

Understanding Collaboration as a Dynamic Process: A Case Study of Collaboration in a Supportive Housing Network¹

Stephanie Rattelade and John Sylvestre

Abstract

Despite considerable research on collaboration, there has been relatively little consideration of the dynamic inter-relations among key characteristics of collaborations. This study examined collaboration within the Ottawa Supportive Housing Network (OSHN). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with members from eight core member agencies that provide supportive housing to a range of vulnerable populations. The interviews examined six categories of effective collaboration characteristics identified in a review by Mattessich and Monsey (1992): environment, membership, process/structure, communication, purpose, and resources. An analysis of the data revealed reciprocal relationships between factors that shifted depending on the nature of the work of the network.

Keywords: effective collaboration, supportive housing, semi-structured interview, community network, qualitative research

Introduction

Collaborations enable individuals or organizations with similar interests to work together toward a common goal (Wells, Ford, Holt, McClure, & Ward, 2004). There has been extensive research conducted on collaborations that has examined how they function and the characteristics associated with greater effectiveness (e.g., Foster-Fishman, Salem, Allan, & Fahrback, 2001; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Suarez-Bacazar, Harper & Lewis, 2005; Warburton, Everingham, Cuthill, & Bartlett, 2008; Wolff, 2001). However, much of the research lacks rigour and consistent findings. The current study examined collaboration among supportive housing agencies in Ottawa. The goal of the study was to examine the dynamic interplay among the common characteristics of

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collaborations identified in previous research. The goals of this study contrast with previous research in which these characteristics were studied as static, independent variables.

There is extensive literature on collaboration that has been reviewed elsewhere (e.g., D'Amour, Farrada-Vidella, Rodriguez & Beaulieu, 2005; Longoria, 2005; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Thomson & Perry, 2006). Therefore, the following review will provide a summary of this literature, focusing on definitions of collaboration, research on effective collaboration, and case studies of collaborations in mental health and housing.

Understanding Collaboration

Over 15 definitions of collaboration have been offered in the academic literature (Longoria, 2005). Longoria reviewed the various definitions and highlighted three that encompassed four common themes: 1) a relationship between two or more organizations, 2) mutual goals and objectives, 3) emerging structural properties, and 4) a cohesive process of collaboration. Longoria's review identified a definition by Wood and Gray (1991) as the most inclusive of these themes: "Collaboration 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).

Although there is no explicit definition of what constitutes an effective collaboration, nor agreement on what are the outcomes of effective collaborations, there are many studies that have suggested the characteristics of collaborations that function well (e.g., Dunlop & Holosko, 2004; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Thomson & Perry, 2006). One of the most succinct summaries of these characteristics comes from a review by Mattessich and Monsey (1992). The purpose of the review was to identify the factors that influence the success of collaborations in government, human services, and non-profit organizations. Through a review of 18 relevant case studies, Mattessich and Monsey identified 19 factors associated with effective collaborations that they placed in six broad categories: *environment*, *membership*, *communication*, *process/structure*, *purpose*, and *resources*. The following section will describe these categories.

According to Mattessich and Monsey (1992), *environment* refers to the context in which the collaboration occurs. In particular, three environmental factors were identified as important: the history of the collaboration, leadership, and the political and social climate. The second category, *membership*, is defined by the skills, attitudes, opinions of the members, and the culture of the agencies within the collaboration. Factors

include mutual respect, understanding and trust among members. The third category, *process/structure*, refers to how the collaboration operates and how it is managed. One factor refers to having members share an interest in the processes and achievements of the group. Other factors include fair and equitable decision-making, group flexibility to respond to new challenges, and adaptability to grow in its purpose in response to new conditions and new knowledge.

According to Mattessich and Monsey (1992) *communication* refers to the ways in which collaborations convey opinions and keep one another informed. Effective collaborations have open and frequent communication as well as established informal and formal communication links. *Purpose* refers to the collaboration's mission and goals. Effective collaborations have concrete, attainable goals and objectives. The final category proposed by Mattessich and Monsey is *resources*. This category refers to having sufficient funds and a skilled convener as important factors of effective collaboration.

