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Exploring the potential for collaborative leadership through a policy lens: a comparative analysis of children's services and flood risk management

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Exploring the potential for collaborative leadership through a policy lens: a comparative analysis of children's services and flood risk management

This comparative study explores how policy enables and constrains collaborative leadership in two very different policy fields in welfare and environmental domains. It adopts a policy studies lens to understand how over the long term policy content structures the environment for collaborative working, leverages joint action, authorises sources of leadership and delineates roles and responsibilities. The authors argue that policy is not simply a context for collaborative leadership in the public domain, but rather a source of leadership itself as it sets direction for collaborative working, establishes the boundaries of power-sharing, and consequently limits what it is possible for actors to achieve. The paper highlights the value of research at the intersection of policy and public management studies, and urges public managers and policy-makers seeking to develop collaborative leadership to attend to the historical development and breadth of a policy field, rather than simply the latest policy announcements.

Keywords: word; collaborative leadership; policy; public management

Introduction

Public policy continues to exhort practitioners to collaborate across organisational and sector boundaries to address complex societal challenges, and to achieve social welfare and environmental objectives. Engaging state and non-state actors in the delivery of policy goals requires collaborative leadership - leading beyond hierarchy, fostering facilitative and inclusive environments, sharing responsibilities, nurturing relationships, and managing horizontal accountabilities (Crosby and Bryson, 2017; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). This form of leadership is inherently shaped by the context that structures collaboration, limiting what it is possible for individuals to achieve (Huxham and Vangen, 2000). Context-rich research increases understanding of the relationship between collaborative leadership and the public domain in which it takes place (Ospina, 2017; Crosby and Bryson, 2017; Vogen and Masal, 2015), highlighting institutions,

values, norms, structures, and power asymmetries that shape actors' understanding of public problems and frame the leadership challenge (Crosby and Bryson 2005, 2010; Ganz, 2010 in Ospina, 2017). A key element shaping this context is public policy, with all its conflicts, ambiguity, competing values and politics (Sowa and Lu, 2017). However, to date the literature has not explored how public policy impacts on the potential for collaborative leadership practice. This paper takes up this challenge, and in so doing also responds to recent calls for studies at the intersection of public management and policy studies (Nabatchi and Balogh, 2012; Sowa and Lu, 2017) - exploring how policy impacts the potential for collaborative leadership across environmental and welfare domains. Comparing insights from these two different domains, the paper draws out the significance of policy content and processes for collaborative leadership practice.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, it explores the key concept of collaborative leadership through a policy studies lens, re-asserting the value of research at the nexus of policy studies and public management. It then introduces the comparative methodology and case examples, followed by comparative analysis and discussion focused on how policy enables and constrains collaborative leadership. The paper ends with brief conclusions, and pointers for further research.

Collaborative leadership through a policy lens

In the complex systems of the public domain, organisational hierarchies co-exist with networked relationships (McGuire, 2006; Agranoff, 2006; Huxham and Vangen, 2000), and actors work with the tension between horizontal collaborative governance structures and processes and the vertical accountabilities, performance management systems, and resource constraints of public institutions (Getha-Taylor et al., 2011). As a public management practice in a “no-one-wholly-in-charge world” (Crosby and Bryson, 2010,

p.211), collaborative leadership enables the state to govern through and with non-state actors to tackle complex public problems in inter-organisational domains (Bryson et al., 2015; Currie and Lockett 2011; Getha-Taylor et al., 2011; Page et al., 2015). It offers public managers potential to create public value, “advancing, shaping, and directing – with conviction – a complex agenda of policy implementation” (Ospina, 2017, p. 276). Leadership emerges from multiple sources, and is shared between actors with different roles (Pearce and Conger, 2003, Ospina, 2017, Gronn, 2002, Crosby and Bryson, 2005). For example the ‘sponsor’ (Crosby and Bryson 2005) of a collaborative project might be located within one agency, from where she directs resources and political attention; whilst the ‘champion’ (ibid) expedites the project, and engages partners – from within another organisation. The leadership task is to coordinate and integrate, aligning systems and processes (Crosby and Bryson, 2010). However, processes and structures themselves act as leadership ‘media’ or sources, shaping practice (Huxham and Vangen, 2000; Ospina 2017), and enabling and constraining collective achievements. Collaborative leadership is then characterised by vertical and horizontal accountabilities; dispersed responsibilities between actors with different roles; processes of alignment and integration; multiple sources of leadership, including people, processes, and structures; and the objective to generate capacity for collaborative achievements.

