It Takes a Community to Change a Broken System: Using an Inter-organizational Collaborative Group to Ensure All Oakland Students Graduate from High School

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IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO CHANGE A BROKEN SYSTEM: USING AN INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATIVE GROUP TO HELP ENSURE ALL OAKLAND STUDENTS GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL

A Dissertation Presented

to

The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of Leadership Studies
Organizational and Leadership Program

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Nyeisha T. DeWitt
San Francisco
May 2011
IT TAKES A COMMUNITY TO CHANGE A BROKEN SYSTEM: USING AN INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL COLLABORATIVE GROUP TO HELP ENSURE ALL OAKLAND STUDENTS GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL

This qualitative study documents the formation and interactions of an inter-organizational collaborative group, Oakland’s Promise Alliance, to determine if there were environmental and community factors that contributed to the success of the collaborative. The research examines how various participatory activities and group interactions used during the relationship-building phase of the groups’ development helped strengthen the group over time. Lastly this study identifies the specific, preexisting characteristics of the Oakland community that affect the propensity for change.

Employing the participatory action research method, 9 of the 13 members of the executive committee voluntarily participated in qualitative interviews and group dialogue to extract their sentiments toward the practice of collaboration in general and in Oakland specifically. I used the social capital theory as the theoretical rationale to examine the experiences the co-researchers have as members of Oakland’s Promise Alliance and the external factors that influence the work.

A summary of findings included the development of 4 generative themes: (a) Commitment, (b) Cohesion, (c) Change, and (d) Communication. The research reveals that all members were highly motivated to participate. Yet, contrary to previous studies on the leadership within the collaborative practice, co-researchers, who were
executive committee members of an Oakland, California based nonprofit organization expressed the desire to have formalized leadership structure.

Co-researchers also found that the key to Oakland’s Promise Alliance’s success lies within its opportunities to improve communication and engage in informal interactions. The retreat, held in Hershey, PA was an example of such. Recommendations for further research, as well as recommendations for inter-organizational collaboration are provided.
This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate’s dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Nyeisha T. DeWitt_________________________ May 12, 2011____
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This achievement has pulled me in many directions and tested my faith, confidence and sense of self worth. Writing a dissertation can be a lonely and intensely, daunting process. To get through, I relied heavily on Jesus Christ. He helped me overcome my deep, resounding fear and removed all uncertainty that everything I needed to push past any internal or external doubt was within me. I thank you Lord for that.
Without Him, I would have quit this endeavor when I lost my mother. However, His light illuminated my path so I could walk through the darkest time in my life, and move closer to what He would have for me. He restored and fortified me so I could make it through and I thank Him from the depths of my soul for His mercy and grace.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother. During times when I felt sorrow and doubt and wanted to give up, I could hear my mommy say to me, “Nyeisha, I didn’t raise you to be a quitter.” The memory of her cheering me on, through the up’s and down’s of my life’s journey, carried me gently through this process, taking me further than I imagined it could. Tears are streaming as I write, at this very moment, because I am happy and sad- I know that she would have been so proud, but not surprised. She believed in me even when I didn’t deserve her support. I am everything I am because she loved me unconditionally.

I would like to thank Shon Buford, my life partner. He was amazing throughout this entire process. His support was unwavering and forgiving. I am sure that it took a ton of patience to stay by my side through the stress of this academic pursuit. Being a resolute man, who is confident in himself and his own accomplishments, must have
allowed him to do what I imagine others might have been reluctant to do. He put his own goals and dreams on hold and gave me the room to pursue mine. His unselfishness sometimes leaves me speechless. I am convinced that God placed us together for reasons that are more complex than we have the bandwidth to comprehend.

I want to thank my beautiful children Eric, Edward and Erin, who inspired and motivated me to pursue education to this level. I wanted to lay the foundation that there are no excuses for failure in our household. In this effort lies my message to them. The first is that no life circumstance or misfortune should cause you to deny yourself the realization of God’s plan for your life. The second is that we are born achievers, and focusing on the opportunities and blessings, within every challenge, moves us closer to our destiny.

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my Chair, Dr. Patricia Mitchell, for all of her encouragement. I thank her for showing me that the academy has an open door, and I needed no invitation to walk through it. I thank Dr. Shabnam Koirala- Azad and Dr. Betty Taylor for setting high standards and expecting my best works throughout the dissertation- writing phase. I would also like to thank Dr. Kimberly Mayfield-Lynch and Dr. Kitty Kelly Epstein, my mentors, for showing me how to resist the temptation let my academic accomplishments define me. But to be defined conversely by my advocacy work in Oakland.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my co-researchers for trusting me enough to take this personal, academic and professional journey with me and understanding that we all stand to benefit from this shared experience. I pray that together we can share the fruit of our labor.
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CHAPTER I:
RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

To maintain the United States competitive and maintain the nation’s dominance in the global economy, President Obama has placed education in the forefront and made school reform one of his highest priorities (Swanson, 2009). Public schools nationwide have fallen short of their intended purpose for many years. Children who spend more than a decade in this public institution should receive a diploma that symbolizes their preparedness for college, careers, and beyond. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Many public schools do not prepare all students for life after graduation. They, therefore, fail to perform the deed essential to their existence (Amos, 2008).

Failing to prepare students for institutions of higher education and jobs is an indication of a much larger problem. Though this study does not focus on the causes and symptoms of America’s eroding public school system, the institution’s negligence results in dismal promotion and graduation rates, which is at the core of this research. This broken system desperately needs repair. During the last decade, there has been much ado about school reform. Reform centered on academic outcomes showed traction, but those improvements have not lasted long (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Improving our nation’s high schools has emerged as a focal point for reform because they are failing our most vulnerable youth (Swanson, 2009; Martin & Halperin, 2006).

Readiness and preparedness for high school, or the lack thereof, is a leading predictor of which students will graduate (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). When students do not do well in high school, there is a chance they will not graduate. Reducing
America’s dropout rate is a national issue and, as noted by Swanson (2009) it is a critical “topic in the debates over education reform, economic vitality, and the direction of domestic and public policy” (p. 1). The current state of the nation’s economy causes intense media attention on the negative consequences of high dropout rates, and contemporary research frequently addresses the social benefits of graduating (Martin & Halperin, 2006).

Martin and Halperin (2006) suggested that the dropout crisis has a “disproportionate impact on particular communities, but the effects of any such societal ill cannot be contained within city limits.” Depending on the source of high school graduation data, which is a problem in itself, the national graduation rate was 70% in 2004–2005 (Swanson, 2009). Urban school districts have the highest concentration of dropouts, and only half the students in some high schools receive diplomas within 4 years (Pinkus, 2006; Alliance for Excellence in Education, 2009; Swanson, 2009; Martin & Halperin, 2006). Research conducted at Johns Hopkins University showed that, of the 7,000 students who drop out of high school each day, 50% attended one of the 2,000 schools identified as dropout factories (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

Ethnic groups with the lowest graduation rates are Latinos (55%), African Americans (51%), and Native Americans (50%). Graduation rates for males from those ethnic groups are significantly lower than for their female counterparts. This inequity can be observed on national, state, and local levels (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

In Oakland, CA, the dropout rates are comparable to those of most other urban school districts. California and the Oakland Unified School District, like most other states and districts, use varying methods to calculate dropout rates. There is no absolute
definition for a dropout, so the accuracy of graduation-rate data cannot be trusted, which leads some to believe that keepers of the data are reluctant to accept the cold, hard truth. Consequently, it is extremely difficult to ascertain the extent of the crisis (Martin & Halperin, 2006). According to the Secretary of Education, however, Oakland is failing to graduate 40% of its high school students, and even that figure may not account for those who drop out before they enter the ninth grade.

Like many municipalities, Oakland is coordinating with multiple partners across multiple sectors to prepare high school students for college or jobs by raising graduation rates and bolstering opportunities. Oakland’s Promise Alliance (OPA) is an inter-organizational collaborative that brings people together to work toward this common goal. Private, public, and community-based groups synchronize their efforts through this nonprofit organization, despite difficulties establishing a baseline from which to measure progress.

Inter-organizational collaboration, geared toward addressing serious issues such as the national dropout crisis, is increasing (Martin & Halperin, 2006). Past studies show that collaboration is essential to advancements in education, and it is a vital element in school reform (Romety, 2007; Warren, 2005). Use of the collaborative model is an extremely exciting trend in the public sector, but it is not without opposition. Collaboration lends itself well to the business world, where individuals or corporations benefit from shared knowledge and resources because they want a common outcome, which is usually tied to increasing revenues. Collaboration in education, however, is somewhat unbalanced because building social capital, creating a shared vision, and aligning goals to achieve a commonly desired outcome is not as clear cut. Sustaining a
collaborative, education-oriented network can be extremely difficult because human motivations and capacities vary; leadership and organizational structures change; and resources are scarce. Sustained effort is particularly difficult if there is no common belief that the group can succeed.

Building collaborative relationships require an enormous investment from all parties involved. Huxham and Vangen (2003) suggested members and managers should come to a mutual understanding to create a “well-functioning interface between each of the member organizations within which individuals can represent and lead their organizations… and help ensure that individuals are genuinely to represent and act as conduits” for their respective organizations (S69).

To ensure the success of Oakland’s Promise Alliance and establish it as the premier intermediary in the Oakland area, members of the group must develop a highly perceived, collective efficacy (Du Chatenier, Verstegen, Biemans, Mulder, & Omta, 2009). If its members believe that by working together, they will have the wherewithal to reduce the dropout rate and feel motivated to launch a community-based effort to reengage disconnected youth. Such an effort could mobilize Oakland residents to amend the regulations, standards, and education policies that undermine the chances of youngsters maturing into successful adults and enjoying long-term civic vitality (Du Chatenier et al., 2009; Grady, Rothman, Smith, & Balch-Gonzalez, 2006).

The questions facing Oakland’s collaborative group are; How big of a role does the community’s culture play in the way it approaches the collective effort? Was the Promise Alliance formed and structured in a way that can ensure progress? Are there historical factors, relationships, and attitudes about working across sectors, or economic
realities that encumber the members’ commitment to change? If there are phases of collaboration, what—if any—are the distinct actions that move the group along that continuum?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study is to document the formation of an inter-organizational collaborative group, Oakland’s Promise Alliance, and determine if there are environmental and community factors that contributed to the success of the collaborative. The study will also examine how various participatory activities and group interactions, used during the relationship-building phase of the groups’ development, helped strengthen the group over time.

Because of Oakland's unique history and nature of the community’s involvement, it is crucial to employ the right strategy to inspire change and resolve issues that affect the public schools. Accordingly, this study identified the specific, preexisting characteristics of the Oakland community that have shaped the propensity for change.

Background and Need for the Study

Introduction

Inter-organizational collaboration has become a widely used practice. There is, however, remarkably little research that supports the correlation between the practice and the effectiveness of the collaborative practice when it comes to improving people’s lives in a community (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). Despite encouragement from those who contribute funds, produce reports and conduct research, the complexity of inter-organizational collaboration makes it extremely difficult to track the factors that lead to its success.
In exploring what it takes to build a successful inter-organizational collaboration, I reflected on Oakland’s Promise Alliance’s development since 2008 in relation to the nature of Oakland’s community. In doing so, I took into account the political landscape and the former mayor’s responsiveness to the collaborative practice to solve community-level issues. I also considered Oakland’s national connectedness, which would allow the Alliance to provide the community a deeper awareness about the dropout crisis. This section culminates with an explanation of how this study can help clarify what it takes to strengthen the internal and external social capital that is critical to their success in Oakland.

Oakland community members are remarkably familiar with working across sectors to achieve goals. Inter-organizational collaboration is a common practice employed to combat the community’s challenging social issues. Yet one concern continues to emerge in conversations about the various partnerships, collaborations, and coalitions in the community and elsewhere: If there is a monumental task to achieve, are the various partnership structures equipped to handle the challenges that inevitably confront even the most well-intentioned groups? Coordination is essential from within the organizational framework to ensure growth inside and outside the structure.

Spirit of Collaboration in Oakland

In most American urban centers, civic engagement is critical to bringing about change (Kaye, 2001). A well known fact throughout the Bay Area is when individuals, organizations, or agencies want to implement a successful, widespread effort, they will face stiff opposition unless they recognize Oakland as a “grassroots” organism. According to Kaye (2001), grassroots community residents typically do not appreciate
“professionals” or insider/outsiders coming in to tell them what should be done to fix their problems. The significance of involving the community cannot be disregarded.

It is essential for community members to provide input on strategic planning to help strengthen their community (Kaye, 2001). Collaboration leaders contend that individuals from all education, career, and socioeconomic levels should participate in the process (Huxham & Vangen, 2000a). An example of a successful school reform initiative with broad-based community support is Oakland’s Small Schools Movement. This initiative’s goal was to reduce disparity between the “hill corridor” schools and the “flatland” schools. By and large, schools in the hills had fewer students than those on the flatlands; there was at least a 3:1 difference (Shah, Mediratta, & McAlister, 2009).

In a study conducted by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, Shah et al. (2009) analyzed Oakland’s Small Schools Movement and found that community organizing concerning the city’s failing schools does the following:

1. Brings together public-school parents, youth, and community residents, and/or institutions to engage in collective dialogue and action for change.
2. Builds grassroots leadership by training parents and youth in the skills of organizing and civic engagement.
3. Builds political power by mobilizing large numbers of people around a unified vision and purpose.
4. Focuses on demands for accountability, equity, and quality for all students, rather than on gains for individual students.
5. Aims to disrupt long-standing power relationships that produce failing schools in low—and moderate-income neighborhoods and communities of color.
6. Uses the tactics of direct action and mobilization to put pressure on decision-makers when necessary (p. 3).

The researchers credited that movement’s success to involvement by the Oakland Community Organization, a local group that mobilized, educated and organized the parents, community members, and youth (Shah et al., 2009). The organization’s experience, capacity, and network enabled its success in leveling the playing field.

Collaboration, coalition building, and partnerships are extremely popular in Oakland. In any given week, concerned residents easily can find themselves at four separate meetings, which are coordinated by four different organizations, to solve different community-related issues. Yet, they may see the same faces at each table. Huxham and Vangen (2000a) noted how that level of inter-organizational collaboration creates membership ambiguity because roles they play within the groups confuses them. Whether volunteering or working for nonprofit organizations that was founded to oppose or support serious social initiatives, most group members end up working with government agencies as the source of needed resources, which can further complicate things (Huxham & Vangen, 1996).

A community’s unique characteristics must be considered as multiple sectors come together to cause significant changes. Community members must be part of the planning process to get them to mobilize around an issue. In part, multi-sector collaboration emerged out of interdependence because groups needed to share resources (Huxham & Vangen, 1996).
Leadership and Cross-Sector Collaboration

Crosby and Bryson (2010) stated, “Leadership, work is central to the creation and maintenance of cross-sector collaboration that advance the common good” (p. 212). Crosby and Bryson recounted cross-governmental and cross-sector collaborative efforts. They used several methods to gather information, including the MetroGIS website, written histories, and other archival research sources. At the time of the study, MetroGIS was a 14-year-old international organization with more than 300 participating government units and organizations.

The authors aimed to provide “propositions” that offers practitioners a framework to view multi-sector leadership. The “parts” described by Crosby and Bryson (2010) are “initial conditions, processes and practices, structure, and governance, contingencies and constraints and outcomes and accountability” (p. 216). The propositions presented the notion that leaders must be aware of the environment they are attempting to change and the need for strong support from key stakeholders and decision makers. Cross-sector collaboration is more successful when formal and informal agreements are in place and the leaders who developed those agreements have an impact on the effort because bottom-up collaboration affords more “leeway” (Crosby & Bryson, 2010).

Crosby and Bryson (2010) cited trust as an extremely critical element in successful collaboration. Leaders must establish credibility inside and outside the collaborative group. They must be aware of the environment within which they are working and have the ability to adapt to changes within that environment. Leaders must have superior negotiation skills. They should posses the ability to navigate the balance of power, and to make all stakeholders believe their interests are met through participation.
Leaders must publicly celebrate short-term and long-term successes. In the end, Crosby and Bryson (2010) warned that even with effective leaders, cross-sector collaboration is complex and success is truly “difficult to achieve” (p. 227).

**Political Climate and Leadership**

Being an Oakland resident and working particularly closely with the mayor’s administration gave me insight into how influential city leadership can be in collaborative efforts. Oakland’s leadership, specifically on the mayoral level from 2006 to 2010, set the stage for collaborative work before it became popular. During his 26 years as a congressman, Oakland’s former mayor, Ron Dellums, was a consensus building, diplomat. He embodies the skill set needed to bring people together to accomplish tasks on international, national and local levels. The relationships he built with his congressional peers and Oakland supporters are a testament to his potency as a leader. Dellums’ administration inspired and facilitated numerous cross-sector collaborations, coalitions, and partnerships in Oakland and beyond.

Dellums became Oakland’s mayor in an unorthodox way. Due to feelings of dissatisfaction with their leadership options, community members recruited him. Before accepting the call to serve, he required organizers acquire more than 10,000 signatures on the recruitment petition. The community coordinated Oakland’s largest grassroots recruitment campaigns in political history, which convinced the reluctant Dellums to accept the nomination.

After his victory, Dellums initiated 14 task forces and sought community members to serve on them. He convened more than 900 residents according to their areas of interest and expertise, and he requested recommendations for what he should do during
his first term as mayor. Because he is an Oakland native, Dellums understands it is not a “top-down” community, so change in Oakland requires community members’ buy-in. Everyone with real experience working or living in the community is familiar with that nuance. A community’s uniqueness must be considered as multiple sectors come together to make meaningful change. Community members must have opportunities to participate in the planning process to motivate them to organize around issues.

America’s Promise Alliance

The influence and connections of a local leader can bring much needed resources and attention to a community that is lacking both. When dealing with a local crisis, the municipal leadership must leverage relationships with internal and external stakeholders to create a sustainable effort to overcome challenges that exist within Oakland. Mayor Dellums was adept at doing just that. One example of his ability to draw on external resources and relationships is the selection of Oakland as a “Featured Community” by America’s Promise Alliance (APA). America’s Promise is a national, nonprofit organization. General Colin Powell and his wife Alma Powell founded APA to bring youth-supporting organizations together and resolve issues that impact youth across the country. The organization promotes collaboration in every way possible and encourages its partners to develop relationships on the local level. APA also funds my full time coordinator position, and I am considered “the leader” of Oakland’s Promise Alliance (OPA).

Oakland’s Promise Alliance

This year is the third year of Oakland’s partnership with APA, and the initiative has experienced significant progress. The goals of Oakland’s Promise Alliance are (a) to
increase the graduation rate to 90\% by 2020; (b) to increase the extent by which Oakland provides all five promises to its youth; (c) to enhance youth and parent engagement; and (d) to change policy and practice so Oakland youth experience joyful, safe, engaging education and community life.

Oakland’s Promise Alliance has supported many projects to help young people stay in school. These include supporting the opening of school-based health centers; hosting back-to-school rallies at City Hall; developing Oakland’s Teach Tomorrow program, which recruits local, permanent teachers from diverse backgrounds; supporting an innovative program to develop youth leadership for ending gang violence; and expanding the pool of adult mentors and advocates. Because of its connection with APA, the collaboration adopted the name Oakland’s Promise Alliance and expanded its member organizations.

Its first-year goal was to bring a steering committee of various organizations together to reduce Oakland’s dropout rate, and host engagement events to increase community awareness. Among the many objectives it accomplished were the following:

1. Hosting a dropout preventions summit in partnership with (sponsored by) State Farm, which had over 300 attendees.

2. Hosting a parent engagement roundtable in partnership with and sponsored by the Anne E. Casey Foundation, which had over 35 attendees representing various parent organizations.

3. Hosting a youth engagement forum in partnership with the Youth Advisory Commission, which had over 75 extremely enthused young people in attendance.
4. Hosting the 3rd Annual Back to School Rally in partnership with Oakland Natives Give Back, Casey Family Program, an APA partner, also supported the event.

5. Coordinating the local “My Idea” grant with a large participation rate and several awardees.

6. Generating publicity for the graduation initiative.

7. Collaborating with the school district on anti-truancy and gang-reduction initiatives.

8. Dialoging with the school district on a common understanding of numbers and percentages of those dropping out.

9. Requesting a state policy audit of policies that contribute to young people dropping out of school, based on an idea we obtained at the last APA convening.

10. Starting a Career Pathways project with one highly gang-impacted local high school that kept many sophomores from dropping out of school.

11. Working on an initiative to increase the number of youth advocates.

12. Participating in the school district’s task forces aimed at improving high schools and African American male achievement.

While OPA worked to improve life for Oakland youngsters in meaningful ways, I began to notice a shift in our original purpose, which was to coordinate community involvement and align efforts to prevent students from dropping out. Before this work became the focus of this study, I felt the need to make improvements that would enable OPA to withstand the leadership transition and various other changes more gracefully and
establish a reputation as Oakland’s premier dropout prevention organization. I began to
determine the internal and external threats to the group’s success, forecast challenges on
the horizon, and explore opportunities to mitigate their effects.

The idea of focusing on one area of Oakland emerged from the analysis of the
strengths and weaknesses of the first year’s citywide work. I also reviewed specific data
sets and inquired with key stakeholders; and I benefited from participating in the APA
events and technical assistance training. The prospect of fine-tuning the group’s efforts
became more attractive as I considered OPA’s opportunity to pioneer the initiative in
West Oakland. Along the way, I held exploratory conversations with the core team to
explain my vision for a regional focus, and they fully supported the idea. I believed all
members of the larger steering committee would agree with the new direction of OPA.

I imagined at least two or three members might resist. I felt, however, that the
steps taken to cultivate the group’s external relationships and build social capital would
help bridge any divide. I spent months expanding awareness and organizing grassroots
support for the initiative in the community. Because I am from Oakland, I knew that
focusing on West Oakland would involve consultation with key regional stakeholders,
including West Oakland volunteer organizations, non-profits, agencies and school
administrators. I now realize that approaching it in that way, without first going to the
OPA steering committee, had its risks. I felt, however, that there was not enough time to
wait for the “go ahead” from all of the group members, especially since there was no
need to plan operations unless we knew that the West Oakland community members
would support us.
I prepared for consequences of moving forward by crafting a presentation explaining the West Oakland community’s organic nature, which I hoped would make it easier for steering committee members to appreciate the steps taken to obtain external acceptance for the initiative. Without knowing how members would respond to focusing graduation support efforts in West Oakland, I planned to present the proposal at the steering committee’s first retreat. We had our retreat in Hershey, Pennsylvania, at an America’s Promise Alliance convening, in the fall of 2010. Prior to the retreat, I asked the members of the committee to complete a questionnaire because I wanted to assess our standings prior to the changes that were on the horizon. I hired a neutral individual to facilitate the retreat and help us through the process. I did not think it was appropriate for me to assume that role.

Everything was beautiful in Hershey until a member of the committee expressed her uneasiness with the fact that the process that led to the decision. She felt the decision itself did not seem transparent. Although I am paraphrasing her statement, the bottom line was that she felt as though she did not think that such a significant decision should be made outside of the consideration of the group. Others agreed, so we took a step back and opened it up for discussion. I hoped that, with all of the effort I had put into cultivating the relationships in West Oakland, the committee members would not allow my approach to negate the presentation of the evidence that we should move in that direction.

Fortunately, the goal was to come together and establish decision-making protocols, clarify our roles and most importantly, develop a strategic plan. The process drew us closer to a shared understanding of the changing nature and function of OPA. We discussed the political landscape, since the city and school district’s election results were
looming. We also took advantage of opportunities to become informally familiar with one another. What started off as a somewhat contentious environment turned out to be the catalyst to improved working and interpersonal relationships.

Complexity of Collaboration and Need for Deeper Understanding

Building collaborative relationships require a massive investment from all parties involved. In part, multi-sector collaboration emerged out of necessity and interdependence. Groups collaborate out of the need to share resources (Huxham & Vangen, 1996). Community development organizations or coalitions can inspire and promote change in ways different from other organizations (Chavis, 2001). Since OPA was designed to do just that and my job to keep the collaborative work going, I had to discover a way to engage the steering committee in the act of building collective will and increasing our capacity.

Theoretical Rationale

To understand group dynamics relative to development of successful collaboration, I explored social capital theory to provide a theoretical framework for this study. Social capital theorists posit that effective social action and progress of social groups—from the smallest voluntary organizations to the nation as a whole—depend on a “secret ingredient.” Social capital proponents claimed social groups or institutions work well because they have well-structured and formal rules, forward-looking and clearly stated objectives, and individual and group values appropriate for collaboration (Coleman, 1988; Bordieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995).

Successful collaborative efforts also have clear distribution of roles and fair provision for rewards and punishments. All these are worthless, however, if the of trust is
not present. The theorists claimed all these elements may be factors for successful social groups, but unless a group fosters a network of personal, social relationships based on trust, they would not be effective (Coleman, 1988; Bordieu, 1986; Putnam, 1995).

According to Putnam (2000), municipalities with populations with high social capital are more progressive than those with low social capital. He claimed that, in the United States, social capital has been fast diminishing over the past 50 years (p. 25–26).

The central tenets of inter-organizational collaboration are trust and motivation. Many layers of social networks, relationships, and intra-group and inter-group culture must be exposed to respond to the needs of a community and collaborative groups. The importance of trust and motivation must be understood to collaborate successfully.

Though there has been widespread study of social capital widely in recent decades (Portes, 1998), it continues to produce highly conflicting understandings of the concepts (Gewirtz, Dickson, Power, Halpin, & Whitty, 2005). There is no common school of thought about social capital. Instead of focusing on the definition of social capital itself, many researchers focus on the elements of social capital that fit their areas of study. Since ambiguity around the definition and the theory’s imprecise use by researchers, some question the theory’s verifiability. According to Adam and Roncevic (2003), social capital is relevant, and

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\text{despite the problems with its definition as well as its operationalization, and despite its (almost) metaphorical character, social capital has facilitated a series of very important empirical investigations and theoretical debates which have stimulated reconsiderations of the significance of human relations, of networks, of organizational forms for the quality of life and of development. (p. 177)}
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Conceptually speaking, social capital fails to meet a rigorous standard, and there could be a time when the rampant use of the term social capital may diminish its scientific reliability and validity (Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001). Uphoff and Wijayaratna
(2000) stated that social capital “needs to refer to things that can be observed and measured” (p. 1876). In that vein, Uphoff and Wijayaratna said there are two forms of social capital, structural and cognitive, both of which are cognitive in nature.

Schneider (2009) attempted to clarify the concept of organizational, social capital, specifically for nonprofit organizations. Schneider defined organizational, social capital as “relationships based in patterns of reciprocal enforceable trust that enables people and institutions to gain access to resources” (p. 644). Among social scientists, the synonymous misuse of the concepts of civic engagement and social capital often occurs, but they are not the same. In contrast to social capital, civic engagement and serving in the community do not build social capital for all participants (Weisinger & Salipante, 2005; Schneider, 2009).

Schneider (2009) defined the key elements of social capital theory—networks, trust, culture, and norms. Networks are ties that give members of groups access to resources and information. Trust levels include thin trust, also called generalized trust, which is consistent with the type found in civic engagement; and deeper trust, called enforceable trust, which exists when social capital is present. Lastly, norms or culture deals with multi-group social capital, which can lead to organizational culture transformation among members.
Research Questions

I addressed the following questions in this study:

1. How was the inter-organizational collaborative group (Oakland’s Promise Alliance) formed and how were the members selected?
2. What are the environmental and community factors and preexisting sentiments toward collaboration within Oakland, and how have they affected the success of the inter-organizational collaborative group?
3. What are the membership dynamics and to what extent do various participatory activities and group interactions used during the relationship building stage of the inter-organizational collaborative group’s development affect membership dynamics within the collaborative?

Limitations of Study

According to Creswell (2003), limitations are the weaknesses of a study that the researcher has no control over. Since I am the leading OPA and conducting in-depth research on the collaborative process, I will face inherent influence, bias, and prejudices in the process of collecting, compiling, and analyzing data, which is a limitation of the study. I am aware of such conditions and their impact on the group as a whole and the findings in part. To mitigate and limit the influence of bias, I will be careful to make each data collection experience as informal as possible and will document any influence that biases may have in my journal entries, field notes, and interview notes.

I employed qualitative open-ended interviews as a method of data collection for the research. Hence, one limitation is that the findings only reflect the interviewees’
perceptions, knowledge, and first-hand experience with regards to the questions. Interview participants may also have inherent biases about inter-organizational collaboration in general or specifically toward OPA that they may unconsciously draw from during the interview.

The limitations within a study often speak to its generalizability. OPA’s executive committee has no more than 13 members. The group comprises a cross-section of members in terms of age, ethnicity, career levels, education attainment, and gender. Although the sample size of this study poses a limitation in that it is not statistically significant in terms of generalizability, the diverse makeup of the group, coupled with its inter-group experience and the participatory nature of the research, could offer a significant contribution to the study of inter-organizational collaboration.

Significance of Study

One might argue that working collaboratively automatically makes it easier to achieve a goal than working in silos. While that is not always so, in the public realm, there are several reasons why collaboration is key to making a significant change. Glaring evidence of this, for example, can be observed in funding trends on the local, state and federal levels. During tough economic times, funders seek opportunities to ensure their dollars have maximum impact. The logic seems to be when multiple organizations come together, to provide a level of expertise in the specific area they plan to service, the funder’s contribution reaches more people than it can when they fund a single organization.