A set of six similar characteristics were identified in a study conducted by Dunlop and Holosko (2004). Through a qualitative analysis of interviews with 22 public health managers involved in the Healthy Babies/Healthy Children Program, they found financial conditions, institutional conditions, operational processes, organizational processes, and relational processes to be important facets of the studied collaboration. These categories were strikingly similar to the resources, environment, membership, and process/structure categories outlined by Mattessich and Monsey (1992).

A limitation to these studies and much of the literature on collaborations is that the characteristics of effective collaboration are often discussed as though they are static and independent from one another. First, the categories are discussed as either present or absent without a consideration for how they develop or evolve over the course of a collaboration. Another limitation is that these categories are discussed as factors that are independent of one another, without considering how they may influence one another. It is likely, for example, that the purpose of a collaboration or the available resources would affect other factors such as a collaboration's structure or its processes.

One exception is the work of Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2005) who proposed a model of community-university collaboration. Similar to Mattessich and Monsey's (1992) work, this model proposes six factors important to community-university partnerships: trust and mutual respect, adequate communication, respect for diversity, culture of learning, respect for the culture of the setting, and development of an action plan. According to their model, these factors reciprocally influence one another. However, the nature of these inter-relationships and the factors

that might influence these inter-relationships are not depicted.

A review of the multidisciplinary literature on collaboration confirmed the dynamic nature of effective collaborations (Thomson & Perry, 2006). Thomson and Perry discuss how collaborations evolve over time and require reciprocal relationships within the collaboration process to be effective. They outline their own five dimensions of effective collaborations, with the expressed understanding that these dimensions are interdependent: governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and trust and reciprocity. These dimensions do not occur in a specific sequence and any change in one dimension will influence changes in all others. Two of Thomson and Perry's dimensions are similar to Mattessich and Monsey's (1992) process/structure and purpose categories. However, this review is less comprehensive than Mattessich and Monsey. Furthermore, Thomson and Perry (2006) fail to outline how change influences each dimension. More research is needed to understand how change influences effective collaborations.

Warburton et al. (2008) looked more specifically at the relationships among categories in effective collaborations. Their study developed an analytic framework on collaboration through a review of the collaboration literature and then used this framework to conduct a theory-driven analysis. The review identified six categories of effective collaboration, similar to Mattessich and Monsey's (1992) categories: context, characteristics of partners, procedures, relationships and structures, purpose, and resources. Although organized differently, both Mattessich and Monsey (1992) and Warburton et al. (2008) proposed comparable characteristics of effective collaboration. However, Warburton et al. then took these categories and combined them with a model of collaboration for public service delivery developed by Préfontaine, Ricard, Sicotte, Turcotte, and Dawe's (2000). The resulting model illustrated how these six categories may be interrelated. The model proposed that the context is a starting point for change in a collaboration. As a result of changes in the context, the purpose of a collaborative group may be altered, leading to changes in the processes, structure, relationships, and resources of the group. This model also incorporated the collaboration stages based on the work of Préfontaine et al., showing the step-by-step lifespan of a short-term collaboration.

Warburton et al. (2008) confirmed their model with qualitative research on collaborations that focus on ageing. Qualitative data were collected from 60 stakeholders, including government officials, service providers, and representatives from other relevant organizations. The analysis was guided by the proposed model, to determine whether the proposed theory accounted for experience from practice. The findings showed support for the model and provided examples of how a change in

context could influence characteristics of collaborations such as processes, structure, relationships and resources.

Collaborations in Delivery of Supportive Housing

There has been little research examining collaboration among organizations providing supportive housing (Nelson, 1994; Trainor, Lurie, Ballantyne & Long, 1987). Supportive housing is a form of social housing that offers congregate living options (e.g., converted homes, independent apartments clustered in a single building) and a range of forms of personal and housing support (Parkinson, Nelson, & Horgan, 1999). Using resource mobilization theory, Nelson (1994) examined a mental health coalition advocating for housing and community support programs for psychiatric consumer/survivors. This case study collected meeting minutes, coalition correspondence, newspaper articles, and government documents for coding. Findings showed support for resource mobilization theory over the course of the coalition's lifespan (Nelson, 1994). A second study also used resource mobilization theory to study a supportive housing coalition (Trainor et al., 1987). Trainor et al. used a case study method to review the development and outcomes of the Supportive Housing Coalition of Metropolitan Toronto. This study showed the positive impact of the collaboration's advocacy on supportive housing, with improvements in services, legal issues, and the larger system. These studies illustrate the usefulness of collaborations for supportive housing agencies. However, they did not identify what factors were effective for these collaborations.

