The Effects Of Trust In Brazilian Public Nonprofit Partnerships

Autoria: Mirtha I. Oquendo, Alketa Peci

Propósito Central do Trabalho:
This study seeks to evaluate how interorganizational and interpersonal trust affects the governmental degree of interference in Brazilian Public-Nonprofit Partnerships (PNPs), based on two case studies of Social Organizations (OSs) in the cultural sector of Sao Paulo state. This research seeks to prove that exists a substantial relationship between the level of interorganizational and interpersonal trust between public and non-State partners and the liberty the State gives to Social Organizations (nonprofit partners) to manage their own operations. Since Brazil is a society based on personal relationships, we expect that given high interpersonal trust between members of partner organizations, members will trust in the partner organization’s rules, norms and management and consequently State interference in management will be less pronounced. On the other hand, where interpersonal trust is low, members will exhibit low interorganizational trust and the State would thus intervene more in the operations and personnel of the OS. Given the qualitative nature of the research, we also discovered a number of factors that may influence interpersonal trust (technical expertise) and interorganizational trust (strength of the board, protective qualities of contract, external funding, and organizational legitimization). The findings were used to develop a trust framework that explains the dynamics of interpersonal and interorganizational trust relations to the degree of government interference and to the patterns of collaboration in the Brazilian context.

Marco Teórico:
Interpersonal and interorganizational trust, though related, are different constructs and affect collaboration between partnering organizations in unique ways (Zaheer et al, 1998). In organizational behavior literature, interpersonal trust in organizations is thus the trust held by the member of one organization to their counterpart in the partnering organization. In the Brazilian context however, various authors highlight the importance of interpersonal relationships especially in regards to trust (Costa, 2006; Sobral et al, 2007; Freitas, 1997). Personal contact is said to be of utmost importance to forge credibility and trust (Costa, 2006). Furthermore, personalismo or the tendency to have close and affectionate interpersonal relationships is said to influence organizational negotiations (Sobral et al, 2007) and to be the basis of Brazilian society in general (Freitas, 1997). As such, we suspect that high levels of interpersonal trust will be important both in and outside of organizations. Unlike interpersonal trust, interorganizational trust is not an individual level phenomenon. It is also not an additive construct composed of interpersonal trust. Instead, it relies on all members of a given organization, the norms and processes that they follow and the institutions they belong to. We will define interorganizational trust as “the extent to which organizational members have a collectively-held trust orientation toward the partner firm” (Zaheer et al, 1998, p. 143). The authors found that under high levels of interorganizational trust, partners rely less on obligatory accountability and elaborate safeguards. In contexts with little interorganizational trust, the state may create overly stringent requirements and contracts, expressing a high degree of interference (Brinkerhoff, 1999). The Zaheer et al (1998) study found that interorganizational trust has a direct influence on relational exchange between partners whereas interpersonal trust has an indirect affect via interorganizational trust. This finding suggests that the people that make up an organization are more variable than institutional structures, rules and practices. Interorganizational trust which stems from these structures is thus more constant than interpersonal trust. However, Carneiro et al (2009) find that in Brazil,
trust between partners facilitate quick joint decision-making and cooperation regardless of the presence of formal institutional processes or lack thereof. They also find that trust must exist before partnerships form and must be based on personal relationships and knowledge. They add that if interpersonal trust doesn’t exist between members of partnering organizations before partnerships are formed, processes associated with the partnership must first be institutionalized to yield effectiveness. This seems to contradict Zaheer’s et al (1998) findings that interpersonal trust has an effect on performance, or in our case collaboration, only through interorganizational trust. This study, therefore, intends to explicitly analyze interorganizational and interpersonal trust separately to verify whether the results of Zaheer et al (1998) hold in a Brazilian context. The study is particularly relevant, when we consider Brazilian PNPs as a case of “manufactured” civil society partnerships, in the sense that PNPs are initiated and controled by state modus operandi (Hogson, 2004), establishing a relationship where the third sector is submissive or an extension of the State (Teodosio, 2002).

