**Decision-making procedures in inter-organizational networks: a protocol of a systematic literature review**

**Registration:** not registered

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**Raionale:**

Inter-organizational networks can take many forms, ranging from simple alliances between two business firms to complex networks connecting hundreds of public and private organizations. Such networks consist of “three or more organizations connected in ways that facilitate achievement of a common goal” (Provan, Fish and Sydow, 2007, p. 482). The nature of organizational networks implies that organizations retain their autonomy, and, consequently, may not have a strict formal hierarchy or subordination scheme. Participation in such networks comes with many benefits for the stakeholders involved. For example, networks may provide access to complementary assets, enable risk-sharing, and/or foster innovation. Nevertheless, up to 70% of business alliances fail to sustain themselves (Barringer, 2000), or end up with one participating organization exploiting network resources for its own benefit (Özen, Uysal and Çakar, 2016). Why are some inter-organizational networks sustainable, while others become dysfunctional or dissolve altogether? At what level – personal, organizational, network – does vulnerability emerge? By entering into inter-organizational partnerships, organizations gain access to resources that are absent or scarce within the organization itself. While doing so can have great advantages, the downside is that even small differences in the perceived value of resources (owned or contributed to the network) may result in significant asymmetries in bargaining power or social influence, i.e., the ability to alter others’ behavior. Such differences may also trigger status disagreements, when “two group members both believe they have higher status than each other” (Anderson and Kilduff, 2009, p. 2), leading to decreasing contributions to the organization or network (ibid.). They can also complicate bargaining, reaching agreements, and resolving conflicts (Bacharach and Lawler, 1981; De Dreu, 1995).

Power asymmetries tend to grow over time, following the logic of the Matthew effect: those who have a higher social influence use it to alter partners’ behavior and accumulate even more influence over time (we briefly discuss sources of influence below). However, in order to benefit from this initial advantage, more influential network members may need to take some actions to either enhance their own power or decrease that of other network partners (Bacharach and Lawler, 1986). The same is true for less influential network members who aim to neutralize power asymmetries. In order to prevent negative consequences of power differences, we have to understand what exactly actors do to alter the social influence in the network at both the personal and organizational levels.

**Objectives:**

This review aims to identify and order types of actions that network members take to change or preserve their relative influence (as persons and as organizations) in inter-organizational partnerships. It also assesses contextual antecedents of such actions such as organizational structure and the decision-making procedures. We propose that this systematic review will answer the following questions:

1. What are the decision-making procedures used in the inter-organizational networks? How does it relate to their structure and the number of members?
2. What tactics do members of the inter-organizational networks use to change their social influence or one of their partners?

**Eligibility criteria:**

Types of study to be included:

1. Qualitative or mix-methods (multiple) case studies that contain the rich description of the research settings: number of organizations (minimum 3), their type (state or private), the type of the collaboration (fixed-term, goal-oriented network or long-term alliance),
2. Studies that contain a description of the decision-making/governance system within the network OR a description of at least one decision regarding the access to resources, structure/governance of the network, distribution of responsibilities.
3. Studies published in academic journals.
4. Studies in English.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Descriptions of merging and acquisition
2. Supply-chain networks (with one organization always being a buyer, and others being suppliers).
3. Other cases of collaboration between organizations or units that are not formally independent.
4. Studies not presenting empirical results (i.e., presenting theoretical framework or simulations only)

**Condition or domain being studied:**

Collaborative relations – both formalized and informal – and power dynamics between 3+ formally independent organizations which vary in their size, resources and other advantages relevant to the aim of the given collaboration.

**Information sources:**

1. PsycINFO
2. Academic Search premier
3. Business source premier
4. Web of Science
5. Scopus
6. SocINDEX

No time limits are set.

EBSCO (include keywords, subject terms, look at meta-information provided); limit to full texts

AB=(("Inter-organi?ational" OR Interorgani?ational OR "Cross-sector" OR "multi-stakeholder" OR "inter-firm" OR "interfirm" OR multilateral)

AND (alliance\* OR network\* OR partnership\* OR initiative\* OR arrangement\* OR platform\*)

OR ("project network organization\*"))

AND ALL=("case stud\*")

AND ALL=("interview\*")

Then limit to English

**Selection process:**

1. The primary investigator (AI) will screen the results of the search strategy for duplicates.
2. The primary investigator (AI) will identify whether titles and abstracts meet the inclusion criteria. If the eligibility is unclear, the paper will not be rejected at this stage. Another researcher (11) will validate the data extraction.
3. Full texts are reviewed by the primary investigator (AI) and another researcher (22) to ensure inclusion and exclusion criteria. All the uncertainties will be discussed with the third researcher (33).
4. Selected texts are organized in data extraction tables according to their relevance for each of the research question. Data extraction table must include the sources of funding (if available).

**Strategy for data synthesis:**

Researchers will group together semantically similar chunks of information (the process that resembles the first-round coding in thematic analysis) and then apply meta-synthesis as described by Sandelowski and colleagues (1997).

We will use Provan & Kenis’ typology of network governance forms (2008) to classify the networks.

Besides, we will collect the following information whenever possible: author's name and standard bibliographical details, name of a network, country or countries where the network operated; industry or industries to which its members belong; whether network members are private or state actors; the number of network actors; source of funding; network's goals; and information on how the network was created.

**Analysis of subgroups or subsets:**

If enough data (>20 studies) are available for the first research questions, the additional analysis will be done within networks with “shared governance”, “lead organization” and “NAO” (Provan and Kenis, 2008).

If enough data (>20 studies) are available for the second research questions, the additional analysis will be done within four categories of tactics (as described above).

**Risk of bias:**

No, since only descriptive information is accumulated.