The Present Study

Although research has explored various components of collaboration, few studies have examined the dynamic nature of collaborations and the inter-relationships among factors associated with effective collaboration. The current study aims to fill these gaps in the research by studying a supportive housing collaboration. The context of the study is the Ottawa Supportive Housing Network (OSHN). The OSHN has existed for over a decade and includes agencies that provide supportive housing to a range of populations, including people with serious mental illness, people with substance abuse issues, people living with HIV/AIDS, young single parent families, and women who left violent situations. Although nominally there are a large number of organizations that belong to the network, there are eight agencies that constitute its core regular membership. Core member agencies have representatives (typically executive directors or senior managers) who are actively engaged in the

network, attend meetings regularly, and are involved in network activities.

This study will apply Mattessich and Monsey's (1992) six categories of effective collaboration in a qualitative analysis of the Ottawa Supportive Housing Network (OSHN). Although similar in its aims to the studies reported by Warburton et al. (2008), it is unique in its methods. This study will seek to inductively generate a model depicting the inter-relationships among these categories, rather than exploring a pre-existing model as in the study by Warburton et al. The specific objectives of this study are: 1) to examine the applicability of Mattessich and Monsey's (1992) categories of effective collaboration to a collaboration of supportive housing providers and 2) to develop an understanding of these categories as dynamically inter-related at different time periods of the collaboration.

Methods

Participants

Nine members of the OSHN were interviewed. These individuals were employed as executive directors or senior managers of the supportive housing agencies that form the eight core members of the OSHN. One organization had recently changed representatives and both the former and current representatives were interviewed. Participants have been members of the OSHN for a range of 1 to 12 years, with an average of 5.5 years. Efforts were made to contact past members of the OSHN. Two past members were identified but could not be contacted to be interviewed.

Measures

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews and questions were derived from the six categories of effective collaboration identified by Mattessich and Monsey (1992). The focus of the interview was on the participants' own experiences and perceptions of the collaboration, rather than that of their organization more generally. The interview protocol was divided into three sections. The first section of the interview consisted of general questions pertaining to the participant's role in their agency and the OSHN. The second section inquired about the history of the OSHN. Participants were asked to identify key events in the network's history during their involvement that had altered the collaboration in some way. Participants were then asked further questions about these key events. These questions were derived from the six categories identified by Mattessich and Monsey: *environment, membership, communication, process/structure, purpose, and resources*. In the third section, participants were asked to identify a potential challenge or opportunity

that may affect the network in the future. Again questions were asked that corresponded to the six categories.

Procedure

After approval from the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, participants were informed of the project in advance on several occasions during collaboration meetings. Then, an e-mail was sent to all prospective participants that described the study, provided an outline of the interview protocol, and included a consent form. Potential participants were also contacted individually through e-mail or by phone to set up interview times. At the start of each interview, participants provided informed consent. Most interviews involved one researcher and one participant. A second interviewer was present for three interviews. Interviews were conducted at the participant's agency and lasted on average 55 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded and notes were taken by the interviewer. Recordings were then transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

Coding began with the six broad categories identified by Mattessich and Monsey (1992). To begin, the nine transcripts were reviewed and observations were coded into one of the available six categories, or an open "Other" category. After an initial analysis, the contents of each category were reviewed. Category definitions from Mattessich and Monsey were reviewed and refined based on initial codes for each category. Codes were also reviewed to identify potential subcategories. Once these initial definitions and categories were developed, the analysis of the remaining transcripts was guided by a method of constant comparison of theory to data to ensure coding represented the data (Strauss, 1987). Whereas initial definitions and subcategories were informed by the work of Mattessich and Monsey, the analysis sought to create categories, definitions and subcategories that reflected these particular data.