Adopting a policy studies lens has potential to additionally uncover how the structures and processes that shape collaborative leadership are in turn shaped by public policies (Sowa and Lu, 2017) – the “deliberate decisions by governments or equivalent authorities to take action or non-action toward specific objectives” (Weible and Carter, 2017, p.24). The policy perspective focuses attention on the impact of policymakers’ structuring of the institutional setting for leadership that delivers social and environmental objectives (Sowa and Lu, 2017; Weible and Carter, 2017). Institutions are systems of rules,

programmes and decision-making processes (Young et al, 2008) that distribute power, guide interactions, and assign roles and responsibilities. They tend to create stability, but institutional changes may re-distribute authority, re-balancing the influence of key actors (Rouillard et al., 2012). Policies can create structure that has potential to engage in actors within and beyond the state (Weible and Carter, 2017; Sowa and Lu, 2017) – for example, promoting mutual accountability, and sharing responsibility for achieving policy goals.

This study follows Sowa and Lu (2017) and Weible and Carter's (2017) advice to adopt a policy lens to view challenges faced by public managers. It poses two questions across the different sets of institutional arrangements. First, how does the state design policy for collaboration – which actors are considered critical; how does policy define the roles and responsibilities of different actors; and what structures and processes are put in place for coordinating their activity? Second, how do policies enable and/or constrain the development of collaborative leadership?

Methodology

Policy analysis examines policy systematically with the objective of understanding process, content, or outcomes (Regan et al., 2014). This study approaches analysis through the 'building blocks' of policy documents (Weible and Carter, 2017), exploring how they shape leadership responsibilities, accountabilities, and sources, and the inclusion (or exclusion) of different leadership actors. Comparative policy analysis is commonly employed across geographical contexts (Geva-May et al 2018; Young, 2013), but this study adopts a different point of comparison – comparing policy responses to public problems across welfare and environmental domains. Crossing disciplinary boundaries can increase our understanding of how policy decisions shape practice, leverage joint action, and structure the environment (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Nabatchi

and Balogh, 2012; Sowa and Lu, 2017); and of how leadership emerges from and reflects different policy-led institutional contexts (Evans, 2015). This serves as a foundation for theory-building, and has an instrumental purpose –enabling policymakers to draw lessons from other domains (Rose, 2005).

The authors selected two cases, children’s services (welfare) and flood risk management (environment), from their portfolio of projects researching inter-organisational collaboration. Each case constitutes a policy process focused on an enduring and complex public problem calling for collaboration between actors from different organisations and sectors, and coordination to provide joined-up responses. Like other complex public policy fields, children’s services (CS) and flood risk management (FRM) have been characterised by successive UK governments’ endeavours to integrate planning, development, and delivery (see for example DCSF, 2008; DfES, 2003; DEFRA 2016; Evans 2004; Pitt 2008). Both fields are highly contested – in terms of the role of state and non-state actors; and the problem they attempt to tackle. In taking cases from apparently dissimilar policy domains, it becomes easier to find structures and processes that would otherwise be difficult to discern from single case analysis (Osinsky and Eloranta, 2014). Moreover, this helps the researcher “to distance oneself from the case one knows best” to deliver insight from the analysis (ibid, p2). As former practitioners and engaged researchers (Van de Ven, 2006), the authors adopt a problem-centred approach, in spite of disincentives (Ospina, 2017), to develop theoretically-informed insights to bring back into each policy field. Recognising that the histories, power dynamics, and engagement of actors in the two fields are very different (Authors) the paper explores the evolving policy process over two decades from 1997-2018.

Document selection and analysis

The authors identified policy documents relevant to inter-organisational collaboration in CS and FRM from three UK governments from 1997-2018 – Labour (1997-2010), Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition (2010-15), and Conservative (2015-present). They included legislation, statutory guidance, government reviews, ‘white’ and ‘green’ papers that set out governments’ policy intentions, and policy reviews by non-departmental public bodies. After defining the two cases, the authors reviewed document equivalence to compare ‘like with like’ and avoid a ‘travelling problem’ (Sartori, 1970, p.1033 in Benson et al., 2013) that would inhibit quality comparative research (Peters, 1998 in Benson et al., 2013). Table 1 lists the selected documents:

Analysis moved iteratively through phases of individual analysis and shared reflection. First, each author identified ideas of collaboration and leadership in the selected documents, then they reflected together on common and distinctive themes. Next, they reviewed each data set to uncover how policy structures each problem; inclusion or exclusion of different actors; roles and responsibilities assigned to those actors; structural arrangements introduced to enable collaboration; and the development of collaborative processes that enable interactions. The final stage returned to collaborative leadership as characterised from the literature earlier in the paper. This analysis structures the two cases presented below, and the comparative analysis that follows.