This study is valuable because of its educational, economic, and societal implications. Employing the participatory action research (PAR) method, this study
documented the formation of a cross-sector collaboration and provided insight into how
the members felt about working together to improve educational outcomes within the
Oakland community during various phases of the collaborative process or spectrum, as
defined by various researchers.

This study can help resolve a research issue in that it may show that there are
various types or levels of collaboration, which can lead to future research that utilizes the
tools mentioned in the literature. Moreover, it may dispel the need to use any of the
popular methods for forming successful collaborations, and reveal that a community
could apply an organic, grassroots approach to forming and working collaboratively.
There may not be a perfect way to arrive at the goal of “authentic collaboration.”
Conversely, it may confirm the need to employ a structured and more concerted design
and implementation model.

Another reason this study is of value is because it may help answer critical
questions about how unique community characteristics, how attitudes about working
across sectors, and how organizational structure and collaborative leadership impact the
likelihood the group can envision success. Through the use of dialogue and open-ended
interview questions, which helped us identify themes and engage in meaningful
discussions, the findings could aid in significant understanding of the bearing peripheral
circumstances have on a group and its overall effort.

Lastly, this study may be useful because at the ground level of this work lies
information regarding the nuances of collaborative work that is informed by the members
of the group charged with the task of impacting critical community issues. At the time of
the literature review no studies addressing that effect could be found.
CHAPTER II:
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Overview

To provide a point of reference for documenting and exploring a collaborative
group that is primarily focused on increasing high school graduation rates in Oakland,
California, the literature review synthesizes the theoretical elements within the
conceptual framework of building an inter-organizational relationship. To do so, this
literature review explores leadership, organizational and social capital theories through
the lens of collaboration.

The review first looks at literature regarding the problem of high school dropouts
in the United States, which I proposed could be resolved by establishing a collaboration
group. Then, it discusses the literature on collaboration, which is considered a continuum.
This review explores the factors that lead to success or failure of collaboration, essential
characteristics of a collaborative initiative, and elements that promote healthy
collaborative relationships. To enhance support for the current study, the literature review
also tackles leadership theories and dynamics within collaborative groups. Lastly, it
examines organizational theories and structures in relation to collaborative groups.

High School Dropout Challenges in the United States

American high schools face student retention problems (Kim & Baylor, 2006).
Various studies emphasized increasing dropout trends for secondary school students
during the past decade (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2006; Ryack-Bell, 2007).
According to Batiuk, Lahm, Mckeever, Wilcox, and Wilcox (2005), the cost of each
student dropout is tantamount to more than $10,000 per year for medical care, housing,
and food assistance support. So increases in dropouts cannot be taken lightly. Dropout rates also play a role in poverty. The 2009 median annual income for Americans without a high school diploma was $18,432, which was 44 percent less than the national average of $33,071, for all earners, age 25 and older (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

Earlier dropout prevention efforts did not give importance to the roles that businesses, communities, corporations, and families could play in improving public education. Such roles were only recognized as a significant part of the solution when education policy specialists initiated research on school reform known as “theory-drive evaluation” (Seitinger, Felner, Brand, & Burns, 2008). Such specialists postulated that a central location linking businesses, communities, educators, families, and students could be created to enable information exchange and shared networks. These networks could help students prepare for their future as adults in long-term, satisfying careers. Today, collaboration is becoming increasingly prominent.

Collaboration

Hibbert, McInnes, Beech, and Huxham (2008) described collaboration as including a range of inter-organizational informal relationships within poorly defined structures with various members and levels of engagement.

Collaboration is a mutually beneficial well-defined relationship entered into by two or organizations to achieve a common goal. Relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goal; jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards (Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001, p.7).

Huxham and Vangen (2000b) stated that collaboration “describes organizations (rather than individuals) that are working together” (p. 1159).
Types of Collaboration

**Teams**

A large body of research on organizational theories suggests that teams are efficient models linking purpose and goals, which results in high performance (Sumanski, Kolenc, & Markic, 2007; van Vijfeijken, Kleingeld, van Tuijl, Algera, & Thierry, 2006). Sumanski et al. (2007) stated that a team should exist within most organizations, irrespective of size. Teams tend to outperform individuals simply because they are able to develop complex solutions individuals cannot.

Katzenbach and Smith (2003) contended that collaboration, increased diversity, and teamwork create an extremely high-performance environment:

> We believe that true teams—true teams, not just groups that management calls “teams”—should be the basic unit of performance for most organizations, regardless of size. In any situation requiring the real-time combination of multiple skills, experiences, and judgments, a team inevitably gets better results than a collection of individuals operating within confined job roles and responsibilities. (p. 15)

Yang and Tang’s (2004) research suggested teams outperform individuals if they have a high degree of group cohesion. Their research showed collective efforts of a group, working in concert, positively improved performance. Higher degrees of cohesion in teams lead to higher team performance, and Yang and Tang concluded that teams that focus on team development achieve higher levels of team cohesion (Bahli & Buyukkurt, 2005; Stroud, 2006). Adding to the team-cohesion factor, Peslak (2006) found that personality has a substantial impact on team performance. Peslak reported that the right personalities on a team improved the team environment, group cohesion, communication, and the ability to handle conflict. Such characteristics tend to improve team performance.
Group potency is another contributor to team performance. The definition for potency is the degree to which groups believe in their ability to perform. The team can be potent if it believes it can accomplish its goals. As potency goes up, team performance is improved (Gil, Rico, Alcover, & Barrasa, 2005). Described another way, teams are the key to organization performance, and the key to creating teams is team building.

Leaders should use teams when high-level performance is necessary and when solving problems requires a mix of complex skills. Teams and organizations that develop true teams outperform their competition over extended periods of time. Teams also outperform expectations of key stakeholders (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003).

**Working Groups**

Groups are a collection of individuals who have not been through the forming process necessary to become a team. Katzenbach and Smith (2003) suggested a working group did not need to become a team. According to Katzenbach and Smith, the members of working groups come together simply to share ideas, resources and priorities and leverage networks. Formalized structure does not have to exist for the working groups to accomplish their individual or collective goals.

Bennis and Shepard (1956) took a different view. They viewed working groups as groups that are in an early stage of team development, but they noted that not all groups become teams. Both business and academic environments have realized teams and teamwork are vital; however, people may not be prepared to work in groups or teams (Smarkusky, Dempsey, Ludka, & de Quillettes, 2005). Under conditions of risk and stress, people are more likely react to their own interests before they respond to the interests and concerns of others (Thau, Crossley, Bennett, & Sczesny, 2007). Thau et al.
(2007) noted how working groups often are unable to develop trust between group members.

Working groups make decisions that help individuals in the group perform their jobs. Simply stated, the focus of the working group is often on the individual (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003). In working groups, individuals constantly fight to resist oppression of the self from the group and for the priority of individual rights within the group.

Bion (1961) described an individual’s degree of willingness to participate as a member of a group as valency. He said if an individual desired to work in groups, the individual had high valency; if an individual preferred not to work in groups, then the individual had low valency. Perhaps Bion’s most powerful statement was that he did not believe people could be without valency. Bion asserted that everyone had a preference toward or away from group participation. But not everyone believes valency is an individual choice. Triandis (2001) strongly emphasized that the group mission never can restrict the self; the individual always must come first.

Katzenbach and Smith (2003) concluded that, in a single-leader working group, the leader applies a classic command-and-control philosophy. The leader is in control and makes decisions. The leader assigns work. The leader monitors and mentors individuals within the working group. The leader alters the working group’s process and approaches when appropriate. The actions and performance of the working group depends heavily on the boss. Working groups commonly develop in a way that promotes inclusivity within the working group. Working group members may start to build trust and strong
communication, but stop short of embracing conflict and feeling comfortable expressing their true feelings, emotions, and opinions (Wheelan, 1994).

Neri (2006) credited Freud with suggesting that a working group has one and only one leader. Neri indicated that a staunch working-group leader acts as a facilitator of tasks. A strong working-group leader encourages the group members to use their talents to achieve the highest level of individual performance possible. The working group then achieves performance through the sum of the individual contributions.

According to Forrester and Tashchain (2006), if there is a high degree of cohesion, there is a greater potential for the working group to achieve its objectives and goals. Forrester and Tashchain also suggested that cohesion increases the level of effort the members and the working group are willing to contribute. Moreover, the greater the cohesion of a working group, the more the individual members care about each other. A general pleasant feeling about the members of the working group often leads to greater group satisfaction.

Increased knowledge is also a key factor to the working group’s performance. Since members can come from various backgrounds, they likely share knowledge that reflects their experiences. Even if knowledge sharing is minimal between the members of a group, collective knowledge is still greater than that of individuals (Pestorius, 2006). Ludwick (2006) posited that when a working group of people with different talents and ways of looking at problems come together, almost nothing exists that the group cannot accomplish. Ludwick noted that cohesive working groups have two characteristics, a diversity of talent and a common set of goals.
Community of Practice

Communities of practice embody a group of people who share common practices. Communities of practice make up the fundamental units of social experience (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Social capital is the glue that holds the members of community of practice together. Social capital is a set of properties including norms, level of trust, and networking that enables a concerned group of people to work together for a mutual benefit (Akerman et al., 2004). Senge (2006) might have disagreed. Senge believed that commitment to the common aim was the glue that held groups together. Perhaps trust networking and cooperation follow from commitment to social good.

Eales (2004) put it simper, labeling a community of practice an informal but highly committed group of people who support the sharing and development of expertise in a specific area. The concept of a community of practice is not new. The community of practice is, in many ways, similar to a learning team as proposed by Senge (2006), in that both develop knowledge and pass it on to others (Chalmers & Keown, 2006). The difference between learning teams and communities of practice is that learning teams go through formal development processes, and communities of practice informally come together and stay together for as long as it serves the purpose of the individual members.

Milne and Callahan (2006) suggested that the greatest value, of communities of practice, lies within the networking opportunities. Eales (2004) suggested communities of practice provide groups with easy access to knowledge, decreased learning curves, and quicker solutions to problems. Communities of practice help generate innovative thinking. Communities of practice are an innovative collaboration strategy for working, learning, and innovation (Garavan, Carbery, & Murphy, 2007).
Garavan et al. (2007) performed research that purposely created four communities of practice to study the feasibility of formally creating the models so that the models could be applied to problems using a controlled, as-needed approach. The catalyst for Garavan et al.’s research is the recognition that communities of practice are emergent and informal. They are balanced by a need to manage and apply them widely. Like teams, communities of practice consist of three basic resources: people, places, and things. The resources focus on learning and solving a social problem. Wenger (1998) suggested three dimensions or development stages that communities of practice go through: (a) members interact with each other and develop norms; (b) members become bound together by a shared sense of purpose; and (c) over time, members develop shared community and relationships.

Intentionally created communities of practice have unique demographics, memberships, characteristics and focus (Garavan et al., 2007). Garavan et al. (2007) contended that intentionally created communities of practice start with formal meetings to develop purpose, priorities, perceptions, and agreed upon processes for moving forward. Intentionally established communities of practice share some development characteristics with teams. Lindkvist (2005) made a distinction between communities of practice and collectives of practice. Lindkvist suggested that collectives of practice are similar to project-based teams that develop more abstract and distributed knowledge. At the same time, he acknowledged that more structured collectives of practice have a better understanding of purpose and issues.
Effectiveness of Collaboration

Collaborative groups can reach more citizens within a community, accomplish objectives, garner more credibility and make greater use of resources than one single organization with a similar aim can (Cohen, Baer, & Satterwhite, 2002). This section reviews available literature to uncover elements of effective, collaborative practices.

Issues with collaborative structures can inevitably arise. Oftentimes, leaders of collaborative efforts lack the ability to handle challenges because they cannot recognize the symptoms of a failing endeavor. Wolff (2001) identified key elements to building successful coalitions, generated from starting and supporting coalitions for 16 years as well as training and assisting others. While there is neither a road map nor perfected means of delivery or practice, Wolff identified several trends in terms of what he deemed essential to success:

1. Community Readiness.
2. Intentionality.
5. Membership.
7. Dollars and Resources.

Mattessich et al. (2001) of Wilder Research Center described the characteristics that lead to success and failure of collaborative initiatives. Relying upon the vast array of
literature on the topic, they discovered 20 “success factors” and put them into the following six categories:

1. Environment.
2. Membership characteristics.
5. Purpose.
6. Resources.

Based on findings related to the research, the Wilder Research Center developed the Wilder Factors Inventory. Organizations can use this questionnaire to appraise the strengths of the collaboration. Each statement responds to a “factor” under the aforementioned categories.

There seems to be an incredible use of collaboration to address local and national issues, and funding is following that trend (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). However, according to Huxham and Vangen (1996), the surge in the practice of collaboration comes with the concurrent lack of understanding of the complexities and difficulty associated with the activity. It is particularly beneficial to consider relationship management in inter-organizational collaborative projects.

Huxham and Vangen (1996) described acceptable practices associated with working across sectors. In the article, they described six themes. These themes are interwoven in many of their individual and collective work around the theories of collaborative advantage. The six themes are

1. Aims.
2. Compromise.
3. Power and trust.
5. Democracy and equity.
6. Determination, commitment, and stamina.

Since many of the themes highlighted by Huxham and Vangen are reflected in articles and books written by other authors, a proper assumption is that the conditions of collaborative work are complex and ambiguous. Yet, the goals are still attainable.

Cohen et al. (2002) provided eight steps for effective collaboration:

Step 1. Analyze the program’s objectives and determine whether to form a coalition. Before deciding whether or not to form a coalition, the situation that the current condition of the organization should be considered. According to Cohen et al. (2002), organizations should first determine that, the community they serve, needs them to form a coalition. They also must consider whether or not forming a coalition is personally beneficial. Organizations should assess the data available to them before deciding whether forming a coalition is advantageous. Although some spontaneous decisions to form coalitions became successful in the long run, lack of planning and thinking before forming coalitions could cause failure because of insufficient resources, historical issues, and other negative situations (Cohen et al., 2002).

Overall, the first step to effective collaboration includes determining whether a coalition is needed and if it fits an organization’s needs, and then assessing whether the organization has the necessary resources and sufficient capacity to form coalitions.
Therefore, those who will decide whether a coalition is needed should be extremely familiar with their organizations’ objectives and capacities (Cohen et al., 2002).

Step 2. Recruit the right people. When it is decided that a coalition needs to be formed, the most notable piece to decide on next is the composition and characteristics of the members. According to Cohen et al. (2002), coalitions should have diverse members to be effective. Although coalitions with less diversity can work faster because they have relatively common ideas and ways of working, these coalitions would not be able to look at more angles and other factors when they contemplate a certain problem.

When organizations are to be considered as members of a coalition, the organizations need to fit the identified issues leading to the forming of the coalition in the first place. The organizations may already be working on the same issue or have similar goals (Cohen et al., 2002). Competitors and adversaries may also be considered as coalition candidates, provided that they are sincere in their commitment to the coalition’s goals. The organizations have to decide whether this move would impede the coalition’s objectives (Cohen et al., 2002).

Once members are decided upon, those who have strong skills or interests should be given the responsibility to carry out tasks. Membership size should also be determined based on the coalition’s goals and purpose. It goes without saying that membership size will differ from one coalition to another (Cohen et al., 2002).

Step 3. Devise a set of preliminary objectives and activities. To have an effective coalition, the goals and activities the coalition will pursue should be carefully devised. According to Cohen et al. (2002), a coalition’s goals should take into consideration the members’ personal goals. Members need to be included in discussions when a coalition’s
goals and objectives are devised. A written mission statement is recommended because it will become a useful tool for providing clarity of a coalition’s goals. However, it is not advised that a coalition be too focused on the semantics of the statement in the initial stages of the coalition’s life. Long-term objectives of a coalition are better when they are not too broad, because as the breadth of the coalition’s agenda widens, its effectiveness can be compromised (Cohen et al., 2002).

Cohen et al. (2002) proposed that to be effective, coalitions should engage in activities that are well defined and relevant to the set goals. More importantly, the activities should optimize the skills of the coalition members. It is also advantageous to engage in activities that will result in short-term successes because these instances can enhance the coalitions’ morale, visibility, and credibility (Cohen et al., 2002). It is deemed that activities, such as those related to the objectives of a coalition, which motivate the members, will lead to the success of the coalition.

Step 4. Convene the coalition. According to Cohen et al. (2002), there are three approaches to starting a coalition. It could be done at a meeting, a conference, or a workshop. The organization should decide which one is the best approach, based on their needs, objectives, and planned activities. When a coalition is convened, facilitators should properly illustrate the coalition’s structure, goals, and activities to make all members aware of them (Cohen et al., 2002).

Step 5. Anticipate the necessary resources. Effective coalitions can incur minimal costs for materials and supplies yet require substantial time commitments from their members. Effective coalitions recognize that their members’ time is the most valuable contribution they can offer. Members should be committed to the goals and activities of
their coalitions. However, facilitators should be aware that some members give unrealistic commitments of their time when they are overly enthusiastic during meetings. Facilitators should also recognize the times when members are resentful of the work and time they are giving to a coalition. When frustration is and over commitment is not recognized as soon as possible, both situations can lead to long-term, destructive effects (Cohen et al., 2002).

Step 6. Define elements of a successful coalition structure. Facilitators should be aware of the technical details of the coalition’s structure because these are significant for the success of the coalitions. They should be flexible for input and changes by coalition members as well (Cohen et al., 2002). The details of significance are the coalition’s expected life, the location, frequency, and length of the meetings. Just as significant are the membership parameters, decision-making processes, agendas and participation during meetings. Although there are no strict rules to have when structuring these elements, these elements should be given sufficient attention.

Step 7. Maintain coalition vitality. Cohen et al. (2002) claimed that, for coalitions to be effective, members should maintain the vitality. This could be done by resolving issues as they arise. Although these may be difficult to recognize immediately, it need to be done so that problems do not become bigger and do not affect the vitality of the coalition (Cohen et al., 2002).

Step 8. Make improvements through evaluation. Lastly, coalition evaluations need to be done regularly so that pertinent feedback from the members can be gathered. Feedback can improve a coalition’s objectives, activities, and processes as well as help the coalition prepare for unanticipated events. Moreover, through an ongoing evaluation
of the coalition, the level of involvement and commitment of each member will be
demonstrated (Cohen et al., 2002).

Understanding Barriers to Collaboration Success

With all of the promise collaboration affords to those who chose to employ it as a
strategy to make a change within a community or neighborhood, there are known
obstacles that contribute to the failure of the group work. Failure of collaborative efforts
between public, nonprofit and volunteer or community-based organizations is not
considered costly in comparison to similar relationships in the private sector. There is,
however, a loss in confidence in the collaborative process, and wasted human resources,
time, and energy (Huxham & Vangen, 1996).

Hansen (2009) agrees with the assertion, made by Cohen et. al., that the first
obstacle an organization faces as it contemplating whether or not to collaborate in the
first place. Increasingly, the standard on the federal, state, and local levels calls for
collaboration, prompting everyone rush to the table to work together. The assumption is
that collaboration is a marvellous thing (Huxham & Vangen, 2009). Collaboration is not
the medicine for every sickness. In fact, working together, if not properly considered, can
cause more harm than good (Hansen, 2009).

Hansen (2009) stated that “modern management” is the enemy of collaboration
because it encourages decentralization, which spawns individuality and silos (p. 49). He
affirms that there are four barriers to successful collaboration, which are the not-
invented-here, hording, search, and transfer barriers. Issues with collaborative structures
will inevitably arise. Often leaders, of collaborative, efforts are ill equipped to confront
challenges because they cannot recognize the symptoms, which leave them powerless
when trying to defend against harm caused by a group ailment. Henceforth, it is imperative that the leaders are aware of the barriers, and know the appropriate response to all of them.

Collaboration and Leadership Theories and Dynamics

According to Forsyth (2006), “Leadership is an inevitable element of life in a group—a necessary prerequisite for coordinating the behavior of the group members in pursuit of a common goal” (p. 372). Many define leaders as the people who establish the vision and get their followers to buy in to move toward the organizations goals. This traditional concept may cause tension among members who are leaders and experts in their own rights. Leadership is not power over people; it is power with the people (Forsyth, 2006, p. 374).

Leadership in a collaborative setting or collaborative leadership takes on an entirely different shape than classic leader-follower relationships according to researchers Vangen and Huxham (2003a). In that vein, the perception is the leader is the one who oversees the activities (Vangen & Huxham, 2003a). Also referred to as the facilitator or convener, collaborative leaders must, therefore, be skilled in ways that allow them to move the agenda forward (Vangen & Huxham, 2003a).

As collaborative practice becomes more widely used, leaders’ approaches and style may evolve as the necessity of the formation and overall functionality becomes more diverse, which may present challenges for the practitioner who does not easily fit the models presented in earlier research. To that end, this section of the literature review examines key findings presented by researchers who have studied collaboration leadership dynamics to understand the various tasks, activities, and challenges they
encounter and identify the skills, qualities, traits, and attributes needed to facilitate maximum orientation toward a collective goal or set of goals. Next, it looks at several traditional leadership theories and approaches to find out if there are parallels between them and the perspective researchers put forward as collaborative leadership activities.

Traits and Behaviors of Collaborative Leaders

According to Hansen (2009), there are three behaviors in collaborative leadership. They help define the style of the leader. He said that collaborative leaders can put their own interests, agendas, and goals to the side and get others to do the same. They involve others in decision making so that they feel valued. They are open to people and alternative ideas; they encourage members to give input on critical decisions that need to be made, but they need to be decisive at the same time. They take accountability and expect members to do the same. He also said that they needed to avoid personal barriers such as power hunger, arrogance, defensiveness, fear, and ego.

Forsyth (2006) would agree with the idea of openness and add that the group leader needs to be conscious, stable, agreeable, and extraverted. He said that they also need to be viewed as intelligent, experienced and holders of expertise. In terms of demographics, leaders are older, taller, heavier, and Whiter. It is also more likely that they will be men.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) stated that the collaborative leader must be able to “create a climate of trust and facilitate relationships” (p. 224). Shared information is shared power; those who hoard information and resources are not suitable collaborative leaders. They need to support the notion of a joint effort. They must understand that alone they are incapable of resolving complex issues. They should be aware that everyone at
the table needs to experience a benefit for being part of the group. Lastly, they should encourage members to have face-to-face meetings frequently.

Activities, Tasks, and Roles of Collaborative Leaders

In most modern research on collaborative leadership, the concept of leadership in collaboration is not hierarchal (Thompson, Framces, Levacie, & Mitchell, 1991). For Vangen and Huxham (2003a), leadership is grounded in collaboration theory and is drawn along the lines of management. Leadership is centered on how the leader makes things move forward. In that way, it does not follow the procession of traditional leadership. Instead, they put forth the notion that the collaboration “structure” and communication processes are the leadership “media” that are as instrumental in leading to the collaboration’s outcome as is the behavior of the participants associated with it (Vangen & Huxham, 2006).

In most research on collaborative leadership, there is less of a focus on the dissimilarities between leadership and management (Bryman, 1996; Huxham & Vangen, 2003a). The leader is essentially charged with the task of mobilizing individuals, organizations, and communities (Stewart, 1999). Although some researchers limit the overseer role to the management of tasks, one must acknowledge there is a stark contradiction between that label and their description of the actual function of the leader, which is both task and relation oriented.

The complex and ever-changing nature of collaboration makes it easy to understand why this dichotomy exists. The role of the leader becomes more multifarious when the collaboration is a virtual organization that has no money and stretches across sector. When the aforementioned scenario presents itself, it is imperative that the leader
posses traits, characteristics and skills to achieve success in the multidimensional, collaborative environment (Huxham & Vangen, 2000b).

Huxham and Vangen (2003) explored the various activities that collaboration leaders must perform. Based on the data they collected through their work with 13 public and community-based collaborations, they found that leaders spend time in four different areas of action—embracing, empowering, involving, and mobilizing. Huxham and Vangen found that this progression leads to the collaborative advantage, which was discussed earlier in the chapter. They stated that many collaboration “managers” express the desire to build infrastructure and relationships so that they can move toward their goals. The action orientation of the leadership role illustrates that, in collaborations, leadership and management are not easily distinguishable (Huxham & Vangen, 2003).

One could argue, however, that to move things, certain activities may have to be managed by the leader. Leadership skills are necessary to engage and connect with the participants so that they feel as though they are being embraced and empowered. Their motivation and inspiration could motivate and inspire others. Notwithstanding the aforementioned notion that leadership could outweigh management in terms of the skill set needed to stabilize a collaborative agenda, it is necessary to recognize the progression of leadership. As described by Huxham and Vangen (2003), the progression moves the leader through the actions of embracing, empowering, involving, and mobilizing.

Embracing members relates to recruiting the right members. It is considered an ongoing task, not just one reserved to the beginning phases of partnership development. Empowering members are more than creating a feeling of being empowered. It is a form
of validating member participation by affording them an opportunity to give input in critical areas of formation, strategic planning and action enacting.

Involving the group members is more challenging in a pragmatic sense. Involvement implies that the leader must first recognize some degree of differentiation between the levels of involvement, which leads to issues related to trust and power. Inherent to the practice of collaboration is the reality that some members play a more active role and take on more work or responsibility than others. Their willingness to do so makes the leader involve them at a deeper level. Inequity ensues when an organization takes the lead role. A question of loyalty is oftentimes at the forefront in that instance.

Mobilizing members is one aspect of collaboration in which it is essential that managers’ possess the capacity to leverage their influence over others. A manager in this case must convince the members that there is a benefit to their involvement. The leader must negotiate the reality that the members’ time is a treasure and; therefore, their involvement may require more than intrinsic reward.

In the same study, Huxham and Vangen (2003) interpreted the role of collaborative leaders. Again, Huxham and Vangen did not recognize the leader-follower relationship in collaboration. Early on, they stated that traditionally, collaborative leaders are not in supervisory roles and are sometimes themselves accountable to the group, depending on the positionality of the leadership role itself. Although the stakeholders or participants look to the leader to clarify the agenda and “affirm values, motivate action, manage processes, and share knowledge” the presumption is made that there is no hierarchy (Rouchanowski, 2001, p. 38). They asserted that traditional leadership theories, therefore, do not apply.
Huxham and Vangen (2003) debunked trait, style, contingency, leader member exchange (LMX), and transformational leadership theories as approaches that are appropriate for collaborative leaders to employ. Instead, Huxham and Vangen (2003) posited that shared, informal, emergent, and de-centering leadership theories are more befitting. Yet, they contended that central to the role of the collaboration leader is human interrelations such as trust building, managing power, and maintaining open communication channels.

The relational elements keep members in sync even when they have varied interest, and help members. They feel as though their input is shaping the agenda. One could argue, therefore, that a formal or informal authority exists, making the traditional approaches worthy of consideration, such that the nature of the perceived authority could lead to interactions, experiences, and effects that are similar to those found in traditional leadership approaches (Crosby & Bryson, 2010).

Leadership Theories

Vangen and Huxham (2003a) stated that leading in a collaborative setting requires that a manager operate from dual perspectives of what they call “collaborative thuggery” and authentic collaboration (p. S73). They also pointed out that “organizational leadership literature” should be viewed from the lens of “collaboration theory” (p. S73).

Path-Goal Theory

The path-goal model of leadership represents another significant approach to contingency theory. House (1971) articulated path-goal theory and described two leadership functions. Later versions defined four types of leader behavior and included supportive, directive, achievement-oriented, and participative leadership (House, 1991).
Supportive leadership demonstrates concern for a follower’s well-being. Directive leadership establishes guidance for performance and focuses upon regulation of behavior through rules and procedures.

Achievement-oriented leadership establishes goals and performance objectives in order to achieve superior results by manifesting commitment and confidence in followers. Path-goal theory contributes to the body of leadership knowledge because the concept contends that leadership behaviors and situational variables are significant and influential considerations, which are not mutually exclusive. Yukl (1998) noted criticism of path-goal theory’s evaluation of four separate leader behaviors even though individuals could conceivably use all types.

Situational Leadership

Hersey and Blanchard (1982) articulated situational leadership theory and addressed some of the conceptual weaknesses of Blake and Mouton’s managerial grid. Situational leadership maintains that the best leaders can adapt to changing situations with various types of people in the work environment. Leadership behavior is dependent upon two interrelated maturity factors, defined as job maturity and psychological maturity. Job maturity is associated with functional abilities related to task performance. Self-confidence and self-respect reflect the levels of individual psychological maturity (Yukl, 1998).

The situational leadership model is depicted as a two-dimensional matrix similar to the managerial grid (Hersey, 1984). The intersection of an X-axis representing task behavior and a Y-axis representing relationship behavior creates four quadrants. The situational leadership model provides a second scale that identifies a person’s willingness
and ability to undertake or assume responsibility. Managers or leaders reduce task-focused behavior by increasing autonomy and freedom while enhancing relationships through emotional support (Blanchard, 1993).

Situational leadership theory defines four levels of leadership behavior (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). The first level, designated S1, is characterized by high task and low-relationship behavior. S1 leadership is directive involves telling a subordinate what to do. S2 leadership has a high task and high relations correlation. Second-level leadership involves explaining why a task needs to be done. S3 leadership reflects a higher focus on relationships and a lower focus on task-associated behavior, involving, mutual participation and a more collaborative method of direction. S4 leadership involves more delegation and less leadership involvement, dependent upon the situation (Carns, Hollenback, Preziosi, & Snow 1998).