Then, the analysis sought to examine inter-relationships among the categories. This was accomplished by examining network events identified by the participants to determine common patterns of relationships among categories. For example, we considered whether events in particular categories were identified as a causal factor producing change in the network, or as factors that were altered by other changes in the network. This analysis produced two models of category inter-relationships that depict typical network functioning, and network functioning in the context of environmental pressures.

Several steps were taken to enhance the trustworthiness, credibility and transferability of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Trustworthiness of data involves considering auditability of the analysis, and the credibility and transferability of the findings. An “audit trail” was created documenting the decisions and procedures in the analysis. To ensure credibility of the data, findings were discussed and confirmed with participants at a collaboration meeting. A supervising professor also conducted a peer audit, providing feedback and direction on analysis. Transferability was considered through a comparison to the literature, finding similarities between the findings from Warburton et al. (2008) and the current study.

Results

This section begins with descriptions of the six categories, their definitions and their subcategories created through this analysis, followed by descriptions of the two models. Each category description begins with the refined definition, followed by the unique subcategories derived from the current analysis. Relationships between categories will also be described. The second half of the results will look in detail at two models that illustrate the relationships between categories. The first model shows typical collaboration functioning, while the second model shows how pressure from the environment changes the relationships among categories.

Categories of Effective Collaboration

Overall, Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) six categories of effective collaboration were found to fit with the current findings. Many of Mattessich and Monsey’s definitions accurately portrayed how this collaboration functions and therefore have been retained in this study. However, new subcategories were created from the data to fit this collaboration. The following section will discuss each category and how it applies to the OSHN.

Purpose

According to Mattessich and Monsey (1992), *purpose* refers to the reasons why a collaboration exists, the goals and objectives of the collaboration, and the activities and tasks the group engage in to meet their goals. In the current study, discussions of *purpose* were mainly restricted to the vision and the goals of the OSHN. When participants spoke about the purpose, they referred to the network’s mission and reasons why it existed. When discussing the network’s vision, the participants noted that the OSHN began as a way for executive directors in supportive housing to support each other in their positions and share information. Participants discussed being aware of this vision before

joining and viewed the mutual social support and information sharing as benefits to being involved. Said one participant, when asked what her expectations were before joining the network, "... just even to get together, to be able to brainstorm issues that we were struggling with and challenges that we had with doing the type of work that we were all doing."

A secondary purpose of the OSHN is advocacy for supportive housing. Participants discussed efforts to educate and increase awareness of supportive housing among funders and policy-makers. One participant described a role of network members "to advocate of course for the need for supportive housing in Ottawa and advocate for the needs of our tenants." Advocacy goals were developed after the network was formed and have continued as an on-going vision, secondary to the vision of mutual support.

Discussions of the network's purpose were typically linked to discussions of *environment*, as efforts to increase awareness of supportive housing were directed toward the *environment*. For example, the OSHN works toward increasing awareness within the municipal government, as they are an important funding source for many member agencies. Despite the network's overarching *purpose*, when a new opportunity was perceived to be emerging in the *environment*, this collaboration was described as shifting its *purpose* towards more specific goals and objectives arising from the opportunity. One participant described this process as "... individuals that can drive the agenda or the agenda being driven by outside influences."

Environment

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) define *environment* as the context in which a collaboration exists. This category includes geographic location, political climate, and any other interactions with individuals and organizations external to the collaboration. In the OSHN, the main environmental influences come from the municipal government and other funding bodies. Participants discussed challenges balancing the needs of their tenants with the demands from funders. The environment was frequently identified as a causal factor impinging on the network, as well as the target of change as a result of the work of the network. Thus, both *environment* as cause and *environment* as effect were identified as subcategories.

