NPOs partnering for enhanced public value: reflections on the research process

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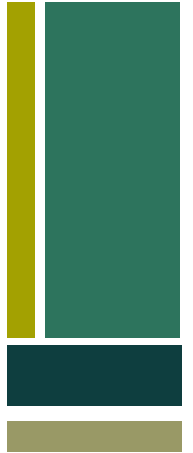
Research supported by...

Aim of presentation

- To provide an overview of my ongoing research which is at early stage

- To share reflections on my research process

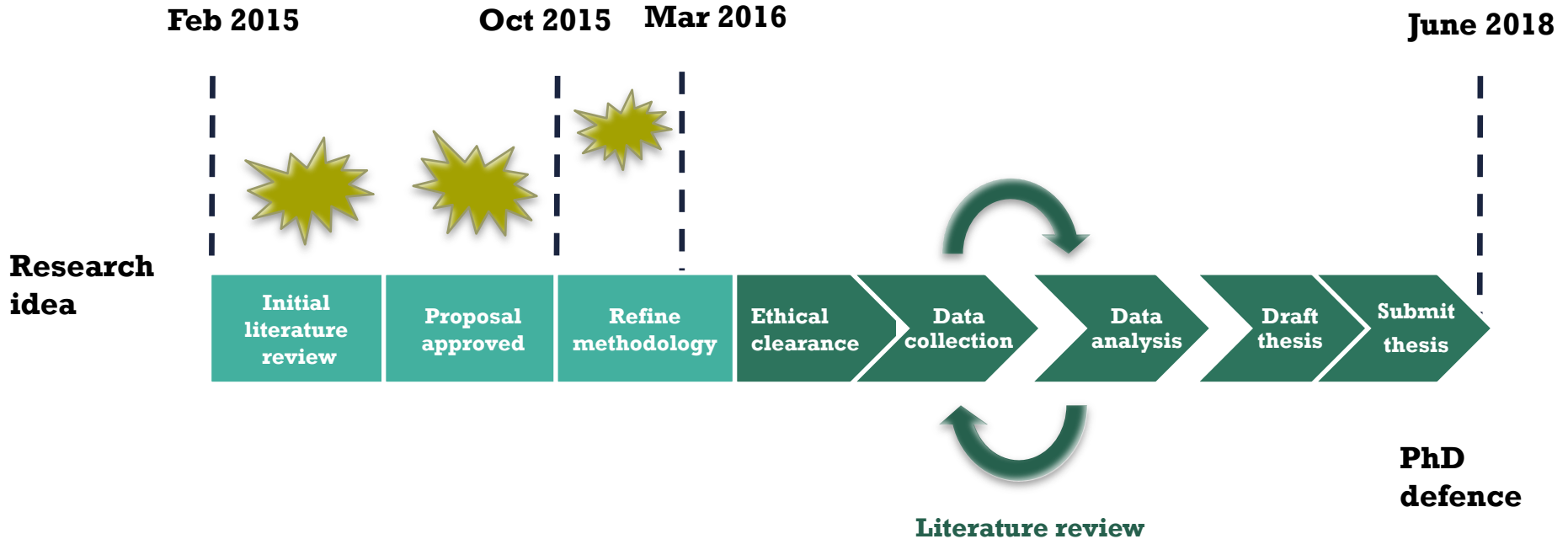- To enrich my study and experience with new inputs

Outline

- Background

- Main research components

- Reflections on
  - Changes to my proposal
  - Key aspects pertaining to my research journey

- Next steps

- Conclusion

My PhD research journey

Research introduction

- **Complex and dynamic societal issues abound** _(Drucker ,2002; Senge, 2015; Benington and Moore, 2011)

- **No one sector can respond adequately in isolation**
  - **Requires co-created, transformative solutions for greater social impact** _(Hamann, et al., 2011; Keast et al., 2004; Waddell, 2005)

- **NPOs are superior vehicles for meeting community needs**
  - **NPOs indispensable – build civil society and social capital** _(Anheier, 2005; Smith, 2012; Anheier, 2005; Salamon, 1996; Weerawardena, et al., 2010; DSD, 2012)

- **NPOs are resource dependent** _(Anheier, 2005)

- **NPOs failing to fulfil mission** _(Ronalds, 2010;)

Research introduction (cont.)