Situational leadership represents a dyadic model of leadership with a one-to-one relationship between leader and follower based upon degrees of maturity (Northouse, 2007). The limitation of the situational leadership model is the failure to distinguish core competencies and to account for the specific motivational links between behaviors based upon self-interest and organizational performance (Northouse, 2007). A need to address the theoretical shortfall signals the importance of rewards and incentives as an important factor in the influence relationship.

**Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX)**

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory reflects transactional leadership by describing the role each party portrays in the interchange process. “The basic premise of the theory is that leaders develop a separate exchange relationship with each individual
subordinate as the two parties mutually define the role of the subordinate” (Yukl, 1998, p. 150). Exchange theories of leadership are rooted in dyadic interaction at the direct and personal level of leadership relations.

The leader’s position has degrees of authority to reward or punish individuals based upon performance or other considerations (House, 1991). French and Raven (1962) explored positional authority as the basis of power in organizations. LMX defines followers as either an in-group or an out-group in relationship to the organizational power structure (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Steinberg, 2004). In-group perceived attributes include work commitment, loyalty to the leader, and burden sharing with the leader. The out-group focuses upon compliance to obligatory positional and organizational requirements. Yukl (1998) stated, “leader and members gain more personal power with each other due to mutual respect and trust” (p. 151).

Leader-member exchanges are subject to a number of potential group dysfunctions. The prospects for perceived inequality, unfairness, and intra-group rivalries arise when based upon real or perceived slights, discriminations, or competition for rewards, personal validation, or career mobility (Northhouse, 2007). Green and Mitchell (1979) explored the use of attribution theory to articulate how individuals conceive judgments relating to performance. Dienesch and Liden (1986) related the way the attribution process contributes to a leader and a follower’s interpretation of one another’s actions.

Contemporary evolutions in LMX theory suggest that leaders should cultivate individual relationships with all followers (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). Martin, Krapels,
and Douglas (2005) argued that the quality of relationships between leaders and followers determines task performance.

_Transformational Leadership_

Burns (1978) first described the concept of transforming leadership. Rost (1993) argued, “A definition that states leadership is a multi-directional influence relationship of people who use persuasion to make an impact is a paradigm that articulates what transformation is all about” (p. 124). According to transformational leadership theory, leaders provide a mission, vision, and values to followers in order to instill pride. By doing so, leaders gain respect through creating intellectual stimulation to achieve common goals that are based upon personal consideration and mutual respect (Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002).

Avolio and Bass (1988) identified four salient dimensions of transformational leadership. First, the concept of idealized influence represents risk and burden sharing by the leaders with the followers and the leader manifesting consideration for the personal needs of followers. The second dimension, inspirational motivation, is characterized by behaviors that create meaningful and challenging work for the followers. The third dimension intellectually stimulates followers through the solicitation of ideas and collaborative problem solving. The fourth dimension focuses upon individualized consideration by the leaders attempting to promote the personal development of the follower (Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004). “Transformational leadership is essentially leadership that motivates followers to transcend their self-interest for collective purpose, vision, and/or mission” (Feinberg, Ostroff, & Burke, 2005, p. 471).
**Team Leadership**

As a leader, one has to employ Haddock, Walker, and Daniels’ (2005) team synergy. According to Haddock et al. (2005), leaders need to be adaptable and flexible in applying these team leadership tools and principles according to the internal and external environment at any given time. The principles are

1. Protect and maintain the boundary of the team.
2. Keep the team focused on its work and consider all contributions in relation to the task (using effective chairing or facilitation, as appropriate).
3. Be accountable for the function of the team.
4. Hold the team members to account for their functioning.
5. Monitor the flow of information across the boundary, ensuring that team views are represented to the external environment and that information from the external environment is kept to a manageable level. More is not necessarily better or even desirable; when there exist a great deal of unnecessary information the important piece gets missed.
6. Clarify what is required for team member.
7. Be aware of dynamics of groups, particularly developmental processes.
8. Be aware that a group may sometimes see and experience leaders differently from the way the leaders see or experience themselves. It is essential for a leader to have space to reflect on this (through monitoring, supervision, consultation, and learning sets). Sometimes a leader may be part of the problem. For example, when a team leader’s anxiety results in over-controlling behavior.
9. Ensure the team has appropriate information and ways of communicating to enable the work to progress and to know where the gaps are.

10. Manage difference and conflict. Clarify and allow exploration of differences—this is an opportunity for learning and solving problems. A leader needs experience and courage to raise and confront issues, which may be uncomfortable for themselves and the team.

11. Be aware of roles other than the leadership role.

12. Be aware of the external environment and keep the team appropriately informed. (Haddock et al., 2005).

**Collaboration and Organizational Theories and Structure**

All collaborations are not made equally. To understand the collaborative process as a practice, it is essential that an exploration of the structure that supports collaboration occurs. Organizational theories supply the basis for understanding the complex, chaotic, and dynamic nature of collaboration. To that end, this review of literature explores the organization through the lens of collaboration. It examines organizational theories including change through the complexity theory. Lastly, it considers implications of the collaboration relationship with the environment within which it operates.

**Organizational Theory**

Nobel laureate and former Carnegie Mellon University professor, Herbert A. Simon (1947) posited that organizations did not exist as self-contained islands. Simon’s arguments provided the intellectual impetus to break from a simplistically, mechanistically, and rationally scientific-oriented view of organizations offered by Taylor (1911), Gilbreth (1914), and Gantt (1919). Simon’s departure signaled the
advance of human relations as a major branch of study in the field of management and leadership. The Human Relations School focuses upon environmental and behavioral considerations affecting the influence process. Simon’s (1946) challenge to the prevailing paradigm began with the publication of the article “The Proverbs of Administration” (Shafritz & Ott, 1987).

Simon (1946) contended that notional descriptions of authority, centralization, and span of control referred to by Fayol (1916/1949) require precise definitions to provide operational value (Shafritz & Ott, 1987). The same challenge exists for contemporary leadership theories in the emerging work environment (Rost, 1993). The theory of administration is concerned with how an organization should be constructed and operated in order to function efficiently. Simon suggested that many principles are definitions, rather than enduring truths, because of the limited information that exists for making wholly rational decisions. Simon’s premise regarding the limits of rationality is termed bounded rationality (Shafritz & Ott, 1987).

Bounded rationality means that individuals do not have perfect information to make decisions and try to make the best decision possible with the available information (Simon, 1946). The objective is to ascertain the most reliable information in a situation subject to changing contextual influences. Simon (1947) challenged the concept of the perfect economic man who recognizes all possible choices and consequences for selecting each. Simon insisted that the cognitive ability of people is limited. Individuals make choices that are the best available rather than optimal, and Simon (1983) coined the term satisficing to describe this characteristic propensity in decision making.
Collaboration, Organization, and Change

*Change*

Collaborative partnerships for community change and improvement have increased in popularity (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Watson-Thompson, Fawcett, & Schultz, 2008). There are various levels of change, types of intervention, and forms of partnership (Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). John Kotter (1996) stated that there are eight stages to the change process:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency.
2. Creating the guiding coalition.
3. Developing a vision and strategy.
4. Communicating the change vision.
5. Empowering broad-based action.
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change.
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture.

An inter-organizational collaboration must consider concepts of change from internal and external levels if success is the goal. They have to look at actions that could potentially lead to change within an organizational that is in a network with the change-leading collaborative. External factors including funding, policy changes, and environmental forces can change the way collaborations function. Huxham and Vangen (2003) further explained that there are “cyclic relationships between the nature of participating organizations and the forces of collaboration, with the participant defining the focus and the focus defining new participants,” which can change the nature of
collaboration (p. 793). Thus, if the forces and the focus change due to external forces, membership and the basis for membership may need to be adjusted accordingly.

While change is an inherent element of the collaborative process, the fact remains that change without progress, among other things, can lead to members rationalizing their participation and relative commitment to the partnership or the collaborative efforts. The implications from this study seem to highlight the need to consider the membership structure in that it is vital to have the right individuals and organization at the table. They need to know their roles and the roles of other members. In addition, the following questions are worthy of careful consideration:

1. Who is at the table?
2. What do they do in their organization/community?
3. Why are they participating?
4. Do they want to participate?
5. When should the group expand?
6. What do they hope to gain from their participation? (Huxham & Vangen, 2003)

As members join the collaboration, the collaborative leader should seek to arrive at the answer to these or similar questions (Vangen & Huxham, 2003). These questions can provide insights into how to approach the task of designing and defining a membership structure.

*Complexity Theory*

Complexity science offers a conceptual lens to view organizational change and development (Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Parsons, 2007; Schreiber & Carley, 2006; Stacey,
In complexity theory, organizations are considered complex adaptive systems. A complex adaptive system is “a diversity of agents who interact with and mutually affect one another, leading to spontaneous ‘bottom-up’ emergence of novel behavior” (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001, p. 55). In the case of organizations, the agents are humans. Interactivity among these agents occurs at varying points in time. It includes activities ranging from the actions of a single individual to those involving larger networks of interactions, which could include diverse groups.

Complexity theory draws on the complex dynamics of living organisms and those occurring within organizations (Solow & Szmerkovsky, 2006; Stacey, 1995). Organizations, like organisms, are interacting systems that are continually changing and adapting to the emerging environment. Carlisle and McMillan (2006) maintained that organizations are in a constant state of self-organization: “Activities are determined by the conditions in which the system finds itself, and it responds in a self-organizing reaction” (p. 4).

The self-organizing process of complex adaptive systems allows for both unpredictable and multiple outcomes for organizational systems, which is primarily a result of multi-source influence on the overall system (Solow & Szmerkovsky, 2006; Stacey, 1995). One of the significant outcomes of the complex adaptive systems model is that it minimizes individual influence on overall system outcomes. Therefore, organizational outcomes are driven by the interactivity of individuals and their environment.

This study emphasized the critical relationship between humans and technology within the context of organizational systems. In sum, complexity theory offers an
appropriate theoretical lens through which to view modern organizations because of their interactive, dynamic, and emergent nature (Surie & Hazy, 2006).

Organizations and Environments

One area where the effectiveness of collaboration could be explored in a promising way is in the growing knowledge of quantum physics or new science. This area describes the importance of fluctuations, disorder, change, dynamic attractions, complexity, and chaos. New science is a worldview that espouses systems, relationships, transformation, energy and more others. This worldview is much more fitting for the collaboration process than the old paradigm.

Although the collaboration process has often been described in a linear fashion and characterized as rational, it is more imbued with chance, serendipity, occasional chaos, fluctuations between breakdowns and healing in actual. According to Wheatley (1992), new science illustrates the fluctuations between order and disorder in life. New science demonstrates that, in the face of shocks or fluctuations that create disturbances and imbalances, physical systems have the tendency to move toward self-order. In that case, disturbances come to be the main factors behind creativity and renewal of systems.

Open systems, that favor continual exchanges of information, even at a minimum level, are more receptive to effective change. Wheatley (1992) posited a direct link between physical and social systems. In relation to the collaborative process, Wheatley claimed that the quantum world vanquished the concept of the unconnected individual. The dynamics inherent in the quantum world make the collaborative process significant. There is a vast web of universal connections and relationships that consistently alter the form and function of material matter and organizational systems. As a result, traditional
social communication and power relationships are being reorganized. The mass media
and telecommunication developments created considerable turbulence in existing social
and political systems. As new channels of information emerge, the older command and
control models of organizational power arrangements are overshadowed. Collaboration is
responsible for change, and it is the facilitator of further change down the road. These
trends are stimulated further by information technologies built around the use of the
World Wide Web (Bradley, 1999)

Building Relationships, Will, Trust, and Capacity

Trust

Research clearly indicates that true collaboration efforts not only require strong
leaders, but also are extremely dependent on leaders especially in the early stages of its
development (Crosby & Bryson, 2010). Wheelan (1994) suggested that although a strong
leader is necessary, the role of the leader changes as the group progresses. Progression,
however, is highly dependent on the production or existence of trust within the
collaborative efforts. When trust is present, it is easy to share resources (De Weaver,
Martens, & Vandenbempt, 2005). If trust changes, the relationships change, and the result
could lead to changes in the network. Thus, the effectiveness of inter-organizational
collaboration could be strengthened or weakened (De Weaver et al., 2005).

The leader bares the bulk of the burden of facilitating trust (Huang & Van de
Vliert, 2006). Although the members must be open to trust building activities, the leader
must create the environment for trust to manifest. Trust allows the leader to foster
agreements, solve conflict, and forge collective beliefs and values (Wheelan, 1994). With
trust, leaders help individuals deal with their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The focus
is to help the members deal with their roles within the team. Trust also allows the leader to instill confidence and keep the team motivated until the leader can sit back and watch the group perform.

Group Efficacy Theory

Katzenbach and Smith (2003) suggested that six things are necessary for leaders to do when developing and managing people in a collaborative effort. First, the work need to be relevant and meaningful. The group members want and need the group leader to help clarify and commit to their mission, goals, and challenges. Secondly, the leader must build commitment and confidence. Third, the leader should assess the strengths and the various skill levels within the group. The leader helps the group members develop and hone the skills they need to be effective.

Fourth, they manage relationships with outsiders, including by removing obstacles. Fifth, they create opportunities for others. The leader must provide performance opportunities for the group. Sixth, they do real work. The leader must be a working member of the group and must perform value-added work within the group.

A number of additional tasks and guidelines are available for group leaders. Thamhain (2004), in research on technology project groups, suggested that group leaders need to create group involvement early in a project or challenge. They must define the group model, staff the group with members who have appropriate skills and talents, and stimulate enthusiasm and excitement. Lastly, they have to create reward systems, ensure senior management support, build commitment, manage conflict, provide direction, and create and foster an environment of continual improvement. Pearce (2007) added that a group leader must set clear goals and objectives, develop communication, encourage
innovation, and give the group freedom to do work, treat people with dignity, and get the job done efficiently.

Consensus

Collaborative groups should also be committed to the common purpose and performance goals. Katzenbach and Smith (2003) had difficulty finding a real group that did not have both purpose and performance goals. Hamlyn-Harris, Hurst, von Baggo, and Bayley (2006), in their research on strong group predictors and satisfaction described strong groups as working toward a common goal, and being aware of each other’s skills. They labeled the groups strengths and weaknesses stating that they are helpful to each other, and have an understanding that the group is only as strong as the weakest member, So, they are willing to share resources and knowledge to aid in group development.

The group members should have a consensus that they should prioritize the well-being of the team ahead of their own interests (Hede, 2007; Katzenbach & Smith, 2003). Davies and Kanaki (2006) pointed out that although the leader is the most respected and most influential member of a working group, the collective influences of the remaining members can still exceed the leader’s influence. The leader’s job, therefore, is to explore roles that fit the individuals’ talents and to make sure all members want to perform. In addition, because consensus is extremely beneficial, group conflict should be avoided or at least managed well. Castiglione (2007) suggested that when there is less conflict, members feel free to share ideas and engage in open discussion. Leaders of collaborative groups should see to it that conflicts are prevented or at least resolved as fast and as efficiently as possible when they arise.
Communication

Spillan, Mino, and Rowles (2002) believed that effective communication is crucial in organizational management and that organizations need effective communication to survive. Calabrese (2004) and Spillan et al. showed that managerial style determines the flow of communication within organizations. Further, modern organizations have been described as complex adaptive systems (Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008; Lichtenstein et al., 2006; Minas, 2005; Solow & Szemerekovsky, 2006). Organizational outcomes are attributable to the interactive nature of the open systems within modern organizations in complex adaptive systems (Kaiser et al., 2008). The communication system is one of many interacting systems, or structures, within an organization.

The characteristics of different types of communication technologies make it more or less suitable for particular contexts and social structures, which is information that organizational leaders should be aware of. Different media can distort or enhance communications to the benefit or loss of the organization. Lengel and Daft (1988) provided a useful scale for approximating the richness of a message. From richest to least rich, the types of communications ranged from (a) personal interaction, such as face-to-face meetings; (b) interactive media, such as a telephone call; (c) personal static media, such as memos and letters; and (d) impersonal static media, such as bulletins or flyers (Lengel & Daft, 1988).

*Input/Output Persuasion Model*

McGuire’s (1989) input/output persuasion model emphasized “the hierarchy of communication effects and considered how various aspects of communication such as
message design, source, and channel, as well as receiver (audience) characteristics, affect the behavioral outcome of communication” (p. 44). The output or dependent variables are persuasion-mediating response steps, which are behaviors ranging among attending, comprehending, yielding, behaving, and retaining. The independent communication variables consist of the characteristics of the source, message, channel, receiver, and destination (McGuire, 1989).

Communication is vital because it “influence[s] fundamental beliefs, values, and attitudes” that leads to a group of individuals or organizations reach a certain consensus (Martin et al., 2006, p. 296). An effective communication program delivers information and knowledge sharing, which increase productivity (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979). One measure of group effectiveness is the flow of communication. The flow of communication is the result of lateral, vertical, and multi-directional styles of communication. Communication effectiveness contributes to positive effects on innovation or team dynamics.

**Communication and Leadership**

Communication is a critical component of the organizational structure and its vitality (Spinks & Wells, 1995). Spinks and Wells (1995) posited that the overall quality of organizational communication contributed to improved performance and increased levels of stakeholder satisfaction. Successful communication elicits improved follower alignment and increased levels of trust throughout the organization (Darling & Beebe, 2007).

Leaders play a crucial role in enabling the conditions that maximize these communication structures within an organization (Schreiber & Carley, 2006). Lengel and
Daft (2005) noted that communication quality was an issue of particular importance, and commented on how decision makers in organizations frequently failed to consider that factor. Lengel and Daft stated, “Executives often fail to realize, however, that both sending and receiving information through a communication medium is a decision that affects the meaning of the message” (p. 225). With the wide variety of modes and networks from which to choose, when deciding how to transmit information, the quality of the communication is a significant, mitigating factor.

Communication can be effective or ineffective resulting in negative or positive outcomes for an organization. The effect of communication on a team or organization has been researched in both quantitative and qualitative studies. Communication effectiveness is a popular topic for research because “communication is vital to all functions of an organization” (Goris, Pettit, & Vaught, 2002, p. 664). It is a vital part of leaders’ ability to meet environmental pressures and inform stakeholders of organizational goals, beliefs, and direction.

Organizational leadership style dictates the flow of information and the communication style he or she employs throughout an organization (Bass, 1999). Leadership style determines the success of the organization and the ability to increase innovation (Creswell, 2002). An organization that fails to provide seamless information to all stakeholders will fail to receive information from stakeholders (Hinds & Kiesler, 1995). A lack of information and knowledge sharing may lead to deficits in the organization’s ability to meet internal and external environmental stressors (Thyer, 2003).
Relationships

In an action-based study, Huxham and Vangen (2000a) researched the complex nature of the human relations element of collaborative structures. Their exploration involved researcher intervention and interactions with members they worked with as consultants or in a similar capacity over a 10-year period. The data collection method used was observation, interviews, flip chart responses, video recordings, notes from meetings or workshops and meeting minutes. The study focused on the membership of collaboration, and the data was analyzed by grouping information they gathered into themes.

From that process, “five clusters emerged…around lack of clarity of membership; consideration in stakeholder analysis; the evolution of collaboration; individuals as members vs. organizations as members; and the structure of the collaboration” (Huxham & Vangen, 2000a, p. 776). They conducted further research to arrive at the basis that would help describe and “identify key dimensions of membership as an indicator of the types of ways in which ambiguity, complexity and dynamics are manifested in collaborative structures” (Huxham & Vangen, 2000a, p. 777).

In the study, ambiguity is referenced in terms of membership, status, and representativeness. For membership, Huxham and Vangen (2000a) noted that most members of the collaborative could not name other members of the group when asked. Members also expressed a lack of clarity around who was considered a member and who was not. They even questioned their own status as members. That dilemma also emerged when Huxham and Vangen examined member motivations to participate and how they
perceived the importance of the member or organization. For example, funding could create a presumed contribution, interest, or stake in the collaboration.

Representativeness considers the question of who is at the table in the collaboration. Is it an individual or an individual representing an organization? Huxham and Vangen (2000a) reported that things are further complicated when members are working as individuals in their organizations. Yet, Huxham and Vangen highlighted the notion that individuals represent interests. They bring “their organizations’ cultures and views” to the table with them and they must make sure that the movement of the group is in accordance with their role within the organization they represent (p. 781).

Huxham and Vangen (2000a) found that structural dynamics presents challenges caused by members participating in multiple multi-organizational partnerships, which causes “complex hierarchies of collaboration” to develop (p. 786). Similarly, there is no consideration given to the issues created when there is a lack of coordination between the many partnerships and various meetings members attend. This overlap can cause cynicism and feelings of mistrust and stagnation as people begin to see themselves across the table from the same people in different settings. They often mistake any lack of input or action for the way they operate without considering the circumstances and the situation surrounding their perceived lack of participation.

Dynamics of collaboration, according to Huxham and Vangen (2003), highlight the ever-changing nature of a coalition’s structure, membership, and aims. They examine internal and external probable causes of tension. Internal shifts in membership sometimes alter the structure of a coalition. Individual roles, career or organization moves, and other
factors can alter a coalition’s membership by changing who occupies a contributing organization’s seat for the coalition and how that organization participates.

Theory of Reasoned Action

Important in this discussion is the theory of reasoned action. The theory of reasoned action, proposed by Fishbein and Azjen (1975), is the adoption of behavior, which derives from a “function of intent”. According to Fishbein and Azjen, the “function of intent is determined by a person’s attitude (beliefs and expected values) of performing the behavior, and by perceived social norms (importance and expectations that others expect one to perform the behavior)” (p. 291).

The theory of reasoned action aims to frame statistical generalizations for predicting people’s behaviors. This theory is designed to predict the attitudes and behaviors of a large group of people. The theory indicates two factors that influence a group’s behavior. First, people gravitate toward a specific behavior because they perceive the choice to do so can lead to a positive outcome. Second, they make choices regarding how to act based on social norms, risks, and rewards in relation to their choices. The theory proposes that people first consider their actions before they react. This process allows them to understand their own intentions, whether they consider a certain behavior positive or negative, if there are social pressures promoting or discouraging the behavior (Fishbein & Azjen, 1975).

Fishbein and Azjen (1975) theorized that an individual’s perceptions and behaviors “are influenced by the perceptions and behaviors expressed by members of groups to which he or she belongs and by members of the individual’s personal networks. People rely on the opinions of others, especially when a situation is highly uncertain or
ambiguous and no objective evidence is readily available” (p. 294). Ludwick (2006) suggested teams should encourage all members to contribute because successful teams not only tolerate different points of view; they value different points of view.

Social Capital Theory

Robert Putnam is a preeminent social scientist who places social capital at the center of his work. Putnam (1995) argued that social capital is quintessential to democracy and civic engagement. Putnam (2000) stated that trust is necessary and leads to social capital. Trust is neither constant nor inevitable. Trust ties can be weak or strong (Schneider, 2009).

Schneider (2009) illustrated the levels of trust by describing the pursuit of an employment opportunity. If an applicant is referred to his or her manager by an existing employee whom the manager trusts, the manager would be more inclined to trust that the applicant meets the standards and qualifications for the job based on that recommendation. Conversely, if an interested candidate applies for a job at a recruitment event, and the recruiter passes the resume along to the hiring manager, the manager is not relying on trust insofar as the candidate is not personally known by the recruiter. That last example is considered a “fleeting contact” or passing encounter with another person, as opposed to formal knowledge or relationships (Schneider, 2009).

Trust is not simply between people. In established relationships, where organizations have a history of working together, trust sometimes goes beyond the staff or members of the group (Schneider, 2009). For example, an executive could elect to do business with another organization and share its resources with that organization even if
members of the organization have left or leadership changes have occurred. In that way, trust transcends the individual to the organizational levels.

The manner in which trust develops depends heavily upon the type of social capital in play in a given situation. Schneider (2009) said bonding social capital extends beyond the group or organization. Bonding social capital exists in a network of relationships—networks trace various levels of connections between the members. Bonding social capital exists when groups are more homogeneous, and the members have have things in common, beyond their institutional roles. Bridging social capital deals with groups that have members who are more different than they are similar, and it crosses cultural boundaries. Scientists suggested that bridging is better than bonding, while others claim the inverse (Schneider, 2009; Weisinger & Salipante, 2005). Schneider (2009) contended, however, that neither is more beneficial than the other.

Although bridging capital takes longer to develop in cases in which ethnic diversity is richest, greater diversity in the group leads the participants to make broad change because there is less reliance upon commonalities (Schneider, 2009). In either case, Schneider said, “organizational culture combined with community-wide culture and subculture to influence the social capital available to individual organizations” (p. 651).

Linking social capital goes beyond similarities and differences among equals. Linking social capital speaks to the relations between individuals or organizations in which there are subordinates or persons or organizations that are in power because they have more resources (Schneider, 2009). Similar to bridging social capital, trust takes time to develop in linking social capital.
Convolution can emerge when dealing with aspects of diversity and social capital. The motivation to have diverse representation in inter-organizational collaborative groups stem from various needs, requirements, or desires (Weisinger & Salipante, 2005).

Weisinger and Salipante (2005) examined diversity in organizations. They found that voluntary organizations should focus on bonding social capital and work toward bridging social capital. Both types of social capital lend well to the discussion of diversity because “difference” is the central distinction between the two (Weisinger & Salipante, 2005).

Weisinger and Salipante (2005) explained that bridging social capital can slow progress and increase conflict because leaders tend to rely on the individuals they relate to (i.e. those who are most like them). As a result, leaders experience a lack of comfort when dealing with members of other ethnic groups because they lack a “shared life experience,” which leads those members to feel disenchanted with the group.

Consequently, the value of the mission and goals declines. Weisinger and Salipante concluded that “pluralistic interaction” toward pluralistic diversity, which is where “diverse views challenge organizational assumptions so as to change the fundamentals the organization itself,” should be the intention (p. 32). Pluralistic diversity does not simply seek representation of ethnic groups, which creates token membership. Instead, the goal of diversity is a process of “relationship development” (Weisinger & Salipante, 2005, p. 32).

DeWever, Martens, and Vandembempt (2005) explained the significance of social capital in inter-organizational networks. They posited that social capital is a “multi-dimensional construct that can facilitate action for an organization” (p. 1525). DeWever et al. described the structural and relational diminutions of social capital as critical to
group success. Structural diminution deals with “negative ties” and relational considers “trust, trust worthiness, norms and obligations” within the network (p. 1525).

The goal of DeWever et al. (2005) was to show the interdependence of trust and network configurations for successful and effective practices. DeWever et al. found that the interdependence was greater than indicated in previous research on inter-organizational network effectiveness. They considered inter-organizational networks as collections of different network ties characterized by different structural features. They wanted to explore the impact of structural features of social capital of performance. Viewing it first from that vantage point, they discovered that network ties alone do not lead to willingness to share information and resources freely. Trust and motivation must be considered to achieve higher levels of sharing.

DeWever et al. (2005) defined trust as the willingness to of one party to be “vulnerable” to the actions of another party. This trust is based on the expectation that each will perform an action pertinent to the truster, irrespective of an ability to monitor or control the other party (p. 1528). Levels of trust are generalized and specific (DeWever et al., 2005; Schneider, 2009). Generalized trust is closely related to trustworthiness and associated with indirect knowledge, whereas specific trust is associated with direct knowledge.

Inter-organizational groups are inextricably interdependent, which creates a sense of vulnerability. Willingness to make oneself vulnerable is based upon how comfortable a person is with taking a risk, which requires a level of trust (DeWever et al., 2005). Risks include both the sharing and receiving of resources and information because the giver risks feeling used and the receiver risks feeling incompetent (DeWever et al., 2005).
Ultimately, trust can minimize the negative end of those feelings, making trust essential to inter-organizational collaborative practice.

In collaboration bridging, bonding and linking social capital exists when people try to build relationships and trust. Working within the framework of the intricacies of organizational, social capital can lead to innovation and enhanced collaborative success and understanding (Schneider, 2009). Collaboration builds capacity and increases access to information and resources (Marra, Peterson, & Britsch, 2008). If the network is active and strong, it is likely that the group will have the external connections it needs to experience broad success (McGrath & Sparks, 2005).
CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine the formation of an inter-organizational collaborative group, Oakland’s Promise Alliance, to discover environmental and community factors that have contributed to its success. The study also examined how various participatory activities and group interactions used during the relationship-building phase of the groups’ development helped strengthen the group over time. Because of Oakland's unique history and the nature of the community’s involvement, it is particularly salient to employ the right strategy to inspire change and resolve issues that affect the public schools. Accordingly, this study also sought to identify the specific, existing characteristics of the Oakland community that shape its propensity for change.