The network members also described feeling pressure from the *environment* to comply with the recommendations from the external funders and policy-makers. For example, the municipal government had suggested the OSHN join a social housing registry to help manage waiting lists. The OSHN felt pressure to comply with this request

regardless of whether it was in the best interest of the member agencies. In this situation, the OSHN tried to compromise, creating a standard application form that satisfied the needs of the member agencies while trying to comply with municipal pressures.

The network also advocates for supportive housing in an effort to affect the *environment*. Members engage in presentations and in other collaborations to represent supportive housing. Participants described efforts to affect change in the *environment* as ongoing work of the OSHN. Effects on the *environment* can also be a response to the opportunities presented by the *environment*. For example, the OSHN was invited to make a presentation to a municipal committee, causing a temporary shift in *purpose*.

The *environment* category is closely linked to many of the other categories. The environment provides opportunities and pressures on the network, causing a change in the network's *purpose*. In response, the network uses the opportunity to advocate for supportive housing, pressuring the *environment* to change. This relationship between *environment* and *purpose* often leads to changes in other categories, such as *membership*. This shift in focus changes the interaction between the network and the *environment*, creating a reciprocal relationship between them. One participant described a situation where this shift occurred: "We were sensing a push from the city that we should be having some sort of coordinated access for supportive housing beds. And it led to huge discussions at our table."

Environmental influences were also tied to the category of *membership*. One participant discussed a presentation that was made to the municipal government and the subsequent changes to the network, particularly in *membership*. Pressure from the municipal government to expand network membership caused the OSHN to create specific membership criteria. When asked about what provoked these changes, one participant said "Well I think there was a push from the city to broaden who we were. And they kept trying to push us (the OSHN) to include (another type of social housing) and that's not who we were about." This example also shows the interaction between *purpose*, *environment*, and *membership*. The pressure from the *environment* changed the *purpose* of the network to defining who they are as a group. These discussions led to changes in *membership*.

Membership

Mattessich and Monsey (1992) define *membership* as the individual members' perspectives on the collaboration. When participants were asked about *membership*, they discussed the inclusion and exclusion criteria for OSHN members, as well as the cordial relationships between

members. For this collaboration, membership is voluntary. It was only after pressure from the *environment* that inclusion criteria were created.

Within the network, two types of members were identified based on their level of participation. There is a core group of eight agencies that are highly involved in all network activities and are constantly present at all meetings. The other member agencies are less involved, increasing involvement when specific activities fit their own goals or agency resources allow for it. Said one participant, "There's been a core group that continues to meet." As the network's *purpose* changes, the core group becomes involved in the new focus of the network and other network members choose to be more or less involved.

Discussions of *membership* were also linked to the goal of information sharing. It was through relationships among members that information and expertise is shared. Diversity among members and the populations they serve are seen as strengths of the group and an opportunity to broaden their knowledge. There is mutual trust and respect for other members and recognition of the individual strengths within the group. As one participant described, "That there was expertise within the room and we could tap into that expertise."

Process/structure

Process/structure is defined as "the management, decision-making, and operational systems of a collaborative effort" (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992, p. 22). In this study, the OSHN operates with an informal structure that fits with the nature of this group. This collaboration does not have formalized guidelines to direct how the collaboration should function. As one participant explained, "I mean, when I say structure, it's so loose in the first place, it's hard to really say that there is a structure." Instead, the operation of the collaboration is highly dependent upon the particular objectives or activities in which it is involved. Within *process/structure*, three subcategories were identified: decision-making, roles, and activities.

For the OSHN, decision-making is accomplished collaboratively through consensus. Members brainstorm and discuss issues in an open format during meetings. Decisions are based on consensus from the group, although formal votes are rare. When asked about how decisions were made during a specific event, one participant said "We brainstormed. What would it take to make everybody happy and get each of us what we needed through the process?" The OSHN is strengthened through their decision-making process. As these brainstorming sessions and discussions occur, other categories emerge into the discussion. Questions often arise about *membership, purpose, and communication*, impacting these categories.

Member roles are also informal. One member has emerged as the

leader of the group, taking on the tasks of organizing and chairing meetings and activities. Other members share responsibilities and volunteering for tasks and activities. Activities are defined as the efforts and tasks the collaboration engages in to achieve a goal or objective (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). The OSHN typically engages in meetings and discussions regarding network activities and goals. When the *purpose* of the network changes in response to an opportunity from the environment, activities centre on the new *purpose*.