- 140 000 registered NPOs in S.A.
    - Most support government with growing development gaps
    - Mainly funded by corporate sector, private individuals and government (Trialogue, 2014)
- Limited shift in social outcomes (Morgano, 2012)
- S.A. NPOs are capacity constrained and resource dependent
    - Lack skills and capacity (Henry, 2012; DSD, 2015)
    - Diminishing financial resources and competition – need alternative income sources (Stuart, 2013)
    - Portrayed as under-developed and dependent on business and government for survival and sustainability
- 'Reinvention' needed to cope with current demands and to remain relevant (Inyathelo, 2015; McIntyre Hall & Kennedy, 2008; Ronalds, 2010)

Research introduction (cont.)

- Collaboration = organizational modality of 21st century (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012)
  - Sharing resources and expertise can lead to learning, innovation and transformation (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012)
  - Partners have different motivations and expectations but also offerings (Mendel, 2013; Waddell, 2005)
  - Partnerships are dynamic and complex (Hamann et al., 2011; Mendel, 2013; Bryson et al., 2006)
- Different levels of partnership (Weerawardena et al., 2010; Mendel, 2013)
  - Collaborative value creation framework - continuum (Austin & Seitanidi, 2012)
    - Philanthropic – Transactional – Integrative - Transformational
  - Relationship continuum (Mandell & Keast, 2013)
    - Cooperation – Coordination - Collaboration
  - Meaningful partnerships – stronger commitment moves partnership from 'doing good' to creating public value (Mendel & Brudney, 2014)
- Gap ito leveraging partnerships to enhance organizational effectiveness and public value contribution for improved social outcomes in NPOs in a development context

Research introduction (cont.)

- **PV introduced to reform public sector** (Moore, 1995; Benington & Moore, 2011; Bryson et al., 2014)
  - Strategic management approach to improve social outcomes and encourage entrepreneurial thinking and creativity (Benington & Moore, 2011; O'Flynn, 2007)
  - Challenged by networked governance (Benington & Moore, 2011; Bryson et al., 2006)
- **Strategic triangle highlights**
  - Importance of balancing public value outcomes, authorizing environment and operational capacity
  - Need for engaging key stakeholders incl. partners and beneficiaries
- **Recognise and measure PV** (Moore, 2003, 2012, 2013; Hartley, 2005)
  - PV scorecard linked to strategic triangle; also PV chain (Moore, 2003; 2012; 2013)
- **Research gaps**
  - Mostly normative propositions, theoretical development and analytical frames; few empirical studies contribute to operationalizing PV (Williams & Shearer, 2012; Mendel, 2010; Trujillo & Ospina, 2015; Talbot, 2008; Bryson et al., 2006)
  - Multi-disciplinary approach needed for research (Minderman & Bekke, 2011)
  - Need for specific PV concepts and measurement systems (Moore, 2012; 2013)

Research focus areas

NPOs are resource-dependent and reliant on 'investors'. Capacity and resource constraints threaten sustainability. NPOs to adapt to changing environment. Changes present challenges but also opportunities to deliver improved social outcomes and regain 'voice'.

Partnerships higher on collaboration value creation continuum involve complex stakeholder dynamics - needs strategic management to secure legitimacy and support. Partnerships offer potential for positive organizational and social change.

Public value was introduced to transform the public sector to deal with complex social issues through networked governance. The 'strategic triangle' offers an approach to manage the 'authorizing environment' as well as create public value and improve social outcomes.

Research problem

- NPOs need to remain relevant, be resilient and optimise their public value contribution on a sustainable basis

- South African NPOs to be better equipped to deal with the myriad of community challenges

- Need to secure the longer-term support of their partners, 'investors' and beneficiaries

- Partnerships hold potential for organizational and social change
  (Seitanidi et al., 2010)

  - NPOs could regain their 'voice' as vibrant catalysts for change

- Take lessons from NPOs that leverage their partnerships effectively

Research aims

- Gain insights on
  - Partnering arrangements of NPOs in S.A.
  - How partnerships contribute to creating public value and achieve social outcomes
- Enrich the partnership and public value debates especially in a development context
- Offer practitioners "a set of "conceptual handles" for enabling "reflective action"" (Huxham and Vangen cited in Morse, 2010:232)

Research questions

- How do successful NPOs partner to create public value and achieve the desired social outcomes?

