

# **LEADING SUCCESSFUL INTERINSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATIONS USING THE COLLABORATION SUCCESS MEASUREMENT MODEL**

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## **Introduction**

Increasing numbers of higher education institutions are entering into collaborative partnerships to address the accountability and cost control pressures existing in the current political and social environment. In order for these interinstitutional relationships to be successful, faculty and administrative leaders need to acquire a working knowledge of collaboration theory and an understanding of the factors that assist in the development of successful interinstitutional collaborations. Institutions interested in collaboration also need collaborative models to guide their actions when forming, interacting in, and assessing their collaborative efforts in order to create effective and sustainable partnerships. These models will assist institutions in developing action steps to guide their collaborations.

The data presented in this paper was collected during Czajkowski's (2006) study of 52 Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) member institutions of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Eighty-one percent (81%) of the 52 institutions represented public institutions with 70% representing two-year community colleges and 30% representing four-year institutions granting bachelor's degrees or higher. The purpose of the study was to determine if a group of collaboration success factors could be identified in collaboration literature that would be supported by these 52 institutions that were currently involved in collaborative partnerships. These success factors, once identified, would provide the foundation for development of a collaboration success measurement model for institutions to use

when developing, interacting in, and assessing their interinstitutional collaborations (Czajkowski, 2006).

### Coordination, Cooperation and Collaboration

One of the problems when studying interorganizational relationships in higher education is defining the variety of terms used to identify these relationships. Three relationship processes are identified in the literature on interorganizational relationships: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. In practice the term collaboration is commonly interchanged with cooperation and coordination. Each word, however, carries a different meaning and exhibits a different level of formality and structure (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001; Hord, 1986).

#### *Cooperation*

Cooperation refers to a simple verbal agreement between organizations to take some kind of unified action to make their autonomous programs more successful (Hord, 1986). Each cooperating organization remains totally independent, takes no risk, and retains total authority (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001). Cooperation, therefore, is the most informal interorganizational relationship lacking any common mission, structure or joint planning (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001).

#### *Coordination*

Coordination is slightly more formal than cooperation because the coordinating parties determine that their individual missions are compatible and that they can work together to advance their separate, yet compatible, missions (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001; Hord, 1986). Coordination involves a low level of joint planning, sharing of resources, defining of compatible roles, and interdependent communication channels (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001). Some risk is experienced as the parties coordinate efforts that may or may not

be successful for both parties (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001). Each organization retains their autonomy and individual authority (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001).

### *Collaboration*

Collaboration is the most formal interorganizational relationship involving shared authority and responsibility for planning, implementation, and evaluation of a joint effort (Hord, 1986). In their meta-analysis of research literature on successful collaboration, Mattessich, Murray-Close and Monsey (2001) define collaboration as "...a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals" (p. 39). Collaboration brings autonomous organizations together to fulfill a common mission that requires comprehensive planning and communication on many levels (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001). In addition, the risk to each collaborating organization is greater because each member contributes its own resources and reputation (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001). Wood and Gray (1991) define collaboration as a process that "...occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain" (p. 146).

### Synthesis of Collaboration Success Factor in the Literature

The research literature on collaboration success factors seems to indicate that there is no single success factor responsible for creating successful interinstitutional collaborations and that institutions need to align several factors to some degree to insure effective collaboration (Mattessich and Monsey, 1992). The 21 collaboration success factors identified by Mattessich, Murray-Close and Monsey (2001) were used as categories to sort the success factors found in various research studies. Six key collaboration success factors and one emergent factor, outcomes assessment, were identified. These six categories were used as a framework for

measuring successful interinstitutional collaboration in higher education. The six collaboration factor categories synthesized from current literature are:

1. Trust and partner compatibility
2. Common and unique purpose
3. Shared governance and joint decision making
4. Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities
5. Open and frequent communication
6. Adequate financial and human resources

These six collaboration success factor categories provided the themes that were used to analyze and code the data collected from the 52 respondent institutions. Data were collected using three sources: (1) an adapted version of the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory (CFI) developed by Mattessich, Murray-Close and Monsey (2001) adapted with permission, (2) semi-structured telephone interviews of key respondents, and (3) review of extant data received from the key respondents. Findings were ranked and compared to the top six collaboration success factors synthesized from the literature in Table 1. These factors are most likely to impact the success of interinstitutional collaborations in higher education.

Table 1

Success Factors Ranked Across Data Sets

Rank	Literature	CFI	Interviews	Extant Data
1	Trust/respect	Benefits institution	Trust and respect	Purpose/goals
2	Common purpose	Political/social climate	Political/social climate	Benefits institution
3	Shared governance	Attainable goals	Communication	Roles/responsibilities
4	Roles & responsibilities	Trust and respect	Benefits institution	Outcomes assessment
5	Frequent communication	Communication	Outcomes assessment	Communication
6	Financial/human resources	Appropriate members	Attainable goals	Human resources

While Table 1 indicates the overall findings from the literature and the three data sets, it is difficult to read and to compare the findings. Therefore, in order to more clearly view the common and unique success factors identified by the higher education respondents, Table 2 was developed to list the factors found in the literature and the three data sets by success factor theme rather than by factor rank. Table 2 more clearly reflects the success factor themes that were supported across the data sets (Czajkowski, 2006).