Communication

Communication refers to the ways in which members stay informed, send and receive information, and express opinions (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). During these interviews, *communication* was not frequently discussed. Participants mentioned e-mails and phone calls as a means of sharing information, but formalized communication strategies were absent. As a participant stated, “The communication mechanisms are basically meetings and e-mails and, you know, those are the kind of standard mechanisms.” Patterns of *communication* change, however, when there are specific tasks to accomplish. These temporary shifts in purpose cause a time-limited challenge for *communication* where the members’ normal, informal communication becomes strained to meet new demands.

Resources

Resources are defined as the financial and human contributions needed to sustain a collaboration (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). In the current study, the resources category can be divided into financial and non-financial resources. Non-financial resources include contributions such as time, knowledge, and support.

The OSHN works with limited resources as it has no funding of its own. This limits its ability to undertake many projects and activities. When specific projects require financial resources, the OSHN must actively seek out these *resources* from the *environment*. Members contribute to non-financial resources by volunteering time and knowledge to the group. However, members in this collaboration have limited time available and this can limit the network’s ability to work towards its goals. Limited resources in both financial and non-financial subcategories impact the network’s ability to achieve its *purpose*.

The lack of *resources* affects other categories as well. A lack of *resources* may limit *membership*, reducing the ability of agencies to participate. Activities are also limited by financial and non-financial resources, making goal achievement difficult. One participant described her frustration, “If we had the time and the manpower, we could make

more presentations. We don't have the time." *Resources* are often provided by the *environment*, particularly financial resources. The network can also submit proposals to external funders in the *environment* for desired financial *resources*. These sought-after resources could increase the network's ability to achieve its purpose if they were available.

Relationships among Categories

Two models have been developed to show how these categories are inter-related in this case. The first model illustrates typical collaborative functioning, when the *purpose* of the network is support and information sharing (see figure 1). The second model shows the process of change that occurs when the *environment* pressures the network (see figure 2). Both models demonstrate the dynamic nature of collaborations and the reciprocal relationships among factors.

Model 1: Typical Collaboration Functioning

The main *purpose* in this model is to provide support and share information, and there is little need for a formal *membership* or a clearly defined set of *processes or structures*. In addition, these categories are influenced by the presence or absence of *resources*. An absence of *resources* keeps the network from establishing more ambitious goals, and working to expand its membership. In the first model, the absence of *resources* is illustrated by a dotted line and *resources* are shown in grey, because they are generally unimportant for achieving the typical collaboration goals of support and information. The interrelationships between *purpose*, *membership*, *process/structure*, *communication* and *resources* lead to outcomes for the network.

At this point in time, the *environment* is not an influencing factor for the network. However, the *environment* has an important influence in key events for the OSHN. When pressure from the *environment* mounts, the network responds by shifting its *purpose* and subsequently altering the other categories. The second model represents the changes and shifts in category relationships.

Figure 1. Typical Collaboration Functioning

Legend:

P = Purpose

M = Membership

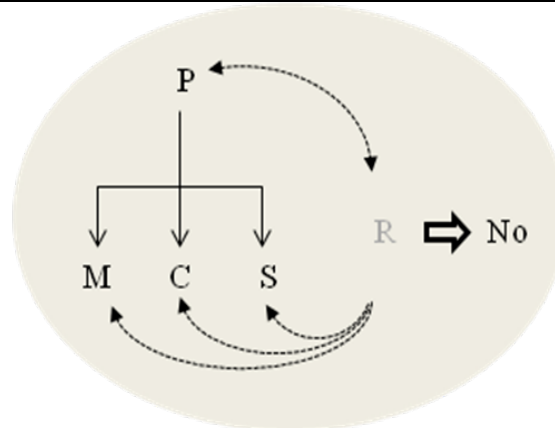
C = Communication

S = Process/Structure

R = Resources

No = Network

Outcomes



The relationships between *purpose, membership, process/structure, communication, resources, and environment* during typical functioning.