  - Sub-questions:
  i. What role does partnering play in NPOs achieving the desired social outcomes?

  ii. What value is created through partnering?

  iii. What tensions influence the partnership dynamic, and how does the NPO deal with it?

  iv. How do key role players involved in different partnering arrangements view the partnership, and the value which is contributed and appropriated through partnering?

  v. What capacity, resources and skills do NPOs need to partner effectively to create public value and achieve the desired social outcomes, and why?

Research design and method

- Phenomenological paradigm
  - Multiple realities informed by social context and experiences
- Exploratory study using qualitative approach
- Case study design – multiple cases with embedded units
  - 3 success cases
  - NPOs with partnership arrangements
- Purposive sampling for cases
  - Registered and compliant NPOs
  - NPO with job creation focus – part of the Employment Creation Think Tank
- Snowball sampling for informants
  - Partnership role players at NPO, also partners, 'investors' and beneficiaries

Research design and method (cont.)

- Data collection and analysis
  - Various collection methods to triangulate data (Yin, 2014; Remenyi et al., 1998)
  - Documentation, interviews, observation, 'executive sessions' (Moore & Hartman, 1999)
    - Member-checking
    - Audit trail
    - Over 12 – 15 months
  - Textual analysis
    - Data coding

Reflections: proposal changes

- Proposal accepted by USB in Oct 2015 – a confidence booster

- Key changes to proposal
  - Research questions underwent much reframing
  - No longer action research study - emphasis not on promoting change by actively engaging the informants; explore current practices
  - No longer pilot study
    - Initial choice influenced by my lack of knowledge and experience
    - Pilot study with informants will bias results
    - Will pilot test interview guide – ensure asking good questions and limit misunderstandings
  - Now three case studies to enrich data and draw tighter analytic generalizations (Yin, 2014)

Reflections: proposal changes (cont.)

- Not a longitudinal study but a "snapshot" of a situation (Gray, 2009).

- Added new and expanded theories and concepts
  - Started reading widely – multi-disciplinary approach
    - Many quotes and citations so as not to lose the ideas
  - Now zooming in on certain authors, principles and concepts, and deepening my understanding
  - Appreciate that literature search to widen later again

- I wanted to 'change the world' – but change agents need "a certain degree of humility in assessing one's individual potency in change projects" (Chua & Mahama, 2012:81)
  - Now intend to make a small, and hopefully, noteworthy contribution

Reflections: research journey

- Moving from practice to theory
  - Corporate and consulting background – long history in practice
  - Grappling with theoretical concepts – some make sense long after

- Limiting assumptions and misunderstandings
  - Use of language is important
    - Questions not always simple for a variety of reasons
    - Concepts misinterpreted or difficult to measure e.g. 'partnerships' and 'optimise'
    - Can influence construct validity – need definitions and consistent measures
  - Can't take information at face value – also existing literature – need to check quality of source and methodology
  - Will pilot test interview guide and request member-checking

Reflections: research journey (cont.)

- Being open to new ideas
  - Different perspectives can lead to surprising bursts of insight
  - Literature from multiple disciplines can inform methodology and lead to new pathways of interpretation
  - Input from others

- Asking the right questions
  - "Sharper and more insightful questions about the topic" can enrich the study (Yin, 1994)
  - Many hours spent reframing and rewording my research questions which I am now happier with than before

- Managing an iterative process
  - "Case study design is not something completed only at the outset of a study" (Yin, 1994:52)
  - More fine-tuning of research methodology and questions
  - Iterative process is challenging if like structure, but appreciate the value of new inputs and being flexible can enrich study

Reflections: research journey (cont.)

- Theories and theorising
  - Theorising allows for making a knowledge contribution (Chua & Mahama, 2012:80)
  - Failure to theorise properly results in "an ill-fitting 'wrapping' around a description of action" or a "meandering storyline"
  - A key development area for myself

- Managing the 'field'
  - Work the 'field' to make a significant research contribution
  - 'Field' is "a constellation of theoretical ideas, empirical sites and research problems" (Chua and Mahama, 2012:79)
  - Another key development area for me

- Going slow to go fast
  - Concerned that not getting to the research site
  - Research design and methodology still needs refining
  - Rushing ethical clearance likely to have come-backs
  - Data collection and analysis could be 'fast-tracked' later

Reflections: research journey (cont.)

