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Collaboration: Investigating the Convergence between Theory and Practice

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Abstract: Improving the practice of collaboration among public, private and the non-governmental sectors is critical given the urgency, importance and complexity of the problems that need resolving to improve quality of life for everyone. Advancing the practice of collaboration requires a sturdy reciprocal relationship between theory and practice in which theory informs practice and practice informs theory. This study seeks to determine the extent to which theoretically deduced concepts of collaboration actually mesh with empirically derived concepts of collaboration. The study employed a series of listening sessions and a telephone survey to collect data from community-based organizations (CBOs) to identify empirical elements, which COBs consider important in forming successful collaboratives. These elements and the underlying dimensions derived by factor analysis are compared with concepts deduced from a review of the extant literature. Results show that, in general, there is a high degree of convergence between the theory and the practice of collaboration in the sample studied, although there are a few gaps in practice based on the theoretical prescriptions and a few differences in how some concepts are operationalized in practice. Understanding the factors that promote collective action will improve our chances of building collaboratives that can achieve collective impact.

Key words: community-based organizations; collective Impact; collaborative decision-making; collaboration; complex problems

JEL codes: D70, D71, C38

1. Introduction

Belief in the value of collaborative effort stems from the realization that many pressing socio-economic problems are messy, complex phenomenon (George, 1994; Thomas & Gunden, 2010) and adaptive in nature (Heifetz, Kania & Kramer, 2004). These problems are beyond the capacity of any single group or organization to solve, and have not responded well to top-down prescriptive single solutions. Problems in the domain of health care, natural resource management, poverty and drug use are typical complex problems (Gray & Wood, 1991; Reilly, 2001; Kania & Kramer, 2011). Solving many important problems that impinge on quality of life issues

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depends on our ability to work collaboratively to achieve collective impact, where multiple organizations learn, share and act together from the same perspective leading to emergent solutions with powerful systemic outcomes (Kania & Kramer, 2013). As Giddens (2003) observed, society can be likened to a three-legged stool where each of the three legs represents the public sector, private sector and the civil sector (NGOs and CBOs[1]). The implication is that each sector must not only shoulder its responsibility in supporting the effective functioning of society but must also do so in unison or collaborate to achieve efficient and effective functioning of society; this is especially so in the face of increasing complexity. This reality signals the need to advance collaborative practice.

Advancing our understanding of collaborative practice hinges on an active interaction between theory and practice, in which theory informs practice and practice informs theory through feedback and double loop learning. Therefore, to promote the continued advancement of collaboration it is necessary to assess the degree of consistency between theoretical prescriptions and actual practice in order to reveal potential opportunities for improving both the theory and practice of collaboration.

This paper is organized as follows. First, we proceed with a review of the dominant theoretical perspectives on collaborative relationships. Second, we deduce from our discussion of the literature the primary normative elements of the collaboration construct. Third, we compare a cluster of normative elements with those derived empirically from a survey of community action agencies (CAAs)[2] and a case study of Greensboro Crisis Resolution Center (GCRC) and Greensboro United Way (GUW) Collaborative Alliance — a multi-agency collaborative effort established to resettle survivors of hurricane Rita and Katrina in Greensboro(Davis, Gray and Thomas, 2006). This comparison is made in an effort to identify the degree of congruence between the prescriptions in the literature and the concepts that guide collaborative practice among community groups. We then provide an operational interpretation of the concepts based on insights gleaned from listening sessions involving CAAs and the GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance efforts in Greensboro. We conclude with a discussion of the implication of our analysis for practice, theory and policy.

2. Theoretical Perspectives on the Collaboration Process

2.1 Defining Collaboration

Collaboration is defined variously as: a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible (Gray, 1989); and as a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem engaged in interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to a problem domain (Wood & Gray, 1991) — this is a revision of Gray's 1989 definition following a critical review of definitions offered by Fleisher (1991), Hayes et al. (1989), Logsdon (1991), Golich (1991), Pasquero (1991), Roberts (1991), Selsky (1991) and Westley and Vredenburg (1991). A more recent perspective on collaboration views it as a collective impact initiative where there is long term commitment by important stakeholders from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem. And where collaborative action is supported by a shared measurement system, reinforcing activities, continuous communication and an independent administrative structure that supports the activities of the collaborative (Kania & Kramer, 2011).

