



E-PARCC

COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE INITIATIVE

Syracuse University

Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs

Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration

The Politics of Structuring Interorganizational Collaboration and the Selection of “Good Clients”¹

Teaching Note

This case is designed as a variation on the interrupted case method (Freeman Herried, 2005). By comparing the actual processes enacted by different structures for interorganizational exchanges, the case sensitizes students to think more critically about interorganizational collaboration. Specifically, it highlights the way interorganizational arrangements can be used for selecting “good clients,” serving the interests of organizations rather than clients. Meyer and Rowan (1977) classic article on structure as myth and ceremony can provide relevant conceptual companion for the case; however instructors may use more current readings that make the same point (for a review see Boxenbaum & Jonsson, 2008).

The case can be used in different ways, depending on the course or workshop, and the amount of time instructors want to allocate. The two options outlined below provide guidelines for using the case over four sessions (A minimum of 2 hours per session) and an abbreviated version to be used within one session (A minimum of 3 hours). Instructors may also integrate elements of the maximum and minimum time options if they want to use the case over two or three sessions. For example, instructors may decide to focus on the structuring and restructuring of the joint admissions committee without engaging the students in thinking about alternative structures. Instructors may also develop other ways of working with the case in line with the purpose of their course.

This case was an honorable mention winner in our 2011-12 “Collaborative Public Management, Collaborative Governance, and Collaborative Problem Solving” teaching case and simulation competition. It was double-blind peer reviewed by a committee of academics and practitioners. It was written by Eli Teram of Wilfrid Laurier University. This case is intended for classroom discussion and is not intended to suggest either effective or ineffective handling of the situation depicted. It is brought to you by E-PARCC, part of the Maxwell School of Syracuse University’s Collaborative Governance Initiative, a subset of the Program for the Advancement of Research on Conflict and Collaboration (PARCC). This material may be copied as many times as needed as long as the authors are given full credit for their work.

¹ This teaching case was written based on material extracted and adapted from Prue Rains & Eli Teram, *Normal Bad Boys: Public Policies, Institutions, and the Politics of Client Recruitment*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1992, Chapters 6 & 7. Some details have been changed or eliminated to reduce the complexity of the case. The legislative context is described in general terms that capture relevant considerations, without overloading the reader with specific details that are not essential for understanding the case.

Option 1: Analyses of the Case over 4 Sessions

Session 1: Developing an ideal structure for the YITN's Admissions Committee

Pre session preparation: Students should be given copies of Part 1 in advance and asked to think about an ideal structure for the Joint Admissions Committee/s.

The initial class discussion should relate to the following general questions:

- What do you think about the mandating of joint admissions committees in networks like the YITN?
- Why is it a good idea?
- Why is it not such a good idea?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a central admissions committee for the network, as opposed to separate joint committees for each institution?

(Allocate a minimum of 30 minutes for this discussion)

Following this discussion, ask for a show of hands indicating a preference for a central admissions committee for the YITN as opposed to a separate committee for each institution. Most students are likely to prefer the centralized option.

Inform the class that, like them or unlike them, the YITN decided to opt for a Central Committee. Divide the class into small groups (4-5 students) to work on developing the most rational central structure for this committee, specifying membership, chairperson, general referral procedures, and general decision making processes. (Allocate a minimum of 40 minutes for these small group discussions)

Following the small group discussions bring the class back together to share the outcome of their small group discussions. Ask one of the groups to present its proposed structure for the Central Committee. With this initial proposal as a starting point, invite comments and suggestions from other groups. Facilitate a discussion that would move the class towards a consensus regarding the key features of a centralized structure for the YITN's admissions committee, integrating ideas and suggestions from all groups. In case of irreconcilable differences between groups, the outcome of the discussion may be two or more proposed structures. (Allow minimum of 50 minutes for this discussion)

Following this discussion, hand out Figure 2 that outlines the structure of the Central Admissions Committee developed by the YITN. In preparation for the next session, ask students to compare this structure with the structure/s developed by the class, and how they think it worked or didn't work when implemented by the YITN.

Session 2: The YITN Central Admissions Committee

In the first part of this session review the structure the YITN Central Admissions Committee (Figure 2) and facilitate a discussion of the main differences between this structure and the structure/s developed by the class in the first session. (Allocate a minimum of 15 minutes for this discussion).