Research Design

For this study, I used a qualitative method employing a participatory action research (PAR) approach to gain a better understanding of what it takes to build a solid inter-organizational collaboration that will be capable of achieving success in its efforts to solve a serious community issue. I chose to employ the participatory research method because it is solutions-based and affords the most effective qualitative tools and methods for gathering and processing information. Participatory research is a post-positivist method whereby the participants serve as active members of the investigation, not passive objects of the study (Gaventa, 1993).
PAR and Social Transformation

Participatory action research is socially engaging and is an exercise in solidarity between the researcher and those directly being affected by the problem being investigated (Maguire, 1987; Dyrness, 2007). In an effort to improve the lives of those meant to benefit from the process and transform fundamental societal structures and relationships, participatory action research invites a critical consciousness. It offers researchers a way to demonstrate solidarity with oppressed and disempowered people (Maguire, 1987) and allows people to participate in decisions that affect their lives (Dyrness, 2007). According to Rahman (1991), PAR is a cultural movement. Rahman described the functions of PAR as micro-level intervention and macro-level social transformation. It also promotes the motivation to change their immediate environment (Rahman, 1991). PAR raises people’s consciousness

PAR is a Break from Tradition

Participatory action research allows researchers the latitude to break away from the confines of quantitative research and analysis. Epistemology is a system of knowing with internal logic and external validity (Ladson-Billings, 2000). No longer bound by the positivist, subject-object relationship between the researcher and the research participant, academics interested in social transformation were able move to what Herda (1997) called an “ontological directed inquiry”, which is concerned with the “relationship between the researcher and the participant and the active orientation of the researcher toward the research project” (p. 58).

Positivism recognizes the truth in positive facts and observable phenomena, which can be measured and recorded (Maguire, 1987). In the positivist tradition, the
students do not question or study the implications of their research paradigm (Herda, 1997). Instead, they carry out their projects in the normal manner to graduate because they believe that is what research is. Research is not merely a step in the process to those who are in search of the truth because they know that searching for the truth communally and personally can affect one’s life when he experiences it for himself (Herda, 1997).

PAR and the Importance of Trust

Participatory action research requires that the researchers be open to personal and societal transformation and conscientization; therefore, trust is a crucial factor (Maguire, 1987). Freire (1970) said of trust, “They talk about the people, but they do not trust them; and trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change. A humanist can be identified more by his trust in the people, which engages him in their struggle, than by a thousand actions in their favor without their trust” (p. 41).

In order to build and maintain trust, there has to be a move toward authentic understanding. For trust to take hold, researchers must not see themselves as superior to the research participants. Notwithstanding the preconditions of the research participants, understanding begins with seeing the self in relation to others. Through understanding, the possibilities and potential of a person are disclosed; understanding is not simply given to someone by someone else (Maguire, 1987). Human understanding is circular (Herda, 1997). By using language and dialogue, one takes a step toward that understanding.

PAR Levels the Playing Field

PAR attempts to avoid the hierarchical systems present in other qualitative research methods, which are often referred to as, “traditional,” “orthodox,” “mainstream,” or “classical” because that mode of thinking is a subscription to the elitist,
academic, “ivory tower” mentality toward social science research (Maguire, 1987). Moreover, within those modes, knowledge is a commodity acquired, qualified, and prescribed from an imperialistic, Euro centric perspective of the world (Smith, 2000).

Conversely, PAR asserts that using qualitative research that is guided by questions the researcher and researcher consider relevant, and engages people in dialogue about a communal cause, can lead to collective research and action.

Freire (1970) stated that oftentimes, those who are oppressed do not always realize that they know things they have learned. They do not trust their own knowledge, so they do not let go; they hold themselves back from sharing and defer to those who theoretically have knowledge—like professors. It is a supposed belief that primitive, nonacademic people cannot use their minds or intellect (Smith, 2000). In PAR, the participant is the expert because the method legitimizes the notion that people are capable of producing knowledge through their own means and they have the right to use the knowledge to guide their own action, without being dictated to (Rahman, 1991).

Many academics use PAR as a tool to address issues within a broader context of social justice and self-determination. Academics are not the gate keepers of knowledge. Tandon asserted that information and knowledge is power, and the one holding the knowledge has what has become the single most significant bases for power and control (as cited in Maguire, 1987, p. 40). “Power sharing begins with a shift in the most basic power relationships in research, the relationship between the researcher and the research participant” (Maguire, 1987, p. 40).
Research Setting

Internal

During the formative stages of building inter-organizational collaboration, OPA held meetings at City Hall, in Oakland, CA. Since Mayor Ron Dellums’ administration spearheaded the Effective Teachers for Oakland Taskforce initiative and his relationship with APA was the catalyst for them selecting Oakland as a featured community, it was befitting that the meetings took place in an environment close to the origins of the initiative. Gathering in City Hall gave the members of the collaborative access to resources not found at a school site. The mere fact that we had authorization to occupy space in City Hall for the meetings inspired the feeling that the research was action oriented, and could lead to change.

Since Mayor Dellums’ term as mayor concluded at the end of 2010, selection of the research setting was critical to the successful transition of this project. The setting was in or around City Hall initially. I still hold office space in City Hall and know several city staff that could reserve meeting space for the group. It is, however, extremely vital that everyone feels comfortable. Therefore, I sought input from the executive committee to see if they wished to continue to meet at City Hall, or change the venue to a more convenient and comfortable location.

The setting is critical to creating a sense of trust, safety, and confidentiality among those participating in PAR. Food was the centerpiece of every meeting to ensure them member’s comfort. Although convening at City Hall makes our meetings feel “official”, we committed ourselves to creating an atmosphere that was formally informal. In other words, while engaging in critical thinking and problem solving
strategies, we were cognizant of the crucial nature of the task. While eating or having off-topic discussions, we were informal with one another.

External

In Oakland, the history is so rich that it is subterranean; it burrows into the city’s core and runs through its heart, which beats with a thunderous rhythm that resounds throughout the community. With over 100 languages spoken, Oakland is one of the most diverse communities in the United States. Yet, the culture of Oakland is unique in that it transcends ethnicity and race. Oakland natives have a hometown pride that unifies us. We share a common experience that binds us.

Oakland’s beauty is unparalleled. Its location has attracted many would-be transplants from near and far. With all that the community has to offer in terms of its aesthetic splendor and proximity to San Francisco and Silicon Valley, concerns with public safety and the educational system make people reconsider. Oakland is known for many things, among them are the high crime and dropout rates, and a review of the data for both areas indicates a direct correlation between the two.

For example, according to the analysis conducted by the school district’s police chief, 67% of all males who were chronically truant in the ninth grade in 2005 have been arrested. That means nearly 7 out of 10 males who missed 20 or more days of school that year were arrested subsequently. Another finding is that, over the last 10 years, nearly 134 children under the age of 18 were homicide victims.

The school district is in the midst of hosting multiple meetings in the three areas of the district with community members, youth, district staff, and school board members. The superintendent is hoping to gain community support for his 5-year strategic plan and
gain input on the challenges and needs from the community’s perspective. The superintendent’s plan is both aggressive and ambitious, and it aptly conveys the sentiments of a steadfast leader. His vision is clear and focused. If his plan is successful, the achievement gap will narrow, and graduation rates will climb. The superintendent is aware of OPA, as key district staff sits on the executive committee. Yet, with increased graduation rates at the heart of his plan, there is no mention of OPA to date.

According to the school district website, the student body population is composed of 36.5% African Americans, 33.7% Latino, 15.3% Asian, and 6.8% White (Oakland Unified School District [OUSD], 2008). Approximately 67% qualify for free or reduced-price lunch; 30 percent are English language learners, and 44 different native languages are spoken in the homes of the students (OUSD, 2008). Using data captured by the California Department of Education (2010), the district indicates that the dropout rate is 40%, and only 37.8% of the students who do manage to graduate have taken coursework that qualifies them to be “UC Ready,” which means they graduate meeting the UC/CSU admissions requirements.

Table 1

*School District 2008–2009 4-Year Adjusted High School Dropout Data for Males*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>White</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Dropout Rate Percentages</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>29%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dropout Rate Numbers</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>21</td>
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</table>

*Note: Adapted from California Department of Education (2010) Educational Demographics Unit*
The dropout rate in the public school district was 40% in the 2008–2009 school year according to the data listed on the California State Department of Education’s Demographic Unit website. Those rates are disproportionately higher for African-American and Latino males than their white male counterparts.

To calculate the dropout rate, the CDE uses a proxy “completer” method, which uses data from high school graduates and drop outs over a 4-year period. The completer rate calculation has advantages and disadvantages. The upside is that it is a relatively stable statistic and is suitable for highly mobile student populations, which is the case in Oakland and most other urban communities. The downside, however, is the fact that the numbers are likely to overshoot actual figures, one way or the other.

Another external mentionable is the leadership change at the city level. Oakland recently elected its first Asian American woman to serve as mayor. Mayor Quan’s deep commitment to education and understanding of its challenges derives from her experience as a school board member. She considers herself the “education mayor.” A partnership between the mayor’s office, the superintendent, and the president of a local university should prove to be a promising venture, and people in the community are excited about the possibilities.

The research setting can be a room, a building, a community, or a combination of all of the above. In the case of this study, it was the last. For this study, the location of the meetings, and the conditions within the community and the school district in which OPA seeks to make a significant positive impact, was considered simultaneously.
Research Participants

Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2000) reflected on the ethical dilemma of the “self-other” (p. 108) in that the relationship between the researcher and the participant brings the question of “who” is the expert and audience into the forefront. According to Maguire (1987), in PAR, the process is designed to “develop critical consciousness, to improve the lives of those involved in the research process, and to transform fundamental societal structures and relationships” (p. 4). The research participants belong to a unique working community that existed in part prior to the inception of Oakland’s Promise Alliance. We are all Oaklanders. We are advocates who have a distinct commitment to resolving the issues that plague our city’s schools. We also support young people’s pursuit of success in high school and beyond. Moreover, we hold positions that afford us first-hand knowledge of the challenges and the ability to make changes.

Table 2

Co-researchers’ Demographic Information

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<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
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<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>City</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Law Enforcement</td>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Collaborations</td>
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<td>Dozens</td>
<td>A trillion</td>
<td>Many</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No. of meetings</td>
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<td>3–4</td>
<td>10–15</td>
<td>At least 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4–5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7–8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

For this study, I used dialogue, brainstorming, critical reflection, and testimonials at OPA group meetings to collect data. I used field notes from formal and informal meetings, observation, and community consultation to gather information. I also used an open-ended interview to guide the discussions and further elicit the perspective of the research participants. Essentially, study followed the action researcher (AR) design model of diagnosing, action planning, taking action, evaluating, and specifying learning (Susman, 1993).

OPA Group Meetings

I held formal 2-hour meetings twice in March and once in April. During the first half hour of the meeting the group discussed upcoming community events; further developed, reviewed, and made adjustments to the strategic plans to create alliances with policy makers and elected officials; discussed opportunities to involve the community; and planned events. During the meetings, I asked a member of the group to volunteer to take informal notes to maintain clarity and focus on the goals and to direct subsequent meetings. The first part of the meeting contributed to the research, but the impact and relevance varied due to the nature of the meeting process.

The second part of the of the meeting directly and deliberately focused on the research elements for the study to outline themes for research, engage in critical reflection and dialogue about the participants’ feelings about the collaborative work, and brainstorm ideas to improve group functions and effectiveness. Each meeting had a theme. The themes led to dialogue, and the group brainstormed ideas. The brainstorm led
to actions designed to bring about change related to the theme. Notes from the meeting were taken on large chart paper as well. The themes are as follows:

Meeting 1—Strengths of OPA and feelings about likelihood we can achieve success (based on report generated from a previously completed collaboration inventory).

Meeting 2—Setting the tone.

Meeting 3—Where are we now?

Following each meeting, I wrote in my journals for 5 minutes to reflect on the theme and the dialogue. I also asked the co-researchers to use a journal after our meetings as well as the ones they had in the community in preparation for the interviews. Freire (1970) said that the researcher and participants must engage in critical thinking for true dialogue to occur; which can create critical thinking. According to Freire, without dialogue there is no communication and without communication, there is no true education. I collected the journals 2 weeks after the April meeting. Each meeting led to an action step toward increasing the graduation rate. According to Wadsworth (1998),

Essentially participatory action research is research which involves all relevant parties in actively examining together current action (which they experience as problematic) in order to change and improve it. The group will do so by critically reflecting on the historical, political, cultural, economic, geographic and other contexts which make sense of it.

Dialogue With New Members

I engaged in dialogue to bring new members up to speed. Since the new members wished to contribute to the study, the other co-researchers considered the best way for them to participate would be for them to learn about the origins of OPA so that they could better understand the ways that they could be a part of the change we were attempting to inspire. There were no scripted questions for the dialogue.
Non-OPA Meetings and Community Consultation

The researchers sought consultation from other inter-organizational collaboration leaders, as well as community, agency, and nonprofit leaders. The involvement of others outside of the group, through consultation, was a significant priority for the research group because they value the “real life” experience they embody. Community members hold the key to unlocking the mysteries within the community, schools, and households. Opening the research to the community enhanced community awareness, showed support and solidarity in matters close to their hearts, and justified the plan of action the research group will take after their research was concluded. In inter-organizational collaboration, community involvement and buy-in is critical. Data from this phase was collected using journaling and field notes and was stored for the analysis phase as completed or upon completion.

Getting to Work

The idea of “getting to work” stemmed from the hope that action will be the result of our research efforts. The actual “work” will take place after the commencement of this study, both inside and outside OPA. Inside OPA, for example, we may implement strategies that improve the cohesion of the group so ensure we have the capacity to achieve the work we are committed to doing in the community. This phase may also include other activities we deem appropriate to ensure the success of the collaborative itself and to increase its presence in the community. So in essence, the work is not a part of the study, but it will be the derivative of this study. This phase will be ongoing. The data from this phase will be collected using field and meeting notes and stored separately (from current data) for future research.
Researcher’s Journal

I documented my experience from the perspective of the leader of the group. The purpose of the journaling is to capture my feelings, day-to-day activities, and progress, challenges. I also captured my interactions with internal and external stakeholders.

Open-Ended Interview

In this section, “group members” and interviewee refers to the co-researcher. In PAR, the researcher does not put ideas to the participants but guides them to think about events they might not generally give credence to (Maguire, 1987). We used open-ended interview questions with the dual purpose of assessing group standing and prompting dialogue. I contacted the group members by phone and email to schedule meeting times, dates, and locations for the interview. I sent confirmation email as friendly reminders. The interviews took place at a cafés or other agreed upon locations. For the sake of convenience, I also conducted (and recorded) a few over the phone.

When feasible, I arrived at the site in advance to set up the space and make sure that was conducive to open and confidential communication. I was prepared, with all of the necessary tools, to conduct and record the interview, including a note-pad, pens, markers, and a digital audio recorder with extra batteries (as applicable). I recorded interviews and took some longhand notes to capture aspects that a recording cannot capture and document follow-up questions. Following the interview, I reviewed the notes and made relevant additions in terms of the setting, assumptions, biases, and influence.

Next, the interview recordings were transcribed within two weeks of the interview. Upon completion, I emailed the interview transcript to the participant for review. At that point, they were advised of their one-time opportunity to clarify, revise,
and approve the transcript. The interviewer attached the notes to give the interviewee an opportunity to view the full interview picture.

The interviewee revisions were due in writing within 72 hours from receipt of the transcribed document when the interviewees wished to clarify themselves or made revisions to the interview transcript. As applicable, I took note of the changes and the final copy was stored for the analysis phase. When they approved the transcript, the participants responded in writing (via email) to confirm the accuracy of the transcript within 72 hours.

Protection of Human Subjects

Since this research is not a condition of involvement in OPA, the participants self-selected. The informational email included the cover letter (see Appendix I) and the researcher’s bill of rights (see Appendix K). The informational email cover letter contained the key elements included in the information sheet and the researcher’s bill of rights. The co-researcher signed the informed consent form prior to their participation.

Validity

As the research methodology and other portions of the proposal were developed, I began to question the legitimacy of study. I confronted issues of being obviously biased and looking for answers to questions that would validate my assumptions. Upon selecting the research method for this study, I came to understand that there is an assumption that when researchers take a stance of neutrality, they are not being political and are being objective (Apple, 1994). Smith (1999) said, however, “Research has not been neutral in its objectification of the other. Objectification is a process of dehumanization” (p. 39).
Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges with neutrality, my role as the leader of the collaborative group could lead to the assumption that certain tactics were used, and actions were taken, because I wanted to ensure success of the collaboration. In essence, that would be a valid assumption. To minimize the effects of my desire for a successful outcome for OPA, I sought the participation of the other members of the executive committee to help investigate the group and guide the action that resulted from our findings, which further necessitated the use of PAR. We also used a variety of strategies to make certain our findings were credible, such as co-researcher debriefing and checking to assess and adjust (if necessary) the various forms through which data were collected during the study.

Ethical Considerations

All participants in this study were treated in accordance with the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the American Psychological Association (APA). The potential risks to the participants have been identified as frustration, emotional discomfort, loss of control, and loss of confidentiality. Another potential risk is that they may experience the feeling of failure if the collaborative group is not successful, despite the increased understanding of the collaborative process. This could be the result of both the process of collaboration itself and the nature of some of the tools we have used to collect data. I have made every effort possible to minimize risk and maintain an environment that is natural, yet sensitive to effects of the actions that may yeild from our findings.

I was mindful of my influence. Therefore, I emphasized the fact that participation in the study itself is not a stipulation of their participation in the work of OPA. I have also
notified them in writing that they were free to opt out of the study all together or decline to answer any question or participate in any aspect of the study without retribution.

Lastly, I took careful steps so that the other researchers were meaningfully involved in all phases of discovery.

Data Analysis

After processing the data, I analyzed it based on the research questions. Specifically, the following items (see Table 1) address the corresponding questions.

Research Question 1—How was the inter-organizational collaborative group (Oakland’s Promise Alliance) formed and how were the members selected? Questions 4–9, 14–15 of the open-ended interview protocol, dialogue and researcher’s journal informed question 1.

Research Question 2—What are the environmental and community factors and preexisting sentiments toward collaboration within Oakland, and how have they affected the success of the inter-organizational collaborative group? Questions 6–9 of the interview protocol, group meetings, critical reflections, researcher’s journal, community consultation, and getting to work also informed question 2.

Research Question 3—What are the membership dynamics and to what extent do various participatory activities and group interactions used during the relationship building stage of the inter-organizational collaborative group’s development affect membership dynamics within the collaborative? Questions 23 through 32, 39, and 40 of the interview protocol offered context for the member’s perceived effectiveness. Questions numbers 6, 9, and 33 through 36 gave insight into members’ feelings of trust. Questions 4 through 9 spoke to how the members felt about inter-organizational
collaboration. Question 10 through 13 revealed how members considered the strength of OPA. Questions 14 through 19 gave insight into how the members of OPA regarded the leader’s effectiveness. Group meetings, dialogue, the researcher’s journal, and getting to work provided information for question 3.

Table 3

*Comparison of Instrument and Other Tools in Connection With the Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Group Meetings</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Interview Protocol</th>
<th>Researcher’s Journal</th>
<th>Community Consultation</th>
<th>Getting to Work</th>
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After the data was collected, organized, transcribed, and analyzed, I transferred all of the files into Microsoft Word documents and stored them on my laptop computer. The transcripts were placed in a folder, under a secure, password-protected user account specifically created for the research documentation process. To manage and analyze the date, the researcher used software Atlas.ti v6 program and co-researcher debriefing and checking.

**Background of the Researcher**

My K–12 experience shaped my philosophy of education and my perspective on the education system. To be honest, I was not a good fit in high school. I was terribly bored, and to complicate things even more I was an adolescent spinning completely out of control. When I could not take another moment of the torture, I quit after the 10th grade. It was not a hard decision for me to make either. I met little opposition because not
one of my teachers, counselors, or administrator did much to convince me to stay. My mother, who was functionally illiterate and a high school dropout herself, could not persuade me to change my mind, although she tried.

With an enormous amount of prayer, grace, and mercy, I managed to earn my GED and a couple of degrees. However, the outcome I experienced is rare. Countless students who I encounter in the field at work are at risk of dropping out of school. Unfortunately, there are limited resources designed and designated to recapture those kids, much less prevent them from becoming at risk to begin with. My personal and professional experience helped me realize my commitment to urban youth. I believe that, even with the odds stacked against them, each and every one of them is a born achiever. Children, if given the opportunity and tools, can overcome many of obstacles and challenges they face.

When I heard my calling to become a teacher, I accepted it. Once I was in the classroom, however, I realized that I really did not like it. How horrible was that discovery? I was extremely confused. It took some time, but I finally concluded that being a teacher need not confine me to a K–12 classroom. I will always be a teacher, but I prefer being considered an educator who is committed to making an impact on the lives of under-represented youth. I have firsthand knowledge of the many challenges that the students, teachers, and parents encounter in Oakland’s schools. I concluded that as long as I maintain my focus on finding solutions to those challenges, I will experience the fulfillment I felt as a classroom teacher.

Since then, through my jobs, consulting projects, and research projects, I have built great relationships with youth, teachers, school administrators, and district and city
level personnel in Oakland. I am physically and emotionally moved when we engage in
deep discussions about the perils to the schools, and because of my bond with the
community; I have the intrinsic desire to be a part of the solutions being proposed in
relation to education. I currently reside in Oakland and I am a product of Oakland’s
public schools. As an educator, I have to be willing to stand on the front line with the
community members to be a part of change. In doing so, I will feel that I have made a
meaningful contribution to my native city.

I have been exposed to the many aspects of the educational process—as a student,
parent of students, a teacher, a consultant, a teacher of teachers, a member of the
Effective Teachers for Oakland Taskforce, an employee of a private company servicing
public schools, and now, as the director of a dropout prevention program; therefore, I
have gained invaluable insight into the public school system and what plagues it.

Notwithstanding that experience, I want to learn more. I want to know the ins and
outs of public school policy and administration, especially aspects related to supporting
young people so that they are successful in high school and beyond. Going into this
academic process, I realized the blessing embedded in this experience. This has been
nothing short of a wonderful gift. I had an opportunity to learn from the experts and other
people in the community, who were as committed as I am to unleashing the power within
each and every one of our youth.
CHAPTER IV:

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

In the past, studies on collaboration have revealed that the practice itself is not a magic pill that can easily resolve all of society’s woes and conflicts. In fact, some researchers spend more time suggesting ways to avoid the pitfalls of collaboration rather than providing examples of efforts that are successfull, and what ultimately led to that success. The purpose of this study was to learn from the experiences of the members of Oakland’s Promise Alliance. Utilizing PAR led us on a path of critical inquiry, which inspired us to create a plan that directed our action to develop and implement practices that will ultimately strengthen our inner ties and improve the outcomes for our work in Oakland. After we reviewed the findings, the co-researchers actually made suggestions on how to address many of the challenges that were expressed in the study, which was actually an added bonus.

Data Analysis Process

I ended up with six transcribed interviews and three audio tapes. Although I am have been a member of OPA for over two years and the leader of the collaborative group for over one year, the duration of the PAR study was an 8-week period. I collected field notes on meeting materials and in my journal and I also recorded my reflections in my journal. The aforementioned were referenced during group analysis discussions. The use of PAR allowed me to take the analysis of the findings through several layers of inquiry. Throughout the phases, the co-researchers and I made adjustments and concessions to ensure the full spectrum of information was captured.
Capture Authentic Voices

To better understand the experiences of members of an inter-organizational collaborative group that is working to resolve a societal issue that impacts young people in Oakland, the co-researchers engaged in dialogue at three group meetings over an 8-week period. One extra dialogue was added to explore the formation of the group. Additionally, six open-ended interviews were conducted during the primary 8-week research period. The following research questions were addressed.

1. How was the inter-organizational collaborative group (Oakland’s Promise Alliance) formed and how were the members selected?
2. What are the environmental and community factors and preexisting sentiments toward collaboration within Oakland, and how have they affected the success of the inter-organizational collaborative group?
3. What are the membership dynamics and to what extent do various participatory activities and group interactions used during the relationship building stage of the inter-organizational collaborative group’s development affect membership dynamics within the collaborative?

Co-researchers

Participatory action research allows for the researcher and research participant to become one and the same. For a point of reference, I have included a bit of information about the co-researchers, who agreed to the use of alternate identifiers. Also, throughout this study, I refer to an additional member of our executive committee who was not a co-researcher because she was the founding convener of OPA. I will refer to her as Kate for the purpose of this study.
Christy is an African American woman between the ages of 35 and 44 who earned her master’s degree in history and currently works for a youth-leadership development agency. I invited her to participate in OPA. She has been a member for 2 years. When asked how many collaborative efforts she has been a part of she said, “a trillion.” She said that she attends 10 to 15 collaborative meetings a month.

Maya is a mixed-race African American and Japanese woman between the ages of 25 and 34 who earned her bachelor’s degree and currently runs a youth-serving non-profit organization she founded. I invited her to participate. She has been a member for less than a year. When we discussed how many collaborative efforts she has been a part of she said seven. She stated that she goes to at least four meetings a month.

Chad is an African American man between the ages of 35 and 44 who earned his master’s degree in education and is currently the director of a public school district initiative. He was initially invited to participate by Kate. He has been a member for less than a year. When we talked about the number of collaborative initiatives he has been a member of, he said that he attends four. He said that he attends five collaborative meetings a month.

Ken is an African American male between the ages of 45 and 54. He is a program director for a parent and youth-serving non-profit organization. Kate invited him to participate. He has been a member for less than a year. He said that he has participated in “dozens” of collaborative initiatives and he sometimes finds himself at three to four meetings in a month.

Karen is an African American woman between the ages of 45 and 54 who earned her doctoral degree in learning and instruction. She is currently an education professor at
a local university. The former collaborative leader invited her to participate when OPA was founded 3 years ago. She has participated in many collaborative efforts and attends fewer than three collaborative meetings a month.

**Paul** is a White man between the ages of 35 and 44. He has a bachelor’s degree and currently works in the law enforcement field. I invited him to participate. He has been a member for more than one year. He has participated in four to five collaborative efforts and attends three meetings a month.

**Sam** is an African American man between the ages of 35 to 44. He earned a master’s degree in science. He works in many capacities, but he is a self-employed consultant. He mainly consults for youth serving organizations and agencies. Kate invited him to participate. He has been a member for more than a year. He said that he has been a member of “many” collaborative efforts and he attends five collaborative meetings a month.

**Laila** is an African American woman between the ages of 25 and 34. She has a master’s degree in social work. She currently works for a foster-youth serving agency. I invited Laila to participate. She has been a member for a year. She said that she has been a part of more than 10 collaborative efforts and attends four to five meetings a month.

I am the ninth researcher. I am between the ages of 35 and 44. I earned a master’s degree in teaching and I am the director of OPA. I have been a part of 15 collaborative efforts and I attend seven to eight collaborative meetings a month.

**Dialogue During Group Meetings**

The main goal of the dialogues was to help address all of the research questions. We used the meetings to assess the past and present conditions within our collaborative,
plan strategies to enlist feedback from the entire executive committee, and extract collective feedback so that we can make critical adjustments. To achieve our goal, each meeting had a theme that we followed loosely. Since there were no scripted questions, we made an effort to stay on course, but we knew there was some chance the dialogue could go in a different direction. Isaacs (1999) stated that dialogue “raises the level of shared thinking, it impacts how people act, and in particular how they act together” (p. 22).

**Meeting 1— Strengths of OPA?**

Our first meeting took place at City Hall as planned. I ordered enough pizzas to for all 13 members, but only five showed up. One member asked if anyone else was coming. I told her that I did not know for sure. I immediately felt myself shrink. I wondered why I felt so defensive—I felt as though I had to explain why there were not a lot of people at my party. In my journal entry on February 28, I noted,

>I am struck by the feeling of embarrassment I experience when people who are voluntarily donating their time to come to the meetings inquire about the absence of others. At first, I did not understand why I carry that burden because I literally dread the question. After the meeting, I had time to think about it. I arrived at the conclusion that I feel this way because I do not want them to begin to feel like we cannot accomplish this incredible feat without full support and participation of the team. I just do not want them to assume that others’ inability to attend is due to the lack of interest and have the members who are in attendance take that sentiment up as their own.

As the minutes ticked by, we elected to start the meeting. Although I do not normally chair the meetings, in this instance I needed to move forward to ensure that we got through the agenda. I started by formally inviting them to assist me in the research process, restated the purpose of the study, and collected all of their signed consent forms. Then I presented the findings from the collaboration inventory we completed at our retreat. The report revealed that there were a few areas of weakness that were in need of our attention. I also pointed out our strengths. I asked the members to share their
reactions to the report. Christy stated that we needed to keep in mind that the inventory was taken prior to our retreat in Hershey. She said that she believed that areas of weakness were addressed there. Others agreed and went on to say that they felt that the structure, while much better, may need adjustment. “I agree that we need to make some adjustments,” I admitted. “What do you think that we need to change first? Where do we start?”

Paul said that we need to invite others to join the group who really can impact the work on the ground and who are willing to do the work that we commit to doing within this group. “It is one thing to say that you are a part of this group, but how do you show it?”

I asked the other members if they agreed that we should add members to the group. They all answered in the affirmative. They felt that we have an amazing cast of members at the table, but they felt that we need more people that can take up a little bit of the slack. “We should also add more people of color,” Christy added. “I think we have a good representation of minority groups, but I think that we need to draw members of the Southeast Asian population because they have a dropout rate that, although it is not as high as other people of color, is the highest among Asians.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, I summarized the dialogue to ensure that I had captured the sentiments of the group.