[1] CBOs are private or public not for profit organizations that are organized and controlled by community residents to serve the needs of a community.

[2] CAAs are community-based organizations which were organized to lead the fight against poverty at the local level following the enactment of 1964 Economic Opportunity Act.

Making clear what a concept represents enables us to identify its constituent components and differentiate it from other concepts. Based on their 1991 definition described above, Wood and Gray (1991) specified the following constituent elements of a collaborative alliance:

(1) *Stakeholders of a problem domain*. This phrase refers to all groups or organizations with an interest in the particular problem domain. Groups may have similar or different interests at the outset of the collaborative effort, but these interests may evolve or become redefined over time as the collaborative process develops. It is important to note that, in practice, not all stakeholders in a problem domain may become involved in the collaborative process at the outset. For example, there are several CBOs working to address issues related to poverty in the Black Belt Region (BBR) of the U.S South, but there are several of these groups that are not involved in a collaborative process, although they are members of the problem domain we can identify as the poverty domain.

(2) *Autonomy of stakeholders*. Stakeholders in a collaborative alliance retain their autonomy. That is, they make the decision whether to retain or to what degree to relinquish their independent decision-making power. Note that if stakeholders relinquish all their decision-making authority, a collaborative alliance no longer exists; a different form of organization would be created — an organization akin to an entity with formal structure, formal lines of authority and processes.

Interactive process. Stakeholders involved in a collaborative alliance are engaged in a change-oriented relationship for some period of time. All stakeholders are involved in an active participative exchange of ideas as they become animated and fully engaged in dialogue to establish norms, rules, structure and direction for the collaborative alliance.

(3) *Shared rules, norms, and structure.* Stakeholders must work to develop a set of agreed on rules and norms that will govern their interactive process and guide the collaborative alliance in carrying out its tasks. Structuring refers to defining roles, relationships and responsibilities of the collaborative alliance — the frame work within which the stakeholders will operate. Structure is usually conceptualized as temporary and evolving, although more permanent forms of collaborative alliances such as joint ventures, federations and associations may develop over time. But even these are subjected to dissolution and realignment. For this reason, the authors believe that collaboration should be viewed as a shared structure, a dynamic framework subjected to realignment and dissolution.

Actions or decisions. Groups enter into collaborative alliances to take decisions to address problems of import to them — the collaborative alliance has an objective. Therefore, in a collaborative alliance the participants must intend to act or decide, although this does not mean that the stated objective must be realized for collaboration to occur. According to the authors, collaboration can be said to exist as long as stakeholders engage in a process that is directed at taking action or making a decision.

(4) *Domain orientation.* A collaborative alliance must orient its actions, processes, and resources toward addressing issues related to the problem domain that brought them together in the first place. The problem domain may be defined as the set of organizations, groups or individuals that become joined by a common concern, issue or problem. For example, community based organizations (CBOs) working to address poverty in the Black Belt Region of the Southeastern U.S. A problem domain may be as broad as addressing poverty in the Black Belt region (BBR), or as narrow as groups working to address child care issues in a specific community in the BBR. The collaborative alliance should address issues that are related to the domain's future, although collaborative alliances may vary with respect to the scope of decisions made and their effect on the future of the collaborative. In some instances, a collaborative emerges to address a problem that spans many "domains". For example, the

GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance comprising multiple groups with disparate missions ranging from: providing child care, after school programs, job training and placement, health care and housing; collaborated to provide services for resettling survivors of hurricane Katrina and Rita. As one member of a CAA explained, in some instances you have to step outside of your mission in order to work collaboratively to address a dire need.

(5) *Outcomes.* The authors note that several of the case studies reviewed specified particular outcomes toward which the collaborative alliance is focused. For example, focus on working with ideas and materials to produce change (Roberts & Bradley,1991)an increase in systematic capacity to respond to the environment (Selsky, 1991) and a vehicle for social change (Pasquero, 1991). In actual practice, a collaborative may describe its intended outcome in more specific or concrete terms such as improving graduation rates or providing services to resettle displaced survivors of a hurricane.