- Balancing the inputs and views of different supervisors
  - Joint supervision is challenging
    - Role clarity needed – 1 leads context; 1 leads methodology
  - Joint sessions to limit any misunderstandings, conflicting opinions or rework
  - Process worked well so far - enabled me to rethink aspects of my work to date and improve on the quality of my research

- Practising project management
  - Managing this study as a project gives more control with an end goal in sight

Next steps

- More reading on methodology and attend to development areas

- Finalise my research design and methodology

- Get the buy-in from the three selected NPOs

- Submit ethical clearance application and get approval before commencing with data collection

Conclusion

- Research journey to date
  - An intimate dance – 2 steps forwards and 5 steps back
  - Sometimes in tune with music, other times missing the beat

- Insightful questions and guidance from my supervisors and others allow me to rethink and rework certain aspects of my study

- More confidence is gained through reading, and engaging with fellow students, researchers and academics

- Inputs invited to enrich my study and my PhD experience, as well as to shine the light on yet unknown windows of opportunity
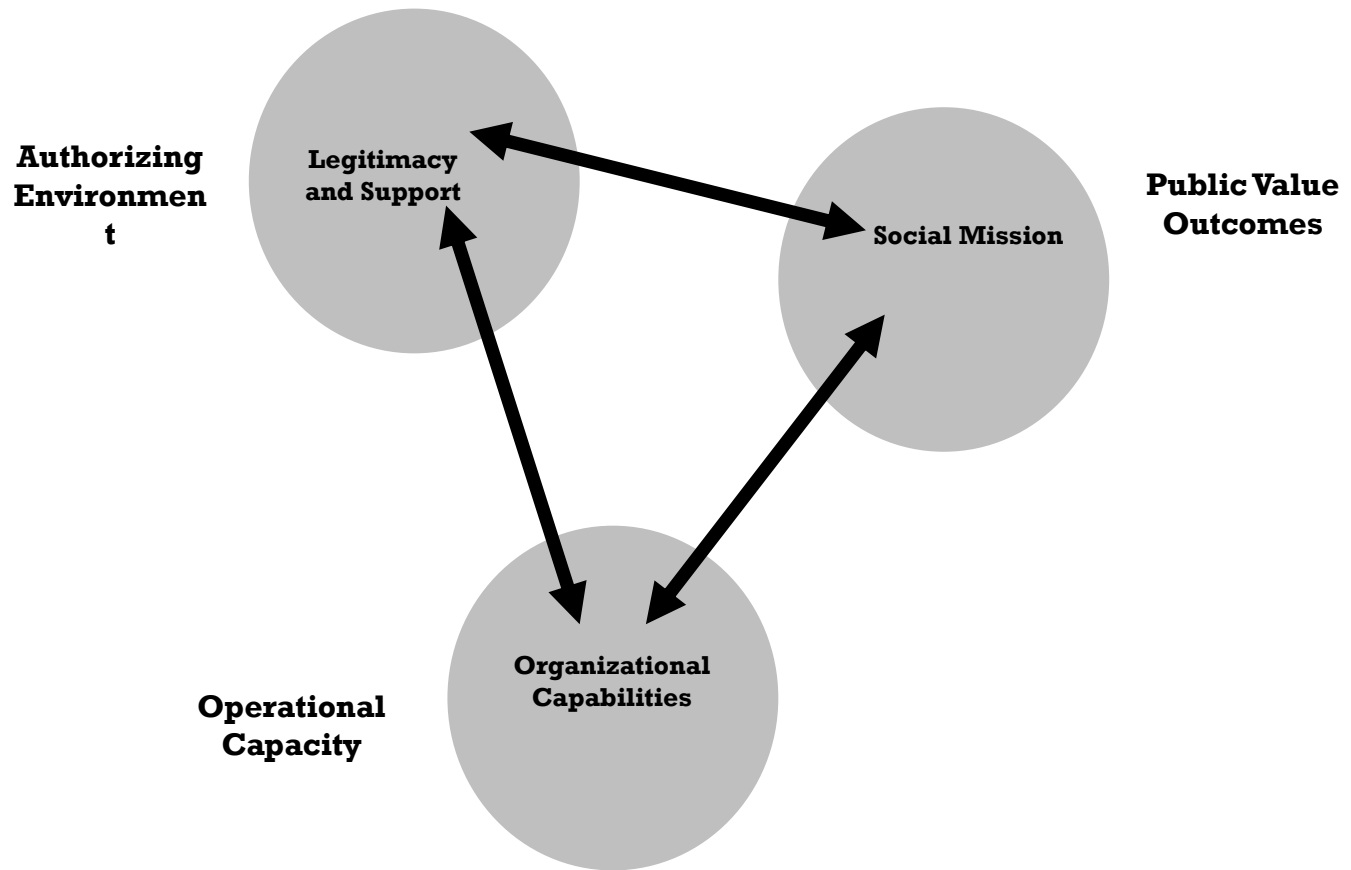
Thank you

Any questions or inputs?