So we said that we are in a better place now than we were in when we went to Hershey. We understand that there is still work to be done but we definitely feel that the retreat added to our sense of purpose, structure and commitment. We have amazing members at the table, but we need to add others, such as Chad who is leading the African American Male Achievement initiative for the District. We can fold his program into ours to ensure we can provide mutual support. We also need to reach out to the Southeast Asian community to see if they have organizations that or individuals who work with young people.
Everyone agreed that I had captured the gist of the meeting. We adjourned the meeting after agreeing to meet in a week for an encore meeting (since others felt that there was not enough notice) to discuss action steps to achieve goals.

Meeting 2—Setting the Tone

Our second meeting was held at City Hall. Five of the executive committee members were in attendance. At that meeting, there was a brief mention of those who were not in attendance. Sam, who chairs the committee, immediately jumped in:

I think that we need to focus on the tasks. We need to center ourselves on the tasks that we need to assign for work to get done instead of focusing on who is or is not in attendance. If we focus on the task, people who are not in attendance will become curious or wonder why they were not included so they could benefit from the action taken.

His statement immediately shifted the focus toward his recommendation. We started thinking of ways to create a niche for ourselves. We reviewed the strategic plan again.

We decided that we needed to make some adjustments. Christy felt that we needed to replace a dormant priority.

At this point, we need to make policy and research a main priority if we really want to make OPA a household name. We need to push to continue the work we started last year with the policy audits and we need to make sure the policy that has been identified as problematic is changed.

I agreed and asked others if they agreed as well. They said that they felt that was a great idea. So to move things forward, I asked what activity they wished to initiate to start moving toward action. I suggested that they look at the strategic plan. When there was a long pause, I threw out the idea of doing transcript audits at our focus high school. The co-researchers were very excited about the idea. I asked if they thought that it was in line with our strategic plan. They all said yes and thought that it would be a great way for us
to start to get the other members engaged. Laila offered to take the lead and said that she would bring in a colleague to train us on how to perform a transcript audit.

I was beginning to see progress, which induced me to push the group to think critically. “So, if we all work on this project, how do we ensure that others feel like they can share the work and the credit for the initiatives we undertake? How do we share the work and the credit?”

Paul said, “That is the way it’s supposed to be, right? Isn’t that normal?”

“Well yeah,” I agreed. I told them that the goal is always to share networks, resources, information, and physical effort. “But we need to find a way to do so that isn’t a burden on others while at the same time we do not only have the input and energy of the same people every time an action is initiated.”

At the conclusion of the meeting, we scheduled another meeting 2 weeks later at which we would have someone come and train us on transcript analysis. We also left the meeting agreeing to meet prior to our next meeting to plan for the April meeting.

Meeting 3—Where Are We Now?

Prior to the third and final meeting, four of the co-researchers (who were available to do so) and I met to plan how we would approach the final meeting of the study. We started by looking at the initial analysis of the data that I collected to that point, which included the six interviews and the previous meeting notes. We decided to ask the members to specify the areas that they felt we needed to improve upon (based on a list that I provided that correlated to the initial findings in the data that we collected to that point) to create a more cohesive group so that they feel like they are all a part of the
corrective movement. We also thought to suggest that we needed an option other than the quorum because many members were feeling stagnant by it.

The final meeting of the study was held at City Hall. There were more members present than there had been in nearly a year. I would attribute that to the fact that we had just come back from a very powerful America’s Promise dropout prevention summit in Washington D.C. I later wrote in my journal that I was hoping that we could have moved forward with some activities, but because we finally had a quorum, I was not going to miss out on the opportunity to have members discuss other options.

For nearly 45 minutes we discussed the decision-making protocol. I started by reviewing the way we arrived at the protocol and sharing concerns that had been expressed by other members. No one resisted the idea of changing it, but there was no chance that we were going to eliminate it altogether as Ken had suggested. He said, “I think that if two people show up, two people should make the decision as long as adequate notice is given for the meeting.”

Karen said that she did not feel comfortable with two people making important decisions for the rest of the group. “There has to be an in-between here,” she insisted. Another executive committee member suggested that we structure it such that we have a minimum number of members present to make important, strategic plan-altering decisions. It was important that we agreed then on what that number should be.

After a healthy dialogue of clarifying other elements of our decision-making protocol, we settled on having a minimum number of five members present to make any changes to the strategic plan. There was still one member (a co-researcher) who did not agree with the new protocol. We spoke later, and he stated that his dissention was in part
based upon principle. His style of participation is best suited when there is action and he is opposed to any blockage of that action. “There are children dying out on the streets of Oakland. There is no time to ponder these moves we are trying to make here. We need to move because somebody’s child’s life is at stake here.” Then he stated, “And the last thing that I want to say is that we need to trust the leadership to make decisions for this body!”

The next order of business on the agenda for the day was to make improvements to other elements of our inner structure. I presented the list of options upon which we were to vote. Maya suggested that we use Survey Monkey to collect their priorities and suggestions so that we could move on to the action because it is a simpler tool to use rather than having to record and retype all of the feedback. I took her suggestion and we moved to action items. I closed the meeting by reviewing the next steps to provide feedback for our study. She later told me that she sensed that there was a need to have some action and she did not feel that a meeting full of process and structure related elements of our group was going to go over well with the members.

Getting to Work

Later that evening I sent out the Survey Monkey survey to the co-researchers. It simply included all of their choices. A few of us conversed over the phone to ensure that it was as close as possible to the activity we planned. It was completed by seven out of the nine co-researchers and the feedback was great and extremely helpful. It will ultimately be used to create new processes to reinforce our group—to make it stronger and sustainable.
We planned to present the new process to our members at the next executive committee meeting.

Dialogue—Formation of OPA, From the Leader’s Perspective

This analysis follows the theme that describes the formation of OPA presents the findings that help inform. This portion of the interview represents response to research question 1.

The co-researchers suggested that I bring the newest co-researchers up to speed by having dialogue about the formation of OPA, from my perspective. This dialogue actually took place during the data analysis phase as one of the co-researchers admitted that it was very difficult for her to follow along due to the fact that there were gaps that her personal experience could not explain.

I agreed to engage in a brief dialogue with her to answer any questions that she and Chad might have. She contacted him and asked if he had any questions and he said that he was comfortable allowing her to use her judgment. The dialogue was not scripted. She simply asked the questions she thought would help bring clarity to the analysis process.

Maya: So how did you decide who to invite to join OPA?

Nyeisha Dewitt: The way the members were selected for OPA was very interesting. Most were selected by Kitty. I would say 90% of the members were selected by Kitty, who was the founding leader of OPA. If they weren't selected by her they were brought in by someone who was selected by her. So it was very interesting because the way she went about bringing members into the organization was looking at the work the individual was doing in the community and looking at the work that the organizations (with whom they were affiliated) were doing in the community to decide what pieces would complete the puzzle. If that makes sense...

Maya: Yeah. It actually does make perfect sense.
Nyeisha: It was really fascinating. She made sure that the people who were at the table were people that complimented one another and the mission and the goals of the work we had set out to accomplish. Member selection was not haphazard. Her actions seemed very calculated and thoughtful. And when I took over in the role, I operated in the same manner. I was just as, if not more thoughtful of the membership make-up because I did not want to dilute the chemistry that already existed, which probably led to the slow-down in growth. However, my philosophy is quality, not quantity. This is highly complex work here. Leading a collaboration is not easy to do.

Maya: So was it a challenge to peak people’s interest to get them to sign up?

Nyeisha: In the beginning, nothing was formal. There was no contract or anything to sign up for in that way.

Maya: There isn’t a contract now right?

Nyeisha: No there isn’t. Most of the people who were at the table were there because they felt like there was a shared goal of helping the City of Oakland increase the graduation rate. There was high-ranking staff from the school district. There were high-level community members representing various volunteer organizations. There were also executive directors from different non-profit organizations and City agencies. There were also mid-level practitioners and grassroots organizers, with diverse backgrounds, who had connections on the ground with the members of the community who had social capital in networks within the community we intended to serve. No matter the career income or educational level of the person at the table, everyone who was at the table had a voice and a significant role to play. They were respected as decision makers in their field and were considered change agents within their own organizations and in the community.

Maya: As I read through the interviews, it seems like there was some confusion at some point or another for most of them. It appeared that there was no structure. No offense.

Nyeisha: None taken [Laughter]. Often times at the meeting we would share the results or accomplishments that were made since we last met, for example. We might even add new items on the agenda and open up dialogue around that topic, but there was very little promotion of action or forward motion in the sense that we were collectively taking action. There might be a strategy put on the table to accomplish a certain goal and folks standing up to support the strategy, but there was no real attempt for the creation of new programs and any deliberate action to collectively share work and resources.

Maya: Was that understood to be the purpose of the meetings? If so, what about that is confusing?
Nyeisha: Well, I think that is just it. When I was invited to the meetings as a partner, I was not clear what the purpose was either. I was invited on a professional development trip to APA, along with nine others, and I was excited that I was selected as a valued organization for the mayor’s office to consider a partner in this great challenge of increasing the graduation rate.

Maya: Is that what you think everyone felt?

Nyeisha: I don’t really know, but I can imagine that it was somewhere in their minds that it was an honor to be recognized as a chief contributor to the effort. So yeah, as a partner, I was as confused, but I also had no inclination to ask for clarity. I believed in the office that called me to duty and I believed in the young people who I was going to serve so that was enough for me.

Maya: Really?

Nyeisha: Yes! I really felt as though some things that we do here in Oakland just happen… There is no clear pathway to success. No roadmap, just work to be done and the people who are willing to roll up their sleeves to get it done. Sometimes things can get a little crazy in those instances, but somehow, even that works itself out. I think that when you work as hard as we do here in Oakland, with what little we have to work with, we are left to our own devices because we do not have funds to hire strategic planners and theory of change specialists. We have to get to work plain and simple.

Maya: Do you think that those things would have helped in the start-up phase?

Nyeisha: I believe so. At least one would think so. I imagine that the clarity that exists now comes from an effort to create a plan with which everyone could understand and identify because they helped design it, is the byproduct of that (strategic) planning process. But honestly, as far as I could see, everything was fine before certain aspects of the group started to change.

Maya: So what were the changes?

Nyeisha: Well, the first shake up was when I assumed a leadership role in OPA. Through the funding for my position, I am able to take advantage of some amazing PD (professional development) opportunities all over the nation. Going to the APA professional development trainings opened me up to different featured community structures and practices. I was very eager to share what I experienced and learned. I thought maybe people would be willing to try something different. Perhaps I could create a little more structure within OPA. When I came back to Oakland with all that I had learned I just thought maybe it's time—maybe we can go from this organic fluid structure to a more formal structure. That's what they were doing in other communities. They have MOUs (memorandum of understanding). They have formal agreements. They have letters of intent and they have letters of interest. They just had more structure, period. I longed for structure because I felt that formalizing things would make us more successful.
The resistance against that was the all too observable notion that sometimes, too much structure in Oakland tends to make people feel like things are too formal, like they’re boxed in because there is no flexibility.

Maya: Right! Is that what it is? [Laughter] I never even thought about that… There is very little structure. It is like we are down south. We do things with a smile and a handshake and hope everything is above ground.

Nyeisha: Exactly! And you know, I totally understood that concept. By no means did I feel that it was worth alienating the members at our group who had been there from day one by creating a formal structure. So I let that idea go. What I started to find, however, after assuming the leadership role, was that there were going to be some external shift that would really impact our immediate circle of support and we needed to really work on ways to mitigate the impact of that change or shift that I saw on the horizon.

Maya: What shift?

Nyeisha: The shift in the mayor’s office. The shift in the school district—everything around OPA was about to change. So I felt the need to really devise a solution to the inevitable. I grounded our work in the community and built trust and generated buy-in though various acts of support and the like. I just anchored OPA to the constant, or at least in my mind what I perceived to be the most constant. You cannot do anything in Oakland without the support of the community, even if you have the green light from the mayor’s office.

Maya: Yeah, I noticed that.

Nyeisha: Right. So that is uniquely Oakland and it is what we love about it.

Open-Ended Interviews

The interviews in this study provided context and the co-researchers helped me to refine my interview questions and process throughout. The order of the interviews were random and were scheduled according to the co-researchers’ availability and my accessibility to them. The interviews ranged in time from 45 minutes to 2 hours. Due to time constraints and the lack of availability to meet face to face, a few of the co-researchers ultimately agreed that it would be more efficient to conduct phone interviews for those who had limited availability during the day. Of the six co-researchers who were
interviewed, Karen, Sam, and Laila were interviewed via conference call, and Christy, Ken, and Paul were interviewed in person.

One observation that we had was that the in-person interviews tended to be shorter and the responses were in less detail regardless of the setting, while the phone interviews provided rich, detailed responses to the questions. The interviews were transcribed in their entirety and served as a guide for setting up initial the identification of themes, which was also beneficial during our group brainstorming sessions. I refer to all of the participants by their alternate identifier, but I also referred to them as “most co-researchers,” “some of the researchers,” and “a few,” et cetera. When one of the members had a drastically different take, that response was picked out and provided for comparison and an example of the unified response was given as well.

An important thing to note is that not all of the co-researchers participated in the interviews. The two who joined later in the process were not interviewed. The main reason for that decision was to maintain the continuity of the responses. Experience with the group has a bearing on the responses to the questions. The other reason was the lack of time. In lieu of an interview, they were given the option to engage in a dialogue with me, which would enable me to provide a historical context for this study.

The following are the responses to the open-ended interview questions. As I made an effort to capture the authentic voice of the participants and draw themes that helped us formulate a conclusion that are both informative and useful to our group, it is important to keep in mind that the co-researchers provided different perspectives and viewpoints. Almost like looking through a prism, even if the prism is suspended from string that is hanging from the ceiling, as the sun hits the many angles, it sheds a different light. In line
with that understanding, throughout the presentation of the findings, I will add relevant information about the co-researcher through both personal and professional lens in hopes to make bring forward full-bodied responses.

From the Outside In—Affect of Environmental and Community Factors

According to most research on collaboration, the environment within which the collaborative group operates is an important component to consider. It is very important for the members of the group to be aware of the characteristics of the community that may create barriers or propel the group to success. This analysis followed a theme that led to insight into the co-researchers’ experience with collaboration, in general, outside of OPA, which helped us understand how those past experiences affect their current expectations and interactions within OPA.

*Political Environment*

One important environmental element to consider is the political landscape. When asked, the co-researchers seemed to recognize that the change in leadership on the city and school district levels was going to have an impact on our efforts in Oakland. Laila looked at the political landscape and saw both opportunity and challenge. “I think Oakland's in a state of transition politically,” she said. “And we're entering even a greater stage of transition with the election coming up next year for city council and Obama.”

Ken was less fazed because as far as he was concerned there was still work to be done “regardless of what the political landscape looks like.”

Sam was somewhere in the middle of the spectrum when we discussed the political landscape:

The political environment around academic success and dropout prevention and push out prevention, it's I think there's a lot more talk. Of course it's a great cause,
it's a great campaign focus. Young people are always good to talk about. But my experience has been because young people don't vote, they typically aren't really represented. So when they are discussed, it's more objective in terms of objectifying young people than it is about really leveraging political clout to change a situation. So that's very opinionated and loaded and I'll accept that.

My experience has also been that even if you're able to navigate those different worlds of politics and educational systems and communities, when you actually start making change, effective position change on the ground, it's those political forces and those systemic forces that push back, even if those were the ones that asked you to come in and try to make the change that they're now seeing. So I'm still not clear on even how that works. But I am clear [LAUGHTER] just on the fact that the politics doesn't always consider what's happening on the ground, even though what you hear about the politics sounds like it's saying the same thing as what is needed on the ground.

When asked, Paul stated that lots of things come into play in when you view collaboration through a political lens. “Fund allocation, resources, information and who is available to help you when you need to get things done.”

Use of Collaboration

Another aspect of the environment is how the community uses the practice of collaboration. Are they over-using it? Do they actually know how to collaborate? If they have experienced limited outcomes or achieved success, does that deplete or enhance their sentiments toward collaboration? The open-ended questions around the general practice of collaboration in Oakland gave insight into their feelings. Many of the co-researchers agreed that the practice was not necessarily overused, but two thirds of them said that they see some of the meetings like sort of a Groundhog Day experience, in which they start at the beginning every time. Since there was much more talk than action, they felt like the collaborative practice was ineffectively used. I asked Christy if she thought collaboration training would help, and she said that it would benefit most groups because the people do not really understand what collaboration consists of, they just call every joint venture or meeting with many individuals a collaboration.
Paul explained his issue with the frequency as the lack of forward progress and action:

I think that the frequency there was the number one flaw I see in terms of collaboration. Oftentimes I'm at these meetings and they become repetitive and redundant, discussing the same thing they discussed the previous month before because there weren't any clear-defined objectives of A) what do you want to achieve in the meetings, and B) do A, B, or C, and we come back however we're going to measure whether or not we were effective in achieving that goal. So, I think that sometimes the meetings that don't really have a purpose. I mean, I'm aware that there's all these meetings where people come together, it can simply be sharing meeting, or everybody's kind of bringing one another up to speed on what they've been working on, but too frequently, I've seen meetings that have no objectives and goals.

Nyeisha: So is that overuse or poor use?

Paul: I guess you could say the latter, but that tends to play out like overuse. If you are consistently doing something wrong without trying to correct it, then you should just stop. But don't get me wrong...Collaboration is vital to our successfully conquering these major issues. A lot of a good thing is never too much. When collaboration is bad though—well that isn’t good.

Community’s Perception of OPA

How the collaborative group is perceived in the community will ultimately direct the response the community members have to OPA’s offerings. Increasing awareness has been a huge area of concern for all of the members. Most of the members felt that we were not nearly as well known as we should be in the community. I asked why that was, and most said that in Oakland we do not do a really good job of sharing our story, we just do the work. Sam identified OPA’s perception in terms of the individual parts of its membership:

OPA's presence in Oakland is only as strong as the presence of its individual participants. We have not that I can see done anything to really formalize ourselves, to market ourselves. Well, I'm sorry, let me back up. Formalize ourselves, that's not the right way to say that. To market ourselves, to prepare ourselves to be a recognizable force in the community. I haven't seen us do the things that typical organizations do. And not that I've expected it. I think part of it is because we're not, for example, a 501(c)(3). We call ourselves a steering
committee. And I think that limits or dilutes our potential presence and impact in the community. I don't think any of us have business cards. There's no brochure, one pager. I don't think we have a website. So those are kind of the kind of things that media makes your—media announces your impact in the community, unfortunately. And I think without that, we really don't have a true consistent presence beyond the members who diligently work on behalf of the steering committee and who make sure that those goals are in the front of our minds and in the work that we do every day regardless of who we're working with. Sometimes I talk about OPA, sometimes I don't. But I always am thinking about and keeping in mind the goals that we have and our plans to achieve them. And how do I move that forward directly or indirectly in the work that I do.

In the interview Karen stated that although we do great work in the community and some people know about us, we are what she considers “Oakland’s best kept secret.”

Laila felt as though things are a bit confusing in terms of the community’s perception of OPA. I wanted to get a little clarity on exactly what she meant by that. I wrote in my journal that I appreciated her candor because if I were in her shoes, I would be confused too. There had been such a drastic change in OPA’s function since inception. We essentially went from being a convener who brought organizations together to talk about strategies to reduce the dropout rate and celebrated the accomplishments of our partner organizations as if they were ours to an organization that was initiating programs so that we could actively reduce the dropout rate. Laila’s response captured her viewpoint of the transition:

I think that it is that way because OPA is still becoming more and more acquainted with the strategy and the strategic plan that’s set in stone to drive the groups in an area that will help us achieve the mission and the goals. And because of that, we're still at a place where we have to come up with, so what's our marketing plan, how are we gonna get the word out right now? We're just trying to get on one accord as a group. So once that happens, then pamphlets, brochures, flyers, endorsement, that stuff, our brand can be broadly disseminated. But I just don't think we're there yet.
Earlier in the interview, Paul stated that in order to improve the community’s perception of our group, it is important that we leverage the access we have (through our network) to the data and information:

I think we need to do better. One of the easiest ways to do that is to publish something, you know, come up with a, a quick study that really defines why we're trying to do what we try to do and publish it to bring attention to our cause. I've done a bunch of work around chronic truancy and its effect on kids' entry into the criminal justice system. That's something we could elaborate on and put out a press release. That can bring awareness to the cause.

Christy’s response was in line with Laila and Sam’s statements, but she added another layer. She stated that people who are in “high-level positions” or highly visible positions are aware of OPA, but the people who are most in need of the services we offer do not know what we do. “Of course we do the back-to-school rally. They know about Oakland Natives Give Back, but they don't know that they're a part of the collaborative, the OPA collaborative. They know about all of our separate entities, but not that we're part of OPA.”

Summary

Although the political environment is a factor to negotiate and maneuver around and within, as the community becomes more familiar with our collective work, the co-researchers felt that OPA will develop the resiliency to withstand the external leadership transitions that come upon us. In Oakland, collaboration is used frequently and some of the co-researchers believed that it is used too frequently, which contributes to positive or negative sentiments toward it. They acknowledged that they see the same faces at many of the conference tables they find themselves seated. With observation, they admitted that the constant pull on the few members of the community who are actually willing to do the work is exhausting, especially when the collaborative projects that do not set goals
that are small enough to show measurable progress along the way; when there are no short victories to celebrate. The co-researchers expressed that as OPA continues to refine its goals and initiate activities that have a beginning and end point so that we can experience small successes, we will reach the level of community awareness that we desire.

From the Outside In—Impact of Past Experience with Collaboration

*Achieving Success*

If a member of a collaborative initiative has experienced success with the practice in the past, the co-researchers agree that there is a higher likelihood that they will be inclined to believe the success is plausible in OPA. Yet, the subjective nature of what is considered a success is a variable that is difficult to capture. Christy articulated that success is a measurement that derives from ones perspective. She felt that the fact that we are all on the same page in thinking that there is a need to come together to resolve community issues in itself is monumental.

There's always success. It's just how you measure success, what you use to measure success. Anyone likes to be a success. You know, stopping one kid from dropping out is success, but that is our job—that we do. Although we're not necessarily quantifying them the way that we possibly could, that's success.

I asked her if that success impacted her feelings toward collaboration. “I think in many instances, it's made me value it. Probably made my success in it has been increasing every day or it's made me feel like collaboration is important.”

Ken said of his experience of success or action in collaborations,

I’ve experienced a great deal of success in some collaborations and other collaborations it have been less than desirable. But more importantly is having the dialogue. Having an opportunity for everyone to be heard and to know what’s going on I think is the best way to establish trust. Sometimes I’m very disappointed with the actions. Um, the trust has already been there for. …Sometimes I think we spend too much time and not enough time doing.
Trust and Success

Trust is an unmistakable factor in collaborative environments and the past experiences with success when trust was present or failure when it was not is an important phenomenon to investigate. When I asked how relevant trust is for the success or lack of success of the efforts, most agreed that trust was extremely important, but the focus of trust and the baseline of the trust varied to some degree. Put very simply, Ken said that trust is absolutely essential in any collaboration along with the creation of clearly defined roles. Sam suggested that trust is centered on what people have proven that they can and will do:

I think trust plays a large part in the success of the collaboration, at least the formation of the collaboration and having a strong organized group. But I also think that it kinda depends on your definition of trust. So I think working with a group of people who are committed independent of the collaboration is where I've seen success working in terms of trust. And if I don't know what they do, then it makes it hard to trust them to do whatever it is they do. So I guess individuals and organizations who have a track record and a history independent of any particular collaboration, allows them to come to the table with a certain level of—I don't know if it's credentials or reputation, but something that can be trusted. And so, but what that equals is sometimes I'm willing to sit at a table with some organizations and others I may not be based on what I know they typically do.

Christy also agreed that trust is extremely important. “If there is no trust, I don't think there could be success. It's more successful if there's trust because you have to trust the people you're working with to get the work done.” Throughout the discussion around trust it was evident that the co-researchers certainly understand the importance of trust, yet they have different ways of looking at how trust presents itself in collaboration. Karen brought them together to do the work. She said,

I think it was pretty relevant—I mean, I would say on a scale of one to five, trust was relevant at a four or a five. But I think what was different in those examples that I cited, is that people were coming together to implement a vision of a leader they believed into there was more trust in the process because people were
coming together They had that sheer passion for the work because we were part of a larger vision that someone who we all liked had created So I think, yeah.

A person’s past experience can impact the propensity to continue to indulge. All of the co-researchers have experienced some success working in collaborative groups but readily admit that they feel that they are sometimes overwhelmed by all of the meetings they go to in support of various collaborative efforts. Paul suggested, “I think too often people will say they're collaborating, or if they're really just trying to use other organizations to kind of leverage what they have.”

Christy said, “I think in most of them, I do experience action. In most of the ones that I participate in or that I see it's just information—no action that comes out of it. Laila candidly expressed her sentiments toward collaboration.

Laila: I'm a firm believer in collaboration and the model itself and its potential to impact change on a large scale.

Nyeisha: Is that a byproduct of your success or the success you have witnessed?

Laila: Yeah. I think it's both. Because as a person who is from the community and benefited from a lot of projects, initiatives, works that happened to enable me to participate in summer programs and enrichment activities that helped me to grow as a young person. I definitely had an appreciation, a certain level of appreciation for the model. But then studying it as a professional working in that environment, I've had my moments when I've become a bit jaded. But that's where the small victories and actually participating in initiatives or collaborative, projects, have really helped to ground my belief in it.

So yeah, I would say that it's both. Both the value in my appreciation for it, but also my real-time experience in doing the work and achieving those small and large victories to really sustain my belief in it. But again, I believe that in those times when I've had success, successful participation, and successful outcomes with a collaboration, it's been the facilitator who has been working in tandem with the chairperson that was leading the initiative. But then working together so that our process was tight and that everyone was abreast of what was going on. And that they're one voice, everyone felt validated in terms of their participation.
Comfort With Taking Risks

Risk is an important element of collaboration. Members are subject to a degree of risk when they sit across the table from others with whom they have not personally chosen to work. There is also a bit of vulnerability involved in the process. The exposure to risks comes from inside and outside of the collaborative group. When I posed the question about that risk, all of the co-researchers were definitely aware of the relative risk, but none of them were deterred by it. They admitted that risk is relevant in collaborative environments. As a matter of fact, they all seemed to infer that the risk itself is part of the reward. Karen saw it as “not wholly relevant” because she felt comfortable saying or sharing whatever information or comment she had without concern for offending people, she did feel that the risk is important to think about. Sam stated that risk deserves situational consideration:

I think that for different situations, depending on the focus of the collaboration, depending on the focus and mission of the individual agency or even individual that may be participating, risk is different.

So specifically in collaboration, the way I minimize risk is to be open and honest and up front early. And that allows me to basically bare my concerns, my strengths, my weakness, my perceived risk, my concerns, and based on that the responses, gauge how well we'll be able to form the collaborative. I know a lot of people are risk averse, and so they will—if someone is willing to be that open about the risk or about being vulnerable, then I can typically see them pull away and not wanna engage that.

And again, that helps me know and trust people to do what they do and know whether or not this collaboration; this partnership is something that will work for me. So I'm working to save children who are [in a] pipeline to prison. So if I'm not willing to take risks, then I'm not gonna be effective. And there are others who work with young people in different capacities who don't feel the need or there may not even be the need for them to take those kind of risks.

But because that's what I know needs to be done for the young people I serve, I'm willing to do that around collaborative tables. And I feel like if we aren't willing to at least be honest about what the risks are, be honest about our vulnerabilities
and liabilities and assets, then it's really not worth, for me anyway, really taking the time and energy to build something.

Laila related risk to the need to develop trust and stated that there needs to be trust-building exercises to minimize the anxiety experienced with risk. Laila explained:

> Oh yeah, risk is very relevant. And I think the risk part is what makes the— it drives the importance of trust building, that's got push pull tension. Because unless you're talking about a small town or a community that is homogenous and free from challenge, which that's highly unlikely [LAUGHTER] in most settings, you're talking about people who have different opinions, different values, different objectives, different political pressures that are driving their professional and organizational existing or their values. So each person as they come to the table may have their different ideas or different views about the people who are at the table.

Then also just about the goal of the collaboration project in and of itself. Some people may be thinking, well why are we focusing on this? This is the real issue, housing, not education. So to a certain degree, there's always gonna be that layer of risk for people just trying to get a sense of, should I really be here at this table? Is this appropriate for me? And that's where the importance of trust building and relationship building comes into play?

Paul’s reaction to the relevance of risk was passionate and seemed to support the expressions of the other co-researchers:

> It's like, the reason you do something… right or wrong or whatever. There's always going to be an element of risk in those scenarios and it needs to be analyzed sort of do some kind of risk assessment. What are the risks? How can we mitigate them? We shouldn't be in the dropout prevention business or doing this kind of work because you know there's always going to be pitfalls out there. I mean you're not going to be able to perceive all this, but you should make an attempt to.

There was no fine line to it for Christy. She was upfront in terms of her tolerance for risk:

> Risk is huge—I mean, it’s first things that I think of with some people that I don't trust. I may not share things with people I do trust that I would want to say, but with other people around that I may not trust, I probably wouldn't take the risk. I wouldn't. So risk is extremely relevant to me in terms of how much I will put into collaboration.

Ken said that everyone has to be willing to take certain risks:
It’s imperative that everyone be willing to take certain risks. If we want something different to happen we often times have to do things that aren’t absolutely familiar and absolutely you have to try and things that we’re not confident in. So we have to be willing to try different stuff. So the flexibility to take a risk is extremely important.