Case1: Children’s Services

The policy problem

Central to Children’s Services (CS) policy, is a debate about when and how state and non-state actors should intervene in the private domain of family life to promote wellbeing and minimise risk of harm. Services for children have been provided historically by

multiple actors, resulting in fragmentation, duplication, and problems of coordination. A key policy objective since the 1990s has been to join up service delivery and planning. Legislation, including the *Children Acts* of 1989 and 2004 required agencies to cooperate to protect children, and successive governments have issued policy guidance (*Working Together* 1999, 2006, 2010, 2013, 2015, 2018), specifying structures, processes, and actors for local cooperation. An enduring policy objective is to integrate services, offering joined-up support, and ensuring that children do not fall through gaps between services provided by different agencies.

Policies have also addressed the planning and delivery of preventative services that promote child well-being and improve life chances by removing social barriers – poverty, poor education, limited opportunity. Labour’s *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003, 2004, 2007), and successive governments’ *Child Poverty Strategies* (2008, 2010, 2011, 2014) have positioned CS within the broader social policy context, impacted by underlying social, economic, and political trends.

Key actors

Child protection and prevention policies have both constituted CS as a policy field of concern to a range of public agencies and non-state actors. Labour’s 2008 Child Poverty Strategy described the reduction of child poverty as ‘everybody’s business’, a ‘shared responsibility’ crossing government departments, under the leadership of the Department for Education, and involving multiple local actors – within and beyond public organisations. The Coalition’s *Working Together* guidance stated ‘Everyone who comes into contact with children and families has a role to play’ (DfE, 2015, p.5).

More specifically, *Working Together* guidance from successive governments has specified and, until 2018, extended the list of actors required to participate in local

arrangements to protect children. The 2015 guidance (DfE, 2015) listed nine agencies that *must* be represented in Local Safeguarding Boards, with local authorities (LAs) required to take reasonable steps to include further educational, lay and voluntary sector representatives. In addition, it required LAs to ensure that commissioned agencies provide consistency for service users. Prevention policy provided a less prescriptive but broader lists of actors. For example, Labour's *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) noted the importance of engaging practitioners, communities, business, voluntary organisations, and the media in achieving positive outcomes for children. Similarly, the most recent *Child Poverty Strategy* (2014) recognises business, voluntary organisations, and state agencies as partners.

Policies from successive governments have specified who is to lead the multi-actor endeavour to protect children and achieve their wellbeing, and outlined their leadership roles. At the national level, the Labour government introduced a Minister for Children, Young People and Families, situated within the DfE, specifically tasked with coordinating policies across government (DfES, 2003). This role continued until 2018 when it was downgraded from cabinet level to junior minister. At the local level, statutory guidance assigned leadership of children's services to LA actors (eg. DCSF, 2009. DfE, 2013). Specifically, it required an elected official (Lead Member for Children's Services, LMCS) and a senior manager (Director of Children's Services, DCS), to share leadership responsibilities, providing 'a clear and unambiguous line of local accountability' (DfE, 2013, p.4). In 2018 children's services policy reiterated LA leadership of multi-agency collaboration through these two roles (HMG, 2018), but removed the requirement for multi-agency boards, instead identifying three 'safeguarding partners' (LA, police, and health) to be held jointly responsible for meeting local needs and engaging with agencies beyond this triad.

Structures for collaboration

The twenty year period under analysis has been punctuated by the introduction, adaptation, and withdrawal of policy-driven structures through which local actors are required to collaborate. This is illustrated by two examples – Children’s Trust Boards (CTBs) and Local Safeguarding Boards (LSCBs). While the first is an example of short-lived partnership structures introduced to drive innovation and achieve integration, the latter is an enduring structure that has adapted through successive governments’ policies since the 1970s, responding to political choices and external events. Both CTBs and LSCBs were introduced through policy interventions following tragic child deaths, with high media scrutiny, and consequent reviews highlighting failures in inter-agency coordination.