Theoretical perspectives
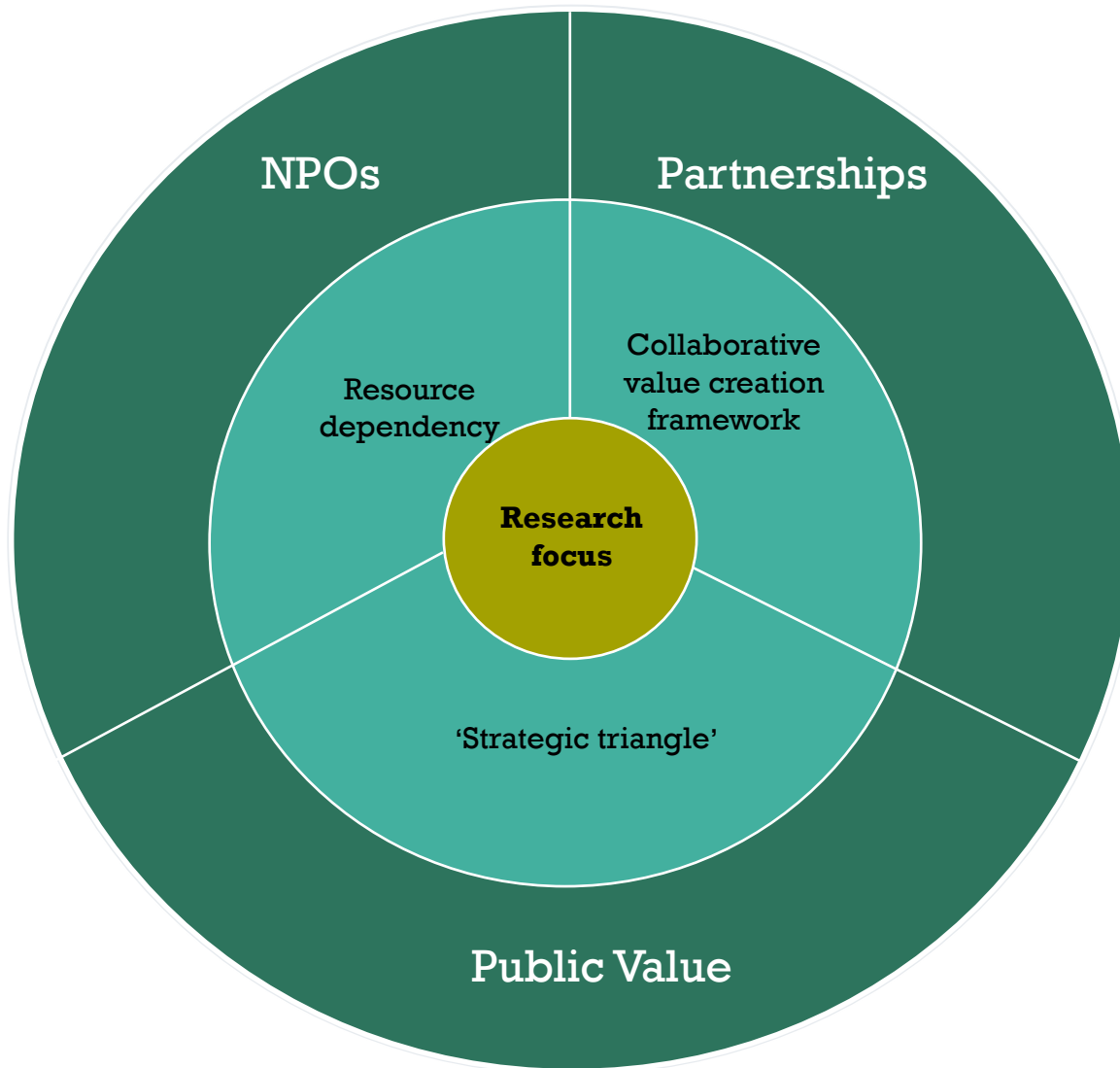
Strategic triangle

Source: Adapted from Moore, 2013:103; 2003:23; Benington & Moore, 2011:5