*Raising Awareness and Celebrating Success*

When asked if they raise awareness about our work in the community or within their organizations, the responses were quite interesting. The assumption is that if people talk about it outside of the company of the committee members, they believe that it is something worth talking about. The inverse might be that if they do not talk about it or feel that there is something to “buzz” around about, it is not something to which they feel connected. Ken, Sam, and Paul stated that they take advantage of occasions to talk about the work that we are doing and they also make it a point to share opportunities to engage other in our work, but they admitted that they are more known for the work they do for their respective organizations. Laila, whose organization has a partnership with APA on a national level, takes the role of being a conduit between the foster care community and OPA very seriously.

Laila acknowledged,

Well, in well my professional role, it's any tables that I'm at pertaining to the foster care community, when it's appropriate, if I hear there's a conversation or some information that's being shared where I feel that Oakland's Promise could either benefit from being a part of this, or that individual or organization could benefit, then that's when I speak up and I mention it. I mention it in other organizational settings when I see the potential connection.

Laila also said that she celebrates OPA’s success “often.” Christy said she celebrates success in personal and professional settings. She said that in all that she does she consistently considers all of the projects in which she is involved to bring forth opportunities for the group or the interested party. Karen said that *celebrate* was a strong
word but conceded that she raises awareness in professional and social settings but feels that events provide the best opportunity for increasing awareness. Since she is a professor at a local university, she takes every opportunity to share events and her professional development experiences with her colleagues and students. She also shares it with her sorority members. Christy also said that since she deals with dropout prevention issues, she readily references the members of the collaborative that deal with that issue.

**Summary**

The success that the co-researchers experienced with and through collaborative efforts helps them remain committed to the practice of working with others to resolve deeply rooted community issues. Through it all, the co-researchers recognize the extreme importance of trust. They explained that the work they do with others with whom there is some level of trust is enhanced by that trust.

The minimum level of trust for the co-researchers lies in their observation of how the person, who is the object of the trust, “shows up” and gets things done. In other words, they trust those upon whom they can depend and those upon whom those they trust regard as trustworthy. They actually admitted that they work harder with those they trust.

Taking risks is a consideration in collaborative efforts. Risk is regarded as a function of their work and the vulnerability they face is respected as a byproduct of working within the inherently unpredictable collaborative environments. Moreover, for many, risk is a barometer for whether or not a task or project is worth consideration of their participation.
Since one of the goals of OPA is to raise awareness in the community, it is very important that the members sort of carry the torch that illuminates this collective endeavor. The depths of the members’ commitment to the group, cause or the work, the more likely they are to spread the news of their work. In some cases, they will express excitement prior to any measurable success.

Some co-researchers identified their individual and organizational successes as the way they increase awareness of OPA, in the community. By virtue of their association with OPA, their accomplishments enhance OPA’s credibility with others. Conversely, other co-researchers make it a point to “talk it up” in formal and informal settings. Although “celebrate” seemed to be synonymous with “raising awareness”, they acknowledge the enthusiasm that derives from OPA’s potential.

From the Inside Out—Membership Dynamics

*Relationships and Interactions with Members*

In terms of relationships with members, all of them said that they get along fine with everyone else. Throughout the research, I noted the co-researchers’ reaction to the different levels of connections with the executive committee members. Karen stated, “For the most part, what is transparent has basically been fine. I think that we're all cordial. There are definitely different communication styles, working styles and expectations. And so I think some of that definitely affects the in person interaction.” She also said, “When we are together, I would say I have a good rapport with everyone that comes to the table. I feel like I can ask them questions about the work they do.”

When Paul and I discussed relationships within the group, he shared that he thought of our relationship building as personal growth—he was contributing to
improved reactions to law enforcement among group members. He said, “When I joined
the group there were probably people who were like, “Wow, he’s pretty cool. People in
my profession are not so bad after all.”

Sam said that his relationships were based on the work he does with most of the
members of OPA:

My relationship with those in OPA is based on those that come to the table to do
the work at OPA. And so that's pretty much what the relationship is built around.
We've had formal and informal conversations about the situation of young people
in Oakland and the larger Bay Area, even state wide. We've struggled with how to
address that and challenge each other's ideas about what's the most effective way
and come up with ways that everyone could agree on.

So I would say I've built some relationships that I didn't have by being at the table
of OPA. And it's been with people who I may have known not as well, but know
much closer now, have worked much more closer now. Then there's others who I
didn't know at all prior to OPA that I know have strong working relationships
with. So I would say that's kind of the summary of my relationships.

When I explored the question of the co-researchers’ experiences with in-person
interactions, many of them expressed that they are mixed. Sam’s response most
adequately encapsulates their reaction:

I think all the way back to our first steering committee meetings, it was just a little
unclear exactly why we were at the table, and how they could support and
participate. I just remember sitting at the table just trying to get caught up. So it
seemed to me that there was the right people around the table. It did feel like we
weren't all on the same page, and it definitely felt like that was for different
reasons.

But again, it was Hershey where I was looking at people, the same people at 9:00
at night, and then 9:00 in the morning, and then going to workshops together, and
then sitting down and having a meeting at 8:00 at night, and just really working
through stuff. Again, that level of trust and that just knowing who your allies are
within the space. Right, so there's folks who were in that circle who I work with
in other capacities on a weekly basis. And more than one. And what's interesting
is that some of them I have a stronger relationship around the executive
committee, than I do in our other capacity where we work together at least on a
weekly basis.
And then there's at least one other that is part of the executive committee where I have a stronger relationship in terms of work and effectiveness outside of the executive committee doing what we do weekly together there. But when I show up to the OPA executive committee meetings, they don't show up. And so that's just an interesting observation for me. But the face to face interactions allowed me to really know who my allies were, who was gonna do the work, which allowed me to focus my energy when I was putting energy in, when I am putting energy into OPA, I know who to call and who to send the e-mail to if I want a response and if I want feedback.

Relationship With the Leader

Everyone recognized me as the leader of OPA. The co-researchers spoke to different aspects of my leadership skills and attributes. Paul made a connection between the relationships he has with me to the fact that if we all became better acquainted with one another, we would be more in sync:

I really feel like we have become friends. It is great sometimes to work collaboratively, but so much easier to, to work alongside somebody if you care about them as a friend, so that—it touches upon another aspect that I think one of the things that we haven’t done as a group is have enough opportunity where we met up and you know, not just talking about business, just kind of developing those deeper friendships with one another. I think that would do nothing more than really bringing the group closer together and feel better about the challenge at hand.

Sam has always been very supportive and oftentimes steps in to fortify my areas of weakness. His response depicted our rapport:

I guess I’ve always appreciated your leadership style in terms of leading OPA. It's always been informational, it's always been collaborative, and it’s always been participatory. And I think I, as an executive director, I saw where there was a level of clarity just in terms of structure, expectations, and a process on how to get things done. So there were times that I felt your struggle of trying to get things done, but not necessarily having a clear structure or vehicle to make that happen. Having a group of volunteers around the table that don't necessarily know each other, that haven't all necessarily committed in the same way to the mission.

So I think that being able—once we were able to formalize the executive committee and I was given the label of chair, that gave me the opportunity to support you in ways that I felt you needed that you weren't getting. And one of the first things I said to you was, basically you’re the executive director. So whatever
anybody's telling you, if you're the only person leading a whole thing you're the founding executive director if you just wanna be clear.

So somebody else may call you coordinator, somebody else may call you facilitator. But if you don't drive it, it won't move. And I know from experience that being in that position of trying to move a community piece and you feel like you're the only one really making decisions, that in itself will stifle you because who am I to make decisions for the whole community. And so I immediately wanted to be a sounding board for you and somebody who would challenge maybe your ideas to maybe push you to expect more from others. One thing I've said to you consistently is delegate, get clear on what you need to get done and immediately figure out who could do that.

Laila responded to the prompt about organizational leadership by speaking to both her professional and personal relationship with me:

I'd say professionally, I have really grown to respect Nyeisha in her—grown to respect her as a colleague, as a leader of this initiative, and as an expert in the dropout area. I point so many people to speak to her to, you need to connect with this group if you're talking about dropout. And that's an area that I didn't know I didn't know about, 'cause it wasn't really spelled out as an area to me prior to meeting Nyeisha and becoming involved with OPA. Dropouts were clumped in another category, all clumped in terms of achievement.

But I have found and grown to understand Nyeisha's body of knowledge around attendance rates, around how you even identify or classify the multiple levels and degrees of individuals who have dropped out of school. Or if they're chronically truant, habitually truant, all the data that supports it. I've been overwhelmed in a good way by it. And so I hold her as an expert, to me, personally [LAUGHTER] with that knowledge.

Another reason I think so highly of her professionally is because she just always shows up and is so committed. And no matter what's going on, and there's often times a lot of things that she has going on between juggling her personal life, her children, and her family. She still manages to show up on time. It seems like she never sleeps. [LAUGHTER] She's always diligent and always follows up and follow through, and can acknowledge when she wasn't able to follow through. And I really appreciate that. I think I could say I've grown to respect because to me respect is earned and it's commanded and not demanded. And so has been, I'm a believer by far, just based on how she shows up, that she's definitely committed and worthy.

And because she's a parent and she dropped out as well. That's credibility, to me. It's don't talk about something that you cannot taste, feel, smell or touch, or you haven't done before. And so I just, again, am able to be able to talk to her at any moment about my personal stuff around the work, my frustrations around how to
strategically think about things. And I found that it's a great value and I'm excited about our blossoming friendship, in addition to the work that we have before us in OPA.

Value Added

All of the members felt as though their opinion was valued and said so in one or two work responses. Laila’s response was more elaborate so I captured it below. Laila said,

Yes, I do. Probably sometimes—if you can say sometimes too much, but not in that way. I'm very vocal in the meetings around things that are, that I'm passionate about or I'm curious about a little more. And I feel like it's valued because one, I think both for my personal and professional credibility. And I think that's the piece that has allowed us the—to put us on the fast track in terms of the relationship building. We're still in the forming nascent stage of development, but we have—there's some familiarity there that allows us to have this common bond. We have this common interest, this common stake in improving the education conditions for Oakland. And we all kind of know each other or have heard of each other and our organizations.

And so we respect each other from that lens, from that realm. We just—the fuzzy part is that we just haven't had the opportunity to maybe work together formally. So, and that's the beauty and the potential. As far as my voice, again, I guess I think it's the personal and the professional credibility. Professionally I'm working for a foster care agency. Folks are by and large familiar with the organization and our various foundations. So and because I do work for a foundation, I think that allows people to maybe listen up a little bit more, or at least they're engaged or they're curious in terms of what we're doing.

Challenges Within the Group

I asked the members of the group what the biggest challenge was for OPA. Ironically, there was at least one co-researcher, Ken, who insisted he did not see any challenges, only opportunities. Others, while not so optimistic, shared their opinions about the potential threats to our efforts. Sam was clear that there were challenges.

Sam: Critical mass of individuals and organizations that are ready to commit the time and energy to the work. And resources, financial and otherwise. And also visibility. So going back to the business cards, brochures, etc.

Nyeisha: How do you communicate those challenges?
Sam: I have communicated them sequentially. So some of the things I mentioned I haven't brought up. But I definitely have brought up the issues around commitment, consistency, and effort and energy. And so I think that's kind of where we are at this point, really working with those things among the people who are showing up every day, or every meeting I should say. And from there, being able to execute a plan. So efficacy is around accomplishing goals and assessing and evaluating impact.

So I think we have just gotten to the point where we're clear on the “who” of that, who's gonna make it happen. And now we're—and we're also clear on the what, and we're in the process of the who doing the what. And from there we'll be able to measure our impact. So I guess in short, we haven't had a lot of opportunity to create impact and measure our effect.

Karen spoke of cohesion as a group as our biggest challenge.

And because I talk to the coordinator a lot, I feel like I'm able to express that. I think the more we do, I think she's sort of charting—no, she's leading the effort for more cohesion by being present at the events of people who are part of the collaborative. So she, if somebody is having a rally, she'll go make an appearance.

Somebody's having something at their school or something like that, she tries to be visible. Which I think makes people feel like there's some reciprocity. I care about your event, you care about my event, so I'm gonna care about your event, or I'm gonna care about what the collective does, 'cause you went out of your way to come over here. The conversations that we will be having in the near term will help to delineate that.

Laila related the challenges to my having to be both a facilitator and chair and the complexity that lies in those dual, yet very conflicting roles.

Laila: The biggest challenges for me is, like you spelled out, I have a personal passion, personal and professional passion for facilitating, and facilitation as an art, as a skill. And I think the challenge for me has been often times not knowing who the facilitator versus who's chairing. Because those two roles are very distinct. And I think for a long time Nyeisha has kind of helped—has been wearing both hats, which is a very complicated place to be.

And so because as the chair you're making the executive decisions at the end of the day, but as the facilitator you're trying to make sure that you have as much consensus as possible as you move forward. And the two, traditionally they support each other, but you can't—it can be complicated to be, to have both. [LAUGHTER] It's like, I'm gonna tell you what to do. No, I wanna know from you. Or I wanna hear from you. But then I'm gonna make the decision at the end of the day. So it can come off as condescending.
The other challenge is that not everyone shows up consistently or participates. Sometimes the meeting notices and requests for information are last minute. We have a short window to reply to them. And so that to me, it's very—well sometimes it's frustrating because—well now I'm able to participate as a part of my professional role. So I can make certain adjustments in my schedule to go to certain meetings. But because on other side of my job I'm also a case manager, I have to respond to other individuals and their schedules and meet within the follow up on the service plans.

Nyeisha: How do you communicate that challenge?

Laila: Well, I think that's when I lean on my personal relationship with Nyeisha to just tell her at moments when, oh, this is frustrating to me. Because so and so, or I had to turn around that e-mail on a short time frame and I couldn't do it. And then she's usually, or almost always flexible to say, well, okay, can you send it to me by this time? Or can you just get it to me, I set this date because I need to hear from everybody. But if you can get it to me before Friday, that's fine. Or asking, is there anything I can do, that she could do on her end to help get whatever information she needs for me.

Paul stated that the biggest challenge he saw was with the lack of clarity in how we are going to accomplish our goals. He said that he has never mentioned it to anyone and prior to the interview, nobody asked.

Although she does not communicate challenges either, Christy admitted that the biggest challenge was “Trying to get everybody to buy in and everybody to do the work, that's the single challenge. You know… getting everybody at the table and motivated—and when you say everybody, all of our partners.”

Motivation to Be a Member

Most co-researchers’ answer to the question of motivation to be a member of OPA was a one-word response. Table 4 captures their responses:
Table 4

Co-researchers’ Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names of Co-researchers</th>
<th>Motivation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Highly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Laila</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christie</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ken</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sam</td>
<td>Low</td>
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*Note. Rating of member’s motivation to participate.*

**Trust Among Members**

According to notable theorists, trust is the centerpiece of social capital. To build the will to achieve a collective goal, it is indisputable that at some point, on some level, trust must come into play. The existence of trust is critical to survival both inside and outside of the community. Certain interactions can build, destroy, or establish trust. If trust exists, the members of the group they are more likely to be willing to go the distance—they believe that it is worth it to stretch themselves beyond their physical and mental capacity to support the initiatives that come out of the group. Just as well, outside of the group in the community, if trust is breached it is very hard to recover and rebuild it. According to Ken, Karen, and Sam, trust is essential to the success of OPA and it is earned through transparency. Sam explained,

The way I think trust can be enhanced would be to have a greater sense of transparency, especially in fiscal management. I think that, that basically that’s where trust breaks down and people are concerned about how money is controlled and distributed; have an open honest dialogue around those kind of things—Having a, a set platform for those kinds of discussions. But more importantly, having the dialogue (is important). Having a opportunity for everyone to, to be heard and to know what’s going on I think is the best way to establish trust.
Sam’s response was along the same lines as Karen, but he added that after the retreat the relationships with some members grew, which contributed to his trust among those members.

Sam: Again, the way I manage trust is through transparency. So I am willing to be open and honest early and often. And so that's how I deal with and I'm able to see how people react and respond to that, which helps me be able to trust them to do what they show me they'll do. So I think those who have consistently come as part of the steering committee, I've been able to build trust with. Those who were part of the—who have continued their commitment after the Hershey retreat, I've been able to build trust with. And beyond that, I tend to trust those beyond that circle to continue to do what they have shown me they’ll do. The process, again, I was one of the ones who was seeking clarification in Hershey around the process, decision making, flow of donations, etc. And since then, I think the requests from myself and others to clarify and solidify the process around decision making, meetings, leadership, was done. And it was done in a way that has allowed me to continue to participate to this point.

Nyeisha: How can we enhance the trust that exists for some and is nonexistent for others?

Sam: We (OPA) need to have some successes to enhance the trust that exists within the group. I think some of that trust has to be built by solidifying Oakland's Promise's role in the community in a way that it's gonna—it's clear that we're gonna be here. And I think that would build trust among those who may have been at the table who have stepped away because they couldn't see necessarily the value in it. And so it's easier for an executive director to see the value in partnering with another non-profit, versus sitting on a steering committee, you know what I mean? Just makes it a little bit easier to understand how, what I can do, what I can get out of it, what I can put in it.

Paul shared that there is a deeper level of trust that exists between certain members. He pointed out what he calls tension that may be at the root of it. He did, however, offer solutions to enhancing trust among the members. “In addition to spending more time together out of the area, we need purposefully engage in some quality social interaction. …It may be meeting for lunch once a month or something like that. I mean, that can make a huge difference.”
Christy stated that she trusts some people, but others, whom she does not know as well, she cannot point out why she trusts them. She contributed to the discussion of enhancement of trust by stating that trust is relevant but it is not always a deal breaker because trust is so relative.

*Diversity*

When asked how well we have achieved the goal of making sure that the group’s ethnic diversity is representative of the community and more specifically the ones who are most in need of support, Ken’s statement seemed to sum it up. “When we went to Hershey it was very diverse and I think the community is well represented with OPA.” Sam was in agreement. He stated,

I think we've been highly successful with that. I wasn't necessarily a part of identifying individuals or organizations to come to the table. So I don't know what it took to really make that happen. I know that I see a variety of groups represented, not just ethnically or racially, but also in terms of foster care versus individuals who stay at home, who have parents at home, parent groups. So for me, I feel like if that was a goal, that it was accomplished. And I also feel like in Oakland, which goal is sometimes easier to accomplish than—you have to do a lot of work to create a homogeneous group of people in Oakland.

*Opportunity for Growth*

All of the members shared the belief that OPA could grow. I admit that I thought that there would be at least a few co-researchers that would feel like we have the capacity to grow. All the co-researchers articulated their confidence in our potential and linked the potential to the strategic planning process. Once again, Sam’s answer captured the responses of the other co-researchers:

I think we have opportunities for growth or opportunities to do good work are opportunities to grow. And so I think now that we have a strategic plan, we have action steps, we at least have identified those who are committed to doing that work, and I think that's a good foundation. And I think it goes back to what I was saying earlier, I think the next steps are, what resources do we have to bring to bear to get those action steps done And if we don't have all the resources it takes
now, what can we do with the resources we have, and how do we bring more to bear. So I think those are kind of, that's kind of the foundation on the next steps around being able to be successful moving forward. And so there's opportunities to share information with families and opportunities to support young people in that success. So I think that's another opportunity for success. And I think kind of bridging the gap between this small committed group of people ready to do what it takes, what resources do we need to get us in the position to actually effect that change in that—even if it's in a small way.

_Funding and Its Impact on OPA’s Goal Attainment_

Most people who operate or work at non-profit organizations understand the importance of funding. Yet, some within the arena insist that when it comes to causes that require such acute attention, some endeavors are worthy of pursuing with or without the potential acquisition of funding. According to the co-researchers, funding is important because there are ancillary expenses outside of my compensation. They also contend that funding is a consideration in terms of OPA’s ability to accomplish its goals. Christy stated that based on our strategic plan, there is only so much we can do without money.

_Summary_

Relationships within OPA are solid according to the co-researchers. Members appear to trust and have good relationships with one another, at least on the surface level or what Karen considers “what’s transparent.” The word _transparent_ seemed to be a popular term because with regards to OPA’s structure, the desire to have transparent procedures, decision making information, and ultimately leadership was a noted trend.

The co-researchers did not want passive leadership. They appreciated input on one hand, yet they wanted to be directed and driven toward the goal. In some ways, the diplomacy of the collaborative practice was a barrier to reaching a level of authenticity. They feel comfortable expressing the challenges faced within the group because their opinion is valued. Although funding is a factor that may contribute to the groups success,
they feel extremely motivated to participate in OPA and feel that the members who are at the table have the collective ability to impact the dropout crisis in Oakland. Therefore, they felt as though OPA can seize growth opportunities.

When challenges present themselves, the members feel a relative sense of comfort with bringing them to the forefront. Among the biggest challenges are commitment, the lack of clarity around the purpose and how to get everyone to actually do the work. The co-researchers insisted that the diversity of OPA’s executive committee is solid.

**Deeper Dive Inside—Activities and Events That Enhance or Diminish Growth**

*Professional Development*

Another activity that had an impact of the co-researchers was the professional development opportunities provided by America’s Promise Alliance. They expressed their appreciation for the support OPA and its members receive from APA. For some, it was the fact that they feel that it is great to actually see the association with our national partner, and others shared that they thought that the opportunities to learn best practices from others doing similar work in other communities was extremely beneficial. Laila’s response sort of captured the outlook of the co-researchers:

> Oh, it's been awesome. Just being exposed to the body of knowledge that's out there across the country in terms of dropout prevention and it's not so much as gaining new strategies and new techniques. It's very validating to hear that a lot of other states and local cities that look like Oakland are against facing the same issues. And in some ways, they are following the same thought process as our local community, service providers, in terms of addressing and tackling these issues such as poverty, dropout rates, and family engagement.

And in some ways it's really validating and refreshing to know that we're even ahead of the game [LAUGHTER] in some of those areas. So, but again, just having the opportunity to network and to meet with other people, and also to gain—really this last conference that we had in DC was phenomenal because we had our vice president of the country, our secretary, our national secretary of education, really calling out education as an issue of national security. Which means it's a high priority for us. And it really just, it to me grounded my value for
education. And all the work that's being done to correct and improve the system. It really just made it valid. There's national support behind this work. It's not just talk. [LAUGHTER]

**Experience With Communication**

Communication is one of the areas that has led to an opportunity to really move toward better practices. Although Ken felt that the communication was not in need of enhancement, Christy, who said that she thought that it was fine when I first asked the question, finally admitted, “We probably could work on some systems, you know, that could make the communication better but that’s about part of learning and experiencing….We probably should think of a better communications strategy.”

Karen took a minute to think about her response. Again, she has been a member since inception and has seen the many iterations of intra/inter-group communication:

> Hmm. I think that there have been many trials at effective communication. I feel like I am really plugged into what's going on because I have a lot of access to the coordinators. I think as with any collaborative, things can always be refined and things can always be made better or more efficient. But overall, I think the basic elements are going in the right direction. I think part of the issue around communication is people being willing to do basic, basic things. Like say, yes, I got this e-mail, or I saw it, or things like that. So I think the effort has been made to communicate. Yeah.

Paul said that he sees no real issues with the communication but made it a point to add that the experience with us being far away in Hershey, Pennsylvania, made it a bit easier for us to communicate because we had no distractions:

> I think that has been good, especially since it's so tough to get the right people to the table to make sure something like this endeavor is successful. You've got to bring in leaders who are generally people who are either busy and immersed in their own individual specialties. Everyone is sort of a leader in their individual sector which is critical for what we're trying to accomplish.

So inevitably, the downside could be that these people are super, super busy, so I mean, you could go out—I'm sure you could go out and find like five or six people who will return every email on time but they're not immersed in the work so they probably wouldn't bring to the table what this group brings to the table.
The members here are facing some of the biggest challenge in the community and that's kind of a tightrope you're always kind of walking. It's like, hey I am connected to people, but I may not be able to meet all of the time. The challenge is probably how to get everybody's schedules together. How do you manage that? I wish I had an answer, but I don't.

Sam acknowledged that when he was invited initially, it really was not clear why he was there. He joined the group at a pretty volatile time in terms of us really beginning to define ourselves and make the public aware of our effort and going into a steep transition, which likely contributed to his bewilderment. He explained,

I would say from my initial meetings which were around the initial formation, I was coming to the table based on who invited me and did not initially see a clear way for me to participate. I wasn't clear about what the goal and vision was, and I wasn't clear on the action. Therefore wasn't clear on how I could support it or participate. But definitely understood the mission of lowering dropout rates and coming up with ways to work with young people as I had already been doing, to help them navigate the system and be successful. I think for me that's pretty much what it boils down to.

It wasn't until we went to Hershey that communication began to gel. And I think part of that was because we were face to face. We were out of our typical environment, so it wasn't a one-hour meeting at City Hall in between everything else in the middle of the week. It was actually time to look at each other face to face and grapple with questions over a matter of not just hours, but even days. And so for me that was when I got clear enough and the communication at that point was clear enough because we had a very focused goal to come out of that—I'll just call it a retreat—come out of that retreat with, that I saw where I could support what resources I—or relationships I could bring to bear, and became more willing to work to move the group forward and whatever capacity that required.

So since then, I think it's our collaboration, and I think I've shared this with you before, has broken down into a collaboration group and a cooperation group.

**Goal Attainment**

Throughout the research, the co-researchers spoke of the need to bring clarity and formality to our process. The desire to bring formality to a process that was born out of organic soil with plants so used to being allowed to grow freely was one of the biggest challenges for me. I wrote in my journal:
Following in the footsteps of such an amazing leader is daunting when I really think about it. It is never easy to find the courage to trust your own judgment, shift gears, and drive full speed into the direction in which the compass that guides your instincts is pointing you. I recall being nervous and unsure of my ability to lead such incredible people—such people who were commissioned to work with someone much wiser and experienced than I was. I remember telling myself that I was prepared and ready for the challenge. I assured myself that I was hired to do the job because someone knew I was capable. It took a while but I finally hit my stride. I began to trust my knowledge of the community. I began to build relationships and I started to see the results from my efforts. I had a plan and I hoped that the leaders who were around the table with me would appreciate my vision for OPA’s future.

The change in direction was very difficult for members of the executive committee to process. The co-researchers expressed their dissatisfaction so clearly through their responses to the question pertaining to our ability to accomplish our goal. Christy thought we could attain our goals. But she suggested that we clarify things and make the goals “crystal clear.” She gave a step-by-step process that started with brainstorming and setting goals for a month or so. Then she felt that we should come up with a process to figure out how to attain and execute the goals. I wrote in my side notes to her interview that I thought that is what we did in Hershey, but again there was a reason why a quest for clarity still existed. Apparently, the ambiguity seemed to remain.

Paul saw the biggest opposition to goal attainment as the expectation of full consensus:

Maybe that, the biggest problem right now that I see is when there's—you know there's these different types of decision makers obviously. And there are also differences in opinion on how things should be done. Not everybody will agree. I mean you have to be like super in tune and there’s got to be ton of kumbaya on the team for that to happen in every case at the end of the day, I think you’ve got to have some authority.

At the end of the day there's got to be a hierarchical structure somebody's got to agree that at the end of the day we can put all of our ideas in the hat, but I'm the one who's going to look through those ideas and pick the direction we're going to go.

Especially in Pennsylvania where we did have a lot of people there, you can get to the point where you're not going to get everybody to agree and unless you have
that hyper-hierarchical, decision mechanism, you appear to try to appeal to the larger group than you can get everyone’s input but there are some who will still be disenchanted with the direction you think you should be going, so that's a tough one.

Sam admitted that he found confidence in the midst of the other “Chocolate City.” He made it very clear that our retreat in Hershey was a factor that contributed to the belief that we could really make a difference:

I think, like I said before, initially the goal wasn't clear beyond dropout prevention. So we did a conference and there were certain activities to engage young people and engage the community. But in terms of a plan to meet that large goal, it wasn't clear for me. And I think that may have been the case for others initially around the table. And again the Hershey experience for me allowed us to get ourselves organized enough where I could see ways to—well, it got us organized enough so that we could create more of a plan, more of a strategic plan to say, “Okay, if we're gonna impact dropout prevention in Oakland, here are some specific things, or let's come up with some specific things that we could do.” And even let's maybe even figure out a specific area to target.

So I think once we were able to identify what the structure was, identify what the plan was, specifically for Oakland, identify a target area, that allowed us to say, well, okay, now we can create action steps to reach those goals and then we'll just have to measure to see if those action steps which hit those goals that we say will impact the larger goal, we can see if it impacted or not, and then adapt accordingly. So I'm excited about being at that place. I'm really I think now that we are clear about what we wanna do and what we think we can do to be impactful, we have to, I feel like we have to figure out ways to bring the resources to bear to do that.

And that could be people power, that could be dollars, that could be alliances with other organizations. But we had a lot of people around the table without a clear plan. Now we have a clear plan and very few people around the table. And so I'm trying to figure out how do we resolve that because the plan we have requires a lot of energy. Do we look for dollars to pay people? Then we're moving towards becoming more formalized as an agency. Or do we spend the time outreaching and recruiting and building the collaboration, and have those collaborative members bring those resources?