Model 2: Task-Focused Collaboration Functioning

This pressure is illustrated as a wavy arrow, pointing towards agency. Because the network's vision is to provide support to its members, member agencies bring their concerns about the *environmental* pressure to the OSHN table. In most cases, the challenge from the *environment* is a shared concern for members and the network will decide to shift its *purpose* to respond to this challenge. The shift in *purpose* causes changes in *membership* and *process/structure* in response. For example, different purposes may cause inactive members to re-engage in network activities. As in the first model, the presence or absence of *resources* will affect the changes in each category and the overall ability of the network to respond to the challenge. However, in this model, *resources* are a prominent category and have an important role in this event. Their absence puts pressure and strain on the collaboration, potentially limiting its ability to achieve the new *purpose*. This process of change leads towards outcomes for the network, agencies, and environment. The environmental outcomes are often in direct relation to the environmental pressure that started this process.

 Figure 2. Task-focused Collaboration Functioning

Legend:

Ac = Agency Cause

Ec = Environment

Cause

P = Purpose

M = Membership

C = Communication

S = Process/Structure

R = Resources

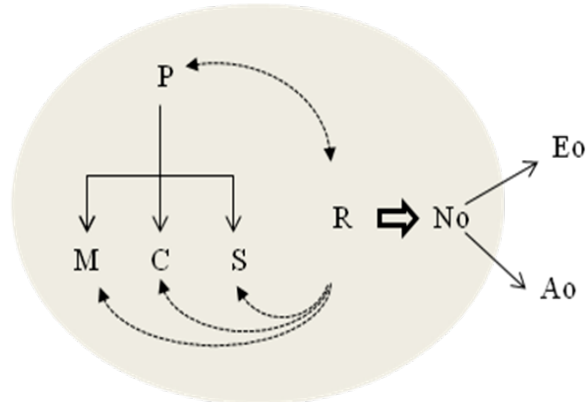
No = Network

Outcomes

Eo = Environment

Outcomes

Ao = Agency Outcomes



Pressure from the *environment* influences change in *purpose*, *process/structure*, *membership*, *communication*, and *resources* within the network. These changes create network, *environment*, and agency outcomes.

Participants discussed a number of key events that exemplify these inter-relationships. One event in particular illustrates how this model applies to the OSHN. Members described an event where the *environment* was pressuring member agencies to develop a coordinated access registry for clients. Members then brought this challenge to the OSHN, shifting the *purpose* of the network to responding to this pressure. This shift in *purpose* changed the structure of the network by requiring collaboration meetings to focus on this new challenge. There was an increase in *communication* as well as an increase in activities to be completed (*process/structure*). The network held meetings more frequently, with discussions focused on the coordinated access registry. *Membership* also changed, with an increase in discussions outlining specific membership criteria. Required *resources* for this project were non-financial in nature; members provided time, expertise, and support for the work that was being accomplished. Financial resources were not sought after and the tasks were completed without additional support.

Members decided on a compromise that would respond to both agency needs and the *environment* pressure. The most significant outcome for the network and member agencies was the completion and implementation of a common application form. For the network, this increased the cooperation and positive relationships among members.

This change also increased environmental awareness of the OSHN and its member agencies, reducing the pressure from the *environment*. Outcomes also impacted clients in each agency, facilitating applications to supportive housing agencies and directly improving agency abilities to serve this population.

Discussion

This study examined collaboration in a network focused on the delivery of supportive housing. It drew on prior work that identified six categories of factors associated with effective collaboration (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Results indicate that the categories proposed by Mattessich and Monsey were relevant to understanding this particular collaboration although differences were found in the subcategories.

These findings show support for Mattessich and Monsey's (1992) broad categories of effective collaboration. However, many subcategories proposed by Mattessich and Monsey were not discussed by members of this collaboration. For example, according to Mattessich and Monsey, the category *members* included the subcategories of respect, cross-section of members, compromising ability, and members see the collaboration in their self-interest. In the current study, discussions of *membership* emphasized the relationships among members, and inclusion and exclusion criteria for the consideration of new members. Similarly, new subcategories were identified for the *environment*, *resources*, and *process/structure* categories, although subcategories within the *purpose* category (vision, and goals and objectives) were consistent with those identified by Mattessich and Monsey.

