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Ambiguity among Partners: Understanding Power and Perception Under Conditions of Mutuality

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Abstract

Power is a construct that is relevant anytime two actors come together. Typically power examinations have been focused on assessments among actors with asymmetrical power profiles. We argue existing characterizations of power are insufficient to understand perceptions of relationship quality when partners have a more balanced power profile. This is the case with an important class of partnerships—those between governments and philanthropic Foundations. We assessed power mutuality and its effects on relationship quality with a mixed methods approach, relying heavily on fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis techniques and interview data. Our findings point to new insights into those power relationships typically examined in the extant literature, those with asymmetry, as well as under condition of mutuality. With regard to asymmetrical power, we point to needed investigation into the role of intangible resources, such as knowledge and legitimacy, to achieve goals, rather than the predominant focus on financial and other tangible resources. With regard to conditions of mutuality, we illustrate that mutuality yields relational ambiguity in the relationship and results in partner tension. Furthermore, our study finds that under conditions of mutuality, resource contributions from the benefactor need to address instrumental organizational needs, not just needs that contribute to mission outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the relational dynamics among organizational partners has been a topic of focus in the public administration and organizations literature since the 1960s. While not a new question, the class of partnership we examine—those characterized by mutuality, rather than imbalance—has received less attention in the extant literature on power. In this article, we examine one manifestation of mutual partnerships—that between government and philanthropic foundations. This type of partnership is compelling for two reasons. First, the involvement of private philanthropic institutions in the public's business presents some fundamental questions for the role of both government and philanthropic institutions in society. Second, the power held by both actors creates an ambiguity within the relationship that has not received much attention in the theoretical literature to date.

The implications of partnership mutuality are yet unidentified in the literature. The vast majority of partnerships investigated empirically have an imbalance of power that provide clarity on which actor is solving the critical contingencies of the other. But in partnerships that are characterized by mutuality, where both parties equally hold power and have sufficient resources—such as in partnerships with government agencies and foundations, the ambiguity of which organization is in the role of receiver and which is the benefactor may negatively affect the relationship. As both parties navigate this mutuality, the interactions among partners can be marred by tensions. Tensions about roles can have repercussions for the relationships among the partners, specifically regarding trust and willingness to participate long term or in repeated interactions. Thus, these perceptions about the relationships are consequential.

While mutuality is acknowledged in some textbook treatments of power, there is little work specifically focusing on this dynamic. As partnerships between governments and foundations become increasingly common in the public service, this class of relationships merits concerted attention. The work presented in this article provides an exploratory investigation of the situational context in which mutuality exists and its impact of the relationship perception. We revisit the body of knowledge on power to examine how our theories cope with relationships based in mutuality.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Questions of power, relational imbalance, and relational mutuality is deeply rooted in the history of thought on organizations. However, the literature on partnerships to deliver public value have not directly grappled with the power dynamics inherent in government partnerships with external agents. While many forms of government partnerships with outside actors—such as the "hollow State," "contracting

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out," "Public Private Partnerships," and intergovernmental associations—have been examined in the literature, the preponderance of the literature on these partnerships has focused on the coordination functions, operations, and outcomes of the partnership, rather than on the power dynamics. In many cases, if power was mentioned at all, it was either explicitly stated to be a principal agent relationship, as in the contracting literature, or a power neutral horizontal relationship, as in the networks literature.[1] One potential explanation for this is that it is typically taken for granted in the public affairs literature that the authority of the State and its inherent coercive powers serve to make it the superordinate in most, if not all, relationships in which it enters. Here, we fundamentally question the relationships government has with its external partners.

Partnerships between government and external actors may be set up to address wicked problems (c.f. Head 2019), complex problems that require joint production functions (c.f. Isett and Provan 2005) or to shape what the government chooses to act upon (c.f. Bryan and Isett 2018). The activities undertaken in government–external partner relationships dilute the connections between the government and the governed. In democratic societies public servants and elected officials are directly accountable to "the people" through the structures and procedures of Constitutional and incorporation documents. However, that accountability is diluted, if not removed, when a third party is authorized to do business on a government's behalf. In these cases, the external partner is answerable only to the government with whom they have the formalized agreement, not to "the people" themselves (Milward and Provan 2000; Verkuil 2007). While the terms of the service authorization undoubtedly have accountability mechanisms in it, the direct link between the functions and government and its people are disrupted. For these reasons, the involvement of third parties in delivering public services is critiqued as anti-democratic.

Similar to service delivery partnerships, partnerships between government and philanthropic foundations raise anti-democratic questions as well. Current treatments of the partnerships between governments and foundations center on the promotion of private interests under the guise of delivering public good (Berry and Goss 2018; Bushouse and Mosley 2018; Farley 2018). Philanthropic foundations have missions that are determined by their elite founders and/or the elite members of their Boards of Advisors/Directors. Foundations sometimes then seek to influence policy direction and implementation in pursuit of those private missions through advocating action and/or convening meetings that reach across sectors (Bryan and Isett 2018; Bushouse and Mosley 2018; Phillips 2018). Within this "third space" partners come together "to engage more freely in thinking, planning, and implementing collaborative endeavors … outside public view" (Mendel and Brudney 2014, 26). The exchange of ideas and discussions about resource availability, constraints, and opportunities shape initiatives and link government actors to expertise and capacities that assist in achieving policy goals (Bushouse and Mosley 2018). Thus, when foundations partner with governments, government action is shaped by what the foundation wants to promote, rather than actions determined by democratic processes. This shadow role of philanthropy is more important than ever as resources in governments have become scarcer.

The root causes of third-party involvement in the delivery of government services are multi-faceted and complex. Factors such as the erosion of government capacity over time, increased and changing service demands of the populace, technological changes, and sociodemographic shifts in whom the government serves have overwhelmed the capabilities and capacities of government. The organizational inertia of large bureaucracies has long been identified as inhibiting the agility of government to respond to rapidly changing needs (c.f. Hannan and Freeman 1984; Weber 1948), requiring them to find partners that are more readily available and flexible to do so (Piore and Sable 1981; Powell 1990). Whatever the cause(s), it is clear that government now regularly operates in conjunction with actors outside of the public sphere to deliver services and create public value [see Bryson, Crosby, and Stone (2015) for a review of the literature].

Philanthropic foundations have increasingly answered the call to become partners with government to address the expanding and changing needs of the populace. Providing government with the resources they need to address their critical contingencies is a fundamental way that foundations leverage their power in these relationships.