Following one highly-publicised child death, the Labour government introduced Children’s Trusts (DfES, 2003), later embedding their multi-agency boards (CTBs) in legislation (2010). Attended by senior representatives of state and non-state agencies, and by children and family representatives, CTBs were tasked with playing a ‘leadership role’ for children’s services within the locality (DCSF, 2009, p.13). In this collective account of leadership, policy explicitly recognised leadership sources across and beyond public agencies. However, CTBs were short-lived, removed from policy by the Coalition government on its accession to power later in 2010.

LSCBs were multi-agency partnerships with a longer history of sharing responsibility for local child protection as required by successive iterations of *Working Together*. Policy required LSCBs to both ‘coordinate’ and ‘challenge’ inter-agency arrangements for protecting children. Their independent chairs were required to ‘work closely’ with all partners, but particularly with the DCS (DfE, 2015). In 2018, Conservative government

guidance removed the statutory requirement for LSCBs, whilst continuing to affirm the accountability of ‘safeguarding partners’ through the local government roles of DCS and LMCS (DfE, 2018). The prescriptive policy guidance that provided extended lists of partnership actors and prescribed collaborative arrangements was replaced by the requirement of the 2018 guidance to develop locally-determined collaborative arrangements.

Processes of collaboration

Cooperating to protect children relies on processes through which actors interact – communication, information-sharing, decision-making, and resource distribution. In the early 2000s policy addressed the need to plan, manage, and provide integrated services through interactions in collaborative ‘partnerships’, including LSCBs, CTBs, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Partnerships, and Early Years Partnerships (DfES, 2003, 2004; DCSF, 2007). To integrate services, including health, education, social care, diverse organisations were encouraged to build connections, share information, align processes, and develop and deliver joined-up services (DCSF, 2003, *Working Together* 1999). Policy required local government to facilitate and enable these interactions through LA leadership (DfES, 2003, 2004), performance managed by the DfES, and inspected by Ofsted.

However, repeated exhortations to local government to ‘work with’ partners from different organisations and sectors were ill-defined in policy, providing little detail as to how non-state actors might influence public sector-led decision-making (see for example DfES 2003, 2004, *Child Poverty Strategy*, 2005). Furthermore, since the mid-2000s policy has promoted the commissioning of children’s services, with non-state actors increasingly subject to market processes, and positioned as providers rather than partners.

For example, the 2011 *Child Poverty Strategy* looked towards “more devolved, flexible, and potentially market-based approaches involving private and voluntary and community sector providers” (s4.20). Similarly, 2018’s *Working Together* guidance emphasised the development of local commissioning processes.

In summary, CS policy throughout this period structured an environment for collaborative working and authorised local government actors to lead processes of inter-organisational collaboration to achieve successive governments’ policy goals. Leadership roles and responsibilities were clearly defined, but shared only within public agencies. Partnership with non-state actors was only loosely defined beyond their role as service providers; there was limited distribution of responsibilities; and structures to enable multiple accountabilities were time-limited.

Case 2: Flood Risk Management

The policy problem

Flood risk policy directs action to manage risk, keeping communities, land and property safe from flooding. Key policy concerns since the 1990s have been to address the mounting levels of complexity and uncertainty in flood risk management, the escalating damages and rising costs of flood defences in the context of climate change and increased urbanisation. There has been a predominating technical emphasis on the role of authorities in defining, assessing and managing risk. Following shock flood events at the turn of the century, the new Government strategy *Making Space for Water* (2005) first signalled that it was not possible to eliminate all risk, highlighting the need to pursue an ‘integrated portfolio of responses’, working with delivery partners to strengthen flood warning, response and resilience, with and for communities at risk (Defra, 2005). The Pitt Review (2008), again following shock flood events, highlighted gaps in responsibilities

in the way that flood risk is managed, particularly in relation to a growing localised risk of surface water flooding. The *Flood and Water Management Act* (2010) directs current national strategy - setting out which bodies are responsible for managing flood risk, creating a new leadership role for local authorities to act as Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs), with a duty to cooperate in sharing information and seeking partnership funding. Any increased attention on working in partnership is as 'a preferred approach' and has largely diffused into English policy from the *EU Floods Directive* (2007/60/EC) and *EU Water Framework Directive* (WFD) (2000/60/EC). Compliance with the Floods Directive drives integration of plans to manage flood risk from all sources, improve transparency and public consultation on FRM plans, and coordinate water management.