2.2 Precedent Conditions for Collaboration

The foregoing conceptualization of collaboration is not circumscribed by specifics related to which stakeholder and how many will be involved in the alliance, at what level of social organization the collaborative will develop, whether the structure will be temporary or permanent, the nature of the outcome or whether the alliance will succeed. These, according to the authors, remain in the realm of empirical investigation and classification devices. Several forms of groups and organizations are excluded by this conceptual definition of collaboration. Groups such as blue ribbon panels, clubs with no problem solving goal, and legal entities such as corporations whose members have no autonomy with regards to the decision-making process would not be described as collaborative alliances.

Using the work of McCann as a foundation, Gray 1985 synthesized the results of case studies from Gray and Hay (1986), Gray and McCann (1984 unpublished), Gricar and Grown (1981), Kaplan (1980), Lawless (1982), McCann (1980), Taber et al. (1979) and Trist (1977) into a framework of conditions which lead to collaboration. McCann (1983) made the observation that inter-organizational domains evolve through three sequential phases of collaborative development: problem setting, direction setting and structuring. Figure1 identifies the facilitative or precursor activities of problem-setting, direction-setting and structuring. Facilitative conditions required to ensure the realization of the problem setting phase are: stakeholders with the relevant expertise, experience and capacity to contribute to defining the problem, recognizing interdependence among stake holders, the sharing of power among stakeholders, a skilled convener to facilitate the process, and a positive expectation that the desired outcome will be realized. Similarly, precursor conditions for direction-setting include: stakeholders communicating their values and defining and acknowledging a sense of common purpose and articulating a vision for the collaborative. Finally, structuring is facilitated by a high degree of interdependence, external mandates which drives groups toward collaborating, a redistribution of power that enables individual stakeholders to address the problem as it affects them and the ability to influence the environmental context to support collaborative action. Structuring specifies how stakeholders will be configured in terms of roles, relationships and processes for carrying out the activities of the collaborative alliance in the problem domain. Thus, the concept of collaborative alliance previously discussed is consistent with theorized sequential phase of the collaborative process presented above.

Jennings (1993) offers another perspective on collaborative work. From his view, joint intentions are central to collaborative work. He defines joint intension as a mutual commitment to work collectively while in a shared mental state. This expressed commitment under conditions of a shared mental state is essential for distinguishing collaborative action from merely working together. Features of this commonly shared mental state that are

important for collaborative action are:

- Agreement on a common goal.
- Agreement to collaborate to achieve their shared aim.
- Agreement on a common means (plan) of reaching their objective.
- Acknowledge that actions performed by different agents are related.
- Have criteria for tracking the rationality of their commitments.
- Have behavioral rules that define how to behave locally and towards others both when joint action is progressing as planned and when it runs into difficulty.

These features are quite similar to the primary elements of collaboration which Gray et al. (1985) identified. The idea of joint intensions and a shared mental state signal that collaboration is not defined by the activity of collaborating or just working together, but rather by the commitment of the parties to the collaborative process described above. Jennings' perspective of collaboration described above is conceptually similar to the concepts illustrated in Figure 1.

