Genvägen till resiliens

Privat-offentlig samverkan – ett populärt styrmedel för att säkra samhällets kritiska flöden

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Privat-offentlig samverkan – ett populärt styrmedel

Källa: Adam Sandebring, Att organisera privat-offentlig samverkan

Privat-offentlig samverkan har under de senaste decennierna kommit att användas som styrmedel av offentliga organisationer på flera områden. En privat-offentlig samverkan kan ganska enkelt definieras som en någorlunda varaktig interaktion mellan organisationer från såväl privat som offentlig sektor, där de olika deltagarna ska sträva mot gemensamma målsättningar. En annan vanlig benämning på samma modell är partnerskap (på svenska) eller partnership (på engelska). Ibland används också tillägg till partnership som till exempel private-public, crossectoral eller trisectoral.

Under 80-talet användes privat-offentlig samverkan av flera presidentadministrationer för att stimulera den ekonomiska tillväxten i USA:s mycket nedslitna innerstäder. Under 90-talet blev modellen populär också som regionalpolitiskt styrmedel inom flera europeiska stater. Från att först ha använts för att stimulera den regionala tillväxten inom Storbritannien spreds modellen sedan vidare bland annat via EU:s strukturfondsprogram till flera andra medlemsstater, däribland Sverige.

Samverkan används dock inte enbart för näringspolitisk styrning, utan även på så olika områden som hälsoarbete och krishantering. Den dominerande synen på samverkan i samhällsforskningen är också just som ett styrmedel – ett styrmedel som staten kan använda sig av i stället för andra styrmedel, som lagstiftning eller beskattning, för att styra andra organiserade intressens agerande på ett avgränsat område.

Fördelarna med att använda samverkan i stället för något alternativt statligt styrmedel anses bland annat vara att den är relativt osynlig och inte uppmärksammas av några andra än deltagarna. Andra fördelar är att den är kostnadseffektiv, då arbetet på arenorna ofta finansieras av alla deltagare tillsammans, och att den uppfattas som mindre tvingande än andra styrmedel.

Grundläggande för detta synsätt är att initiativtagaren förväntas påverka de övriga deltagarnas aktiviteter på området genom samverkan, en påverkan som de förväntas uppnå på två sätt:

- initiativtagaren förväntas ha möjlighet att välja just samverkan som styrmedel i stället för något annat styrmedel
- initiativtagaren förväntas självständigt kunna utforma den nya arena som skapas för samverkan mellan deltagarna.

Addressing global challenges together

Källa: Johan Bergenäs’ at the “A wider security agenda: Its necessity and challenges” conference in Uppsala 2011

“We find it paramount to enhance the role of the private sector in building security and promoting development. In our interconnected world, it is in the interest of both governments and the private sector for corporations to increasingly become a force for good.

The fact is that advanced technology and public/private sector partnerships are major antidotes to 21st century global challenges.

We must therefore reach out to the companies that manufacture and develop high tech and communications tools and enlist their support in building stronger societies.

Insiders call this a ‘whole of society’ approach. I think that capitalizing on the full resources of society in confronting our most pressing national and international challenges is simply common sense.”

How to engage stakeholders in securing critical flows

Author: Olof Ekman

Privatisation of societal functions reduces the reach of legislative imperatives for ensuring a stakeholder-comprehensive approach to critical flows in society. Despite several attempts it has proved hard to establish productive public-private arenas without public funding.

A three-step process could promote stakeholder engagement. Here, we suggest a broad strategy for initiating such a process.

The Public-Private Challenge

The societal risk and safety environment is changing as the variety of stakeholders providing societal functions increases. In part this may be traced to the last decades' trend of privatisation, by which societal functions shift from public to private stakeholders. Prominent Swedish examples are telecommunications and electrical power supply. This reduces the reach of legislative imperatives for ensuring a stakeholder-comprehensive approach.

