conduct (for instance the united nations ‘good governance’ code). We discuss two other main streams of literature on governance. The first perspective is about governance in the light of the decline of the state, and hollowing out of the state (Rhodes, 2007). This fits our observations about the rise of public procurement. Governance is then about resurrecting the core executive (Rhodes, 2007), not by reversing new public management influences (as if that was even possible) such as undoing

privatization and outsourcing. But by using the power of the state to steer in networks, as a means to deliver public services. We argue that public procurement is ideally suited as a state-power tool to steer in public-private networks. The second perspective is the typology of three different ideal types of organization: hierarchies, markets, and networks (Bevir, 2012). Bevir (2012, p. 75) also mentions the ‘hollowing out of the state’ and complements this with: “the role of the central state is now to govern these other organizations as they govern civil society”. The typology of hierarchies, markets and networks can also be used to interpret the different types of collaboration, or types of ‘working together’ within public-private service delivery.

There is a lot to explore, and there is more than one way forward for working together. We do not oppose the use of the word collaboration, as it is the word of the day in practice, and it has a positive glance about it. But we do propose to differentiate in ways of working together. So to speak the form of collaboration should be ‘best for project’. Whether they are named cooperation or coordination, or maybe different forms or levels of collaboration. We should be aware that different projects have different needs. Our future research will have a focus on these elements, and we will certainly try to make sense of the most effective forms of client – contractor relations.

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