Following this discussion, break the class into small groups (4-5 students) and ask each group to discuss the following questions:

1. What do you like and don't like about this structure compared to the structure developed by the class?
2. What are the potential opportunities and challenges for collaboration this structure may generate?
3. Why do you think the SSC gave up the majority it could have insisted on having on the joint admissions committee?

(Allow a minimum of 30 minutes for the small group discussions)

Bring the class together and facilitate a discussion of the ideas that emerged from the small groups. (Allow a minimum of 30 minutes for this discussion)

Following this discussion, hand out Part 2 of the case, and go over the actual working of the Central Admissions Committee. Engage the class in a discussion of the dynamics presented in this part. Possible questions to generate discussion include:

1. Any major unexpected revelations?
2. Why is the committee using clinical rather than pragmatic language to justify its decisions?
3. Why do the institutions' representatives and psychiatrists honour each other's claims for particular clients?
4. How do the escalation and attachment principles benefit the institutions and psychiatric programs? Can one principle be beneficial without the other?
5. Why do the SSC, DYP, and referring workers, go along with these client selection processes?
6. Could the structure/s developed by the class have altered the dynamics generated by the Central Admissions Committee?

(Allow a minimum of 45 minutes for this discussion)

In preparation for the third session, ask students to reflect further on the dynamics that emerged in the Central Committee, and think about restructuring the joint admissions committee in a way that addresses these dynamics.

Session 3: The YITN Decentralized Admissions Committees

Share with the class the Decentralized Structure (Figure 3) developed by the YITN in response to the dynamics that emerged at the Central Admissions Committee (Figure 2), highlighting the main differences between the two structures. Break the class into small groups (4-5 students) and ask them to discuss:

1. How does the decentralized structure compare to what students had in mind about the restructuring of the committee?
2. What is the potential of the decentralized structure to alter the selection of “good clients” by institutions?
3. What are the potential opportunities and challenges for collaboration the decentralized structure may generate?

(Allow a minimum of 30 minutes for these small group discussions)

Bring the class together and facilitate a discussion of the ideas that emerged from the small groups. (Allow a minimum of 30 minutes for this discussion)

Following this discussion, hand out Part 3 of the case, and go over the actual workings of the Decentralized Admissions Committees. Engage the class in a discussion of the dynamics presented in this part. Possible questions to generate discussion include:

1. Are there any major unexpected revelations?
2. Why are the Decentralized Committees more open about the pragmatic reasons for making placement decisions?
3. What do you think about the escalation principle becoming more visible and the attachment principle becoming less visible? What difference do these changes make for clients?
4. What do you think about the strategic use of the committee by the social workers? What difference does it make for clients?
5. What do you think about the institutions’ complaints about the “non delivery” of clients?
6. Why do the SSC and DYP side with the institutions rather than defend the right and responsibility of social workers to keep youth out of institutions and psychiatric programs?
7. Considering the respective dynamics of the centralized and decentralized structures, which one better serves clients’ needs? Why?

(Allow a minimum of 60 minutes for this discussion)

In preparation for the next session, ask students to reflect further on the dynamics that emerged under the centralized and decentralized structures, and to think about restructuring the joint admissions committee in a way that addresses the respective dynamics.

Session 4: The YITN Recentralized Admissions Committee

Share with the class the Recentralized Structure (Figure 4) developed by the YITN in response to the complaints of the institutions about the Decentralized structure (Figure 3), highlighting its main features. Break the class into small groups (4-5 students) and ask them to discuss:

1. How the Recentralized structure compares to what students had in mind about the restructuring of the committee?
2. What is the logic of this structure?
3. How does the Recentralized structure address the respective complaints about the Centralized and Decentralized structures?
4. What are the potential opportunities and challenges for collaboration this structure may generate?