The findings from this study support the notion that categories of effective collaboration can be examined in terms of their dynamic interrelationships rather than as static and independent. In particular, the link between *environment* and *purpose* emerged as a key relationship in this collaboration. Pressure from the *environment* alters the *purpose* of the network, which in turn affects the other categories. These findings are supported by those reported by Suarez-Balcazar et al. (2005) and Warburton et al. (2008). Both of these studies produced models showing relationships among broad categories of successful collaborations. The model proposed by Warburton et al. showed similarities to the current study findings. Their model also showed the context and environment as the starting point for change, influencing the purpose of the collaboration. Changes in the purpose then influenced changes in process, structures, and resources (Warburton et al., 2008). Notably, however, Warburton et al. arrived at their observation by imposing a pre-existing model on their data, whereas the current study inductively generated its models from the

data.

Contributions to the Literature and Implications for Future Research

This study provides insight into supportive housing collaborations and their functioning. Although this study's findings cannot be generalized to all supportive housing collaborations, it increases awareness of the unique features of these collaborations. It can be assumed that other supportive housing collaborations will show similar relationships among effective collaboration categories. More research into supportive housing collaborations would examine this assumption.

The findings of the current study move beyond the characteristics of effective collaboration to show the relationships between these factors. Although Warburton et al. (2008) also researched this topic, they did not explore how these relationships change over the course of a collaboration's existence. The current study adds a dynamic perspective on these relationships, illustrating the evolution of these categories in response to events. Examining key events has been found to be a useful way of studying collaborations. This allows for a more in-depth analysis of a collaboration, giving insight into the shifting goals, activities, membership, and influences within the lifespan of the collaboration.

Limitations

As is typical of retrospective studies, the quality of the data is related to the quality of the participants' memories. The unreliability of human memory can potentially skew the information collected and this study is no exception. Participants reported uncertainties about dates and details regarding discussed events. This was further confounded by the lack of documentation of events and activities by the OSHN. These documents would have confirmed the dates and details of the events and activities, further validating our findings. This study also relied on a restricted sample composed of current network members. Only one participant was involved at the start of the network, limiting the data collected to more recent events. Interviews with past members would have given more insight into the origins of this collaboration and details of earlier functioning.

A potential weakness to the methodology of this study was the use of pre-existing categories for coding and interviewing. Interview questions were developed around the six categories and interviewers probed for specific information related to the categories. More open questions may have revealed different information about each event. It is also possible that open-ended coding may have found other categories not

included in the six factors used. However, interviews and coding techniques were open to additional categories, definitions, and topics to emerge during data collection and analysis. Interviewers asked participants to describe the event before probing for additional categorical information, allowing participants to provide details that may not have been asked. Also, coding involved an “other” category, allowing the possibility of additional categories to emerge. Findings showed that additional categories and definition changes were not required to accurately represent this data, further supporting the use of these categories.

Conclusion

Collaboration is not a new field of research. Researchers in various disciplines have studied and discussed collaboration extensively, yet there are still avenues that have to be explored. Collaborations are inherently complex, encompassing various combinations of individuals, pushing for a variety of agendas, while pursuing a diverse set of goals. This complexity also lies in how characteristics of collaborations can evolve over time and in response to challenges. In the future, research may yield resources and recommendations to help collaborations evolve to meet these challenges.

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Authors' notes

Stephanie Rattelade, School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, Vanier Hall, 136 Jean Jacques Lussier, Room 3001, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 6N5, sratt031@uOttawa.ca, (613) 562-5800 x7155.

John Sylvestre, School of Psychology, University of Ottawa, 136 Jean Jacques Lussier, Room 3001 Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1N 6N5, jsylvest@uOttawa.ca, (613) 562-5800 x4307, Fax: 613-562-5147.

Correspondence regarding this manuscript can be directed to either author.