Key actors

Government policy sets out which bodies are responsible for managing flood risk, with a more recent emphasis on communities and local partners pooling resources. The Coalition Government asserted that England would rise to the challenge of the changing climate, tackling flood risks by 'working together' directed through the framework of a national FRM strategy (DEFRA, 2011, p.ii). The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) leads on FRM policy, providing government funding through flood defence grants. Other national actors include the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (for LA planning and building regulations) and the Cabinet Office (for civil contingencies) (FWMA, 2010). The Environment Agency's (EA) role was extended under the *Flood and Water Management Act* (2010) to take a strategic national overview. The *Act* (2010) also designated new powers and clarified responsibilities for LLFAs to bring partners together at a local level (EA, 2011), including other LA actors, land-use planners, private sector water companies, drainage boards, and riparian owners.

From 2011, communities were granted a greater role in local risk management decisions (DEFRA, 2011), with partnership with local communities presented as key to securing wider environmental objectives (EA, 2011). Voluntary organisations, such as Rivers and Wildlife Trusts have more recently emerged as ‘catchment leaders’ to coordinate planning and take an integrated approach to the environment (HMRC, 2016). Other non-state actors contribute by providing expertise, local knowledge, and mechanisms of community involvement (*FWMA* 2010), for example supporting communities at risk of flooding.

Structures for collaboration

Pre-*FWMA* (2010) collaborative structures for FRM were at a national level, notably a Programme Board with representatives from DEFRA, EA, the Local Government Association, the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and HM Treasury. For example, the *Making Space for Water* strategy (2005) was not addressed directly through multi-agency boards, but instead through calls for policy integration, for FRM to be embedded across a range of government policies. The *FWMA 2010* created ‘Regional Flood and Coastal Committees’ (RFCCs), replacing ‘Regional Flood Defence Committees’ that had existed from the 1930s, tasked with approving local programmes of work, and developing funding for priority projects. However, policy now frames this structure as ‘the co-ordination of FCERM’, ensuring ‘coherent plans’ for identifying, communicating and managing flood risk across catchments, and providing local democratic input through the majority membership of representatives from LLFA. It thus provides ‘a link’ between the EA, LLFAs, and other relevant bodies to ‘engender mutual understanding’ and promote ‘efficient, targeted and risk-based investment’ in flood risk management that “optimises value for money and benefits for local communities” (DEFRA, 2011).

There is also growing evidence of new permissive governance arrangements. For example, following severe flood events in the south-west (Somerset 2013-14) and north-west (Cumbria 2015) of England, the Somerset Rivers Authority and the Cumbrian Flood Partnership formed to promote joined-up action across catchments. The EFRA review (2016) describes this as part of a ‘proliferation of flood risk management bodies’ at local levels, concluding that ‘business as usual’ arrangements were sub-optimal; the co-ordination of diverse bodies diverted funds and energy; and national decision-making and local governance both lacked transparency, requiring ‘significant overhaul’ to respond to local choice (p.27).

Processes of collaboration

The EA’s *National Flood Risk and Coastal Erosion Strategy* (2011) encourages effective risk management by “enabling, people communities, business, infrastructure operators and the public sector to work together” (p.iii). A suite of guidance documents assists LAs to co-ordinate and ‘lead’ local flood risk management activities with key partners, including guidance on establishing memoranda of understanding or data sharing agreements (EA and Defra, 2011). LLFAs have a duty to develop local flood risk management strategies, and must consult with risk management authorities and the public. Partnership working is encouraged to ensure that risk management is co-ordinated across authority boundaries and more broadly across catchments, with LLFAs encouraged to work together ‘collectively’ (FWMA, 2010). Citing the need for local flexibility, guidance does not prescribe how partnerships should be established, nor specify partner roles and responsibilities. The guidance instead outlines broad considerations and principles to be addressed in establishing, operating and maintaining a partnership, and encouraging innovation, with any participation in these activities being voluntary (Defra, 2010).

Under a policy environment of austerity, the EA National Strategy (2011) captured a step change from state funding, supplemented by local levies, to ‘partnership’ funding (EA, 2011). Risk management authorities were directed to work in partnership with communities, involving them in decision-making, and helping them understand and prepare for risks by protecting their own property. Communities that have experienced flood are encouraged to form local flood action groups, providing volunteer community flood wardens and promoting faster recovery, with training for community volunteers led by the EA. The EFRA Review (2016) evidenced LLFAs’ lack of capacity to deliver, and argued for LAs to be sufficiently resourced to lead local flood protection.

In summary, in comparison to Children’s Services, policy-led collaborative structures are relatively new in the FRM field. The leadership responsibility of LAs to coordinate activity in a crowded and complex space is also new, and with limited specification as to how that responsibility is to be carried out. Moreover, the shift of responsibilities from the national level to local communities lacks adequate state resources to enable a more distributed, bottom-up approach to the leadership of FRM.