Decision Making

As for the responses to the question of who makes the decisions for the group, it was quite interesting to hear the co-researchers’ reaction. The range was that it was
unclear about who makes the (major) decisions to very clear on who made the decisions and the protocol to do so. Paul was pretty unclear. Laila gave her best effort to describe it:

So OPA’s protocol, decision-making protocol. I believe we have a voting structure [LAUGHTER]. It doesn't stand out because we haven't had to do it very—we haven't had to do it to date very much. I don't want to make up stuff. But I think it is the majority vote. It's something like that. [LAUGHTER] So I think it's that, the steering committee, we have to have a quorum in terms of the steering committee members who are there. And I think that's two thirds or something like that.

And then there's—so that's the formal piece. The informal piece is, okay, are you at the meeting? Are you gonna show up and be able to respond to the information that we agreed upon during the last meeting or in e-mail that was sent of you? And we need your request sooner rather than later. And if you aren't able to do that, then you had your window of opportunity. And so that's where that accountability piece comes in. And that's probably the fuzziest area for OPA right now. And that is just keeping people on board and being able to respond to the information, to what's required of the group in order to move forward while we're away from meetings formally, while we're away from conferences and professional development opportunities. I think that would sort of color the structure of things now, the formal protocol, and informal.

Karen contemplated her response because she knows the value of the question. She also is fully aware of what is presented in sidebar, which is reflected in her response:

Well, I think that's kind of a loaded question. Because I don't really know the theory that would explain it. If I thought racism was at work, I would say critical race theory would explain it. But there's what happens transparently. And then there's the stuff that happens behind the scenes. So I think the structure would say that the final decisions are made by the executive committee. But what comes to the executive committee is influenced by the ex officio and sort of works through the core team.

So it's not wholly as organic as I think we would like to believe that it is. There is what I like to call quiet conversations that happen that actually steer the work right now. I do, however, think that because we are putting some basic structures in place, that as those processes are implemented more often, that some of the quiet conversations will stop. Because if we all agree on the process, then we should really all agree on the process, and let the process be the way that the decisions are determined. I don't think there's anything wrong with providing wisdom and sort of guidance. But I do think that the decisions should be made by the group that has been designated to do it.
Sam expressed that since we created the strategic plan, things are much clearer than they once were:

So I feel like all the decisions that we've made since we have finalized—well, I think finalize may be too strong a word, but kind of organized and structured our strategic plan, all those decisions have been made within the structure of the executive committee by those who are on that body that came. So yeah, I feel like that's pretty much how all our decisions have—what we're gonna do, when we're gonna do it, how we're gonna do it, all those have been—all those decisions have been made within the executive committee.

Christy had a pretty good idea of our protocol. She described the inclusive nature of our structure:

So, of course, you get together and we make decisions and then bring that to the larger group and the core team comes together first and figure out what we're going to go through there. And then everybody (in the executive committee) still has a vote and everybody else decides. It's very democratic.

Event That Contributed to Your Belief in OPA

When asked specifically, “What event contributed to the belief that we could achieve our goals?”, all the members pointed to our retreat in Hershey, Pennsylvania, as the event that had a positive impact on their thoughts about participating in OPA. The retreat was not without a fair amount of “storming before the norming” as one of the non-co-researcher executive committee members claimed.

Laila: We had the retreat meeting that I thought was very effective and very helpful. It felt awesome as a new team member to join and receive that sort of introduction and get all the context. I felt that when we had the conversation around transparency, around decision making and communication, that's when I felt the group sort of hit this stormy phase. There were a lot of people who were skeptical. Well, not a lot of people.

There were some folks who mentioned that they didn't know who was making the decisions and that they had one understanding about the group and the direction that the group was heading in. But that it had changed without them being informed or aware of it. And that's what made me a little skeptical. It just kind of put my antennas were raised around the structure and how the group was being governed.
Nyeisha: Did it make you put your antennas up?

Laila: Yeah. Like maybe the group isn't really on one accord around how decisions are being made and certain people may not trust or maybe—I don't know. It just put my feelers up around the structure of the group.

Nyeisha: Were those concerns addressed?

Laila: Yeah. They were addressed. And I think that's what helped to establish our decision-making protocol.

Nyeisha: So you enjoyed it?

Laila: I think the professional development or collaborative development that we did in Hershey, in terms of bringing our steering committee together, formalizing it, organizing it in terms of its structure and how it would work, in terms of giving us a focus in terms of target area, challenging us to begin the strategic planning process.

I think maybe being a little bit more explicit that this is something that has to be done for this body and it's something that you can take back to your organization if you don't already have a process. And if you do, you can support this process and bring your expertise. I think sometimes when you either give—when people know they're getting something back, like oh, I'm gonna get this opportunity to learn something I didn't know. Or they get the opportunity to share their expertise and shine, sometimes that's a way to keep them at the table, when they're trying to figure out where do I fit in, what can I do.

Ken explained that the retreat was an eye-opening experience for him because the maze of OPA came into focus and he was able to see where he fit in:

The conference in Hershey, Pennsylvania, was really good for me. Going out there and, and seeing the agency from a national perspective and recognizing the efforts that’s happening all over the country was really big. It gave me the opportunity to learn some really new practices that are happening in the south and on the east coast. I thought it really established OPA as a very legitimate agency that could offer some real support and so I would say performance, the particular thing would be that conference in, in Hershey.

Social Interactions

Christy’s response to the question to gauge her social interactions with other members spoke to long-term relationships and shorter relationships that were deepened when she was on OPA-related trips. She said, “The OPA trips have given me an
opportunity to connect with other members with whom I was less acquainted. It gave us
chance to talk about who we are outside of work.”

Sam said that given the fact that we are all leaders in our respective organizations
and capacities, we are limited in our free time to get together.

We're all so busy...I think that [social interactions] was probably the trust
building and part of the building of the structure among at least the executive
committee members because we had time in Hershey to spend time together
outside of the professional setting. So we were able to hang out at dinner time,
after dinner at the lobby in the hotel. And so that is probably the extent of social
interactions I've had with steering committee members. And even more
specifically the executive committee members.

Ken said that he felt that we have relationships that go beyond the collaborative. He said,
“I don’t think it’s enough though. We probably should hang out more than we do.
Because we all tend to go our different ways and a lot of times I don’t see you guys for,
until we meet.”

Summary

Looking deeper into OPA gave insight into the interpersonal relationships as well
as the elements that contributed to the positive or negative sentiments toward their
participation. The inquiry presented a point of view that revealed appreciation confidence
and stanchness toward OPA that was both refreshing and hopeful. This section was a
culmination of sorts. The co-researchers revealed that they truly gained value from their
participation in various professional development activities. Moreover, their involvement
in the strategic planning that would guide OPA’s work for the next 2 years.

The retreat in Hershey provided the basis for each and every one of the co-
researchers to see themselves in the plan and see a clear path to the goals they set.
Remarkably, the retreat essentially turned what had been a confusing and somewhat
purposeless into a meaningful experience that assured members that OPA was moving in
a direction that they could support because they designed it, vetted it and approved it. A byproduct of the strategic planning exercise was the opportunity to interact with other members on a personal level, which according to the co-researchers contributed greatly to their sense of connection to the other members and the movement overall.
CHAPTER V:
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This participatory action study attempted to address absences in the literature related to the internal dynamics and experiences of the executive committee members of an inter-organizational collaborative group that was established to help increase the high school graduation rates in Oakland. Staying true to the participatory action research methodology, co-researchers were involved in the critical reflection process to assist me in interpreting the findings that derived from our data collection and help present the results of the research. The co-researchers’ voices provided the answers to the research questions.

Discussion

Research Question 1: How was the inter-organizational collaborative group formed, and how were the members selected?

According to Cohen et al. (2001), how an organization forms has enormous impact on its success. The co-researchers found the Oakland Promise Alliance’s formation was organic in nature. One of the mayor’s staff invited many alliance members to participate, and co-researchers found the cause credible. Since most its members emerged from the same school of thought, the membership’s surface layer trust was inherent. That likely is why – despite inconsistent participation, leadership changes, difficulty defining roles for themselves and other members, and a frustrating lack of clear purpose – the co-researchers remain highly motivated and committed to the OPA cause.
During the current economic adversity, inter-organizational collaborations have become the norm and replaced the silos that formally housed solutions to societal challenges.

Research Question 2: What are the environmental and community factors and preexisting sentiments toward collaboration within Oakland, and how have they affected the success of the inter-organizational collaborative group?

Whether a collaborative group is based in an organization, company, or agency, or simply convened to solve an issue that affects the quality of life for young people, the interconnected and interdependent nature of collaboration requires a deep sense of awareness of the department, company, city, state, nation and world around it. The co-researchers confirmed that since OPA’s goals and mission is in line with their individual and organizational interests, committing to the group is easier from a personal and professional standpoint.

Establishing a unified front with organizations and becoming acclimated to the changing political landscape takes a high degree of agility, patience and understanding. Relationship building is the work of collaborative efforts. So the key to achievement will be the initiation of a structured communication and community engagement strategy. Although the retreat provided the foundation for us to move in that direction, because there was no formal purpose, the research revealed that we need to do a better job communicating the OPA story.

Collaboration across sectors and within organizations and agencies is prevalent in Oakland. The co-researchers’ experience working with others in the community, on short-term or long-term basis, impacted how they perceived the OPA’s propensity to
succeed. Ultimately OPA’s likelihood to achieve success depends on the community’s response and receptiveness to the initiative. To secure community support, we concluded it was vital to increase awareness citywide and particularly in West Oakland.

All cities are unique, but Oakland is a spectacularly dynamic community. This dynamism is revealed in how we work to resolve community issues and how residents respond to solutions imposed upon them. Social capital is critical in Oakland. On the street level, it is referred to as a “ghetto pass.” In some neighborhoods, residents outright reject those without “street credibility,” which makes it hard for organizations offering support to succeed.

This research aroused the realization that for OPA to be successful, we must rely heavily upon one another to make vital connections with those whom we may have limited access In terms of what DeWever et al. (2005) considered “strategic resources acquisition” (p. 1524), members must trust one another to share information and network connections. Without trust, members do not feel inclined to make themselves vulnerable, which makes sense since information can be used to gain a competitive advantage or to sabotage progress. Moreover, connecting someone who trusts you with someone who intends to exploit that trust could ruin both relationships.

OPA members feel comfortable taking such risks because of how most of us were recruited to participate. All our members are extremely credible leaders in their areas of expertise. We are very fortunate to have what one person who was “plugged into” the OPA network called “movers and shakers” at the table. Our accomplished membership connects us to the mayor’s office, institutions of higher learning, and cabinet-level school district leaders. More important than our members’ professional and educational status is
the diversity of the OPA’s executive committee, including numerous people of color – particularly women – which is remarkable and indicative of the Oakland way. Our diverse membership connects us with members of the Latino, African American, and Asian American communities.

The co-researchers’ observations were in line with the literature in that bonding social capital is the easiest kind to achieve, yet bridging social capital is essential if we are to serve the youth who are most likely to succumb to the negative elements within the education system. Former OPA leader Kate’s insistence that we go beyond simple effort to achieve diversity and reach those who can benefit from our support is a testament to her understanding and knowledge of Oakland. “Bridging social capital can change organizational culture as well as shift the values of their perspective” (Schneider, 2009, p. 602).

As I pondered Oakland’s values, I searched my research notes for a comparable experience related to this study. I recalled my visit last fall to a community in a Southern state. Before arriving, I marveled at the community’s structure and the ability of organizations, schools and businesses to connect the dots of service and to tell their stories. Their marketing collateral was unbelievable. It was obvious they were well funded and extremely structured. After visiting four to six sites, however, I wondered: “Where are all the people of color?” I was stunned no blacks or Latinos were leading any of the organizations, nor were they present at most our meetings.

At a small group debriefing that evening, I felt a yearning from deep inside to mention my observation to Tim, who leads the community’s dropout prevention efforts. “You know,” I began, “I don’t get it. How can it be that nearly everyone, besides you,
who is thinking of and providing solutions for dropouts, who are mostly African American and Latino students, is white? I mean, what sort of example are you setting for the youngsters who are looking for solutions? What is that saying about who has the capacity to actually provide those solutions for their issues?”

Tim was slightly offended and grew defensive, but it was a safe place and I was sincerely concerned and I needed to understand. His response was that it did not matter because the results spoke for themselves. I have a tremendous amount of respect for him, but I felt his reaction was a “cop-out” and flat-out resistance to critical thinking and denial of his reality. Of course it matters! It matters because the predominance of white solution providers is an observable projection of a problem that perpetuates the myth that non-white people cannot organize themselves to solve their own problems.

Contention grew as others chimed in with input. Some made the same observations as I had, and even those who did not still offered their commentary. In the end, I concluded the discussion by stating his reality would never be acceptable in Oakland. Although forced diversity or “managed diversity” can be contrived and artificial and “can actually slow progress” (Weisinger & Salipante, 2005, p. 29-32), diverse representation is not debatable. It is the Oakland way. OPA would never reach its goal without the ability to serve all vulnerable youth.

Going forward, we plan to invite an even broader section of the community to participate in our initiative. We intend to solidify our position within the city by establishing a clearer purpose. We hope clarifying our mission will enable key stakeholders to identify their roles and better align themselves with OPA.
Research Question 3: What are the membership dynamics and to what extent do various participatory activities and group interactions used during the relationship building stage of the inter-organizational collaborative group’s development affect membership dynamics within the collaborative?

Since complex working relationships generally congeal when resources are stretched thin, chaos sometimes causes people to scramble into partnerships without considering the multiple facets involved (Crosby & Bryson, 2010). Cross-sector collaboration in the public sector plays out differently than it does in the private sector. The challenge is increased when the joint effort stems from community ailments and those who initiate the call to action often do not recognize that people do not naturally collaborate. To resolve community issues, inter-organizational collaboration should be viewed as a movement.

The leadership role becomes more important when an intermediary is involved. If the leader is being paid and funding is tied to a specific outcome, the leader is certain to do whatever he or she deems necessary to achieve the collective goal. The Oakland’s Promise Alliance is an intermediary of sorts that was designed to bring organizations and individuals together to increase the city’s high school graduation rate from 60 percent up to 90 percent. Though its framework has evolved and outcomes are tied less to raising awareness and more to increasing graduation rates, internal and external relationship building remains at the core of my work. Healthy relationships are critical to our success.

The co-researchers acknowledge success will not be instantaneous, and individuals representing the multiple sectors understand succeeding will require all their resources and networks. As we share our networks, their expansion will benefit us all.
The co-researchers (who were OPA members early on) found meeting for the sake of networking and sharing to be a foreign concept. They wanted tasks that led to action and direction from leadership. While they wanted their opinions heard, they did not expect full consensus.

The constant reference to transparency made it clear that although the deceptive nature of traditional leadership within a collaborative effort calls for me to disguise my authority. While in reality, as the leader of OPA I had to move the group in a certain direction. That made members very uncomfortable because they were not fools. They preferred I be upfront, honest and authentic. They did not respect my veil of neutrality.

I tried to match my literature review notes to the co-researchers’ reaction to my leadership of OPA, and I found the team leadership theory might be the most fitting approach to provide the most appropriate environment. Questions exploring OPA’s inner-workings underscored my desire to identify contradictions and confirmations of what I assumed at the study’s beginning or during my literature review. The inquiry surrounding leadership provides an example of that.

As I highlighted in Chapter 2, past studies gave the impression that traditional leader-follower relationships had no place in collaborative settings. The co-researchers, however, preferred more than lay support. After reviewing leadership theory literature and documenting what theories researchers refuted as viable, my goal was to view collaborative leaders by making comparisons to traits, tasks and functions. Table 5 captures those comparisons.
Table 5

Collaborative Leader Comparison Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory and Early Contributors</th>
<th>Aim of Leader Continuum</th>
<th>Approach</th>
<th>Focal Point</th>
<th>Point of View</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Situational Approach</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hersey and Blanchard (1969)</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Styles</td>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Leader’s behavior should adapt to development of the subordinate</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Follower</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Supporting</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Knowledge)</td>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Delegating</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Path-Goal Theory</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House (1971)</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Behaviors</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>Relationship between leader’s style and characteristics of subordinate and the work setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>Directive</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Follower</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Supporting</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participative</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Achievement-oriented</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Leader Member Exchange Theory</strong> (LMX)</td>
<td>Creation of linkages in relationships</td>
<td>Phases in Leadership Making</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Leadership process-Dyadic relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns (1978)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Interactions between the leader and the individual followers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dienesch and Liden (1986)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transformational Leadership Theory</strong></td>
<td>Motivation Change</td>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Change</td>
<td>Leader behavior Needs of subordinates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downton (1973)</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burns (1978)</td>
<td>Desire to influence</td>
<td>Desire to influence</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Team Leadership Theory</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership Actions</td>
<td>Performance</td>
<td>Leader monitors the team and takes whatever actions are necessary to ensure team effectiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haddock et. all (2005)</td>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>Performance Development</td>
<td></td>
<td>Leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take Action</td>
<td>Leader decision</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forecasting</td>
<td>Team effectiveness</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Diagnosing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prevention</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Follower Characteristics</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dogmatic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsatisfied</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomous</td>
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<tr>
<td>High expectations</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Task Characteristics</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(unclear, complex)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repetitive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mundane</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(unclear, unstructured)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambiguous</td>
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<tr>
<td>(challenging, complex)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transformational Leadership Theory</strong></td>
<td>Change</td>
<td></td>
<td>Process by which leader makes significant change</td>
<td>Leader behavior Needs of subordinates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since collaboration is non-static by nature, it is important to pinpoint the activities and events that positively or negatively impact the group. Over two years with various entry points and lengths of participation, members likely could cite different factors impacting the group’s dynamics. By and large however, the co-researchers named the retreat in Hershey, Pennsylvania as the most impactful experience as OPA members.

The retreat reinforced our desire to participate because we jointly created a strategic plan in which we saw pieces of ourselves. Restructuring OPA, to move it beyond being just a convener into an organization that took on its own projects provided a platform that made their contributions more meaningful.

Two co-researchers felt the retreat’s most important effect was that it provided informal opportunities to bond and connect with other members, which would have been much more difficult to accomplish without being far away from home, work, and other distractions. The chance to connect in authentic ways is rare in professional settings. Connection becomes even more challenging when the work is intermittent. The interviews made known informal social interactions are critical because relationships are key to successful inter-organizational collaboration. The research indicated the best forms of social interaction occur away from the natural meeting environment.

Though we are not certain that all informal social interactions are equal, we know our time together in Hershey was a catalyst to improved relationships, trust and the belief that we can achieve success within our collaborative. As is inherent for organizations like ours, funding many such excursions is beyond our financial capacity. We have agreed to work collectively to secure funds that will enable us to create more informal engagement experiences.
Conclusions

There were many common experiences noted throughout the data analysis phase. As we sought to answer to the research question, the themes that stuck out for the co-researchers were commitment, cohesion, communication, and change. Those themes in some ways capture the group’s strengths and weaknesses, and they penetrate the core of every research question and helped formulate conclusions. Table 6 gives an example of how we connected the themes, data and research questions.
Table 6

Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Commitment      |![](https://placekitten.com/150/150)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Invitation from the mayor's office</td>
<td>-Meets self-interests</td>
<td>-Goal Attainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Member relationships</td>
<td>-Meets organizational interests</td>
<td>-Decision Making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Pick the right people</td>
<td>-Youth-serving</td>
<td>-Strategic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Trust</td>
<td></td>
<td>-Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Comfort taking risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Diverse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohesion</th>
<th>Individualistic</th>
<th>Individualistic</th>
<th>-Back to School Rally</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Need more informal interactions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Leader/member support of other members’ events</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change</th>
<th>-Internal leadership</th>
<th>-External leadership</th>
<th>-Retreat—Organic to structure</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Need to show progress</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Build relationships with new members</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Build relationships in the community</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>-Build relationships with new leadership</td>
<td>-Opportunity to meet out of the area to define plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|        | -Build relationships with new leadership | -Opportunity to meet out of the area to define plan |

*Note. Table 6 shows major themes that emerged out of the data analysis process and their relationship with the research questions.*

**Commitment and Formation**

This study led co-researchers to conclude we all initially were committed because a member of the mayor’s staff called us to the table. Therefore, the cause was credible.

We were honored to serve our community’s leader, and we asked very few questions...
because it was a great networking opportunity, if nothing else. I can recall no formal structure or stated purpose.

The co-researchers explained they felt the right people were around the table to achieve our goals, and they still believe that. According to Cohen et al. (2002), member selection is key to the success of a collaborative, especially during formation. My dialogue with Maya about the formation of OPA gave me a bit of history on the membership selection process. Most the members who were considered partners were vaguely to formally familiar with one another; only a few of us had informal relationships. Kate was the main connection for most of us.

Kate was the nexus that provided a starting point for trust. In some ways, members who were invited had a proven track record for improving the lives of young people in Oakland. Seven of the nine co-researchers became members before our former mayor’s term ended. When we were all invited to join, we again were being called to serve our mayor, which necessitated our commitment and dedication. No one at the table was present because of a mandate issued from their employer, which Eden and Huxham (2001) described as detrimental to multi-organizational collaborative efforts.

To build the will to achieve a collective goal, trust must come into play. Trust is critical to survival both inside and outside the community. Certain interactions can build, destroy or establish trust. According to Huxham and Vangen (2004), trust is essential for successful collaboration (p. 194). If trust exists, group members generally are more committed to the cause and willing go the distance because they believe it is worth it to stretch themselves beyond their physical and mental capacity to support the group’s
initiatives. Similarly, outside the group in the community, if trust is breached it is very hard to recover and rebuild it.

According to Huxham and Vangen (2004), trust can be the result of “reputation or past behavior, or more formal contracts and agreements” during group formation stages. The co-researchers account of how they were invited to participate and by who (some were invited by Kate and some by me after I officially assumed my role as coordinator) gave some indication of our network and connection to the former mayor’s office and validated the claims made by Huxham and Vangen.

The connection with Mayor’s office contributed to the various levels of trust that initially existed within OPA. Karen explained how the unwavering trust she felt around the table of any project initiated out of our former mayor’s office. In Karen’s mind, the fact they were there indicated “everyone was on the same page.”

As I mentioned in my dialogue with Maya, the membership selection process and retention efforts are not haphazard. While we have room to improve the diversity within OPA, the co-researchers concur we have done a really good job maintaining our intentional diversity. Having diverse membership and partnerships with organizations that serve specific ethnicities was a deliberate goal, and honestly it is an unstated expectation in Oakland-based collaborations. It would be more difficult to find a homogenous collaborative effort in Oakland than it would be to find an ethnically diverse effort in Orange County. Diversity is necessary and expected because it helps us achieve social capital and ultimately builds trust in the different regions of Oakland, especially where language can be a barrier.
Commitment and the Environment

If an inter-organizational collaboration meets the needs of individual members and/or their organizations, they are much more likely to be committed to the effort. The community was not engaged before OPA’s inception because it was created in response to a national organization selecting Oakland as a “featured community.” But after I settled into my role, I took special care to invite individuals and organizations to participate after clarifying for them the reciprocal nature of collaboration.

Reciprocity is the food that nourishes a healthy collaborative. The co-researchers explained how they appreciated my support of other committee members’ events, how I invited them to partner in OPA-led events and projects, represented OPA in an advisory capacity in their organizations, and went out of my way to give committee members access to OPA’s dropout prevention expertise. They said I made them feel the collaborative relationship should be mutually beneficial, which led them to also show support for others members.

As a native of Oakland, I am very aware of how community members feel about being “studied,” as some have complained. I know that if an organization plans to provide support in West Oakland, it had better go ask people whether West Oakland needs that support. The co-researchers affirmed that my going to West Oakland for support before launching OPA there made residents engage and commit more vigorously because people there believed the necessary due diligence had been done in advance.

All things considered, OPA’s origins and commitment to it were not perfect. Various organizational shifts and the mayoral transition left some to wonder, “What is going to happen to OPA now?” With so many external changes, including a new
strategic plan and elimination of so many school district positions, the co-researchers observed that some participants were less engaged, but they could not pinpoint why. They admitted they too were worried, but having a solid plan of action eased their concern.

*Commitment and Events or Activities*

During the interviews, the co-researchers said the retreat was the activity that had the most impact on their commitment. At last November’s retreat in Hershey, Pennsylvania, executive committee members were led through a strategic planning exercise that created a well-connected plan they were confident could be implemented. They said that while in Hershey they established less-formal relationships, which ultimately increased trust and deepened bonds between them. Though many of them had professional relationships, the co-researchers said informal conversations during the retreat provided insight about the personal lives, passions, and motivations of fellow committee members. That coincides with the notion that informal relationships within a collaborative group make it easier to resolve conflicts (Canter, 1994).

But not everything was sweet in Hershey. In her interview, Laila said that during the retreat there was ambiguity over who made what decisions for the group, and that made her uneasy about her participation. There often is uneasiness around power dynamics within collaborative settings. The power struggle we experienced at our retreat could have easily crippled trust among members. Luckily, we worked through that challenge.

On a more positive note, another activity that contributes to the co-researchers’ commitment is the reciprocal support they received from OPA and APA. They admitted
that support makes them want to stick it out, even when they are stretched beyond
capacity with their own work. The investment is mutual. Although OPA does not have a
financial carrot to dangle to draw interest and effort, the professional development

*Cohesion and the Formation*

One might think having such a solid connection would make achieving cohesion
simple. On the contrary, we found that an individualistic approach to work remained.
Despite having good relationships between members and being highly motivated to
participate, the initial structure concentrated so much on individual organizations or
“partner organizations” that individual members did not know what they could
contribute. Huxham and Vangen (2000a) pointed to that ambiguity as the root of
confusion in inter-organizational collaborative structures.

The co-researchers saw their only contribution as the work they were doing in
their organizations, which basically was how things were structured. OPA did not
necessarily intend to claim their organizations’ success as its own, but we celebrated it as
our collective contribution to the community. Therefore, it was very difficult to see how
they fit in as individuals. Huxham and Vangen (2001) stated that being “sent” to
meetings as an organizational representative has an adverse affect on the commitment of
members of a collaborative group (p. 384).

An example of this relationship complexity could be when one of the partner
organizations changes directions. How does a committed executive committee member
fit in, outside of what their organization’s goals and objectives happen to be at the time?
What if the organization is no longer willing to allow that member to participate during
business hours? The “individual” is an asset to the team. The resources may go away
with the organization’s support, but the relationship with the individual should remain intact if that is the goal. That dilemma presents itself as a “dynamic change” in Huxham and Vangen’s (2004) study.

_Cohesion and the Environment_

A unified front results when individuals and group members discover a sense of belonging within the organization (Zhang & Huxham, 2009). According to Huxham (1991), individualism is in the cultural fabric of some organizations. The co-researchers noted how they viewed themselves in relationship to OPA through their organizational capacities. Karen pointed out the need for more cohesion among members and organizations.

The challenge, however, is that individuals in inter-organizational collaborative settings may not feel they have the authority to coalesce on any level with another organization without explicit consent from their organization. There could be a “mismatch in members’ agendas,” which could stem from their organizations (Huxham & Vangen, 2004, p. 776). In that case, they may feel being afforded the time away from their job to work in a collaborative capacity was the limit of their contribution.

Another challenge to creating cohesion is that members often participate in three or four collaborative efforts at once. Paul said, “It is difficult to manage the time requirement when you are being pulled in so many directions.” This finding directly aligns with Huxham and Vangen’s (2004) assertion that members often burn out when they have to attend so many meetings, which was an observable plight in or research. There can be complications when members observe that fellow members behave differently while participating in different groups.
The representativeness of our body strengthens our sense of community solidarity. We are a very diverse community. I noted a remark made by Christie after the conclusion of her interview in my notes, “Our members are not detached from the realities of those we serve. We live the realities ourselves. We are social justice activists.” The fact we are not merely practitioners — but rather we are agitators of the system and the broken way of doing things that consistently fails our youth — enables us to garner a collective credibility, leverage our networks and make connections for our members. They can therefore leverage relationships to expand their access into more areas of our community.

Cohesion Created by Activities or Events

At meetings and during interviews and conversations with members, it was clear the Hershey retreat affected membership dynamics most, though it did not happen during the actual study. The process of creating structure made it easier for us to gain a better sense of our collective capacity to effect change. We only scratched the surface of what we can do to unify under this effort.

The co-researchers identified several activities that took OPA in the right direction, like:

- Participating in the Back-to-School Rally.
- Creating opportunities for informal interactions such as those experienced during first retreat in Hershey.
- Showing up for others’ events and supporting their initiatives.
- Creating a strategic plan together.
- Developing a decision-making protocol.
• Exercising respect for everyone’s voice and exploring solutions to their concerns.

• Participating in APA professional development trainings.

*Change—Chaos and Confusion in the Formation*

Internal and external shifts can cause enormous instability within an organization (Huxham & Vangen, 2000a). Change can come from policy, mergers, closures, funding requirements and a gamut of other variables (Huxham & Vangen, 2004). On any level, change is inevitable in collaborative settings, especially those supported by volunteers. The impact of any change is intensified when it occurs within leadership. In my dialogue with Maya and notes in my journal, I explained how my transition into a leadership role was not abrupt. I was given a great deal of support, but I was a little hesitant to change things too hastily because I was responding to the subtle guidance from my predecessor. I admittedly was second-guessing my ability to fill the magnificent shoes of my predecessor.

Once I found my footing, however, I progressively moved things in a direction I strongly believed would support OPA’s growth. The co-researchers noted seeing me struggle at times to hold things together as both facilitator and chair, especially during meetings. According to Crosby and Bryson (2010), in inter-organizational collaborative settings “leadership work is central to the creation and maintenance of cross-sector collaborations that advance a common goal” (p. 212).

The co-researchers wanted to “feel” me lead. The requirement for passive, non-hierarchal leadership in collaborative settings, as established in the literature, was unsubstantiated by the co-researchers. In converse to Huxham and Vangen’s (2004)
perspective of the leader’s role as simply making things move forward, the co-researchers said I needed to focus less on completing tasks and more on delegating things to members.

A few of them stated I should have unrestricted authority to make final decisions, especially when it kept things moving forward. Instead, there sometimes were people at the table who (as one of the co-researchers put it) finally decided to show up and were allowed to weigh in on decisions along with those who had been through the process of brainstorming, planning, and preparing for action. Crosby and Bryson (2010) stated, “Integrative leadership involves leading across boundaries at the individual, organizational, and broader levels” (p. 216). It was deemed that my latitude to maneuver as a critical element to my success.

The co-researchers also asserted there should be financial transparency. An example of the need for an authentic leader was when a co-researcher wanted to know whether I would have final say over how money he raised for OPA would be spent. He was not comfortable with any ambiguity about the handling and management of funds.

They valued the consideration given to their opinions and concerns. Yet, while they are authorities in their respective fields, they noted they are not authorities on dropout-prevention best practices. Due to my personal experience as a high school dropout, my exposure to best practices on a national level through America’s Promise, and my research on the topic, I am considered a respected authority on the matter. They really wanted me to unapologetically own the leadership role. Forsyth (2006) claimed it is a critical characteristic for a leader to be regarded as an expert in the field.
Vacillation during the decision-making process makes goal attainment less certain. If I were trusted to make decisions and move the agenda forward for the good of the group, things would progress more efficiently. This notion was in stark contradiction to Vangen and Huxham’s (2003a) assertion that leadership is more of a “media” or “instruments” that facilitate outcomes in collaborative environments (p. S62). According to Vangen and Huxham (2003a), the media are structures, process, and participants. The co-researchers wanted a clear direction and a clear director, so they could feel they were following the directions of the director.

Change-Chaos and the Environment

Managing change in any organizational or institutional environment requires skill and flexibility. As indicated by co-researchers during interviews, changes in the political realm can either impair or enhance a collaborative initiative. It would be ideal if new municipal and school districts leaders immediately saw the relevance of the every endeavor supported by their predecessor. Unfortunately, unless they were groomed, overtly supported, or appointed by the incumbent, they unlikely share the same agenda, priorities, or methods for bringing about systemic or institutional change. In fact, some leaders try to obliterate all remnants of the previous administration’s efforts, along with the key people who supported those efforts.

Remaining apolitical is a tall order. When the group members are activists and advocates in the community, lines are drawn and they take sides. Even when a collaborative group leader strives to be neutral during a race between candidates, which may not be possible for all group members, it is very difficult. Co-researchers fear political shifts and shake-ups can disrupt progress and potentially annihilate the group.
Direction shifts by partner organizations also can cause cerebral chaos. One co-researcher spoke about having to deal with that recently. She stated, “After spending a year cultivating a relationship with OPA, it is difficult to change gears so abruptly. I am personally connected and committed to the work. So, how do my personal desires come into play if my organization is not interested in pursuing the partnership?” One could imagine the frustration of a vested member, but since that member is an asset to the effort, mutual frustration resulted.

As Wheatley (1992) stated, all social and physical systems are interconnected. The interconnected nature of collaboration is evident and clear, as noted by the co-researchers throughout the data-gathering phase. That interconnectedness is sometimes frustrating in collaborative settings because, as some of the researchers expressed, it leads to members thinking they are not “bringing something to the table.”

Relying on someone else to do something you cannot do alone is a real risk, and all the co-researchers explored the vulnerability involved in that. “We need all hands on deck,” Paul suggested. “The thing I hate more than anything is when people complain that they do not come to meetings because there is a lack of movement, yet they are not putting forth any effort to contribute to the movement. It is like, how can I complain that there is no food left if I am late and I didn’t bring the dish I was supposed to bring?” His reaction is indicative of other co-researchers who experience the reality of “80/20” — where 20 percent of the members do 80 percent of the work. The researchers concluded the pressure to produce results to attract the attention of absent members can lead the hard-working members to feel they are carrying the weight so others can enjoy the spoils.
Change—Chaos and Clarifying Events or Activities

The primary role of change, in the context of research question 4, stems from our most clarifying activity. The retreat and creation of our strategic plan as the event and activity that most impacted the OPA membership. Thirteen members of our team received an all-expenses-paid trip to beautiful Hershey, Pennsylvania, to see some of the best practices used at the Milton Hershey School. We were exposed to their unique approach to meeting the needs of young people, and we learned about promising practices employed across the country in other featured communities.

That retreat motivated the executive committee members, and co-researchers said it was a critical activity in producing clarity. For some it marked a new direction in how to approach our work. During the retreat, I explained APA had changed its expectations for all featured communities. It wanted our efforts to be more focused and to produce results.

The APA change directive was attached to funding for my position, so it was in my best interest to adhere to the new mandates. Transitioning our role from being a convener for many organizations working on the same challenge into being a more focused organization with our own priorities, objectives, activities, and measurable outcomes was not seamless, but it was necessary. The co-researchers asserted it led us to work more strategically. It gave us a frame for our work. It guided our decisions about our work. The plan gave us structure and a platform to develop accountability, which kept our actions in line with the goal and activities defined within it (Huxham & Vangen, 2000a).
Communication and the Formation of OPA

As most literature focused on collaboration explains, the ever-changing membership and external and internal pulls create multiple challenges, and little can be done to stabilize a group (Hibbert & Huxham, 2005). The one opportunity to do so presents itself through effective communication. Some co-researchers expressed contentment with the surface layer of the communication, but others admitted there was room to grow. Even those who thought OPA was doing a good job communicating still were confused at one point or another. The subtext exhibited their lack of clarity on various aspects of our work, which is the result of poor communication.

For example, I admittedly did a poor job communicating with the rest of the executive committee about my exploration and ultimate decision to focus on West Oakland. I sought advice from my core team, but not the broad committee. I honestly did not understand why I needed “permission” to do my job. I was being paid to produce results, and I sensed a shift toward even greater accountability on the horizon.

I felt I had no choice but to do the due diligence necessary to secure buy-in from the region we hoped to serve. I viewed West Oakland as a partner, so I had to access my network and the networks of others who had deeper roots there than I had. A ton of work went into the relationship-building phase. In my mind, there was no time to wait for permission because if I did not communicate my intention to the community first, it might not support the initiative, which would mean there was no reason to share my plan with the group.

That example highlights the frustration some co-researchers had with elements of our communication structure. One co-researcher explained how in order for there to be
trust, there had to be transparent communication. He felt being honest up front minimized miscommunication, which can create instability. As the leader, I had to take full responsibility for the vitality of OPA’s communication structure. Therefore, though the surface layer of my communication was fine in terms of what Huxham and Vangen (2003) considered OPA’s “managerial tasks,” the subterranean layer of communication that nourishes our effort needs to be fortified for us to succeed.

*Communication and the Environment*

Another opportunity to improve exists in how we defined ourselves as executive committee members and how we communicated our purpose to those outside OPA because raising awareness was a part of our role. An important consideration is that we have never defined roles or our responsibility as members. The co-researchers may have been able to articulate their functions or their status within the group, but none could clearly describe their role. To some degree that’s because they were left to figure out their roles on their own, which was never explicitly communicated to them. How can they raise awareness if they cannot answer such simple questions?

As I explained in my dialogue with Maya, when most partner organizations were asked to participate, we were drawn to OPA’s goal and honored to serve the mayor’s office. During this study, I reflected on Sam’s interview responses in my March 31st journal entry.

We have never fully defined a purpose, let alone put one in writing. The insufficient documentation of that sort of information seems to be the source of the lack of clarity among executive committee members as they attempt to sort through how they fit in and how they share what we are doing in the community. The purpose needs to be jointly defined so that members can begin to understand what we are and what we do and do not aim to become. And then it might be helpful to just clarify the purpose for the meetings themselves so people are not there thinking that it is something that it is not.
The lack of understanding about the dropout crisis and the need to put human or financial resources toward the collective cause could lead to ambiguity (Eden & Huxham, 2001). When the purpose is not clearly defined, it compromises membership stability, especially when the members’ organizations ask for progress updates or begin questioning OPA’s quantifiable impact.

*Communication, Events and Activities*

During the data-collection phase, I noticed the co-researchers who had been members since 2009 were less frustrated by ambiguity about the purpose of their membership, but none of them were really clear. Once again, I believe our retreat provided us time to clarify many things. We were able to have uninterrupted discussions. As Paul stated in his interview, “No worries about having to put out fires at home or at the office because I had already arranged for someone to handle any such issue ahead of time.” Many co-researchers noted how informal communication really helped them understand the members’ diverse perspectives on personal and professional levels.

Two-hour meetings on a monthly basis do not provide time for such uninterrupted discussions. People often are late, must leave early because they have overbooked schedules, or cannot make it to the meeting at all. The co-researchers explained how the retreat clarified what had seemed like a totally fragmented message. I was able to explain the rationale for the changes, and we talked through all the challenges that emerged.

*Final Thoughts- Our Participatory Action Research Experience*

Participatory action research is well suited for social justice seekers, advocates, and change agents of complex institutional systems than any other method. It recognizes the biases that are invariably present in research while other methods attempt to hide
behind numbers as if to disguise their inherent desire to advance their perspective. I did not wish to hide, I did not wish pretend, I will not apologize. Our goal is to improve the outcomes for the young people in Oakland. Before we came into this study, we were advocates. As we conclude this phase of inquire, we remain advocates. The thought of any positivist research method would be out of sync with the natural order of our principles.

The overarching goal of the “action” in this study was to explore ways to enhance our inner structure, which would enable us to increase our impact in the community. As I considered the threats to the reliability of conclusions drawn from our study, I pondered my ethical responsibilities as a researcher. After reading countless dissertations and articles, I wondered about the process of inquiry and reporting. I recall thinking, “What is up with this need to appear to be devoid of emotion toward the subject matter and the outcome?” Everyone who knows me is aware of my tendency to overanalyze. So of course, I took some time with this swirling thought. I concluded that it had to be an act, because there is no way that I could undertake such an enormous task without being deeply invested topic and the outcome. It is that simple for me.

Just as well, I could not have imagined depriving my co-researchers the benefit of this academic development opportunity. We all learned from this experience. I leaned on them to gain understanding, while through our dialogue, I was able to give them insight into mine.

Of course, I could have simply interviewed them and gone through the process alone, but that would be a cop out; a contradiction to the study of collaboration itself.
Through this collaborative research process, I experienced all of the elements present in the practice of collaboration.

1. Risk and vulnerability—I had to complete this study, and if they refused to participate or if they were offended by my inserting my desire to advance academically, I would have to shift gears with minimal time to do so. Another notable vulnerability was the fact that I had no idea where the line of questions in the open-ended interviews would go. They could have had expressed extremely negative sentiments or flat out turned the process into a gripe session. To get the answers to the questions, I had to be open to and accepting of the positive and negative feedback.

2. Trust—I had to trust that the co-researchers would be honest and open with me. I had to trust that their honesty was coming from a healthy constructive place. The co-researchers had to trust that this research was not entirely about me, that it was also about us.

3. Social capital—I found it difficult to ask members with whom I had not developed a close working or personal relationship to participate in this study. Although I opened it up to everyone, the committee members who agreed to participate were those who were deeply invested and the newer members who I recruited to join OPA. Also, since I considered the relationships more reciprocal in nature, I did not have a problem relying on their support.

4. Group efficacy—Once the co-researchers agreed to participate, we all had to believe that the time we were giving to this study would have a positive impact on our work or it would not be worth dedicating so much of our time.
5. Relationship with the leader—The executive committee members who participated cared enough to support my academic pursuits. They trusted that I was not using the information they provided to hold against them at a later date. They felt like I valued their input and perspective on what it would take to move OPA to the next level.

I can say that the participatory research experience was all that I hoped for and more. It turns out that the process had an unintended benefit. The unintended benefit of using PAR and the employment strategies of participatory research such as critical reflection, dialogue, and open-ended interviews was that it actually allowed us to achieve a deeper level of introspection than anticipated. The co-researchers shared that it was important to really be introspective, as a group and as individuals, to determine where those opportunities lie for us to be successful.

In my journal, I noted several occasions when the co-researchers were both surprised that they knew certain facts or details about Oakland’s Promise Alliance or America’s Promise Alliance and really happy that they were being asked to participate in a process that, although intensely academic, was going to lead to improvement that they would take part in designing. Throughout this study, there was no departure from the understanding that there was still more work to be done to become revered as the premier dropout prevention organization in Oakland. The hope resides in the possibility that exist within the improvement that we experience as a result of this study.

Recommendation for Inter-organizational Collaboration

The co-researchers indicated that their experience with inter-organizational collaboration has been mixed; while they have had some success experiences, they do not
consider the process efficient or properly executed. To be more effective, interorganizational collaborative leaders should be trained in the application of the practice. Success is not guaranteed simply because a group of people come together to do the work. In fact, in a study on achieving the collaborative advantage, Huxham and Vangen (2004) posited that the reason to collaborate is because the participants believe that there is a better chance achieving success. Quoting a member of the collaborative they studied, Huxham and Vangan said that when it is good, collaboration can be energizing. Yet, they contend that many members are often frustrated by the “slow grind” of the movement toward “output,” which they consider collaborative inertia (p. 194).

After exploring the inner workings of OPA, it was very clear that it would be useful to have some support on the mechanics of collaboration. Yet, not everyone has time to devote to the working and learning how to most effectively get the work done collaboratively. It would be optimal if there were a quick reference guide to follow that, at least during the formative stages, was flexible enough to accommodate organic communities like Oakland, and structured enough to suit a community or organization that required it. In my research, I did not run across such a tool.

Recommendation for Future Research

This process of discovery was extremely enlightening. It was allowed me to take inventory of OPA’s assets and deficits. This study of an Oakland-based collaborative group gave attention to the formative stages of OPA’s development, the environmental and historical attributes that influence success attainment and the events that could impact group dynamics. This exercise could also generate similar insights within other interorganizational collaborative initiatives in Oakland.
Another option would be to conduct a longitudinal study tracking the experiences of collaborative members over a 2-year span to measure how their experiences change over time from formation through environmental shifts and participatory activities. A study of that sort could yield a broader spectrum of perspectives. After this research process began, I recall wishing that I had engaged the members in the research much earlier so that I could capture the sentiments of those had come and gone as well as the new members and the ones who remained. Although I could have included them in the study, I elected not to because of the constraints imposed by the sheer lack of time and access.

Future studies could also employ the various quantitative evaluation tools I discovered during the literature review such as the Wilder Collaboration Inventory, Collaboration Math, Collaborative Leadership Questionnaire, and inventories to potentially uncover a deeper layer of understanding. Collaboration is complex. There is self-, group, organizational learning that takes place during the process of working together. It may be useful to make use of tools that measure the leader’s self-perceived effectiveness, the group’s perception of the leader’s effectiveness, the strength of the collaboration, and the stages of development.

OPA’s structure relies very heavily upon voluntary participation. I am the only paid staff and, with the exception of one successful grant proposal, there is and has not been any funding to cover any formal or informal interaction, which has contributed greatly to moving our success meter. I feel that the experience would have been different if I had paid staff, if our members were being paid to participate, or if we could fund the members’ initiatives. Based on the findings of this study, it would be optimal if there was
funding for an occasional outing or retreat. An area of inter-organizational collaboration worth exploring is one in which the members are paid to participate or the convener were able to fund projects.

As I have said many times during this study, success is not a matter of happenstance when it comes to inter-organizational collaboration. Some very deliberate measures should be taken. While this study seems to debunk the notion that there are specific or mandatory steps be followed to ensure collaborative success, the co-researchers agreed that even though we struggled to find stability and we survived the turbulence created by the leadership changes, there should be some consideration given to the structure. Oakland is unique, and going through a multitude of steps prior to coming together to resolve a community issue is unheard of. That is not the nature of our existence. Yet, the way we operate in Oakland may not work well in other areas. Therefore, I believe that a more research is necessary to investigate whether organic formation would be as successful in other communities.
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Appendices

Appendix A:

Interview Protocol

Open-Ended Interview Protocol

Introduction:
1. Where do you work and what is your current position?
2. Describe how you came to be a member of OPA.
3. Describe your role within OPA.

Collaboration (in general):
4. Do you Oakland think employs the inter-organizational collaboration model too frequently or not frequently enough?
5. To what extent have you experienced action or achieved success in an inter-organizational collaboration?
6. How relevant was trust in the success/action that led to success or failure of the initiative (even if the work is currently underway)?
7. How has the action/success or lack thereof impacted your sentiments toward collaboration?
8. How relevant is funding to an inter-organizational collaborative effort, and how does it impact your desire to participate?
9. How relevant is risk in the way you feel inclined to share information with inter-organizational collaborations with which you chose to participate?

Collaboration (OPA):
10. Describe your experiences with OPA, from September 2009 to December 2010 in terms of the following;
   a. Communication
   b. Interaction (in person)
   c. Goal attainment
11. Describe your experience with the professional development opportunities offered by OPA and our national affiliate APA.
12. Describe your perceived opportunities for growth.
13. Describe your relationship with the members of OPA.

Leadership (OPA):
14. Identify the leader of OPA and what makes that person a leader.
15. Describe your relationship with the leader
16. Who makes the decisions for the group?
17. Describe OPA’s decision-making protocol.
18. Do you feel like your opinion and input is valued and respected during the decision-making process?
19. How clear are OPA’s goals and mission?
Community:
20. Describe how you perceive OPA’s presence in Oakland.
21. Describe how relevant you think we have become as the premier dropout-prevention group.
22. Describe how you raise awareness in the community in relation to the collective effort.
23. Describe the political environment and how it may or may not have an impact on OPA’s efforts.

Group Efficacy:
24. What are the biggest challenges for you within OPA?
25. How do you communicate those challenges, if at all?
26. Describe the degree of your motivation to be a member of OPA (high-neutral-low).
27. Can you describe an event that contributed to or depleted your belief that OPA could achieve its goals?
28. To what extent does OPA meet your self-interests?
29. Do you personally feel that you have the skills and qualifications to attain the goals OPA has set forth?
30. Do you believe that, collectively, members of OPA have the skills and qualifications to achieve our goals?
31. Is funding a consideration in your belief in OPA’s goal attainment?
32. To what extent do you celebrate OPA’s successes?

Social Capital
33. Describe your trust level with OPA’s members and process.
34. How do you feel we can enhance the levels of trust that exist within OPA?
35. If it exists, describe your informal social interactions with other members of OPA.
36. To what extent do you believe OPA has achieved its intention to have diverse ethnic representation to reflect the diversity of the community?

Adaptability:
37. To what extent do you feel that OPA evaluates itself and its partners?
38. To what degree are members/organizations who do not engage fully held accountable?

Future:
39. Where do you see OPA three years from now?
40. Where do you see OPA five years from now?
41. Is there anything else you will like to add?

Closing
42. Is there anything else you will like to add?
Appendix B:

Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

Purpose and Background

Ms. Nyeisha DeWitt, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco, is doing a study on members of a volunteer collaboration in Oakland. Over the past two decades, more and more people are utilizing collaborative practice to resolve socioeconomic issues in the community. The researchers are interested in understanding the dynamics of the Oakland's Promise Alliance’s collaborative practices. Moreover, the researchers want to investigate the interrelationships between the members and the leadership of the executive team. I am being asked to participate because I am a member of the executive committee and steering committee.

Procedures

If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:
1. I will complete a short questionnaire giving basic information about me, including age, gender, race etc.
2. I will complete at least one inventory (questionnaire) about collaboration.
3. I will participate in an interview with researcher, during which I will be asked about my collaboration history, my organizational and personal goals, and my expectations for participating in the collaboration.
4. I will complete the surveys and participate in the interview at the Network Café or a location more convenient for me.
5. Meetings will be observed and documented through April 1, 2011

Risks and/or Discomforts
1. It is possible that some of the questions on the collaboration survey may make me feel uncomfortable, but I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.
2. Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information will be coded and kept in locked files at all times. Only study personnel will have access to the files.
3. Because the time required for my participation may be up to 4 hours at a time, I may become tired or bored.
Benefits
1. There will be no direct benefit to me from participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the effect of the collaborative experience on the members of OPA, who are on the executive and steering committees.

Costs/Financial Considerations
1. There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study.

Payment/Reimbursement
I will be not be reimbursement for my participation in this study.

Questions
I have talked to Ms. DeWitt or other researchers about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at (415) 422-1234 or Dr. Susan Washington (415) 422-4321. If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researchers. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Building, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.

Consent
I have been given a copy of the “Research Subject’s Bill of Rights” and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student or employee at USF. My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.

Subject’s Signature _____________________________ Date of Signature________

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent_______________ Date of Signature________

It further attests that you are fully aware of all procedures to be followed, will monitor the research, and will notify the IRPBHS of any significant problems or changes.
From: nyd1@sbcglobal.net

To: participant@yahoo.com

Bcc:

Sent: Date: Month XX, 2011

Subject: OPA Inter-organizational Collaboration Study

________________________________________________________________________

Nyeisha DeWitt, MA
Doctoral Student
Tel: (510) 917-1477
E-mail: nyd1@sbcglobal.net

CONSENT COVER LETTER

2/10/11

Dear Participant:

Ms. Nyeisha DeWitt, a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is doing a study on members of a volunteer collaboration in Oakland. Over the past two decades, more and more people are utilizing the collaborative practice to resolve socioeconomic issues in the community. The researchers are interested in understanding the dynamics of the Oakland's Promise Alliance collaborative practices. Moreover, the researchers want to investigate the interrelationships between the members and leadership of the executive team. You are being asked to participate because you are a member of the executive committee and steering committee.

I obtained access to you through an existing relationship I have with Oakland's Promise Alliance, as the facilitator of the collaboration. If you agree to be in this study, you will complete the attached questionnaire that asks about your past and present collaboration experience. It is possible that some of the questions may make you feel uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or to stop participation at any time. Although you may not be asked to put your name on the questionnaire, I will know that you were asked to participate in the research because I sent you this letter and the questionnaire.
Participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Study records will be kept as confidential as is possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study.

There will be no direct benefit to your child for participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the effect of the inter-organizational collaborative experience for the members of OPA, who are on the executive and steering committees. There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this study, so there is no need for reimbursement.

If you have questions about the research, you may contact me at 510-917-1477. If you have further questions about the study, you may contact the IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling 415-422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Bldg., University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. The Oakland Alliance of Community Partnerships is aware of this study but does not require that you participate in this research and your decision as to whether or not to participate will have no influence on your present or future status as a member of OPA. If you agree to participate and if you agree to complete the online questionnaire, please do the following:

1. Review the enclose Information Sheet
2. Review the enclosed Research Subject’s Bill of Rights
3. Log-on to the following link, using the username and password provided:
   Questionnaire Link: __________________
   User name: __________________
   Password: __________________

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Nyeisha DeWitt

Doctoral Student, University of San Francisco
Appendix D:

Information Sheet

**Nyeisha Dewitt**
Doctoral Student
Tel: (510) 917-1477
E-mail: nyd1@sbcglobal.net

**INFORMATION SHEET**

**INFORMATION SHEET ABOUT THE RESEARCH STUDY**

My name is Nyeisha Dewitt and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at the University of San Francisco is doing a study on members of a volunteer collaboration in Oakland. I am interested in understanding the dynamics of the Oakland's Promise Alliance inter-organizational collaborative practices. Moreover, I want to investigate the interrelationships between the members and leadership of the executive team and the group's efficacy toward the work. You are being asked to participate because you are a member of the executive committee and steering committee.

Collaborative groups can reach more citizens within a community, accomplish objectives, garner more credibility, and make greater use of resources than one single organization with a similar aim (Cohen, Baer, & Satterwhite, 2002). Collaboration has gained popularity over the last two decades. With the surge in use of the collaboration practice comes the reality that this highly complex organizational structure can lead to wasted resources and time and can obliterate the will to work with others to address societal ailments in the community.

In Oakland, it is customary to work across sectors to achieve a set goal. Inter-organizational collaboration is common practice and is widely accepted as a norm in terms of how members of the community, organizations, institutions, agencies, and municipalities combat challenges. Yet one concern continues to emerge in conversations around the tables of the many partnerships, collaborations, and coalitions, in Oakland and elsewhere—if there is a monumental task to accomplish, an issue to tackle, or an obstacle to overcome, are the various partnership structures equipped to handle the challenges that inevitably confront even the most well-intentioned groups? To discover the answer to that question and moreover move the agenda forward, it is important to fully understand the nature of the collaborative process and how members feel about their participation in the group, on multiple levels.

This study attempts to investigate the dynamics of an Oakland-based collaborative group, explore relationships between the leader and members of the group, uncover the impact that the history of collaboration has on the members, and look at how the organizational structure impacts the members in an effort to gain a greater understanding
of how and when the members arrive at the point of group efficacy, if they arrive there at all. Lastly, I hope to unearth how members feel as they move along the continuum of collaboration. You are being asked to participate in a survey because you are a member of the executive committee and steering committee.

If you agree to be in this study, you will complete and submit an on-line questionnaire on an encrypted web-based secure database server, maintained by Wilder Research Center that will ask about your collaboration experiences and perceptions. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

This study is considered minimal risk to the participant. Some of the questions on the questionnaire may make you feel uncomfortable, but you are free to decline to answer any questions you do not wish to answer, or to stop participation at any time.

Although you will not be required to put your name on the questionnaire, participation in research may mean a loss of confidentiality. Your responses will be kept confidential to the degree permitted by the technology used. However, no absolute guarantees can be given for the confidentiality of electronic data. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Questionnaire data will be maintained on an encrypted web-based secure database server. The researcher will be unable to remove anonymous data from the database should the participant wish to withdraw it. At the end of the study you will receive results of the group’s responses. Individual results will not be shared with the other members of OPA.

There will be no direct benefit to your child for participating in this study. The anticipated benefit of this study is a better understanding of the effect of the inter-organizational collaborative experience for the members of OPA, who are on the executive and steering committees. There will be no costs to you as a result of taking part in this study so there is no cause for reimbursement.

If you have questions about the research, you may contact me at 510-917-1477. If you have further questions about the study, you may contact the IRBPHS at the University of San Francisco, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. You may reach the IRBPHS office by calling 415-422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Bldg., University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. Oakland Alliance of Community Partnerships is aware of this study but does not require that you participate in this research and your decision as to whether or not to participate will have no influence on your present or future status as a member of OPA.

By completing this survey, you are agreeing to participate in the research.
Appendix E:

Research Subjects’ Bill of Rights

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As a research subject, I have the following rights:

Research Subjects

Bill of Rights

Research subjects can expect:

- To be told the extent to which confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained and of the possibility that specified individuals, internal and external regulatory agencies, or study sponsors may inspect information in the medical record specifically related to participation in the clinical trial;

- To be told of any benefits that may reasonably be expected from the research;

- To be told of any reasonably foreseeable discomforts or risks;

- To be told of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment that might be of benefit to the subject;

- To be told of the procedures to be followed during the course of participation, especially those that are experimental in nature;

- To be told that they may refuse to participate (participation is voluntary), and that declining to participate will not compromise access to services and will not result in penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled;

- To be told about compensation and medical treatment if research related injury occurs and where further information may be obtained when participating in research involving more than minimal risk;

- To be told whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research, about the research subjects' rights and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject;

- To be told of anticipated circumstances under which the investigator without regard to the subject's consent may terminate the subject's participation;
• To be told of any additional costs to the subject that may result from participation in the research;

• To be told of the consequences of a subjects’ decision to withdraw from the research and procedures for orderly termination of participation by the subject;

• To be told that significant new findings developed during the course of the research that may relate to the subject’s willingness to continue participation will be provided to the subject;

• To be told the approximate number of subjects involved in the study.

• To be told what the study is trying to find out;

• To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice;

• To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes;

• To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be;

• To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study;

• To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study;

• To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise;

• To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study;

• To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form; and

• To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study. If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher or the research assistant. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling 415-422-6091, by electronic mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to USF IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Building, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.
References: JCAHO and Research Regulatory Bodies

1. To be told what the study is trying to find out;
2. To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice;
3. To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes;
4. To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be;
5. To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study;
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study;
7. To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise;
8. To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study;
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form; and
10. To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study. If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher or the research assistant. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling 415-422-6091, by electronic mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu or by writing to USF IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Building, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.
February 10, 2011

Dear Ms. DeWitt:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS) at the University of San Francisco (USF) has reviewed your request for human subjects approval regarding your study.

Your application has been approved by the committee (IRBPHS #11-010). Please note the following:

1. Approval expires twelve (12) months from the dated noted above. At that time, if you are still in collecting data from human subjects, you must file a renewal application.

2. Any modifications to the research protocol or changes in instrumentation (including wording of items) must be communicated to the IRBPHS. Re-submission of an application may be required at that time.

3. Any adverse reactions or complications on the part of participants must be reported (in writing) to the IRBPHS within ten (10) working days.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRBPHS at (415) 422-6091.

On behalf of the IRBPHS committee, I wish you much success in your research.