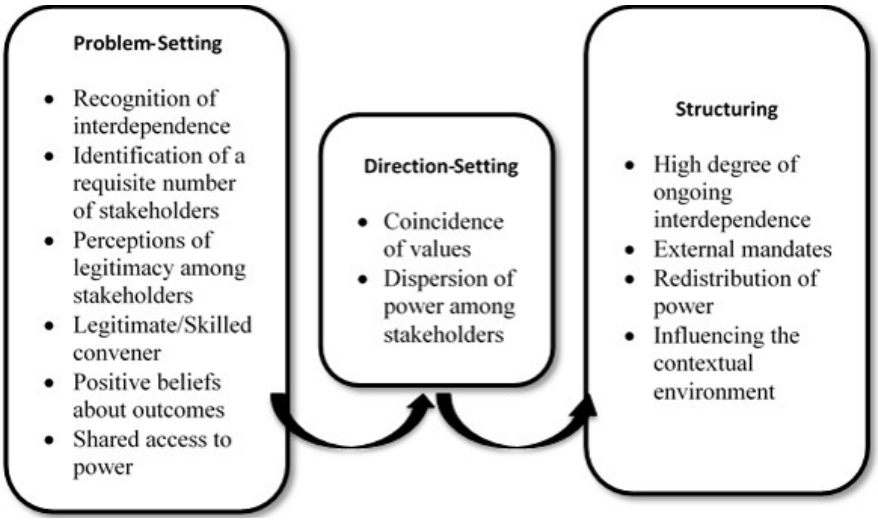

Figure 1 Facilitative Conditions at Each Phase of Collaboration

Adopted from Gray, 1985, p. 918

Although collaboration has broad intuitive appeal it is not a panacea for solving problems. The objective of collaboration is to leverage value through focused collective action by individuals or groups who are mentally attuned to and committed to collective action as a means of attaining their desired objective. Hansen (2009) draws attention to the need for disciplined collaboration — the act of leadership determining when to collaborate and when not to collaborate and cultivating in people the willingness and capacity to collaborate to produce results. Collaboration will not happen without the unwavering support of leadership. Leaders must epitomize a collaborative leadership style; that is, involve others in decision-making, portray a vision of the broad goal of the collaborative that eclipses narrow agendas and be accountable for actions and accept responsibility for errors (Hansen, 2009).

To summarize, Hansen's suggestions for disciplined collaboration involve: evaluating opportunities for collaboration across organizational units, identifying the barriers to collaboration, and taking steps to address them and practicing a collaborative leadership style. The barriers to collaboration would include: the not invented here

barrier, which refers to the unwillingness of groups or individuals to reach out to others to get the resources they need to act collectively; the hoarding barrier, which refers to the tendency for groups or individuals to hold onto, keep or refusing to share resources; the search barrier which is the difficulty of identifying who has the relevant resources or where it is located and the transfer barrier, which refers to the difficulty of transferring expertise, information, knowledge or know-how.

Reilly (2001) approached the analysis of the collaborative alliance from a slightly different perspective from that of Gray (1985); Gray (1991a; 1991b). However, Reilly's core concepts share similarities with the Gray's ideas. In his review, Reilly (2001) identified the following factors as central to the internal operations of a collaborative alliance: a central purpose that incorporates a shared vision and a need for action; membership that is diverse; a structure that supports the collaborative alliance — clearly defined roles, agreed upon ground rules, open communication; an open process that enables the accomplishment of goals and a process that finds favor with those in power and stakeholders; and adequate resources. These elements are, essentially, similar to the ones Gray (1985 and 1991) identified. Additionally, Reilly (1991) also proposed a phase-model based on findings from a number of case studies that included both successful collaborative activity and unsuccessful ones. The model includes the following elements which are similar to items illustrated in Figure 1: Path identification which is similar to problem setting, formation and implementation which encompass elements of direction setting and structuring, engagement/maintenance which also contains elements of structuring and direction setting.

Based on the foregoing review, we can infer that collaborative alliances will flourish when:

- The alliance brings together the resources needed to address the challenges of the problem domain
- Agree on a common goal and plan of action;
- A convener is employed to bring participants together
- Efforts are made to involve a diverse set of stakeholders
- Outcomes are satisfying — positive outcomes produced and results are achieved
- Have criteria for checking the rationality of their commitment
- Power is well distributed-equal status and respect for all participants, rules of behavior established
- Problems are relevant and significant to the domain,
- Values are coincident and trust is high — there is joint commitment to the collaborative
- Collaborative is proactive in responding to challenges
- Legitimacy of membership in the problem domain
- A structure that supports the collaborative alliance
- Recognition of interdependence

The conceptual elements listed above represent a synthesis of elements from the literature that facilitate the formation of a collaborative in any problem domain in business or the social sector — a prescriptive or normative model of collaborative alliance. The purpose of this paper is to assess the degree of consistency between theoretical prescriptions and actual practice in order to reveal potential opportunities for improving both the theory and practice of collaboration.

3. Collaboration in Practice

Here we use the experience of CAAs and the (GCRC)/(GUW) collaborative alliance to offer an interpretation of the elements in Figure 1 derived from the foregoing review:

(1) *Recognition of interdependence* signifies the complexity of the problem domain and the enormity of the problem which is beyond the capacity of any single organization in the domain to fix; essentially, groups lack the resources to address the problem by themselves. The collaborative process will be strengthened when stakeholders share the same mental predisposition toward the problem and there is a mutual commitment among them to work together. That is, stakeholders recognize the value of the contribution made by each other and the synergy that flows from their collective action. For example, CAAs recognized that getting the unemployed back into the active workforce and keeping them there mean more than providing the requisite job skills. It also means more than one organization will be collaborating to ensure that the unemployed have the capacity to get to work, and that they have access to day care for children, after school programs for school age children, and access to affordable housing among other things.