The resulting uncertainty frames the problem: how can private stakeholders be engaged in ensuring critical societal flows without public financing and legal imperatives? One way to do this is to use information management for leverage. This method draws broadly from social science and suggests a three-step process for promoting private stakeholder engagement:

1. Create a public-private dialogue by offering an attractive arena for interaction by information sharing.
2. "Win" stakeholder representatives' commitment through cultural bridging and social identification.
3. Trigger stakeholders by customizing information to their specific domains.

These steps should be seen as helpful rather than a complete fix.

1: Create dialogue

Most people probably agree that dialogue across stakeholder borders is a good thing. However, such a dialogue is often hard to formalise. First, today's public and private working environment is typically littered with multiple arenas for interaction, both within and between organisations.

Stakeholders may therefore see little immediate benefits associated with yet another form of interaction. What they see is instead a cost per se in allocating resources to a public-private arena. They may also be reluctant to commit formally to such an arena if they see a risk for further costs through the arena outcomes.

The first challenge is thus to convince stakeholders to participate, finding an incentive for dialogue. Here, research points towards information sharing as potentially useful motivation.

Information sharing has for long seen to contribute to self-organisation. It has also emerged as one of the more effective tools for coordination in the humanitarian relief domain. As society moves further into the Information Age, actors increasingly use strategies based on information as a commodity.

Two examples of such arenas may be highlighted:

The first example links to the humanitarian relief domain, in which multi-actor collaboration has proved to be inherently difficult. For this reasons the United Nations have for some time used the On-

Site Operations Coordination Centre concept (OSOCC). The method is simple: invite all actors to a tent and let all talk. This opens for potential benefits for all and has proved to be a successful concept.

The second example comes from the Swedish Energy Agency. Recently it led a development project on public-private collaboration with a focus on ensuring electrical power supply in crisis. The project involved networks open for all stakeholders, giving exclusive access to arrangements and working groups. In return stakeholders provided man-hours and other non-monetary resources. While these networks were largely successful, the results suggest focusing not only on crises but also on every-day power supply. This would provide stakeholders with stronger economic motives to participate.

These examples are similar in that stakeholders get (nearly) cost-free network building, information sharing and visibility. However, the second example implies that stakeholders need to perceive arenas as immediately relevant. This leads to our suggested strategy for the first step, to create a dialogue:

Establish stakeholder dialogue by offering an exclusive and information-rich arena, which deals at least partly with current issues.

2: "Win" representatives

However, dialogue alone is not enough. Stakeholders also need to be persuaded to take action. Assuming that an information arena has been successfully established, the channel for such persuasion becomes the stakeholder representative.

If a stakeholder representative cannot be convinced that her parent stakeholder should act on an issue, the process stops. In other words, it is necessary to "win" the representative as an advocate for the arena and its issues. This calls for conditions that allows for getting the message across. In turn, this likely requires the representative to be both qualified and established in the arena.

People in general are sensitive to whom they open up to and especially so when values are at stake. Thus, a stakeholder representative likely benefits from being qualified in terms of legitimacy and domain knowledge. This means being

- legitimate in their parent organisation in order to be able to influence it
- perceived as such by other representatives in order to be a meaningful discussion partner
- familiar with the overall societal domain, i.e. also outside their own area of expertise, to be able to judge and discuss how to best allocate and use the parent organisation resources.

Altogether these requirements effectively point towards middle managers. They are the practical targets, as top management seldom has the time to spare and lower levels mostly lack the necessary knowledge. While also middle managers often have multiple pressing commitments and may be hard to involve, they are highly valuable as often influential in stakeholder strategy making. This links to the fact that not even strict hierarchical structures are immune to bottom-up influences.

A major control on organisational behaviour is the values held by its members. Having a suitable set of representatives around the table may however not be enough. They also need to agree on what the problem is and what to do about it.

This calls for both familiarity and trust.

By definition a widespread set of stakeholders bring different conceptual frameworks. A new arena, and the issues associated with it, is thus likely to be more foreign to the stakeholder representative compared to her parent organisation and its corresponding issues. As the familiar is preferred before the unfamiliar, and humans tend to avoid uncertainty if they can, foreignness may work as a barrier for collaboration. With foreignness also comes fragility of trust.