Comparative analysis and discussion

Policy draws diverse actors from and beyond public agencies into collaborative processes, outlines their roles and responsibilities, and introduces structures through which they are to interact. This influence is both direct – in the form of prescriptive statutory requirements; and indirect - as policy creates (or fails to create) an environment for collaborative leadership to develop. The cases explored here show how policy to address different public problems differs in the level of prescription in the structuring of collaborative arrangements, and specification of who should lead and how.

Leadership responsibilities: the impact of history

Significant differences between the cases originate in their historical context, with previous policy choices and events shaping subsequent policy responses (Weible and Carter, 2017). The different histories influence the distribution of leadership responsibilities – first in terms of state responsibility for the public problem; second in relation to the influence of non-state actors; and third in relation to political context at the time that the problem is acknowledged as public. These factors impact on the potential for collaborative leadership to develop. The prescriptive CS policy extends back to the 1940s origins of the UK welfare state, and the state's acceptance of responsibility for child welfare. The authority of local government to lead CS is repeated in policy guidance since this time. However, non-state actors, with their history of leading child welfare prior to the welfare state, have continued to deliver services and influence their development. The partnership policy of 1997-2010 built on this history. In contrast, FRM has a much shorter history, as a policy issue for which the state takes lead responsibility, and as a site of multi-actor interactions. FRM policy initially focused on centralised arrangements, the language of *local* partnership came to the fore later, in a public sector environment characterised by austerity and increasing marketization. FRM has then, by comparison, limited institutional capacity for public and non-state actors to share responsibility through robust and challenging partnership. This constrains the potential for collaborative forms of leadership to develop.

A policy process in which state responsibility is established over time, like CS, provides a context in which roles and responsibilities of other actors may be distributed and delineated (Gronn, 2002). Hybrid leadership emerges (Gronn, 2002; Osborn et al., 2014), with strong positional leadership through public agencies, together with a shared pattern of influence. This configuration is continually dynamic as policy positions and

repositions state and non-state responsibilities in response to events and political context. However, the emphasis on a single source of historically authorised leadership constrains potential for more plural leadership (Ospina, 2017) to develop. Leadership responsibilities are shared in a limited way, and attempts by other actors to achieve greater influence constitute a challenge to the policy process. On the other hand, a policy process with a history of collaborative working has potential for more relational, networked leadership to emerge. To extend Osborn et al.'s (2014) analysis from the organisational context, this means leading through both formal and informal inter-organisational arrangements. A policy process with limited history of state responsibility, like FRM, constrains the development of collaborative leadership. Responsibilities are historically dispersed, but formal coordination arrangements are underdeveloped, and there is less capacity to develop dense networks of informal collaboration. In FRM, those tasked with collaboration are the technical experts, typically engineers, lacking the professional expertise and experience for managing complex interdependent relationships in the absence of supportive policy structures.

Vertical and horizontal accountabilities: managing risk

In both cases, policy structures accountabilities with the aim of managing risk and avoiding high profile failures. Managing risk requires boundary-crossing, 'sector-spanning' leadership (Getha-Taylor et al., 2011) and alignment of systems and processes (Crosby and Bryson, 2010). In CS, this has led to a single line of accountability, with leadership shared between local government manager and elected official. These roles are similar to Crosby and Bryson's (2005) account of sponsors (elected official) and champions (senior manager). All actors are accountable to this shared leadership for safeguarding children and promoting their welfare – as established through repeated policy iterations. Policy structures collaboration to promote compliance with this single

line of accountability, rather than to enable robust debate and the uncovering of alternative perspectives. In FRM, accountability for managing risk is both more (nationally) centralised and more dispersed across agencies and actors. Institutional arrangements offer little clarity as to how actors might hold one another to account; in particular it is unclear how powerful independent private sector interests are held accountable. Instead, policy increasingly positions risk management as a task for communities and citizens, without adequate provision to enable public managers to develop community capacity.