(2) *Identification of requisite numbers of stake holders* — indicates the need to define the boundaries of the problem. In practice it is similar to what Dunn (1994) described as boundary analysis. A technique employed in problem structuring to ensure that a sufficiently diverse perspective of the problem is taken into account in the definition of the problem. Similarly, in a collaborative alliance it is important to capture the right mix or level of diversity of stakeholders in the problem domain. Diversity brings a mix of resources and ideas to the table, which strengthen the innovative and problem solving capacity of the collaborative alliance. Perception of legitimacy among stakeholders speaks to potential contribution of stakeholders to the collaborative alliance — what is it they bring to the table and do they have a right to be there. For example, the GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance needed to ensure that there was sufficient diversity of capacity among participating organizations to provide the range of services required to meet the needs of the survivors of hurricane Katrina and Rita.

(3) *Legitimate and skilled convener* — addresses the need for someone with the right degree of influence and status among stakeholders to initiate the collaborative process and or facilitate the collaborative alliance in achieving its purpose (Gray, 1991; Lasker, 2001). The 32 groups that joined the GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance affirmed that a trusted and respected convener was very instrumental in getting groups to participate. In the language of the literature, this means problem setting, direction setting and structuring the collaborative effort to provide for the needs of the survivors

(4) *Positive beliefs about outcomes* — indicate stakeholders' belief that they will be able to accomplish their purpose and that the established goals of the collaborative alliance are relevant to the problem domain. Stakeholders must believe that the benefit of participation will outweigh the cost of collaborating — collaboration will produce positive outcomes.

(5) *Shared access to power* — captures the idea that all stakeholders must perceive that they possess equal capability to influence the direction and development of the collaborative effort. Extreme power differences can negatively impact both problem setting and direction setting (Gray, 1985). In the case of GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance, the 32 groups that participated in that collaborative alliance attributed the success of their efforts to the fact that each group in the alliance had equal power — enjoyed equal status — in problem setting, direction setting and structuring of the collaborative effort. They indicated that having equal power and the assurance that every group would be treated equally was a precondition for entering into the collaborative relationship (Davis, Gray & Thomas, 2006). It was emphasized that no individual group would be allowed to make press releases concerning the effort and that any such release would be made by the convener of the collaborative.

(6) *Coincidence of values* — this element of the collaborative process directs our attention to the fact that

where groups share a collective appreciation for the problem and the set of values that direct their search for a solution, the overall collaborative process is facilitated and enhanced. Operationally, this means groups in the same network or problem domain is likely to share similar values based on a common interest in similar problems. A shared set of values will also lead to leadership commitment to the collaborative and what it stands for. Initially, if groups harbor incompatible values and divergent perspectives of the problem, a robust search process must be facilitated to find common ground. Usually, a vibrant interactive process is necessary to achieve coincident values. In many cases, dialogue will lead to increase understanding, trust and confidence in the collaborative alliance. Insights from the listening sessions with CAAs and the GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance suggest that the skilled convener/facilitator plays a very important role in clarifying values and aligning them to support the work of the collaborative.

(7) *Influencing the contextual environment* — this element indicates that stakeholders will act to formalize a collaborative alliance in order to respond to ongoing threats or evolving challenges in the problem domain. For example, in the case of the GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance, the United Way of Greensboro and the City of Greensboro took the decision to formalize the collaborative alliance in order to respond expeditiously to future emergencies or disasters. We would also point out that satisfaction with their achievement in addressing the needs of the survivors also served as a powerful motive in taking the decision to establish a structure for responding to future threats from the environment.

(8) *External mandates* — in many cases groups form collaborative alliances to address a need in a problem domain or because of mandates or edicts from higher authorities. For example, Guilford County in North Carolina requires municipalities to have an emergency response plan to meet the challenges of an emergency or a disaster. In response to this mandate, GCRC and GUW facilitated the creation of the GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance which brought several civic groups together to form a formally structured collaborative alliance for responding to the needs of survivors of hurricane Katrina and Rita and future emergencies.