Multiple studies have shown trust to be important for collaboration in temporary groups and especially so in times of crisis. An important key to familiarity and trust lies in social interaction. Empirical findings from operational settings often show that group cohesion builds over time and intensity of interaction with established group members. This develops perceptions of group belongingness. Over time the group may even develop a new and group-specific culture.

Translated to the public-private arena, the benefit of establishing a sense of identification with the arena is that the representative is likely more motivated to act as a bi-cultural interpreter. On one hand she may explain her parent stakeholder's values and interests to the arena, and on the other hand translate the arena issues to the management level of her parent stakeholder. This leads to this suggested strategy for the second step, to "win" representatives:

Target middle management for stakeholder representation, and pursue a continuous and active participation to establish a common identity and issue consensus.

3: Trigger stakeholders

Once the stakeholder representative has been "won", the challenge becomes selling the message to the stakeholder management level. She is to trigger her stakeholder to act.

Making an issue salient for a stakeholder's management level strongly depends on how it is wrapped and presented. An issue only becomes strategically important to a stakeholder when perceived as instrumental to stakeholder performance, or of symbolic value.

While this responsibility ultimately rests with the stakeholder representative, our assumed public-private arena may pave the ground for her to do this successfully. Customizing arena language to fit particular stakeholders may thus be instrumental.

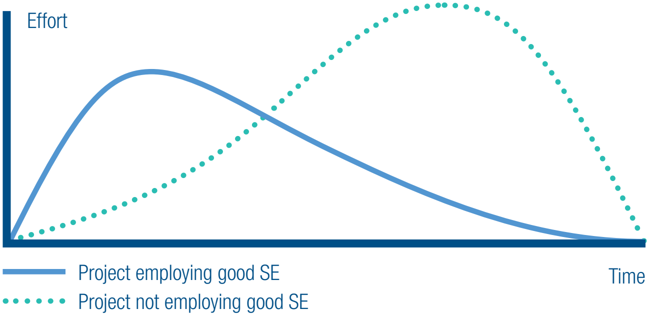
For example, if the objective is to minimise large areas of hardened surfaces to avoid overstraining existing sewage systems, or avoid built-in risks for cascading failures in power supplies, systems engineering offers a language for motivating early investment.

The table below illustrates that making changes during a project's requirements formulation stage is often many times cheaper than making changes in later stages:

System engineering: cost of change/stage	
Project stage	Cost Factor
Requirements	1
Design	3–8
Build	7–16
Test	21–78
Operations	29–1 615

(INCOSE 2009)

Even better may be to illustrate this relationship as a graph, in this case showing how the total effort is less than by addressing an issue earlier rather than later:



In addition, The Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) argues that a systems perspective may help to reveal stakeholder interdependencies which may otherwise be missed and create unnecessary costs.

However, today's private stakeholders may be more receptive to non-monetary arguments than we think. The last decade has seen an interesting development where companies have begun to incorporate societal concerns as part of their business strategies. Termed Corporate

Responsibility, this trend goes beyond moral obligation to society and demonstrates that companies see financial value as well as innovation value and innovation benefits in appearing legitimate.

Top 250 global companies (G250)	
Reporting on corporate responsibility	
1999	35%
2005	64%
2011	95%
Imperatives for reporting (2011)	
Reputation or brand	67%
Ethical consideration	58%
Risk management/reduction	35%
Economic considerations	32%
Relations with Gov't auth.	18%

(KPMG, 2011)