In line with previous research, this sets up tensions for individuals leading collaboratively (Vangen and Huxham, 2003). On the one hand, there is a need to integrate - enabled through a single line of accountability; on the other hand, there is need to protect the potential for challenge through expression of different experience and expertise – enabled through accountability to actors' independent organisations and to the wider community. The dangers of nurturing one of these at the expense of the other become evident in the reviews that follow shock events of a child death or a major flood event. These typically highlight either a failure of shared accountability, exposing gaps between partners, or overemphasis on accountability to an organisation or community that failed to take account of dissenting voices. For high risk policy problems, in which risk can be minimised but not eradicated, the leadership challenge is to develop shared accountability whilst also sustaining accountability to the individual's organisation, *and* the broader community. This is particularly challenging in the context of permissive policy in which structures and processes are determined locally. Enabling a collaborative approach to leadership require policymakers to introduce institutional arrangements in which accountability is explicitly plural, creating an environment in which practices of

challenge, disruption, and contestation can be practiced safely by actors at different points within the complex web of accountabilities.

Sharing power: collaborative arrangements and collective achievements

The concept of collaborative leadership is closely linked to governance arrangements that enable power sharing (Ansell and Gash 2008). Moreover, researchers have argued that successful collaboration requires some attempt to equalize power (see for example Bryson et al., 2006; Ansell and Gash, 2008). However, the cases examined here create different institutional arrangements that are collaborative in intent, but also constrain power-sharing: these in turn influence which potential sources of leadership are authorised and how. Developing further leadership sources requires leadership ‘beyond authority’ (Heifetz, 1994), that is willing to address asymmetries of power and challenge policy decisions.

In FRM, it is unclear whether the national public body authorised by policy to ‘lead’ has power to enable coordinated multi-agency responses. Powerful interests (landowners, developers, scientists, and commercial interests) influence decision-making through control of key resources. While CS policy authorises local government to lead, controlling resources, setting direction for collaborative working and accounting to government, FRM policy positions local government as a convenor, its expertise and democratic legitimacy constrained by powerful interests. Without a strong coordinating governance structure to create a broader system of leadership, competing interests limit the potential for collective achievements (Ospina, 2017). In CS, policy-led collaborative governance arrangements authorise LA leadership. A continuing challenge for public managers is to empower alternative sources of leadership – for example empowering parents to lead, authorised by experience; or non-profit coalitions to share leadership,

authorised through collective expertise and relationship with communities and service users. However, there is limited incentive for public managers to empower these potential sources of leadership as policy holds local government to account for service delivery targets and outcomes. This constrains the development of more collective forms of leadership.

Policy as context and/or source of leadership?

This comparative analysis illustrates the significance of policy for developing collaborative leadership. Somewhat paradoxically, our study suggests that policy may explicitly promote collaboration to address a public problem, and yet constrain a collaborative approach to leadership. We go beyond this to argue that policy is not simply a context for collaborative leadership, but itself constitutes a source of leadership that is significant in developing collaborative capacity, and influencing the potential for future collaborative achievements. Our longer-term historical perspective extends previous insights into the antecedents of collaboration (Bryson et al 2015; Emerson et al 2012), showing how policy choices made over decades by different political administrations have continuing implications for leadership.

Policy that constitutes the response to a complex public problem as ‘collaborative’ creates a system of interdependencies, characterised by multi-directional layers of accountability, and attempts to close gaps in responsibilities. This adds complexity to practice, and threatens to pull actors in different directions, even as policy exhorts them to ‘work with’ one another. To avoid fragmentation, policy identifies and authorises sources of leadership within public agencies. However, this constrains the potential for leadership from other sources – including communities, service users, and citizens. Leaders from public agencies face the dual challenge of accounting to the public sector, and enabling

more inclusive and distributed leadership that allows space for contesting policy goals. However, distributing leadership is by no means unproblematic. Recent localisation policies shift risk away from national government, without creating capacity for robust collaboration. Parallel moves towards public service marketization shift the balance of power towards corporate interests. As a result, public managers find themselves with limited ability to develop the leadership capacity of local communities and non-profit organisations towards a more genuinely collaborative approach. Arguably, policy-led institutional arrangements in both case examples fail to address power asymmetries (Rouillard et al., 2012) in any meaningful way. Enabling genuine power-sharing is therefore dependent on local public managers' determination and skills.

Policy shapes the ways in which responses to public problems are led across organisational and sector boundaries – explicitly, but also implicitly, by structuring the purposes and institutional arrangements of collaborative endeavours. It impacts on the leadership media of structures, processes, and people (Huxham and Vangen, 2000), shaping potential for collaborative working, and authorising leadership sources. Policy may simultaneously enable public sector actors to lead collaboratively across institutional arrangements that engage a wide range of organisations and interests, and, at the same time, constrain the extent to which leadership is distributed (Gronn, 2002) to non-state actors. Generating capacity for collaborative achievements requires leadership that steps beyond these constraints – first to nurture an environment that enables actors from different sectors to work and thrive within multiple accountabilities; and second to develop sources of leadership beyond those authorised by policy.