4. Methodology

4.1 Instrument

An instrument was developed to gather data from the perspective of Community Action Agencies (CAAAS) regarding what they considered to be the important factors for promoting successful collaboration among groups working to address community problems. An iterative process involving the following steps was used to develop the instrument:

(1) 12 listening sessions were conducted in nine southeastern states to collect rich data from members of CAAs on factors they considered important in developing collaborative alliances. Comments from listening sessions participants were analyzed and 14 items were selected for constructing a preliminary questionnaire for collecting data from the population of CAAs in the study area. These items are listed in Table 1.

(2) Two community leaders reviewed the preliminary questionnaire to confirm the salience and relevance of the items distilled from the listening session comments. Adjustments were made to the instrument based on feedback from the two CAA leaders.

(3) A 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 7 (extremely important) to 1(not important) was used to measure respondents' response to the question: in your opinion, how important is each item in promoting collaboration among groups working to address community problems? A list of items on the questionnaire is provided in Table 1.

4.2 Sample

The population for the survey was defined as community action agencies (CAAs) in eleven southeastern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Virginia. A list of the community action agencies and telephone numbers were obtained from the website of the National Association of Community Action Agencies. The population frame comprised 344 CAAs. Because the population was relatively small we decided to include all community action agencies in the study. We chose to conduct a telephone survey since we were able to obtain telephone numbers for all CCAs. Six enumerators were trained over two three hour sessions to conduct the survey.

5. Results

The telephone survey resulted in 124 completed surveys with a response rate of approximately 36%. Reliability test of the instrument yielded and alpha of 0.85, other descriptive statistics are provided in Table 2.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics for Factors CAAs Consider Important in Promoting Successful Collaboration

Items	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Relevance of the problem	122	1	7	6.39	1.22
Access to resources	122	1	7	6.28	1.14
Leadership commitment	123	2	7	6.37	1.04
Flexibility of groups' operating procedures	123	2	7	5.98	1.09
Trust among the groups	122	1	7	6.38	1.14
Problem significance	119	2	7	6.09	1.28
Degree of diversity among groups	121	1	7	5.72	1.33
Board support	123	2	7	6.55	0.91
Executive Director's support	123	2	7	6.59	0.91
Membership in network	121	1	7	5.81	1.26
Group's authority to commit resources	122	2	7	6.16	1.04
Influential individual or groups to coordinate collaboration	124	2	7	5.85	1.14
Partners should enjoy equal status	124	2	7	5.78	1.29
Groups capacity to adopt procedures to meet special needs	119	2	7	5.89	1.18

The data in Table 2 shows that respondents gave very high ratings to board and executive director's support for collaborating with others, relevance of the problem, trust among the groups, leadership commitment, access to resources, a groups' authority to commit resources, and problem significance. In this analysis, we regard a mean score greater than 90% of the scale to be a very high rating. Table 2 compares the empirical factors with those deduced from theory — the normative factors.

From a CAA's perspective, factors important to the practice of collaboration but not specifically identified in the literature (noted in italics) include: flexibility of the groups' operational procedures, groups' authority to commit resources and groups' capacity to adopt procedures to meet special needs. Likewise those deduced from the literature with no explicit or specific match with empirical factors (italicized) include: have criteria for checking the rationality of their commitment, collaborative is proactive in responding to challenges and the collaborative has a structure that supports the alliance. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis in an attempt to reveal any underlying dimensions around which the empirical elements listed in Table 3 would cluster. Factor analysis also offers us the opportunity to discover any perceptual processes of CAAs that may be responsible for producing the particular factor structure. We followed procedures outlined by Mertler & Vannatta (2002). The

method of extraction employed was principal component analysis. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 2 Comparison of Normative Elements Promoting Collaboration with Empirically Derived Elements