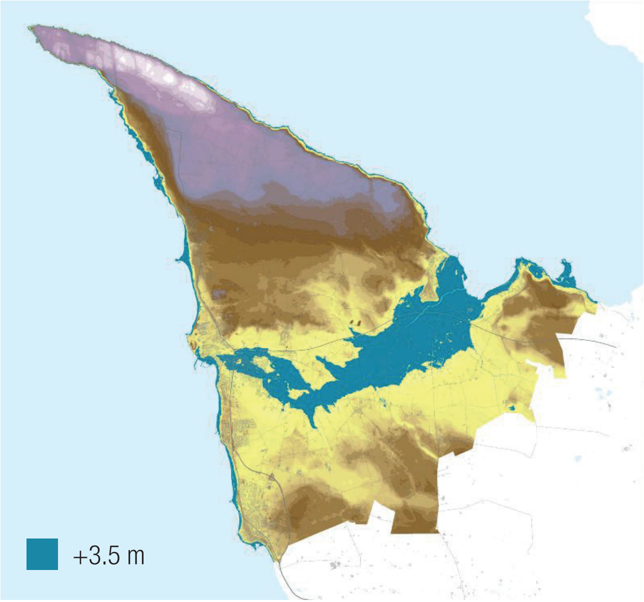
This links to the twenty-year old suggestions that it is important for organisations to come across as socially responsible in order to gain legitimacy. Symbolic values may relate to stakeholder legitimacy both internally and externally. For a stakeholder, coming across as ethical or socially responsible may thus balance the negative aspects of expenditure for increased societal legitimacy. Also, the views and values held by internal actors may influence its management level through bottom-up processes.

An issue also needs to be packaged with skill. It is more likely to be regarded as strategic by the stakeholder management when presented in simple and dramatic terms, when involving high stakes, urgency and a degree of stakeholder responsibility, and when linked to a solution.

This is important for two reasons. First, top management typically have very little time to assess an issue, which calls for an accessible package. Second, management may be careful to determine an emerging issue as strategically important since such a decision inevitably brings further costs.

An arena may therefore need to provide the tools necessary for allowing the stakeholder representative to wrap an issue with sufficient and relevant detail for its parent stakeholder. Such tools may consist of software and expertise for modelling, simulation and statistical analysis, as well as graphic support.

The Höganäs municipality provides a recent example of dramatic



The effects of a 3.5 m water level increase in the Höganäs municipality (source: Höganäs kommun).

packaging. It developed a Climate Memo in which it chose to graphically present the effects of a 3.5 meter increase of the water level, which effectively would turn the municipality peninsula into an island. They also linked this to an estimated cost of the resulting flooding of infrastructure. This immediately caught the attention of the local media and likely helped making the issue salient for the stakeholders involved.

The key message here is that it may not be enough that a stakeholder representative sees a certain issue as importance for her parent organisation. The message also needs to be custom wrapped for the management level it is intended for. This leads to our suggested strategy for the third and final step, trigger stakeholders:

Help customizing language to stakeholder values and interests. Make available tools for packaging issues to be both accessible and detailed for stakeholder management.

A way to create dialogue

The three-part strategy described here is not fool proof. Neither is the process it attempts to set in motion. The eternal question of "who pays the bill" remains. Indeed, there is a potential for discrepancy between management attention and securing desired action.

However, pausing for a moment to reflect on private stakeholder agendas, values and constraints should broaden our understanding of how to help creating dialogue, "winning" representatives and selling issues as strategically important to stakeholder management.

About the author: Dr. Olof Ekman retired as a LtCol from the Swedish Armed Forces in 2013, with experience from multiple NATO and EU staffs on the operational and strategic level. Dr. Ekman holds an MSc in Air Transport Management from Cranfield University, UK, an MSc in Military Operational Art and Science from USAF Air University, Alabama USA, and a PhD in Risk and Safety from Lund University. Dr. Ekman is employed by the Swedish Civil Contigencies Agency (MSB) as a Senior Expert on command, control and coordination. Dr. Ekman is currently Work Package leader in two projects; the MSB project on national guidelines (LoS) and the EC project on cascading effects in incident management (CascEff).


Photo: News Øresund - Johan Wessman

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och hållbara
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Resilient Regions Association är en neutral arena där näringsliv, akademi, kommuner och myndigheter möts för att lösa regionala utmaningar. Tillsammans bygger vi mer resilienta regioner med robusta funktioner och flöden – ett samhälle med förmåga att snabbt överbrygga och återhämta sig från påfrestningar.

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