We go beyond this to argue that policy itself constitutes a source of leadership in that it sets direction for collaborative working, establishes the boundaries of power-sharing, and consequently limits what it is possible for actors to achieve. Policy is not simply a set of

contextual circumstances that impact on leadership practice, but rather an actor in the dynamic system of processes, practices, discourses, and relational networks described by Ospina (2017). Public managers are one actor amongst others in this system, and delivering achievements that are truly collective, inclusive and democratic will require them to grapple with the history and breadth of the policy system - rather than simply responding to the latest policy announcements.

Conclusion

This paper begins to uncover show how the policy context is significant for collaborative leadership. To fully understand this significance, we must next move beyond the policy text to examine the informal rules that guide policy dynamics, translating and interpreting the written document (Carter, Weible, Siddiki, & Basurto, 2016; Ostrom, 1986 in Weible and Carter, 2017). However, this initial contribution to the ‘rich dialogue’ at the nexus of policy studies and public management (Sowa and Lu, 2017, p75), offers insight for policymakers and managers. It highlights the need to “confront the complexity of collective action” (Kirlin, 1996, p. 418 in Weible and Carter, 2017, p.41), and adopt a more critical approach to the potential for collaborative leadership. More specifically, it encourages policymakers to explore further how the prescriptions and omissions of policy might promote the leadership-creating environment in which policy communities can collaborate effectively.

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Table 1. Selected policy documents

Children's Services	Flood Risk Management
<i>1997-2010</i>	
<p>Working together to safeguard children (Department of Health, Home Office and Department for Education and Employment, 1999) – Policy Guidance</p> <p>Every Child Matters (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) - Green Paper</p> <p><i>Children Act 2004</i></p> <p>Every Child Matters: Change for Children (Department for Education and Skills, 2004) – HMG National framework for change programme</p> <p>Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working... (HMG, 2006)</p> <p>The Children's Plan (Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF), 2007)</p> <p>Children's Trusts: statutory guidance on inter-agency cooperation... (DCSF, 2007)</p> <p>Statutory guidance: the roles and responsibilities of the Lead Member for Children's Services and the Director of Children's Services (DCSF, 2007)</p> <p>Ending Child Poverty: everybody's business (HM Treasury, Department for Work and Pensions, DCSF, 2008) – Policy Paper</p> <p>Ending Child Poverty: mapping the route to 2020 (HM Treasury, Department for Work and Pensions, DCSF, 2008) – Policy Paper</p> <p>Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working... (HM Government, 2010)</p> <p><i>Child Poverty Act 2010</i></p>	<p>Foresight Future Flooding Report (Office of Science and Technology, 2004) – Project Report</p> <p>Making Space for Water: Taking Forward a New Government Strategy for Flood and Coastal Management in England (Department for Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), 2005)</p> <p>The Pitt Review: Learning lessons from the 2007 floods (Pitt, 2008) – independent review for Defra</p> <p>Flood Risk Regulations 2009 - Statutory Instruments</p> <p>Surface Water Management Plan Technical Guidance (Defra, 2010)</p> <p><i>Flood and Water Management Act 2010</i></p>
<i>2010-2015</i>	

<p>A new approach to child poverty: tackling the causes of disadvantage and transforming families lives (Secretary of State for Work and Pensions and the Secretary of State for Education, 2011)</p> <p>Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children’s Services and the Lead Member for Children’s Services (Department for Education, 2013)</p> <p>Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working... (HM Government, 2010)</p> <p>Child Poverty strategy 2014-17 (HM Government, 2014)</p> <p>Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working... (HM Government, 2014)</p>	<p>Understanding the risks, empowering communities, building resilience: the national flood and coastal erosion risk management strategy for England (Environment Agency, 2011)</p> <p>Co-operation and requesting information in flood and coastal erosion risk management: statutory guidance on the implementation of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 sections 13(1) and 14 in England (Defra Affairs, 2011)</p>
<p>2015-2019</p>	
<p><i>Children and Social Work Act 2017</i></p> <p>Working together to safeguard children: a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children (HMG, 2018)</p>	<p>National Flood Resilience Review (HM Government, 2016)</p> <p>Post-legislative scrutiny: Flood and Water Management Act 2010. Sixth Report of Session 2016–17 (House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, 2017)</p>