Elements Identified from Practice (Empirical Model)	Matching Elements Identified from the Literature (Normative Model)
Relevance of the problem	Problems are relevant to the domain
Access to resources	The alliance brings together the resources needed to address the challenges of the problem domain
Leadership commitment	Joint intention (mutual commitment to work collaboratively)
Flexibility of groups' operating procedures	*No match*
Trust among the groups	trust
Problem significance	Need to address problems that are important to the collaborating groups
Degree of diversity among groups	Efforts are made to involve a diverse set of stakeholders
Board support	Joint intention/Commitment (this may be viewed as commitment operationalized)
Executive Director's support	Joint intention/Commitment (this may be viewed as commitment operationalized)
Membership in network	Legitimacy of membership in the problem domain, values are coincident
Group's authority to commit resources	*No match*
Influential individual or group to coordinate collaboration	A convener is employed to bring participants together
Partners should enjoy equal status	Power is well distributed-equal status and respect for all participants
Groups' capacity to adapt procedures to meet special needs	
No match	*have criteria for checking the rationality of their commitment*
No match	*collaborative is proactive in responding to challenges*
No match	*a structure that supports the collaborative alliance*

Note: Italics indicate no specific match for either empirical or normative factors.

Table 3 Principal Component Analysis

	Factor Loadings		
Items	Component 1	Component 2	Component 3
Relevance of the problem	0.62		
Access to resources			0.73
Leadership commitment			0.64
Trust among the groups	0.68		
Problem significance	0.71		
Board support	0.77		
Executive Director's support	0.67		
Group's authority to commit resources			0.60
Influential individual or groups to coordinate collaboration		0.79	
Partnership should enjoy equal status		0.78	
Groups Capacity to adopt procedures to meet special needs		0.69	
Descriptive Statistics:			
Mean	6.681	6.151	6.558
Minimum	4.0	3.0	3.0
Maximum	7.0	7.0	7.0
Standard Deviation	0.693	0.908	0.719
Reliability Test (Cronbach's Alpha)	0.77	0.75	0.71

We applied the following criteria in deciding which components to retain: eigenvalue greater than one, the number of factors accounting for at least 70% of the total variance and the scree test as defined in Mertler and

Vannatta (2002). Based on these criteria we retained three components as shown in Table 3. Items with loadings of less than 0.6 on a component were excluded. Component number one included the following items: relevance of problem, trust among groups, problem significance, board support and executive directors' support. This component was labeled problem defining. Component number 2 included influential individual or group serving as convener, partners should enjoy equal status and groups' capacity to adopt procedures to meet special needs. This component was labeled process defining. Component 3 included access to resources, leadership commitment, and groups' authority to commit resources. This component was labeled resource provisioning.

6. Discussion

Factor analysis generated three underlying components that summarized CAAs' perspective of what is important in forming a collaborative relationship. These components are: problem defining, process designing and resource provisioning. The problem defining components suggests that CAAs wanted to make certain that the problem was relevant and significant enough to win the support of top leadership. They also wanted to ensure that sufficient trust would be generated as groups work together to achieve consensus on the significance and relevance of the problem in laying the foundation for building an effective working relationship. Secondly, the process defining component suggests that it is important to have a respected and influential individual to bring groups together and to guide them in developing the ground rules for the collaborative. They believed that ground rules should emphasize that all groups in the collaborative are equal partners with equal status, and they view it as important that groups have the capacity to adopt their operating procedures to meet the needs of the collaborative to accomplish agreed upon goals. In listening sessions, particularly with the GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance, groups insisted that individual groups should refrain from making press releases or make any attempt to capitalize on the work of the group to promote or build the image of any particular group. Finally, the resource provisioning component indicates that groups view the capacity of the collaborative to create access to resources, the capacity of groups to commit resources and leadership commitment to the collaborative effort as essential for the formation of a collaborative alliance. CAAs and the groups comprising the GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance often operate in what may be described as a "resource poor environment". Therefore, it is natural that these groups would view the capacity of the collaborative to improve access to resources and for the leadership of collaborating groups to commit resources needed for goal attainment as very important for promoting a collaborative alliance. For example, in the listening sessions we learned that each group brings to the table unique resources, whether it is expertise in providing access to low income housing, access to after school programs, clothing and food or job training. But if groups don't commit to configuring these resources or expertise to create collaborative access and control, then the collaborative won't have the resources needed to achieve its goals. It may also be that groups believe that the collaborative would be more effective at leveraging resources than any single group acting alone. Additionally, staff members of groups assigned to work with the collaborative alliance should be vested with sufficient authority to act. In the listening sessions with GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance, it was noted that insufficient authority to act led to unwanted delays in providing critical services to the survivors of hurricane Rita and Katrina.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, it seems that groups regard questions of leadership support and commitment to the collaborative