Power, Need, and Partnerships

A power relationship exists in all partnership arrangements. Organizationally, the power relationship is typically characterized by one actor providing resources needed by another in exchange for directing their attention or action in concert with the resources. Within the organizational literature, the enticement to extract desired behavior is usually conceived as the contribution of scarce resources that addresses a critical contingency (Pfeffer and Salancik 2003; Thompson 2017). As specificity of those resources and need increases, so does the power of the supplier of those resources. Effective power structures exert control in ways that make the power relationship so ingrained that actors operate within its constructs without questioning it (Clegg 1981; Mechanic 1962). As such, in most interorganizational relationships overt power is not exercised, but rather is a manifestation of the resolution of critical contingencies the organization faces to achieve its missions, being both relational and situational (Oliver 1990; Tolbert and Hall 2015).

Understanding different sources of power can help to understand how to manage relationships (Purdy 2012). Hardy and Phillips (1998) identified three sources of power in collaborative processes: authority, resources, and discursive legitimacy. Authority, based in bureaucratic logic, emphasizes government's legitimacy to set policy and to make and enforce laws (Tolbert and Hall 2015). For government actors, this source of power is primary. The second source of power, resource-based power, centered in a resource dependence logic, highlights the inherent power present when resource providers can decide how and when they deploy (or withhold) resources (Pfeffer and Salancik 2003). Both governmental and philanthropic actors have

[1]Of course this characterization is an oversimplification of the extant literature. However, the thrust of the statement is accurate that, for the most part, an explicit engagement with power was either eschewed or not taken up as a focal interest in the investigations of these relationships. While there is a rich literature in each of the areas of contracting, networks, interorganizational collaboration, PPPs and other kinds of partnerships, an in-depth treatment of these topics would distract from the central focus of power in this article. Thank you to reviewer 3 for the nudge to make the bounds of our conceptual focus clear.

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considerable amounts of resource-based power. The third source of power is discursive legitimacy, which refers to actors who can speak legitimately about an issue in the public arena. These actors tend to be experts and advocates and represent the societal values underpinning the collaborative effort. Often, nonprofit organizations -including foundations -represent this source of power in collaborative processes (Purdy 2012). As highlighted by Hardy and Phillips (1998), understanding dependence of organizations in interorganizational domains requires assessing actors on all three aspects of power.

While discussions of power sources are common in the literature that focuses on power, the public administration literature has not traditionally made these distinctions. Existing theories in public administration assume the legitimacy and authority of government actors, and therefore emphasize resource-based power when it is addressed. However, government–foundation relationships offer an opportunity to assess power sources in a more nuanced way than in previous treatments.

Within the government–foundation relationship, both organizations retain their traditional power sources. Government's main source of power is structural authority. The establishment of power is in the Constitution with its roles and authority detailed. While at the margin activities of government can be debated on appropriateness (Isett and Hicks 2020), by and large in stable democracies the legitimacy of government to fulfill its mission is not questioned. Foundations' source of power has largely been through its expertise (Purdy 2012). Most philanthropic institutions use their resources to impact a single or a narrowly focused set of issues. They become visible and credible agents of change in these areas because of concentrated attention and impact. Both entities have considerable resource-based power.

While there are different theories about how organizations sort themselves into partnerships (c.f. Bosso 1995; Domhoff 1998; Finger 2018; Jenkins 2006; Mosley and Galaskiewicz 2015), fundamentally organizations seek partners that help them to acquire needed inputs to their organizational processes and help them achieve their organizational missions (Isett and Provan 2005; Oliver 1990; Pfeffer and Salancik 2003; Williamson 1975). Need drives partnering behavior among organizations.[2] Seeking partners to address critical contingencies invites a dependency relationship. Dependencies, when one partner relies on another to provide critical organizational inputs, create an imbalance in the relationship that cedes power to the organization providing the resources (whatever they may be). The imbalance is heightened if there are low numbers of other buyers (monopsony) or suppliers (monopoly), as is the case with government agencies and philanthropic foundations.

An important point that is often understated is that the imbalance creates relational clarity in dependency relationships. Resolution of another organization's critical contingencies explicitly imbues the resolver with control over the terms of the relationship. Classic organizations authors such as Gulick (1937) and Fayol (1970) stress the importance of span of control and clearly defined processes that reduce organizational friction to improve outputs and outcomes. Knott and Miller (1987) add to these observations by noting that super-/subordinate relationships are enhanced when there is clarity about to whom one answers. As such, imbalances caused by dependency create a relational clarity about the terms of exchange in partnerships. This relational clarity can have beneficial effects on partnership processes that create predictability and serve to reduce transaction costs.

Mutuality, Power, and Relational Ambiguity

Acknowledging that the preponderance of the power literature focuses on super-/subordinate structures, a fuller reading suggests that these characterizations of power in relationships are incomplete. Instead, rather than one partner being dependent on the other, the literature describes a mutuality of dependence among partners, even when there is an imbalance in power. As noted by Tolbert and Hall (2015), the power holder needs the power receiver to do something for them, so the holder is dependent on the receiver to follow through on actions just as the receiver is dependent on the holder for the reward.

This mutual dependency of both organizations in the power relationship, and the different types of power that contribute to the mutual dependence, is underplayed in the current literature. This is especially true when the imbalance is not pronounced. Most explorations of power have focused on the asymmetries and the dynamics those asymmetries present. And while mutuality of dependency does not imply that asymmetries do not exist, the imbalance is the focus rather than mutuality. Examining the three sources of power and how they may be different in mutual relationships, rather than in more traditional depictions, can provide insight into how mutuality may present itself.

With regard to government organizations in government–foundation partnerships, structural authority remains, but resource-based power is removed—specifically monopsony power. Typically, government has a mandate to provide services and when they do not produce the services in house, they contract to other entities to produce them in communities (Milward and Provan 2000). Thus, government holds power in these relationships because they are a dominant funder of community services and can contract, expand, or withhold future contracts with partners—partners that often rely on these contracts to stay in business. But with foundation partners, governments are not buying services. Instead, the government entity is the producer that is creating some output in response to an agreement with the philanthropic organization. The principal has become the agent in this relationship. Importantly, the foundation has the choice to partner with many other state and local governments, and so is not dependent on the particular partner to achieve their goals. These factors remove government's main operational power source -resources.

Foundations in government–foundation partnerships are also in unfamiliar waters in these relationships. Like government, the traditional power base of resource munificence is neutralized in this context. Foundations often come into communities to catalyze change with generous funding that exploits community organizations' mission-oriented resource dependencies. Thus, foundations hold power in these

[2] Some recent work by Calabrese and Ely (2022) suggests that the link between Foundations and who they fund is not tied to need in the communities. This finding is further supported by forthcoming work by Grasse, Searling, and Neely (2022). However, for our purposes, we are focusing here on the behavior of the agency and how they pursue partnerships based on needs, rather than the funder.