(Allow a minimum of 30 minutes for these small group discussions)

Bring the class together and facilitate a discussion of the ideas that emerged from the small groups. (Allow a minimum of 30 minutes for this discussion)

Following this discussion, hand out Part 4 of the case, and review its observations about the logic of the Recentralized structure. Engage the class in a discussion of these observations and the case as a whole. Possible questions to generate discussions include:

1. What do you think about the Recentralized structure?
2. What do you think about the argument that the underlying logic of the Recentralized structure was to eliminate opportunities for direct confrontations and overt conflicts between referring workers and institutions?
3. Some argue that overt interorganizational conflicts can be a useful way of preventing the labeling of clients based on organizational interests. Considering what you learned through this case, what do you think about this argument?
4. Some argue that the selection of “good clients” is inevitable in human service organizations. Considering this argument, and what you learned through this case, what difference can the structuring of the interorganizational processing of clients make?
5. If centralized structures for the interorganizational processing of clients are the wave of the future, what can be done to protect the rights and interests of clients?
6. What did you learn from this case and how did it change your thinking about structuring the interorganizational processing of clients in networks like the YITN?

Option 2: Analysis of the case within one session (Minimum of 3 hours)

Students should receive in advance a copy of Part 1 of the case, and Figures 1-3, and asked to think about the advantages and disadvantages of the Centralized and Decentralized Structures for the Joint Admissions Committees.

At the outset of the class, clarify any questions students may have about the YITN and the two structures, and ask for a show of hands indicating their preference between the two. If there is fairly equal support for each structure, divide the class into small groups (4-5 students), based on students' preferred structure. Otherwise, assign students randomly into two types of groups each focusing on one of the structures: Centralized or Decentralized. Each group is asked to come up with a rationale that explains the superiority of its designated structure over the other. (Allow a minimum of 20 minutes for these small group discussions).

Bring the class together and facilitate presentations of the rationale for each structure. (Allow a minimum of 30 minutes for these presentations).

Following these presentations, again divide the class into different small groups, with about equal representation in each group of students who had to rationalize the Centralized and Decentralized structures. Hand out Parts 2 & 3 of the case. Ask students to go over the material and develop a new structure for the Joint Admissions Committee/s for the YITN, considering the dynamics generated by the Centralized and Decentralized structures. (Allow a minimum of 50 minutes for reading the material and discussing an alternative).

Bring the class back together and ask one of the groups to present a proposal for a new structure. Facilitate a discussion of this proposal and exploration of different ideas. Try to identify common themes for a new structure for the Joint Admissions Committee/s. (Allow about 30 minutes for this class discussion).

Share with the students Part 4 of the case, and Figure 4. After the students finish reading the new material, facilitate a class discussion. Possible questions to generate discussion include:

1. What do you think about the Recentralized structure?
2. What do you think about the argument that the underlying logic of the Recentralized structure was to eliminate opportunities for direct confrontations and overt conflicts between referring workers and institutions?
3. Some argue that overt interorganizational conflicts can be a useful way of preventing the labeling of clients based on organizational interests. Considering what you learned through this case, what do you think about this argument?
4. Some argue that the selection of "good clients" is inevitable in human service organizations. Considering this argument, and what you learned through this case, what difference can the structuring of the interorganizational processing of clients make?
5. If centralized structures for the interorganizational processing of clients are the wave of the future, what can be done to protect the rights and interests of clients?

6. What did you learn from this case and how did it change your thinking about structuring the interorganizational processing of clients in networks like the YITN?

(Allow a minimum of 45 minutes for this discussion)

References

- Boxenbaum, E., & Jonsson, S. (2008). Isomorphism, diffusion and decoupling. In R. Greenwood, C. Oliver, K. Sahlin, & R. Suddaby (Eds), *The Sage Book of Organizational Institutionalism* (pp. 78-98). London: Sage.
- De Rond, M., & Bouchikhi, H. (2004). On the dialectics of strategic alliances. *Organization Science*, 15: 56-69.
- Dhanaraj, C., & Parkhe, A. (2006). Orchestrating innovation networks. *Academy of Management Review*, 31, 659-669.
- Donaldson, L. (2001). *The Contingency Theory of Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Freeman Herreid, C. (2005). *The interrupted case method*. *Journal of College Science Teaching*, 35(2), 4.
- Meyer, J., W., & Rowan B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal structure as ceremony and myth. *American Journal of Sociology*, 83, 340-363.
- Mintzberg, H. (1979). *The Structuring of Organizations: A Synthesis of the Research*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Pfohl, S. J. (1978). *Predicting dangerousness: The social construction of psychiatric reality*. Lexington, MA: D C Heath.