process to be very critical for success of the collaborative effort, given respondents' very high ratings of these items. This may seem a very mundane finding. But deeper understanding of operations on the ground may shed some light here. For example, our experience with the efforts of GCRC/GUW Collaborative Alliance indicate that it is usually staff persons who were assigned the responsibility of working together on a daily basis to make the collaborative effort work. Some of these people did not have sufficient authority to make important decisions when it mattered, and others were unsure of the commitment of top leadership to the process. As Hansen (2009) stressed, collaborative leadership style is essential for effective function of the collaborative — leadership must become less authoritative and more democratic in style.

Overall, practice in the field seems to reflect the prescriptions of the literature with only a few exceptions as noted in Table 2. There are two empirically derived factors that have no specific match in the literature. These are group's authority to commit resources and groups' capacity to adapt procedures to meet special needs. As noted above, staff members of groups assigned to work with the collaborative should be vested with sufficient authority to act to avoid costly delays; this calls for executive leadership of groups participating in the collaborative to practice what Hansen (2009) calls collaborative leadership. With respect to the group's capacity to adapt to meet special needs, each group involved in a collaborative alliance has its own standard operating procedures which must be adjusted to the needs of the collaborative in order to take advantage of synergies that arise from collaborating. On the theoretical side, there are three factors that have no specific match with empirically derived factors. These are having criteria for checking the rationality of their commitment; the collaborative is proactive in responding to challenges and a structure that supports the collaborative alliance. In practice, groups may not recognize the need to have specific criteria for gauging the rationality of their commitment to the collaborative, but they may intuitively make an assessment based on relevance and significance of the purpose of the collaborative and membership in the problem domain in relation to their mission and values. Under field conditions, a convener or a convening organization such as the United Way (in the case of the GDRC/UWG Collaborative Alliance) is able to mobilize collaborative action quite quickly in response to a need and at the same time organize and provide administrative backstopping for the collaborative. In this instance, the convener or convening organization plays a dual role of bringing groups together, facilitating the collaborative process and organizing administrative backstopping. The clear implication for theory here is that certain action might not be easily captured by a label, because such action is not an overt practice and is secondary to other important acts, and arise only as a result of taking action in the area of primary importance. For example, significance and relevance of the problem and membership in a problem domain consistent with the values of collaborating groups are of primary concern, but once this evaluation is made, the rationality of their commitment to the collaborative is fulfilled and justified.

Collaboration brings together the resources needed to solve complex problems under conditions of dynamic complexity where there are not only many facets to a problem but each facet and its impact will change with time and context. Under conditions of dynamic complexity where it is not possible to specify a solution beforehand, collaboration among groups and individuals may hold the key to tapping into the rich reservoir of tacit knowledge; and at the same time create and nurture the environment that enables the emergence of a solution resulting in what Kania and Kramer (2013) described as collective impact. From a theoretical vantage point, it is acknowledged that collaboration is essential for addressing complexity, but there needs to be a fuller integration of the ideas of emergence drawn from complexity theory and the techniques for achieving collective impact in order to demonstrate more clearly the role and mechanisms through winch collaboration addresses complexity in problem solving.

Actors in the public, private and nonprofit (social) sectors are faced with a task environment with diffused dynamic boundaries, which are not easily defined and delimited — relevant stakeholders and their interest change over time and space, which makes it less likely for simple top-down prescriptions for solving complex problems to produce solutions. Cooperate actors should embrace social responsibility which involves learning to work collaboratively with non-traditional stakeholders such as CBOs and larger non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on issues such as environmental and resource conservation and community development. Additionally, the dynamic complexity of these and many other social problems renders less useful predetermined solutions. This gives more credence to the need to work through a collaborative process where solutions can emerge. Given the emphasis on addressing poverty and quality of life issues in the public and private arena, and the intractable and complex nature of the problem associated with them, policy makers, public and private actors should focus more on using knowledge of the factors that are important in promoting collaboration to build collaboratives that can achieve collective impact.

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