Table 2

Common Success Factor Themes			
Literature Review	CFI	Interviews	Extant Data
Communication	Communication	Communication	Communication
Purpose*	Attainable goals	Attainable goals	Purpose/goals
	Benefits institution	Benefits institution	Benefits institution
Trust/respect	Trust/respect	Trust/respect	
Human resources	Human resources	Human resources	Human resources
Roles/responsibilities			Roles/responsibilities
	Political/social climate	Political/social climate	
		Outcomes assessment	Outcomes assessment
	Appropriate members		
Joint decision-making			

\*Note: Purpose and attainable goals were combined in Table 20 and considered common themes. A blank space indicates that the factor was not mentioned in that data set.

### Collaboration Theory

In order to create a collaboration model, the key factor themes listed in Table 2 need to be placed into a theoretical framework. The three stages of collaboration identified in Gray's (1989) seminal work on collaboration provided this framework. These three stages of collaboration include: (1) the precondition stage where collaborators come together to form the relationship, (2) the process stage where collaborators interact and make decisions, and (3) the

outcomes stage where collaborators assess the effectiveness of their efforts and adapt to change (Gray, 1989).

During the precondition stage, the parties come together to begin the partnership. Collaboration success factors found in the literature that relate to the formation stages fall into the precondition state. These factors include: determining the reasons for partnering, reviewing partner compatibility, defining the criteria for partner selection, and developing a common purpose, goals and objectives. Relationship factors are most critical at this stage with trust being the major relationship factor. Finally, sufficient human resources must be allocated before moving to the process stage (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001).

At the process stage partners must clearly identify their roles and responsibilities, create joint decision-making and governance processes, set up methods for open and frequent communications, and select a skilled convener (Mattessich, Murray-Close & Monsey, 2001). Fostering interdependence at this stage is critical. Installing shared governance or a joint decision-making process at this stage fosters interdependence. Joint decision making provides ownership of the collaboration by bringing partners together to develop plans to carry out the partnership agreement and identify organizational or systems changes that are needed to meet the goals of the partnership (Kanter, 1994). At the same time, the group must remain open to a variety of ways to organize to accomplish tasks and adjust the process if it is not moving the collaboration toward the goal. Commitment of sufficient human resources also fosters interdependence during the process stage. Partners must assign key people interested in the success of the collaboration to lead the project (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Finally, a formative evaluation should be completed at this stage (Gray & Wood, 1991).

At the outcomes stage, collaboration success is measured by assessing whether the expected outcomes defined at the precondition stage were met. The accuracy of the identified problem domain should also be assessed to determine if the needs of the target group were met and how effectively these needs were addressed. If additional needs or problems were identified, how these needs can be addressed must be evaluated. Summative program evaluation methods should be implemented at this stage to include whether and how the collaboration itself may have been transformed during the process stage (Gray & Wood, 1991). Summative evaluation feedback loops should be established to determine whether the collaboration should continue, be restructured or ended.

These three stages of collaboration provided the theoretical foundation into which the collaboration success themes identified in Table 2 are embedded to create the Collaboration success Measurement Model presented in Table 3 that reflects the success themes found in collaboration literature and Czajkowski's 2006 research study.

Table 3

The Collaboration Success Measurement Model – Success Themes

Precondition Stage Themes	Process Stage Themes	Outcomes Stage Themes
Communication	Communication	Communication
Benefits to institution		Benefits to institution
Political/social climate		
Trust/respect	Roles and Responsibilities	
Purpose and attainable goals	Trust/respect	Purpose and attainable goals
Human resources		
Cross-section of members		
		Outcomes Assessment
	Joint decision-making*	

\*Joint decision-making is included in this model because it was supported in the literature reviewed and considered critical to true collaboration by Gray (1989).

Each success theme is embedded into the most appropriate collaboration stage in the model. Several themes are listed under more than one stage if they are important at multiple

stages (Czajkowski, 2006). For example, communication is listed under each stage because it is an over-arching success theme that is required for at all stages. This supports Kanter's (1994) contention that collaborations must be developed through interpersonal connections. Trust and respect are listed in two stages because trust must be present at the outset of collaboration and must also be cultivated during the collaboration process (Czajkowski, 2001). Benefits to the institution along with the purpose and goals of the collaboration must be identified at precondition stage and reviewed again at the outcomes assessment stage to determine if benefits were realized and whether identified goals were met (Czajkowski, 2006).

To further develop the success themes, action steps listed in Table 4 were developed for each stage of collaboration to help institutions address each success theme in practice.

Institutions may use these themes and suggested action steps to develop their own individualized success measurement models (Czajkowski, 2006).

Table 4

The Collaboration Success Measurement Model – Action Steps

Precondition Stage	Process Stage	Outcomes Stage
Identify benefits for the institutions	Define roles and responsibilities	Collect and review measurable data
Timing – Scan political climate	Set formal communication channels	Determine if goals were met
Timing – Scan social climate	Monitor political/social climate	Assess accuracy of problem domain
Define purpose and attainable goals	Adjust group membership	Feed information back to process
Select partners you respect/trust	Select a skilled convener	Complete summative evaluation
Select appropriate members	Create decision-making process	Continue/disband the collaboration
Commit human resources	Develop measures for goals	Identify emergent problems
Assess trust levels	Assess trust levels	Assess trust levels
	Complete formative evaluation	



## Conclusion

The Collaboration Success Measurement Model developed as an outgrowth of existing literature on collaboration success and the data obtained from Czajkowski's (2006) study of 52 AQIP institutions. The emergent factor of outcomes assessment identified as an important factor by higher education institutions, must be completed in order to leaders to measure the success of their interinstitutional collaborations. The Collaboration Success Measurement Model will assist all types of higher education institutions when initiating, experiencing, and assessing the outcomes and relative success of their interinstitutional collaborations (Czajkowski, 2006).

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