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relationships because they are providing much needed resources to organizations (Delfin and Tang 2008; Froelich 1999). But with government partners, the tax base with which they operate is much larger than any resources they would receive from an outside philanthropic partner. Thus, the government is not dependent on the philanthropy's goodwill to continue the partnership to achieve their mission. Therefore, foundations' resource-based power source is mitigated.

In government–foundation relationships, each organization's main operational power source is neutralized. For government, they are now the recipient of resources and a contractor/grantee and cannot likely dictate the terms of the relationship since the foundation is outside their authority structure. Further, there is nothing for the government to "buy" from the foundations. For foundations, their financial support to public agencies does not represent a significant funding stream, because their funding is often small compared to agency budgets. And thus, foundations do not have as big of a carrot and stick when interacting with government agencies.

With a lack of imbalance, the partners in government–foundation partnerships must navigate unfamiliar roles where it is unclear which partner holds the authority to guide action. This role uncertainty is further exacerbated in that both parties to the partnership are accustomed to being superordinate. These relational ambiguities may cause increased transactions costs and reduced predictability of partner behavior, resulting in tensions between the partners that affect how the partnership operates and achieves its outcomes. It is unclear how well existing theories of power explain the dynamics observed in this class of partnerships. Our empirical work explores this question.

DATA AND METHODS

Our research question centers on understanding the effects of relational ambiguity on partnerships under conditions of mutuality. When partners in a collaboration come together with a power balance (mutuality), how does the resultant relational ambiguity affect the perceptions of the partnership? We employ an exploratory analysis approach, appropriate for theory development, and use qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) to identify patterns in our data. The findings are then used to develop testable propositions for future empirical work on this topic.

The setting for this study is a large intervention project to catalyze change implemented in juvenile justice systems in four states: Pennsylvania, Illinois, Louisiana, and Washington. The project was part of a $120 million initial effort undertaken by one of the largest philanthropic Foundations in the United States. The states and their local sites were chosen by the Foundation for a number of reasons, including geographic diversity, commitment to reforms, and differing needs and opportunities that are reflective of other state juvenile justice systems nationwide. There were 15 sites across the four states. As participants in the initiative sites received access to a National Resource Board of consultants paid for by the Foundation and technical assistance at a group and individual level through the Foundation. Little direct financial resources flowed to the sites, though each state had a Foundation funded lead entity that coordinated the initiative across sites and States.

Data

Focal Outcome

The way partners perceive each other are consequential for the outcomes of that partnership. Good quality relationships can reduce transactions costs and lead to deeper and more trusting relationships (Provan, Huang et al. 2009; Uzzi 1997). Trust has been a focal issue in much social science as important to explain reputation and repeated interactions among partners (Gulati 1995; Ostrom 1998, 2003). Conversely, partnerships that are rife with tensions have consequences that increase monitoring due to lack of trust and can increase the costs of contracting (Williamson 1985). For this work, we use a direct measure of positive or negative perceptions of the Foundation from a secondary analysis of interview data with each of the sites.

Interview data were taken from transcripts with managers at frontline social service agencies from organizations participating in the intervention initiative. Managers spanned agencies that served a variety of social service domains including child welfare, the courts, probation, and mental health services—with 47% of the participants being affiliated with justice related services, 30% from law related organizations, and the remaining 23% from social service agencies. The managers interviewed were those with direct responsibility for implementing the intervention funded by the Foundation. A total of 36 interviews were conducted and representatives from all sites were included.

Data were coded by the second author and reviewed by the first author to assess sentiment of the interview participants with regard to general perceptions of the Foundation. Perceptions were scored based on identified language that is positive or negative in nature with regard to the Foundation's involvement in their reform efforts. Positive sentiments included how the Foundation's involvement facilitates, helps, or accelerates their work; the positive role Foundation resources have played in the reform efforts at the state and local site level; and specific comments about how they view/perceive the Foundation as a positive force in their ongoing efforts. Negative sentiments included how the Foundation's involvement inhibits or acts as a barrier to their work; the negative role Foundation resources have played in the reform efforts at the state and local site level; and specific comments about how they view/perceive the Foundation as a negative force in their ongoing efforts.

Once all perceptions were coded for a specific site, a score of between 1 and 0 was assigned to represent the balance of the perceptions weighted with regard to number of particular sentiments and intensity of sentiments. All positive perceptions gave the jurisdiction a code of 1; all negative perceptions gave the jurisdiction a code of 0; and primarily positive perceptions gave the jurisdiction a code of 0.75, while primarily negative perceptions gave the jurisdiction a code of 0.25.

One important limitation to this study is that we only have one directional perception data. Perceptual data is directed from the agencies to the Foundation partner. Since the Foundation partner in this examination is the same for all the sites, there is a one-to-many relationship between the foundation and their agency partners, and as such the Foundation side of the partnership lacks variation on all measures of the causal conditions. While a fuller examination of this class of relationships would (and should) include a variety of Foundation partners and a variety of agency partners—a

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Societal/sociodemographic					
Party (Percent Obama Votes)	15	0.35	0.70	0.48	0.11
Population non-white	15	4%	51%	23%	15%
Population poverty	15	6%	21%	14%	4%
Median income	15	$32,569	$69,904	$42,754	$10,168
Federal per capita spending	15	$253,717	$11,850,491	$3,660,934	$4,471,149
Community/service demand					
Single head households	15	2,422	16,462	15,969	16,462.78
Low birthweights	15	95	1,637	527	469.54
Teen pregnancy rate	15	137	2,558	663	611.36
Crimes	15	180	7,635	945	1,943.65
Suicides	15	7.8	13.9	10.8	2.12
Unemployment rate	15	6%	13%	8%	2%
Organizational/capacity					
Stakeholder capacity	76	1	5	3.6	0.76
Technological capacity	76	1.6	5	3.75	0.8
Human resource capacity	76	2.2	5	3.88	0.76
Financial capacity	76	3	5	4.12	0.52

many-to-many series of relationships, this type of analysis is unavailable from our dataset. Thus, our analysis seeks to establish a proof of concept that these kinds of relationships are an observable reality and to begin to flesh out their dynamics. Despite this limitation, these data have the advantage of being able to isolate the effect of the Foundation on the relationships with their partners, and to help to establish the questions that could be answered with additional, more fulsome datasets. We believe the benefits of the data outweigh its flaws, and given that this is a secondary analysis of data collected for other purposes, is a reasonable gap in the data.

Dimensions of Need

Need to resolve critical contingencies drives the search for partners as well as the imbalances present in a partnership. The extent to which there is need, combined with the availability of resources, determines the magnitude of the imbalance among partners in an exchange relationship and the demands that can be placed on the partner in need (Castellucci and Ertug 2010; Williamson 1985). Organizational needs come in many forms that span from pressures from the organizations' external environments (e.g., political climate, poverty rates, and federalist passthroughs), through the service needs of the local community (e.g., crime and unemployment rates), to the internal operations of the organization (e.g., are there appropriate people, funding sources, technology to do the work). We use measures of each of these levels of need to ascertain the drivers of the relationship perceptions in our partnerships.

At the broadest level, we consider need as driven by the external environments through the sociodemographic context of each site. The rationale for societal level contextual indicators of resource-based power sources is that these indicators could provide insight for overall levels of resource munificence or scarcity. The indicators used for macro context are political outlook (percent Obama votes in 2008, the election closest to the data collection), percent population non-white, percent population poverty, median income, Federal per capita spending. These data were obtained from the 2010 US Census.

The descriptive indicator means in table 1 indicate a fairly wide range of jurisdictions are supported in this project. Overall, just under half are liberal voting jurisdictions, having voted for Obama in the 2008 election (48%); but in terms of specific demographic factors, the average non-white population is 23% (with a range of nearly 50%), and average number of households experiencing poverty is 14% (with a range of about 15%). Financially, the average median income is about $42,000, also having a large range of almost $40,000, and the average federal per capita spending ranged from around $250,000 to about $11.9 million, with an average of about $3.7 million. Of these indicators, compared to the national average, 47% of jurisdictions had higher non-white populations, 40% had higher poverty-stricken populations, and 27% had higher median incomes.

At the intermediate level we use indicators specific to the community that may lead to understanding the relative demand for social services. It has been estimated that contact of youth with the criminal justice system is driven more by the need for social services, rather than acts of delinquency. High demand for social services could indicate a resource deficit within communities and increased need for external assistance. The indicators used for demand for social services are single head of households, low birthweight rate, teen pregnancy rate, crimes, suicides, and unemployment rate. These data also were obtained from the 2010 US Census.

As with the sociodemographic conditions, there is a great range of demand across the jurisdictions, with ranges in the thousands. More than 60% have a higher than national average number of single parent households, low birthweight rate, teen pregnancy rate, crime rate, and suicide rate. About half have a higher than the national average unemployment rate.

The most micro level of analysis consisted of indicators of organizational capacity. The resources available can affect an organization's capability to do its work and address the reforms being undertaken. Capacity indicators are stakeholder (how external stakeholders support and/or participate in the agencies' efforts), technological (training, data hardware, and access), Human resources (the extent to which there are appropriately trained employees and the supply of candidates), and financial (policies and procedures to ensure financial soundness). These data were obtained through primary survey data collection done for the original intervention study.

The survey respondents were the managers and frontline service providers responsible for delivering services under the intervention. A total of 170 individuals across 76 agencies were identified for the survey. Data were initially collected electronically through a web-based questionnaire, but was followed-up with a paper survey, and a telephone administered survey, if needed. The survey was launched over a 10-week period and achieved a 77.6% response rate. Respondents received a branded pen as a "thank you" for participating in the survey.

The survey instrument was developed based on four of the dimensions of organizational capacity found in the first wave of interview data. Items were generated within each of the dimensions grounded by the findings from the interview data and relevant literature in organization theory, public and nonprofit management, and then checked with content area experts. The instrument included roughly 40 items—four sections of about ten questions each—with the response scale consisting of a five-point Likert scale from 1 being strongly disagree to 5 being strongly agree, with a neutral midpoint.

The 40 questions from the survey were run through a confirmatory factor analysis used to create indexes of each of the capacity dimensions (Cameron and Trivedi 2010). Nineteen of the 40 items combined into four capacity dimensions: financial, technological, human resource, and stakeholder commitment capacity. We used a standard threshold of 0.6 for inclusion of each question into the set, as well as a minimum threshold for reliability set at 0.6 for the Cronbach's alpha score. Table 2 displays the questions that contributed to each dimension of capacity with their factor loadings.

Among the individual responses in the different jurisdictions, financial capacity has the highest reported average capacity score, and stakeholder capacity has the lowest (table 1). Looking at the averages among the responses, 65% of the individuals reported a higher than average financial capacity score, 56% reported a higher than average stakeholder capacity score, and 50% and 49% of organizations reported a higher than average human resource and technological capacities, respectively.

Analysis

We use fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fs/QCA) in this article. Being a method found in the set-theoretic methods family, its purpose is to look for patterns in the relationships of variables (called conditions) across a given number of cases. It acts as a bridge between qualitative and quantitative analyses, stemming from familiarity with cases (a domain of qualitative research), while also being capable of determining cross-case patterns (a domain of quantitative research) (Fiss 2011). The method differs fundamentally from standard regression analyses, where we isolate the effects of individual variables, while holding others at some constant value. Instead, this method explicitly looks for patterns among conditions that consistently appear or do not appear together to produce a particular outcome. Thus, researchers can gain more nuanced insight into how the conditions relate. A key assumption to this approach is that of equifinality, where multiple patterns of conditions lead to the same outcome; yet these patterns are not necessarily equal (Ragin 2009). The strength of the patterns yielded is determined by the combinations' consistency, showing the proportion of cases with the causal conditions that have the outcome of interest. This is roughly equivalent to regression's *p*-value (Thygeson, Solberg et al. 2012). The combinations' coverage, on the other hand, determines how well the set of conditions explains the outcome. It is the proportion of cases exhibiting the outcome that can be explained by the combinations of conditions and is roughly equivalent to regression's R^2 (Thygeson, Solberg et al. 2012).

We considered several empirical strategies to create an overarching analysis that captured all levels of indicators of need in one model. However, due to the constraints of the fs/QCA technique, a model with all of the conditions would be over-specified. For studies of our size (N of 36), we aligned with existing recommendations (Fiss 2009) and allowed for about five conditions. Next, we explored creating an index variable representing sociodemographics and social service drivers, but factor analyses (not shown) revealed that the different conditions did not "hang" well together. Because of the value of each of these concepts, we conducted a separate QCA teasing out these relationships separately.[3]

Conducting an Fs/QCA

The first step in conducting a QCA is to calibrate conditions on a scale of 0–1, being either dichotomous (the condition is either fully in the set or it is not), known as a crisp set, or the conditions are members of a set with varying degrees of membership, a fuzzy set (Ragin 2009, 2014). All need indicators were converted into crisp or fuzzy sets using a straightforward conversion procedure. Data taken from the census (societal context and community indicators) were converted to a 1 if the jurisdiction's condition value was greater than the national average and a 0 if it was below. Then for each of the capacity dimensions, we calculated the overall average of the scores and these were then converted to a dichotomous scale to be used in the QCA. The capacity dimension was converted to a 1 if the jurisdiction's capacity was greater than the average capacity score across all jurisdictions and a 0 if it was below. This calibration is a reflection of both a lack of developed anchors to calibrate such conditions and, being exploratory in nature, an interest in comparing within the sample those with varying degrees of capacity and need. Therefore, discussion of the results as "high" and "low" conditions is relative to the various jurisdictions in the sample.

[3]We also considered a fourth model that combined the "relevant" conditions from each level of analysis, but did not proceed with this option because there were too many remaining conditions. Additionally, this recombination approach violates the basic premise of the QCA approach that posits that it is how each of the conditions act in concert with one another that drives the outcomes. Recombining is more of a variable framework strategy, rather than set theoretic. Therefore, recombining the conditions into a fourth model would lose the power of the configurational approach central to the technique.

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Table 2. Capacity Interview Questions and Factor Scores

Statement (1 = strongly disagree, 3 = neutral, 5 = strongly agree)	Factor Analysis Component Score	Overall Cronbach's Alpha
Stakeholder commitment capacity		0.88
My organization has an engaged and active Board of Directors and/or advisory committees.	0.81	
All important stakeholders are represented on the boards and committees.	0.79	
The Board of Directors and/or advisory committees have responsibility for and an impact on organizational decisions.	0.70	
Board of Directors and/or advisory committee meetings are attended by its members at least 75% of the time.	0.77	
My organization works to make sure all key stakeholders have a voice in the organization.	0.83	
My organization encourages the participation of key stakeholders in the work of the organization.	0.78	
Technological capacity		0.90
My organization has an automated data management system.	0.74	
My organization uses the automated data management and information system for reporting purposes.	0.73	
My organization has the ability to electronically track program outputs (i.e., numbers of clients placed) and outcomes (i.e., impact of those placements on functioning).	0.76	
My organization provides training in how to use the automated data and information management system.	0.73	
My organization's data management system makes decision making easier.	0.81	
My organization has access to the shared data and information systems that we need.	0.80	
My organization has established routines of processing data for programs and services we provide.	0.75	
Our data management systems are effective and useful.	0.79	
Human resource capacity		0.68
My organization has accurate position descriptions for each paid position in the organization.	0.73	
Our organization has adequate skilled, trained and knowledgeable staff to provide all necessary training.	0.79	
My organization has the ability to hire required staff with the relevant education, credentials and experience necessary to effectively do the job.	0.69	
Financial capacity		0.66
My organization has policies and procedures for accounts receivable, accounts payable, purchasing and payroll.	0.73	
My organization has a yearly financial audit done (internal or external).	0.83	

Once calibrated, "truth tables" were created and tests for necessity and sufficiency were run (Veríssimo 2016). Using the standard threshold of 0.9, no necessary conditions were found (table 3). For the sufficiency tests, we conducted fuzzy-set (as opposed to crisp-set) analyses and set the frequency threshold (cases that have at least 0.5 membership in the combination of conditions) to 1 and our consistency threshold to about a 0.75, as is standard in the literature for medium *N*s (Schneider and Wagemann 2010). As a robustness check, we increased the threshold to 0.8 to see how our results faired. The results held.

RESULTS

Overall, the patterns that led to positive perceptions were more straightforward to discern than negative perceptions.

Societal/Sociodemographic

Three patterns of conditions emerged from the cases (table 4, a). The strongest pattern had a unique coverage score of 0.19. This pattern holds that low per capita federal spending, low median income, high non-white populations, and more conservative jurisdictions contribute to positive Foundation perceptions. A few patterns are noted. First, the configurations show a pairing of high/low non-white and high/low poverty populations. So, either having a high proportion of non-white individuals and a high proportion of individuals in poverty, or low proportions on both of these conditions together (and in conjunction with other conditions) yield positive perceptions of the Foundation. Second, the poverty and non-white population conditions show a pattern with median income. When there were low poverty and non-white populations, a high median income helped contribute to positive perceptions, and vice-versa. In other words, a relatively wealthier jurisdiction with low non-white populations and low poverty, or the opposite contributed to positive perceptions. So, the *relationship* between the racial, economic, and financial factors of a community matters for positive perceptions.

Third, only one condition was consistent across all three combinations: low per capita spending Federal spending. The presence or absence of the other conditions varied while having low per capita expenditures did not. This means that while various societal indicators contributed to positive Foundation perceptions, having low per capita expenditures was the most consistent.

We did not find any patterns related to negative Foundation perceptions and the sociodemographic context. This finding suggests that negative perceptions were sporadic, not following any particular pattern with regard to various demographic factors.

Community/Service Demand

From the QCA on positive perceptions (table 4, b), two patterns emerged with one finding being the strongest (unique coverage: 0.16). The strongest combination was: high numbers of single parent households, low unemployment, high crime rates, high teenage pregnancy rates, high rates of low birth weights, and high suicide rates. Overall, the patterns demonstrate that the presence of a large number of community need indicators lead to positive Foundation perceptions. The number of single parent households, as well as high rates of crime, teenage pregnancies, and low birth weights contributed to positive perceptions in both patterns. Conversely, no patterns of negative perceptions were found with these indicators.

Organizational/Capacity

For the QCA, three different combinations of conditions lead to positive Foundation perceptions (table 5, a). Among these configurations, two have the highest unique coverage scores (0.07), indicating that those patterns best explain positive Foundation perceptions. The first pattern holds that high human resource capacity, high financial capacity, and low stakeholder capacity lead to positive perceptions. Whether the organization had high or low technological capacity was irrelevant to their perceptions. The second pattern held that high technological capacity, low financial capacity, and high stakeholder capacity lead to positive Foundation perceptions. Whether the organization had high or low human resource capacity was irrelevant to their perceptions.

Among the patterns, a few distinct trends can be discerned. First, financial and human resource capacities were consistently present or absent together. This suggests that the financial components of organizations consistently affect the human resource capabilities. This finding, paired with the second trend that stakeholder capacity is inversely related to this combination, suggests that even though organizations may have low internal capacities (financial and human resource capacities), having higher than average stakeholder capacity can contribute to positive Foundation perceptions. The opposite is also the case: that the absence of stakeholder capacity leads to positive Foundation perceptions when the organization has high financial and human resource capacities. This presents an interesting dynamic in the relationship between the internal capacities of organizations and

Table 3. Necessity Tests

Condition	Consistency	Coverage
Societal/sociodemographic		
Party (voted Obama)	0.59	0.82
Non-white population	0.55	0.79
Poverty population	0.48	0.79
Median income	0.23	0.56
Per capita federal spending	0.15	0.71
Community/service demand		
Number single head households	0.76	0.78
Low birthweight rate	0.70	0.74
Teen pregnancy rate	0.73	0.77
Crime rate	0.76	0.80
Suicide rate	0.70	0.72
Unemployment	0.59	0.79
Organizational/capacity		
Stakeholder capacity	0.58	0.54
Technological capacity	0.60	0.59
Human resources capacity	0.46	0.51
Financial capacity	0.54	0.60

Table 4. Demographic and Demand Positive Perception Results

a. Societal/sociodemographic indicators								
Fed Per Cap $$	**Median Income**	**Pop Non-white**	**Pop Poverty**	**Obama Votes**		**Raw Coverage**	**Unique Coverage**	**Consistency**
Low	low	high		low		0.40	0.19	0.97
Low	low	high	high			0.28	0.07	1.00
Low	high	low	low	low		0.16	0.16	0.84
Solution coverage: 0.63								
Solution consistency: 0.93								
b. Community/service demand indicators								
Single Head HH	**Unemp**	**Crime rate**	**Teen Pregnancy**	**Low birth weight**	**Suicide rate**			
High	high	high	high	high	low	0.35	0.14	0.87
High	low	high	high	high	high	0.39	0.16	0.88
Solution coverage: 0.51								
Solution consistency: 0.83								

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Table 5. Organizational/Capacity Results

Human Resources	Financial	Technological	Stakeholder	Raw Coverage	Unique Coverage	Consistency
a. Positive perceptions						
Low	low		high	0.05	0.02	1.00
High	high		low	0.07	0.07	0.75
	low	high	high	0.09	0.07	0.80
Solution coverage: 0.19						
Solution consistency: 0.80						
b. Negative perceptions						
Low	high	low	high	0.07	0.07	.75
Solution coverage: 0.07						
Solution consistency: 0.75						

their external capacities. Positive perceptions are present when there is some potential need for assistance in building capacity *either* internally or externally, but when the organization has some organizational capacity to contribute to the goals of the partnership.

This set of conditions did demonstrate patterns related to negative perceptions of the Foundation—one solution was found (table 4, b). This solution yielded that low technological and human resource capacity and high financial and stakeholder capacity contributed to negative perceptions of Foundation. So, different than above, having some high measure of both internal (e.g., financial) and external (e.g., stakeholder) capacity contributed to negative perceptions.

FINDINGS

Power is relational and situational (Oliver 1990; Tolbert and Hall 2015). Therefore, each interaction, no matter how similar they may appear, can result in different power dynamics. Our results illustrate the situational aspects of similar power elements at play, but different outcomes with regard to relationship quality. On the one hand, our results confirm and support the existing findings about imbalance in partnerships and the resultant clarity it provides. On the other, it presses us to further investigate those relationships with less of an imbalance where ambiguity is at play. Consistent with an exploratory approach, we use the findings from our empirical context to develop testable propositions for use in future empirical investigations that will aid in building out the theory in the areas identified as novel.

Support for and Extensions to Existing Theories on Power

Generally, the literature has shown that the need of an organization to have a critical contingency solved by another yields power to the provider of that resource (Pfeffer and Salancik 2003; Thompson 2017). And while the imbalance between the two partners may result in a loss of autonomy for the receiver, there is clarity in this relationship that guides behavior (Holmstrom and Milgrom 1991; Williamson 1975). The relational clarity reduces ambiguity and has positive effects on the relationship between the super- and subordinate (Knott and Miller 1987).

Our findings strongly illustrate that a resource-based power imbalance, as measured by the recipients' need, leads to positive perceptions of the resource provider in government–Foundation relationships. Despite the potential for mutuality in this class of partnerships, the relationship exhibits the hallmarks of a classic hierarchical relationship because of the need exhibited by the government agencies. It reverts to traditional power roles and dynamics in these situations. Where need is indicated, positive perceptions are also found.

The needs illustrated within the data presented here were multiple and overlapping. All positive perception patterns had low Federal per capita spending included in them, regardless of the relationships related to race and median income noted in the results section. Additionally, the service demand analyses showed great needs in all of the jurisdictions, though magnitude of need varied. Taken together, this indicates an opportunity to contribute to the mission of the partner organizations in these locations, and the agencies having a gap to be filled to achieve their missions. It also suggests that the notion of a foundation's financial resource power base being minimized because of its relative size compared to a jurisdiction's tax base, is not always true. In fact, it suggests that the marginal contribution by outside benefactors may be an important tipping point and even catalytic for a jurisdiction.

In concert with the societal and community level needs were organizational needs contributing to positive perceptions and relationship quality. Government agencies with capacity deficits in particular areas benefited from the Foundation's infusion of resources to address these deficits. The capacity analysis findings showed that when there was either an internal or external capacity gap, the help from the foundation partner was welcome. Increasing the capacity of the organization was viewed as a benefit of the relationship. As stated by one of our interview participants with regard to internal capacity:

> What [The Foundation] has really allowed us to do is accelerate those efforts and really by having these staff people dedicate time and energy to implementing things will move faster and change will happen sooner and more effectively … related to that and the other piece is just access to the technical assistance which is amazing and, and unreachable without the [Foundation] support. Because that kind of support costs a lot of money that communities don't have.

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> And with regard to external capacity:
>
> The prestige of the Foundation creates a lot of leverage within, with various stakeholders so that this Foundation that people have heard about and know about that has a great deal of credibility has made a commitment to this area of juvenile justice reform and has chosen [the State] as one of the sites is a real foot in the door to many people. It really helps to refer to our projects as being supported by [the Foundation]. I think the prestige that the Foundation brings to this is really important. And of course, from the policy or the legislative people's perspective, there's a commitment of dollars that they don't have to come up with to do things.

The quotations illustrate a real awareness of the partner organizations of what they got in return for working with the Foundation. Thus, the perception of the partners was positive when they received clear benefits to their everyday operations.

An interesting detail related to this particular intervention initiative is that the resources from the Foundation were not necessarily financial for many of the partners. Instead, the Foundation provided the organizations with other resources such as access to consultants. As expressed by our interview participants:

> The value [of the Foundation] has been to provide us access to some really great consultants, and some people to work with us on some of these issues. From my perspective, sometimes I'm too deep in the weeds to see it, and so the technical assistance really helped me take a step back and to see it not only from a distance, but from the vantage point of other States. You know what I mean? So, they can say "Well", you know, "[State M] did it this way", do you know what I mean? And that can help me. So that part of it is important, but it's also important to have people here locally who will drive the changes when [the Foundation] is not here. So, it's really been a great partnership in that way, because I think the access to consultants and the partnering with other States is sort of here, "Okay, this is how [State N] did it", that's enormously helpful for me. So that's been a huge resource.
>
> [The Foundation] doesn't give you tons of money, saying—"hire these people"; that's not how it works. What they do well is provide the technical assistance. Because we could have never gotten to the point on the screening instrument ... I don't have the capacity.

Other interview participants framed capacity in terms of the legitimacy, one of the three sources of power highlighted in the literature review. They spoke of capacity not just in terms of access to consultants or resources, but also shifts in mindset around evidence-based practices. As stated by the interview participants:

> I think that clearly this community's understanding of evidence-based practices has grown. That's something that I think [the Foundation] did was give us the language to use there; not just a word, but a moral justification to ask for that where it might not have been there before.
>
> It's probably one of the biggest post-Foundation changes is that any discussion you bring into this community about a program you know you're going to be asking about the evidence behind it and if it's an evidence-based practice. It clearly is now the direction that the community from frontline workers up to major administrators understand what evidence-based practices are and why it's important and what does it mean. So that's been a great growth since the Foundation came in.

The quotations hint at the interaction between the two sources of power of the philanthropic institution: legitimacy and resources. In this context, the Foundation used intangible resources, in the form of technical assistance and access to external networks to shift and change practices in government entities, in a way that providing only financial resources to government agencies may not have produced. The existing literature has focused almost exclusively on financial transfers among partners. But here we see more intangible transfers such as knowledge and legitimacy. We also do not know how these different kinds of resources produce outcomes for or are valued by partner agencies. The lack of direct financial contribution to partner organizations is an important nuance to the existing literature. This project draws out that the resources could be something other than money. While that may seem obvious, the differences between how partners react to financial versus other kinds of resource contributions is unknown at this time.

While our findings do support the existing dynamics in the power literature, broadly, they also point out some additional nuances that are yet understood such as the marginal financial contributions of partners, and the role of intangible contributions. These findings lead us to suggest the following propositions for further study:

Proposition 1: When there is asymmetry among interorganizational partners, marginal contributions by the less financially resourced partner can catalyze and coalesce efforts, and lead to positive partner perceptions.

Research Question a: What are the parameters and tipping points for marginal contributions from lesser resourced partners that are beneficial to the partnership?

Proposition 2: When there is asymmetry among interorganizational partners but the resource power source is mitigated, nonfinancial resource contributions that build on other power sources, will lead to positive partner perceptions.

Research Question b: Under what conditions do different kinds of resources matter and when are they effective?

Pushing the Boundaries of Existing Theories of Power

Where our study surfaces greater divergence with the extant literature on resource-based power is when asymmetries among partners does not exist—specifically when there is less organizational need from the recipient partner. A power balance determined by the capacity of an organization to function and operate effectively on its own was a key determinant in our empirical results. If an organization had high internal *and* external capacity, the additional assistance or aid offered by the partner may not have been viewed as worth the additional effort to participate in the initiative. In some cases, asks by the Foundation may have even be seen as an overstep, creating tensions in the partnership. Only with regard to organizational capacity were we able to explain the negative perceptions of some government partners toward the Foundation.

When the organizations in our study had strength in both internal and external capacities, they were less likely to report positive perceptions of their Foundation partner. Unlike the organizations that saw great benefit from the technical assistance resources provided by the Foundation, those with a more even capacity portfolio did not perceive the benefits other organizations did.

When an agency already had the capacity to do its work without aid from outside agents, there were fewer organizational benefits to mitigate the additional burden of participating. In fact, in these cases, there was a focus on the lack of financial resources being contributed. These sentiments are reflected in the following quotations:

> You know one of the issues all along with [the Foundation]—and I think one of the mysteries around the whole initiative is whenever people talk about the financial commitment of [the Foundation] to these various projects, the money isn't trickling down by and large to the local jurisdictions, in the State.
>
> I would like the Foundation to know that this work is important to us, but it's one piece, a small piece of what this whole entire court does. So, when they ask for information, they need to give us a lot of notice in advance or prep us for that.

The perceptions manifested themselves in a general skepticism of the Foundation's intent. Several interview participants perceived that their organization's good work was being usurped by the Foundation:

> I think what was an interesting dynamic ever since I've been involved in this project is the rhetoric very clearly moved from accelerating change that was already happening, catalyzing what was already going on in the system to this is the Foundation's Project. It's became let's do some good … to let's take credit for what's going on.
>
> I think that the theory that [the Foundation] came in trying to put in a relatively small amount of money to accelerate the pace of reform has at times been problematic because people see [the Foundation] trying to take credit for things that were going on ahead of time and that they were doing of their own accord. So the framing of that has been really important, and I think people are getting more and more frustrated....

The perceptions that arise from a mismatch of resources needed by the organization from the donor can create a mistrust between the partners. The ambiguity of who the lead is and whose resources created the intended change is evident in the quotations. The interventions provided to agency partners focused on fulfilling gaps that in some cases were not present and thus were not needed by some of the agencies. The lack of need for the resources offered heightened ambiguity about which partner was responsible for the gains achieved in the communities. While the resources offered were always used by partner agencies, there is less clarity about the extent to which they were needed to achieve the outcomes sought. In the cases where there was good internal and external capacities, the intangible resources offered created little benefit for the agencies while obligating them to the duties of the partnership. This resulted in negative perceptions of the Foundation for these partners. The agency had little to gain to mitigate their critical contingencies and the marginal cost of the partnership was greater than the marginal benefit to achieving their mission.

Drawing on the findings in this and the previous section, mutuality suggests that while addressing mission needs is a starting point, partner organizations may be highly motivated by organizational and process outcomes, in addition to mission-oriented outcomes. Typically, descriptions of government partnerships with external partners, such as Foundations, treat the agency as a pass through of sorts. The resources come into the agency but then pass out to the community in some way, and is focused on mission outcomes. But the findings presented here suggest that agency partners may not be completely altruistic or satisfied in acting as a conduit. Instead, the agency may also seek to gain some *organizational* outcomes in addition to mission outcomes. This is a novel contribution from this study. Further, absent organizational need, the contributions to mission outcomes need to be concrete and tangible, rather than the intangible contributions made in this intervention study. This is a second novel contribution from our study.

Given these findings we offer the following propositions:

> **Proposition 3:** When there is mutuality among interorganizational partners and the recipient has few organizational needs that inhibit mission achievement, the recipient organization will not perceive the marginal benefit of the partnership to be greater than the marginal cost and will result in tensions in the partnership.

> **Research Question c**: What are the relative importance of organizational versus mission outcomes, and under what circumstances do those relative weightings apply?

> **Proposition 4:** When there is mutuality among interorganizational partners and the recipient has few organizational needs that inhibit mission achievement, tangible financial contributions to the organization become more important than other kinds of intangible contributions.

> **Research Question b (repeated)**: Under what conditions do different kinds of resources matter and when are they effective?

Overall, multiple and overlapping need is associated with positive perceptions of the Foundation in its work with government. Neither needs indicated by sociodemographic and social service demand causal conditions themselves, or the magnitudes of those needs, seemed to differentiate between partnership perceptions. Rather these needs contributed to a confirmation that societal and community needs undergird any positive perceptions of the Foundation held by government agency partners, and likely drive the initial engagement between the partners. The imbalances created by these needs

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conform to traditional conceptualizations of resource-based power in interorganizational relationships.

The differentiation between positive and negative relationships in these government–Foundation partnerships was the need demonstrated by the implementing agencies themselves—whether or not the agencies themselves (rather than the context in which they operate) had operational gaps. Throughout the empirical context, governments maintained their authority-based power, and Foundations their expertise/legitimacy-based power. The crux was centered on relevant resources. In this intervention, the resources provided by the Foundation were related to improving an agency's organizational capacity through knowledge transfer and access to external consultants. Agencies with well-functioning and strong organizational processes had a mutuality with the Foundation that fundamentally changed the dynamic among the partners—creating the situational difference that required a different type of relationship. It created a situation where the resources offered were marginal but not additive (as in the jurisdictions where there were capacity needs). Instead, recipient agencies identified a mismatch on the resources the agency needed and those the Foundation was willing to give.

Mutuality in interorganizational relationships creates different power dynamics than in traditional partnership conceptualizations that are based in asymmetry. Our findings suggest that organizational process outcomes may be a key factor in the positive valuation of those relationships ("what have you done for me lately"). While the Foundation and nonprofit literature often emphasizes mission as a driver for partnerships, mission match is not a sufficient criterion for perceptions of a successful partnership when there is mutuality. Instead, mutuality leads to ambiguity. Ambiguity leads to negative perceptions.

In addition to adding a focus on mutuality to the literature, we also identified two important nuances to the existing theory that are ripe for investigation. First, that we need to look beyond financial and other tangible resource transfers and understand the role of intangible contributions in partnerships—under what conditions do the different kinds of contributions work? When/how are they most effective? And second, that governments may not simply be facilitative entities to get resources, goods, and services to jurisdictional recipients. Agencies may be seeking instrumental organizational goals as well. Exploring both of these concepts systematically will make our existing theories on power more accurate for this class of partnerships. Through these investigations, we can push the limits of our knowledge and our theories of power. Our study points to a place to begin exploring this dynamic.

A CALL TO RESEARCH

Conceptual and empirical work on public organizations have not focused on power, largely due to the presumed role of government as the superordinate in their partnerships. While in most partnerships this presumption is upheld, an eschewing of an examination of power serves to overlook a small, but important, number of instances where the coercive authority and resource power bases are compromised. A research agenda that re-examines known truths about power is necessary to discover how power plays out under different resource contribution schemes, as well as under mutuality.

Theories of power were in vogue in the 1960s and 1970s, but became thought of as a blunt tool to understand partnerships in favor of more subtle theories of relationships. While interorganizational relationships (IORs) became the dominant paradigm to study the exchange relationships among organizational partners (c.f. Oliver 1990; Van de Ven and Walker 1984), these theories were based on an understanding of power that undergirded the theories to explain how these relationships came about and functioned. This understanding was hierarchical in orientation and supposed a super- and subordinate structure, as well was exchange oriented as primarily an exchange of money for goods or natural resources as inputs. From these organizational theories developed with firms came our understandings of how government partnerships work.

As our work here illustrates, these assumptions and foundational tenets hold even in relationships with government and their external partners. But there are also instances that are not explained by the existing theories. First, a research program that investigates how marginal financial and nonfinancial contributions within partnerships contribute to partnership quality and outcomes is important. The work in this article focuses on nonfinancial contributions such as the intangible resources of knowledge and capacity through access to consultants and technical assistance. The role and value of nonfinancial, and particularly intangible resources such as "know how," to partnerships is unknown. Further, the mechanisms by which intangible inputs in lieu of, or in combination with, (potentially marginal) financial resources are made effective needs exploration. There are also important questions around the circumstances under which organizations are "ready" to receive intangible versus tangible nonfinancial versus financial contributions. How do needs interact with these contributions? It does no good for an organization to receive inputs they are unable or unwilling to use. There are interesting questions around how organizations define their needs—whether in financial terms or more process and instrumental terms—that could yield important insights. These questions would expand existing theories of power to be more comprehensive.

The second area of expansion for theories of power is on an explicit focus of mutuality. As noted earlier, mutuality is noted in the power literature, but mostly relegated to textbooks with an acknowledgment that mutuality can exist—not as an explicit focus of empirical investigation or conceptual development. The lack of development around mutuality hinders our understanding of the full range of power dynamics among partners—arguably an important justification for further development in and of itself. And while our theories are capable of explaining most relationships, it misses a nontrivial (and growing) minority of cases that have important consequences for the conduct of public business.

However, further development of theories of partnerships under conditions of mutuality can benefit a wider set of partnerships than merely those between US local governments and philanthropic Foundations. A fuller development of knowledge about mutuality in partnerships can contribute to understanding any relationships that exhibit more symmetry than asymmetry. The call to research is on theoretical grounds and is focused on the comprehensiveness and inclusiveness of the existing theories, rather than the specific instance of this kind of relationship included here. Thus, the questions posed here in this call to research should be generalizable to any partnerships that operate under conditions of mutuality.

Fundamental to further investigations of mutuality are boundary and scope conditions. The bounds of the concept of mutuality needs to be identified as an important central component of this research program. Questions of real versus perceived, or actualized versus latent asymmetry can also be fruitful areas of investigation to further build out a comprehensive theory of power among organizational partners. Each of these questions centers on how an organization defines and perceives their organizational needs and how particular partners can address them.

Notwithstanding the generalizability of the questions a research agenda on power mutuality can answer, there are also questions specific to government partnerships with external agents that merit attention. What are the circumstances under which mutuality is likely to emerge among government and their external partners? To what extent is asset specificity a concern with government partnerships and their external partners? And in particular, does mutuality enhance or suppress the anti-democratic concerns lodged by critics?

The work detailed here suggests that it is in cases of mutuality that concerns about the anti-democratic critiques of foundation influence on public sector programs may be allayed. In instances of mutuality, public agencies can resist foundation influence by asserting their will over the processes and programs proposed, and/or end the partnership if it does not suit them. In these cases, the partnership is only of marginal benefit and the contributions may not be crucial for realizing desired outcomes. However, to the extent that government agencies continue to be under resourced and foundations are willing to provide much needed resources to fill gaps that enable mission achievement, the questions of the impact on democratic ideals remain—and these asymmetrical relationships are by far more common than those characterized by mutuality.

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Human Subjects

Institutional Review Board approval was obtained from Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health's IRB.

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