Método de investigação se pertinente:
We delimited our research in order to minimize variation based on cultural context and state institutional and legislative structure focusing our research on PNPs in the cultural sector of São Paulo. We conducted a qualitative, case study approach. Using the prior development of theoretical propositions we built upon existing theory while challenging that some of the interorganizational literature may not apply entirely in the Brazilian OS context. We believe the case study qualitative research to be a robust approach to building trust and collaboration theory since a case study approach is especially useful for new research areas or areas for which existing theory is deemed inadequate (Eisenhardt, 1989). We studied the historical trajectory of two partnerships, Projeto Guri and OSESP, through the analysis of previous and current contracts and other documents, newspaper articles and partner websites in addition to conducting semi-structured interviews. The interviewees, 11 (eleven) in total, with high level managers in state and non state organizations, policy makers or consultants, were obtained using the snowball sampling heuristic proposed by Noy (2008). According to Bardin (1977), an interview script was used. The questions were adapted from the interorganizational and interpersonal constructs developed by Zaheer et al (1998) and OS evolution questions of Teodósio (2008). Interview questions covered topics including the evolution of the partnership, interactions and trust between actors, expectations, obstacles and achievements. We followed content analysis guidelines for document selection and categorization. Categories were adapted to fit our theoretical framework in order to reflect the intention of the study as prescribed by the author (Bardin, 1977). After a preliminary analysis of the interviews we devised a categorization grid that helped developing the trust framework. Like the Zaheer (1998) study, our analysis is limited by the reliability of individual biases in the interview phase of our study. We seek to remedy this shortcoming by interviewing multiple members from each partnership. Policy-makers, consultants and former executive directors who are not currently directly related to either PNPs, but are nonetheless experienced in the area, were also interviewed as a less biased sources of information.

Resultados e contribuições do trabalho para a área:
This research sought to analyze interorganizational and interpersonal trust in cultural sector OSs, finding that interpersonal trust may have a moderating effect on the relationship between interorganizational trust and interpersonal trust. This finding is vastly different than the findings of previous literature that suggest that in times of low interpersonal trust, interorganizational trust leads to sustained partner collaboration (Zaheer et al 1998). From a historical perspective, the case studies show that levels of interpersonal and
interorganizational trust fluctuated throughout the partnerships, resulting in varying degrees of government interference. After the partners agreed upon contract terms, the initial years of the partnership were characterized by less interference for both. As time progressed, however, the moments of greatest tension and State interference resulted from the loss of interpersonal and oftentimes interorganizational trust. The research confirmed that in partnerships characterized by low levels of interpersonal trust and interorganizational trust, the State will be more prone to interference and influence directly the forms and the quality of collaboration between partners. Probably, the most important contribution of the research was the development of the trust framework that related not only interpersonal and interorganizational trust to the degree of State interference, but discovered other factors that may influence interpersonal trust (technical expertise) and interorganizational trust (strength of the board, protective qualities of contract, external funding, and organizational legitimization/status). In fact, the presence of such factors may moderate the impact of interpersonal or interorganizational trust on the degree of governamental interference and control in the PNPs. The study’s finding regarding the importance of interpersonal trust in the Brazilian context, characterized as a typical case of a manufactured civil society (Peci et al, 2011), is particularly relevant. This finding suggests that it is a worthwhile effort for managers on both sides to invest in trust building training and activities that may yield mutually beneficial collaboration. The research focused on providing indications of the unique qualities of Brazil’s personalistic culture and its relevance when analyzing State partnerships. The evidence presented by the study can serve as a foundation for future organizational studies in the area and also contributes to the existing literature by proposing a unique framework that can be applied to Brazilian State – OS partnerships. The framework stresses the importance of context and trust in studying collaborative models like the OS model and can be useful for both OS managers and State agents.

Referências bibliográficas: