

ABSTRACT

Iron Sharpens Iron: Member Experiences of Collaboration in the Texas Hunger Initiative

Leah Helen Gatlin, Ph.D.

Mentor: Robin K. Rogers, Ph.D.

Although the number of food planning councils (FPCs) has grown rapidly in the last twenty years, there is a paucity of research about these groups – especially about organizational theories relevant to their structures and elements that make them effective. Furthermore, the research that is available comes from few authors and even fewer FPCs. This dissertation explores the experiences of member organizations with collaboration within the Texas Hunger Initiative's (THI's) Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs). Chapter One provides an overview of the dissertation and grounds the work in Talcott Parsons's theories. Chapter Two builds on Jones's (2006) work exploring member characteristics in relationship to resource dependence and social network theories. Organizations reported a mean of 12 collaborative partners and being impacted by those collaborations from early in their relationship. Chapter Three utilizes Thomson, Perry, and Miller's (2009) instrument to examine members' experiences with collaboration. Respondents rated all five domains of collaboration favorably and asserted it was more worthwhile to stay in the collaboration than to leave. Chapter Four reports on a phenomenological study of member experiences of collaboration in THI's HFCCs.

Analysis of the interview data illuminated six major themes: collaboration is difficult, valuable, expands and improves services, requires intentionality, requires diversity united towards a common goal, and lessons learned from HFCC participants. Chapter Five contains a recap of the studies, provides important linkages between them, and includes implications and recommendations for social work research as well as social work practice and education.

Iron Sharpens Iron: Member Experiences of Collaboration in the Texas Hunger Initiative

by

Leah Helen Gatlin, B.A., M.S.W.

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Approved by the Diana R. Garland School of Social Work

Jon E. Singletary, Ph.D., Dean

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Approved by the Dissertation Committee

Robin K. Rogers, Ph.D., Chairperson

James W. Ellor, Ph.D.

Edward C. Polson, Ph.D.

Jon E. Singletary, Ph.D.

Charity Samantha Vo, Ph.D.

Byron R. Johnson, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
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J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

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DEDICATION

To the staff and participants of the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty, Texas Hunger Initiative, Hunger Free Community Coalitions: Your collaborative efforts to end food insecurity in the state of Texas (and beyond) is as inspiring as it is revolutionary.

Chapter One: Introduction

Food insecurity is a major national issue with 14.3 million (11.1 percent) of United States households in 2018 experiencing difficulty having sufficient food due to a lack of resources (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, & Singh, 2019). Food policy succinctly defined is “...any policy that addresses, shapes, or regulates the food system” (Harper, Shattuck, Holt-Giménez, Alkon, & Lambrick, 2009, p. 9). Food policy developers create both short and long-term goals to address issues of food security and insecurity. The United States lacks a comprehensive, coordinated federal food policy. In its place is a complicated web of food-related policies administered by several federal agencies (Harper et al., 2009; Haughton, 1987). Having food policies decentralized contributes to policies that are counterproductive.

Beyond having a decentralized and often contradictory system of policies, federal support has changed frequently throughout history while local and state governments have received increased requests for food assistance (Clancy, Hammer, Lippoldt, Hinrichs, & Lyson, 2008; Haughton, 1987). When one sector of society is unable to handle an issue like food insecurity by itself, multi-sector (also called cross-sector) collaboration can be beneficial (Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014; Rasanathan et al., 2017). Some states and localities recognized the inadequacy of the federal response to food insecurity and that the problem is felt primarily at the community level (Hamm and Bellows, 2003). This has been an incentive for some of the most innovative solutions to come from the community level.

Community food security addresses food security at a *community* level using systems approaches including several fronts such as economic development, agriculture policy, and hunger alleviation (England, 2019). Food policy councils (FPCs) (also known as food systems councils, food policy coalitions, food advisory councils, food alliances, and food policy networks) represent one type of community food security model that brings together diverse stakeholders to specifically address food policy and is portable to many locations (Clancy et al., 2008; England, 2019). Multisector collaborations like these are vital to develop the infrastructure needed to ensure food security (McCullum, Desjardins, Kraak, Ladipo, & Costello, 2005).

FPCs work on a municipal, county, or state level and are multi-disciplinary and multisectoral – often including representatives from business, nonprofits, government, and the food industry (Clancy et al., 2008; Harper et al., 2009). While their activities may vary, the broad goal is to increase food security. Dahlberg (1994) found that the first FPCs were most effective when they took a broad approach to food systems, rather than having a laser focus on hunger-specific issues.

Although they have grown by over 1,200 percent from 2000 to 2017, little is known about what makes FPCs effective (Bassarab, Santo, & Palmer, 2019; Calancie, Cooksey-Stowers et al., 2018; Scherb, Palmer, Frattaroli, & Pollack, 2012). Existing research about FPCs has been conducted by a few experts and is based on a small number of FPCs (Scherb et al, 2012). Dahlberg's (1994) seminal paper on FPCs, for example, only includes six locations. Over a decade later, Clancy et al. (2008) located only eight FPCs that met three criteria: multi-issue focused (e.g. not just hunger focused), operational for at least three years, and officially government sanctioned.

The extant literature has documented numerous benefits of multisector collaboration including improved capacity, knowledge creation, efficiency, social development, strategic and political effects, performance, and resources (Hardy, Phillips, & Lawrence, 2003; Lawson, 2004; Provan, Fish, & Sydow, 2007). Since FPCs are a type of interorganizational collaboration, members or researchers might assume these benefits would extend to FPCs; however, little empirical evidence currently exists to prove or disprove this supposition.

The research underlying the three articles in this dissertation (Chapters 2-4) begins to fill this void of empirical evidence by exploring the topic of member experiences with collaboration within Texas Hunger Initiative's (THI's) Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs). The three research questions follow:

- *What are the relevant characteristics of member organizations, especially regarding resource dependence and social networks?*
- *What are member organizations' experiences with collaboration within THI?*
- *What have been member organizations' experiences with collaboration in the Texas Hunger Initiative?*

Literature Review

Describing Collaboration

Twenty years after scholars first began writing extensively about collaboration in the 1970s, Wood and Gray (1991) endeavored to develop a comprehensive theory of collaboration (Borgatti & Foster; 2003; Gazley, 2017; Park & Lim, 2018). In writing about their experiences, the authors assumed that collaboration had a clear definition and was well conceptualized. Yet, the authors listed seven different definitions of

collaboration. Almost 20 years later, Sonnenwald (2007), in studying both natural and social science collaboration, highlighted the difficulty researchers face in establishing search parameters due to the gargantuan size of the literature, spanning several fields, and utilizing a plethora of synonyms and interchangeable terms. What one author calls a network another may call collaboration. Because of this broad variety of terms and disciplines, researchers easily miss information from other disciplines and have difficulty forming one coherent narrative (Sonnenwald, 2007). Williams (2015) affirmed this difficulty, illuminating the lack of common methods of conceptualizing or operationalizing collaboration.

In addition to a profusion of ways to define and measure collaboration, researchers have also studied collaboration on a variety of levels. Some authors distinguish simply between individual (or micro) level and whole network (or macro) level research (Galaskiewicz & Wasser 1994; Kilduff & Tsai, 2003; Provan et al., 2007). Others utilized three or more levels of research, an example being interpersonal, interunit, and interorganizational (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Park & Lim, 2018; Provan et al., 2007; Provan & Milward, 2001). The current dissertation utilizes data gathered at the organizational level. This level of analysis is grounded in research as another common way of exploring collaboration (Bunger, McBeath, Chuang, & Collins-Camargo, 2017; Gazley, 2010; Jones, 2006; Provan et al., 2007).

Benefits of Collaboration and Challenges to Research

In the 1990s at the beginning of intense interest in collaboration (Gazley, 2017; Park & Lim, 2018), Alter and Hage (1993) found that collaboration in social service providers led to better services. Although researchers have differed in how they define

and measure collaboration, literature on collaboration regularly contains reports of benefits to organizations that collaborate. One of these benefits is improved organizational performance, including effectiveness, resources, efficiency, legitimacy, capacity, and social development (Lawson, 2004; Provan et al., 2007). Hardy and colleagues (2003) found that collaboration led to high strategy, knowledge creation, and political effects. Other researchers report that collaboration is correlated with positive outcomes such as survival, better performance, improved resources, adaptability, access to information, network ties, social learning, coordination among stakeholders, responsibility sharing, and the ability to achieve more objectives (Brass et. al, 2004; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003; Gulati, Nhoria, & Zaheer, 2000; Kickbusch & Behrendt, 2013; Kraatz, 1998; O'Regan & Oster, 2000; Salunke & Lal, 2017).

Research has also demonstrated that interorganizational collaboration leads to improved access to information and resources, increased adaptability, ability to achieve more objectives, institutional political clout, greater social learning, better innovation, improved survival, stronger network ties, and improved performance (Brass et. al, 2004; Gulati, Nhoria, & Zaheer, 2000; Kraatz, 1998).

Butterfoss, Goodman, and Wandersman (1993) found the following factors to be positively correlated with effective collaboration: pooling of diverse and valuable member characteristics with high member participation; higher formalization of rules, roles, and procedures; member skills and training; strong and supportive leadership; positive organizational climate; member satisfaction and commitment; and strong links to external resources. Einbender, Robertson, Garcia, Vuckovic, and Patti (2000) found four factors to be requisite for effective collaboration: willingness, capacity, incentive, and

ability. Chen (2008, 2010), utilizing Thomson's (2001) work, observed that trust building and resource sharing/building were the two most salient factors in effective collaborations. Arya and Lin (2007) discovered service generalism (a variety of services) and focal organization status are both highly correlated with collaboration effectiveness. Looking at more subjective data, Lantz, Viruell-Fuentes, Israel, Softley, and Guzman (2001) utilized informant data to determine four factors related to success at a particular organization: receiving support from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), infrastructure and processes for collaboration and decision-making, community partners who were both committed and active in leadership, and trust-building among partners.

Although there are numerous benefits, multisector collaborations, such as FPCS, are difficult to implement and challenging to study (Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer, 2012; Vangen, Hayes, & Cornforth, 2015). Multisector collaborations often must overcome differences or competition in orientations, cultures, and structures (Babiak & Thibault, 2007; O'Regan & Oster, 2000; Selesky & Parker, 2005). Some of their other challenges include difficulty communicating, being inherently more fragile, requiring more trust between sectors, increased likelihood of conflict, needing more management and oversight, and environmental constraints (Agranoff, 2006; Babiak & Thibault, 2007; Roberts, 2010). Furthermore, it is challenging to quantify effectiveness in multisector collaborations due to factors like how often the collaborations change and challenges in differentiating effective versus ineffective factors (van Tulder, Sietanidi, Crane, & Brammer, 2016). When specifically examining multisector collaborations with children and family services, Golden (1990) found four main hindrances to multisector collaboration: finding funding sources that crossed sectors, updating tradition and

education in professions, overcoming traditions and rigid roles in organizations, and deficient resources available to complete the core work (as cited in Raitzer, 1999, p. 51-52).

Difficulties in the practice of operating a multisector collaboration are not the only challenges FPCs face. Schiff (2007) notes the lack of FPC research grounded in organizational theory relevant to multisector collaborations, such as FPCs. Scherb et al. (2012) highlight the limited number of studies on FPC structure, activities, and process. Some authors have pointed out the lack of empirical knowledge about FPC effectiveness (see, for example, Scherb et al., 2012; and Webb, Hawe, & Noort 2001), even as some researchers have expounded on the specific difficulties related to assessing FPC effectiveness, including change taking a long time, internal complications, being affected by other parts of a complex system, number of actors, and internal complications (Calancie, Cooksey-Stowers et al., 2018; Hammond & Dube, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Lich, Ginexi, Osgood & Mabry, 2013; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Scherb et al., 2012; Snowden & Boone, 2007). The current dissertation attempts to address some of the research deficits previously mentioned. First, the sample comes from a group of FPCs not widely studied previously and the author is not one of the few authors Scherb and colleagues (2012) noted were responsible for most of the available FPC research. Second, Chapter Four lays the groundwork for future studies about effectiveness by highlighting member observations about perceived elements necessary for successful collaborations (Bassarab, Santo, & Palmer, 2019; Calancie, Cooksey-Stowers et al., 2018; Scherb et al., 2012)

Study Context: Texas Hunger Initiative

This dissertation utilizes data gathered from members of the Texas Hunger Initiative's (THI's) Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs). THI "...is a capacity-building, collaborative project dedicated to developing and implementing strategies to end hunger through policy, education, research, community organizing and community development" (THI, n.d.a.). THI's three main priorities are: increase assistance for those who are food insecure, raise current program and service usage, and collect and disperse data on evidence-based practices and promising directions. HFCCs are location specific, multisectoral, and collaborative teams focused on improving food security (THI, n.d.b.). From THI's definition of HFCCs, these are FPCs with an organization-specific name (HFCC). Chapters Two through Four provide more detailed information about THI. During the writing process, THI introduced the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BHCP), which became the parent organization that includes THI (Baylor University, 2019). Since THI is a specific program of the BHCP and the original name used in communications, recruitment, surveys, and interviews, it remains the primary institutional name in this dissertation; however, each chapter references that THI is part of the BHCP to reflect this change.

Importance of Theory

Though the topic has been written about since the 1970s, research on organizational collaboration increased in the 1990s (Gazley, 2017; Park & Lim, 2018). Nevertheless, organizational collaboration research still lacks cohesive definitions, conceptualization, and operationalization (Bedwell et al., 2012; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Williams, 2015; Wood & Gray, 1991). Several authors have suggested definitions (such

as Bedwell et al., 2012; Isett, Mergel, LeRoux, Mischen, & Rethemeyer, 2011; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Wood & Gray, 1991). Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2009) took conceptualization a step further and developed an instrument to measure collaboration. While all of these authors, and the many other organizational collaboration authors, included a theoretical basis for their work, this theoretical basis is often based on previous research and newer conceptualizations, such as Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) work on resource dependence theory, rather than older and more empirically validated theories.

The work of this dissertation is anchored strongly in Talcott Parsons's work with action theory and the four function (also known as the Adaptation, Goal attainment, Integration, and Latent pattern or AGIL) paradigm (Munch, 1981; Wallace & Wolf, 1991). This section aims to explicate the roles of Talcott Parsons, resource dependence theory, and social network theory in the current dissertation. It begins by giving context to Talcott Parsons's work, especially with action theory and the AGIL paradigm. Next, the researcher draws parallels between Parsons's work and those associated with both resource dependence and social network theories, especially as those theories are framed in the current dissertation. Finally, the researcher notes important principles shared between Parsons and collaboration researchers, giving strong theoretical foundations for the collaboration literature mentioned throughout this dissertation.

Talcott Parsons

Action Theory. In order to understand the two aspects of Parsons's theory that are the foundation of this paper, one must have a general working knowledge of his action theory. The structure for Parsons's action theory corresponds to Kant and his

work on critical philosophy (Munch, 1981, p. 772). Action theory, like Durkheim's work, begins with an actor (who can be an individual or group). An actor is motivated to reach a goal or end. The action takes place in a situation, which is governed by both means (resources) and conditions (obstacles). Each action is regulated by the actor's social system's standards, which have been internalized by the actor (Wallace & Wolf, 1991, p. 30). As Munch writes, "Every action is to be understood as a product of the interaction of dynamizing and controlling forces" (1981, p. 772). Action theory includes concepts that can both describe behavior and emphasize the fact that society's components are interdependent (Wallace & Wolf, 1991, p. 31).

Action theory consists of a four-dimensional *action space* and then subsystems that have different orders (Munch, 1981, p. 818). The two types of subsystems are regulative (controlling) and dynamizing. Dynamizing and ordering forces have different impacts on an action based on the action's location in the action space and its place in the subsystem (Munch, 1981, p. 818). One important concept is the idea of *interpenetration*, which refers to the relationships and connections among analytically separate subsystems and how these separate subsystems work together or compete to determine an individual's actions (Munch, 1981, p. 709). Despite these systems, Parsons highlights the importance of the *voluntaristic solution*, meaning that action is not simply determined by dynamic factors; order can only happen with intentional actions if the different actors have free will and common values (Munch, 1981, p. 773; Parsons, 1978).

Four Function (AGIL) Paradigm. The Four Function (or AGIL) Paradigm is a furtherance of pattern variables. It both lessens the problem of self in relation to the collective and incorporates a proposition about the nature of goals (Parsons, 1979, p. 11;

Wallace & Wolf, 1991, p. 38). The AGIL Paradigm became an integral part of Parsons's later work. In the AGIL Paradigm, the system can be an individual, institution or society, though simpler communities often collapse functions (Wallace & Wolf, 1991, p. 39-41).

The AGIL Paradigm begins with the presupposition that an actor has at least one goal. The A in AGIL Paradigm stands for adaptation. It is the mobilization of resources as a basis for the realization of goals and distributing these resources throughout the system (Munch, 1981, p. 784; Wallace & Wolf, 1991, p. 39). G stands for goal attainment or goal selection. This is the mechanism to allow goals to be arranged in a hierarchy and develop priorities where choices about goals must be made (Munch, 1981, p. 784; Wallace & Wolf, 1991, p. 40). Goal attainment has a special relationship to time. If actors are future-oriented, then they will think more about their goals and attempts to attain them (Parsons, 1979, p. 13-14). The I stands for integration. This is the cohesion of units in various systems with one another (Munch, 1981, p. 784). A system must coordinate, adjust, and regulate relationships among different actors or units to keep the system functioning (Wallace & Wolf, 1991, p. 40). L stands for latent pattern maintenance, which is a system's ability to preserve its basic structure and to change conditions within the framework the basic structure provides (Munch, 1981, p. 784). A system must (1) make sure actors are motivated to play their parts and (2) manage internal tension as part of the system's pattern maintenance. Through locating an aspect of reality in the AGIL paradigm, researchers and theorists can see how and to what extent the nature of the subject is determined by interpenetration with other subsystems (Munch, 1981, p. 785).

Other Theoretical Influences in the Current Dissertation

The current dissertation utilizes resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, 2003), social network theory (Brass et al., 2004; Kadushin, 2012; Wasserman & Faust, 1994), and several aspects of collaboration research. Other than Pfeffer and Salancik's (2003) brief mention of Parsons's ideas of legitimacy, which they disagreed with, none of the aforementioned authors reference Parsons. Despite this lack of reference, Parsons is clearly a theoretical underpinning for their work and the present dissertation seeks to call attention to these influences in the writings about resource dependence theory, social networks theory, and collaboration research.

In 1978, Pfeffer and Salancik published their first book on resource dependence theory: *The External Control of Organizations: A Resource Dependence Perspective*. The 2003 edition clarifies the three themes central to the first book. First, it is important to examine organizations' social contexts (environments) to understand their decision-making (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003, p. xi). Second, although organizations clearly face environmental and situational constraints, they can also make choices that lead to more autonomy and the ability to pursue their interests, even if temporary (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003, p. xii). Third is how important social power is for understanding behavior both internal and external to organizations. Simply put, resource dependence theory begins from the foundational idea that to understand an organization and its behavior, one must understand its environment and interactions with that environment.

At the center of Parsons's (1978) theory is the idea that an actor (or, in the language of Pfeffer & Salancik, an organization) is motivated to reach a goal. Actions take place in an *environment constrained* by both means and conditions. Pfeffer and

Salancik (2003) would note these constraints might be environmental and/or situational. Parsons (1978) believed actions were the result of the *interpenetration* of behavior and society's interdependent subsystems, or, in the words of Pfeffer and Salancik (2003), interactions between an organization and its environment (P). This action must be voluntaristic, based on freewill and common values (Parsons, 1978). One of his goals was developing a system of the many contingencies actors face and highlighting the structure and level of certainty present. Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) might point out that more social power would lead to more freewill and also change the contingencies facing an organization.

Social power is a segue into another theory presented in the current dissertation: social network theory. Social network theory seeks to explain how actors are connected and what these connections mean regarding behavior and resources (Brass et al., 2004; Kadushin, 2012; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). The basics of social network theory include individual actors or entities (nodes) and their relationships (lines or ties). In discussing the important foundations of social network theory, Borgatti, Mehra, Brass, and Labianca write, "Perhaps the most fundamental axiom in social network research is that a node's position in a network determines in part the opportunities and constraints that it encounters, and in this way plays an important role in a node's outcomes" (2009, p. 894). While social network theory is concerned less with an actor's decision-making, it is concerned with *interpenetration* in the form of how relationship ties affect actions. Social network theory, in a sense, maps part of Parsons's interest in how societal interdependence or relationships might affect an actor's situation.

Chapter Two of this dissertation utilizes both resource dependence and social network theory-related variables within a quantitative context to explore member experiences with collaboration. Beyond these two theories, collaboration research shows foundations based in Parsons's research. In fact, the very concept of interpenetration is a type of collaboration – a collective group of subsystems working together to inform an individual's actions (Munch, 1981). Thinking about interpenetration from an organizational perspective is the basis of organizational level collaboration research. Moving towards pattern variables, Parsons took the ideas of action theory a step further and focused on how individuals balance achieving goals with meeting expectations put on them both by themselves and society (Munch, 1981).

Organizational collaboration researchers often examine variables that take into account outside forces or expectations and how they act upon an *individual* organization's decisions. Hardy et al. (2003) discuss how collaboration leads to positive political effects, specifically influence. Increased influence, in the language of Parsons, implies an ability to be less encumbered by outside forces in deciding on individual or organizational actions. Other researchers have also examined variables such as adaptability, network ties, social learning, and achieving more objectives – all of which imply the ability to manage outside pressures trying to influence or control actions (Brass et. al, 2004; Gulati, Nhoria, & Zaheer, 2000; Kraatz, 1998). To use his own language, Parsons himself is perhaps an analytically separate subsystem that has *interpenetrated* other scholars to the point his work is inseparable from the topic of organizational collaboration.

The works cited in all five chapters of the current dissertation are grounded in relevant collaboration literature. The literature in each chapter encompasses principles about how a subsystem (in this case, an organization) manages outside pressures that are *interpenetrating* from a variety of external sources. Chapter Two focuses specifically on resource dependence and social network theories. Chapters Two and Three are more generally focused on collaboration with emphasis on the principles each shares with Parsons.

Dissertation Chapters

Coordination Between Chapters Two and Three

Data for chapters Two and Three were gathered as part of the same exploratory, quantitative study that utilized one survey instrument designed to identify member characteristics and experiences rather than predict outcomes. Chapter Two focuses on characteristics relevant to resource dependence and social networks; Chapter Three focuses on member experiences with collaboration.

THI was organized into 12 regions at the time of the quantitative study, with eight chosen as the sampling frame. A THI research project manager contacted regional directors for all 12 regions, so all regional directors were aware of the project. Then individuals in organizations that were members of THI and had already begun engaging in collaborative activities with THI were emailed with a description of the study, informed consent, and an invitation to participate. Since no individual-level data were collected, it is impossible to know how many of the eight regions were represented in the survey. With follow up emails, the final sample included 33 surveys that had been at least partially completed. Questions 1 through 12 related to the variables relevant to

Chapter Two (social networks and resource dependence) while the responses to questions 13 through 29 were used for Chapter Three (collaboration measures).

Chapter Two

Chapter Two is an exploratory study utilizing quantitative methods that highlight factors related to resource dependence and social network theories in organizations that are members of Texas Hunger Initiative's (THI) hunger free community coalitions (HFCC). The research question was *What are the relevant characteristics of member organizations, especially regarding resource dependence and social networks?* This research is grounded in three key concepts elucidated in prior research: (a) the relationship between resource dependence and collaboration, (b) the relationship between social networks and collaboration, and (c) the predictive value of both resource dependence and social networks. This chapter uses the scales Jones (2006) developed, utilizing the work of Hasenfeld (1983, 1992, 2000), regarding resource dependence (which he framed as political economy) and social networks. The first seven survey questions were linked to resource dependence. Along with finding a median score for each of the seven questions, the researcher also computed an arithmetic mean index score for resource dependence. The next five questions were associated with social networks. Like the resource dependence questions, the researcher computed a mean for each of the five questions and also an arithmetic mean index score for the combined social network questions.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three is another quantitative chapter, highlighting results from the second half of the results from the researcher's study of THI member organizations.

These results highlight factors related to collaboration within THI member organizations, with the research question asking *What are member organizations' experiences with collaboration within THI?* Questions related to collaboration were taken from Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2009) whose instrument includes 17 statements on a 7-point Likert scale quantifying five domains (governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms) to conceptualize and measure collaboration. Findings in this chapter begin to fill previously identified gaps on FPC research by focusing on a group of FPCs with very little existing research (THI's HFCCs), addressing one issue highlighted by Scherb and colleagues (2012), which is that many of the extant studies about FPCs were conducted by few researchers with limited numbers of FPCs.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four is a phenomenological inquiry about member organization's experiences with collaboration in THI. The research questions are:

Primary Research Question: *What have been member organizations' experiences with collaboration in the Texas Hunger Initiative?*

Supplemental Question 1: *What have been their experiences?*

Supplemental Question 2: *What are their lessons learned?*

These questions are entrenched in existing research about collaboration experiences, including benefits and factors leading to effective collaboration. The study began with a grounded theory methodology and continued with that methodology through the initial two interviews. During the process, though, it became clear that too little was known about readiness for collaboration in THI member organizations. When little is known

about a phenomenon and the purpose of the study is to describe said phenomenon, phenomenology is the most appropriate choice (Creswell, 2007).

The participant recruitment method was very similar to the quantitative recruitment. The THI research project manager reached out to the eight regional directors with information about the study and asked them to forward names of individual participants they would recommend to the researcher. The researcher followed up both with those who submitted names or requests for more information and with those who did not to ensure all eight regions had the opportunity to participate. Six of the regional directors sent names. After receiving names, the researcher sent an email with a description of the study and asked if the individual would be interested in participating or knew someone else who might be interested. Fourteen individuals consented to be interviewed, though the researcher was unable to schedule interviews with two and two more later decided someone else would be a better fit for the interview. At the end of the interview, the researcher also inquired about others the subject might know who would add more breadth or depth to the study, resulting in one interview. The final total was 10 participants from 10 organizations representing four regions.

The interview guide focused on individuals' experiences with their organizations collaborating in their HFCCs. This included asking about how the individual defined collaboration, general information about their organization, and lessons learned about collaboration. As can happen in qualitative research, the interview data did not lead where the researcher initially intended (readiness for collaboration). The researcher asked all 10 interviewees about what happened to make their organizations start collaborating. Unexpectedly, five of the organizations represented either began as a

collaborative by nature and intention or they collaborated from the beginning. Three of the respondents were too new to their organization to talk about when the organization began collaborating. Only two were able to talk about the changes that occurred around the time their respective organizations started collaborating. Since 80 percent of the sample could not answer questions related to readiness for collaboration, the researcher followed the data to discover themes related to experiences with collaborating in THI.

As with the quantitative study, research for this chapter aimed to address the gap of FPC research in the literature (Scherb et al., 2012). While the chapter does not address the effectiveness of collaboration by measuring, for example, improved services, it does highlight *perceptions* about what ingredients make effective collaborations, responding to calls to measure FPC effectiveness and roles in food policy systems (Bassarab, Santo, & Palmer, 2019; Calancie, Cooksey-Stowers et al., 2018; Scherb, Palmer, Frattaroli, & Pollack, 2012).

One Overall Work that Addresses the Gap

This dissertation focuses on organizational-level collaboration within THI's member organizations. The second chapter begins by examining member organizations' characteristics, especially through the lens of resource dependence and social networks. This is essential for two reasons. First, it is important to describe an organization or group of any kind before talking about any sort of experiences the group has. The researcher must know *who* before *what* or *how*. Second, as noted previously, research has shown a correlation between both resource dependence and social networks and collaboration outcomes. This chapter explores these predictors before collaboration itself is examined.

The third and fourth chapters provide a quantitative and qualitative lens, respectively, for examining member organizations' *experiences* with collaboration. To contextualize these experiences and to address the overabundance of collaboration definitions, the author analyzed members' own definitions of collaboration. In comparing these definitions to existing conceptualizations, the author was able to affirm several of the definitions and to point out disagreement with another. Besides contributing to the literature about definitions, the author was able to apply existing information about strong collaborations to a young and unique collaborative model (THI).

CHAPTER TWO

A Survey of Member Resources & Social Networks

Abstract

Despite an over 1,200 percent increase in food policy networks from 2000 to 2017, there is a dearth of research on these particular collaborative groups, what makes them effective, and organizational theories relative to their collaborative structures. The current study features organizational characteristics related to resource dependence and social networks from member organizations participating in regional food policy networks within the Texas Hunger Initiative. It extends Jones's (2006) work testing Hasenfeld's (1983, 1992, 2000) theories of political economy and social network factors in predicting child welfare organizations' degree of adoption of managed care principles. This exploratory study was quantitative in nature, using survey data gathered from employees of organizations participating in Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs). Organizations showed diversity in some characteristics (such as religiously affiliated vs non-religiously affiliated or number of sites operated) yet homogeneity in others (e.g. all 33 organizations were not-for-profit). The organizations were similar in their index scores regarding resource dependence. Employees from organizations indicated high numbers of collaborations and 60.7 percent reported other organizations affected their own. The index scores for social networks were non-normally distributed and explained little of the variance. Although the HFCCs were only about three years old, members already felt impacted by other organizations, which is also positively associated with effectiveness.

Keywords: food policy council, interorganizational collaboration, resource dependence theory, social network theory, Texas Hunger Initiative

Chapter Two: A Survey of Member Resources and Social Networks

In 2018, 14.3 million households (11.1 percent) in the United States experienced food insecurity (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, & Singh, 2019). Coleman-Jensen et al. (2019) define food insecure as, "...households were, at times, unable to acquire adequate food for one or more household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food," based on questions in the Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey. England (2019) highlights the difficulty in pinpointing discrete factors that lead to food insecurity, especially since many of the factors are often compounded by each other.

(Harper, Shattuck, Holt-Giménez, Alkon, & Lambrick, 2009) conceptualize food policy simply as, "...any policy that addresses, shapes or regulates the food system" (p. 9). Food policy can include the entire food process from considerations like environmental resources, production, and processing to distribution, transportation, purchase, and consumption (Haughton, 1987). Considering all of these factors, food policy developers define short and long-term goals to alleviate problems related to food policy. Haughton (1987) points out the United States does not have a single, concerted food policy; instead, the United States has a plethora of policies that affect different parts of the food system (also Harper et al., 2009). This lack of integration can cause policies to actually work against each other, rather than harmoniously working together to ameliorate problems related to food.

Because of the lack of a unified federal food policy, local governments and other groups have realized the need for local food policy in the wake of increased requests for food assistance and changing levels of federal support (Clancy, Hammer, Lippoldt,

Hinrichs, & Lyson, 2008; Haughton, 1987). Similarly to the federal level, local agencies responsible for different aspects of food policies lack coordination (Borron, 2003).

Additionally, Hamm and Bellows (2003) assert food insecurity is often experienced on a community level and some of the best and most ground-breaking solutions are also at the community level. Community food security looks for the welfare of *communities* of households and utilizes systems approaches to alleviate food insecurity. Community food security includes multiple dynamics such as hunger, economic development, agriculture policy, and several other related issues (England, 2019). One model that brings all of these stakeholders in community food security together and is adaptable to a wide range of locations and issues specific to food policy is the food policy council (also known as food advisory council, food policy network, food alliances, food systems councils, and food policy coalitions) (Clancy et al., 2008; England, 2019).

Food policy councils (FPCs) work to address entire food systems at a municipal, county, or state level (Clancy et al., 2008; Harper et al., 2009). They are multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral, often including representatives from government, businesses, non-profits, and people working in the food industry. The goal is coordinated effort to address issues and provide solutions. FPCs vary in their activities, including research and information-gathering, public education, advocacy, and providing resources to communities. Dahlberg (1994), in studying some of the first FPCs found that more successful FPCs engaged the entire food system versus focusing solely on hunger issues.

While some states developed nutrition councils as early as the 1960s, many authors highlight the importance of Knoxville, Tennessee forming the first municipal food policy council in 1982 (Clancy et al., 2008; Edwards, 2012; Harper et al., 2009;

Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). The number of FPCs in North America has grown significantly over the last two decades from roughly 25 in 2000 to 341 in 2017 (Bassarab, Santo, & Palmer, 2019). It is important to note, though, that FPCs are difficult to count. This is partly due to a lack of a central contact agency and conflicting information from organizations attempting to be a contact point for FPCs as well as missing, incomplete, or incorrect information received from FPCs themselves (Schiff, 2007). For example, as of August 1, 2020, the Food Policy Council Online Directory, one of the largest online directories of North American FPCs, did not include any of the coalitions from the current study's sampling frame, even though their work fits under the auspices of an FPC (Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, Food Policy Networks, n.d.).

Despite a growing interest in and number of FPCs, there is a lack of literature about their role in the food policy process and what makes FPCs effective (Calancie et al., 2018; Scherb, Palmer, Frattaroli, & Pollack, 2012). Scherb et al. (2012) point out much of the extant research about FPCs is based on decades of work by few experts in food policy and few FPCs. For example, Dahlberg's (1994) ground-breaking paper on FPCs reported on only five cities and one county. Clancy et al. (2008) were only able to report on eight FPCs that met their criteria for being officially government-sanctioned, having operated at least three years, and having multi-issue focus rather than a single-issue focus (such as solely antihunger).

Besides problems with the small number of researchers and organizations included in studies, there are some specific research areas that need further exploration. Scherb et al. (2012) cites some literature on FPCs specifically examining structure, processes, and activities, however the number is still limited. Schiff (2007) calls

attention to the lack of research on FPC organizational structure that includes organizational theory relevant to collaboration, especially multisector collaboration like FPCs. Lastly, while some authors note the dearth of literature about FPCs' effectiveness (see, for example, Scherb et al., 2012; and Webb, Hawe, & Noort 2001), others have noted the particular difficulties in determining how effective an FPC is, such as: internal complications, belonging to complex systems, number of actors, being affected by other parts of the system, and length of time it takes to see change (Calancie et al., 2018; Hammond & Dube, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Lich, Ginexi, Osgood & Mabry, 2013; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Scherb et al., 2012; Snowden & Boone, 2007).

The current study presents quantitative data gathered from organizations participating in one of the Texas Hunger Initiative's (THI's) regional Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs), which is an organization-specific name for an FPC. The data specifically captures organizations' perceptions based on factors related to resource dependence and social network theories and informs insights about member experiences. The article begins with an overview of resource dependence and social network theories, including their previously demonstrated links to collaboration. After illuminating the study context and methodological approach, the article ends with results, discussion, and concluding remarks.

Literature Review

Resource Dependence Theory and Collaboration

The basic premise of resource dependence theory is that every organization must have interactions with its environment to survive and gain necessary resources and that to understand an organization, one must look at its external environment, which would

include its networks (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Sowa, 2008). Organizations' environments, situations, and resources also put limitations on their abilities to act (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). The key factor in resource dependence theory is how well an organization navigates this search for resources so it can obtain the maximum amount of resources while keeping its reliance on external and environment factors to a minimum, thereby maintaining its own power to control its behavior (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Sowa, 2008). Resource dependence theory is closely related to social network theory, which is discussed in the next section of the literature review, in examining the role other institutions play in how a particular organization acts (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). Mizruchi and Galaskiewicz (1994) view resource dependence as one aspect of social network analysis due to its emphasis on the importance of relationships in directing the flow of resources between organizations (p. 231).

Using resource dependence theory, scholars have discovered that organizations can be motivated to form collaborations in order to reduce environmental constraints and secure resources (Sowa, 2008). In a similar vein, research has also found the following factors, related to resource dependence theory, to be motivations for collaboration: resource scarcity, need for better or more comprehensive services, organizational survival, organizational legitimacy, and improving the organization's strategic position within its field (Sowa, 2008). Among these varying impetuses for creating collaboration, Sowa (2008) also found there are different ways and methods of creating collaboration. Guo and Acar (2005) found that organizations are more likely to have formal collaborations if they have larger budgets or receive government funding through fewer government funding streams. They also found a positive and direct correlation between

resource sufficiency and collaboration. Recognizing the potential benefits of collaboration, Arsenault (1998, p. 5) encourages organizations to utilize strategic planning, including examining the organization's environment and resources, to explore whether collaboration would be helpful.

Hasenfeld (1982, 1992) asserted that the best theory for explaining the reasoning behind how human service organizations structure their service delivery systems was a mixture between political economy theory (closely related to resource dependence theory) and institutional theory because these theories answered how an organization relates to its environment and controls its own destiny. Hasenfeld (2000) also believed the more an organization is dependent on another organization or external factor (such as funding) the more that organization or element influences the way the organization sets up its structure and delivers services. At the same time, it is important to note that resource dependence theory has been criticized for not paying attention to an organization's institutional, structural, contextual, and organizational process factors (Guo & Acar, 2005). Regarding non-profit organizations, the theory has also been criticized because it does not account for the fact that these types of organizations are often guided by legal mandates (Guo & Acar, 2005).

When applying Hasenfeld's (1982, 1992, 2000) theory, Jones (2006) found that social network and resource dependency index scores were the most salient factors in an organization's adoption of managed care principles, while institutional theory index scores were not significantly correlated. This study gives evidence that institutions likely respond to pressures from their external environment (such as mandated adoption of

managed care principles) as a function of their dependence on external funding sources as well as their interorganizational networks.

Social Network Theory and Collaboration

Social network theory, (also known as network theory or social network analysis) focuses on the relationships between actors or entities, including collaborative relationships (Kadushin, 2012; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Researchers using this theory examine the interconnectedness and interdependence among actors and how these connections control or influence behavior and flow of resources, with special focus on patterns and groups rather than one single actor (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Kadushin, 2012; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). While focusing on patterns between actors, social network theory examines the alliances, collaborations, information flow, workflow, influence, and characteristics within a group (Brass et al., 2004). Social network theory has been used to understand topics such as: job satisfaction, individual and group performance, group structure, group problem solving, organizational innovation, organizational survival, corporate interlocking, exchange of power, executive decision-making, and coalition formation (Brass et al., 2004; Mizruchi & Galaskiewicz, 1994; Wasserman & Faust, 2004).

Social network theory has also been applied when examining the types of situations and antecedents that precede networks as well as consequences of networks (Brass et al., 2004; Kadushin, 2012). After overviewing extant research about networks, Brass et al. (2004) assert three foundational consequences of networks: they share information, negotiate interactions and cooperation, and exchange access and power. The authors believe these factors lead to increased similarities, innovation, and imitation

among networked organizations. Other ramifications include: faster disbursement of information, firm survival (especially in newer organizations or those undergoing major changes), social learning, and better performance (Brass et al., 2004; Kraatz, 1998). These outcomes coalesce with activities and benefits of collaborations as collaborating organizations are necessarily networked organizations.

Guo and Acar (2005) randomly sampled 97 Los Angeles-based nonprofit organizations with 501(c)(3) status to elucidate factors leading organizations to formalize collaborative activities. Among other perspectives, the authors utilized social network ideas that having board members who served on other nonprofit boards would likely increase the likelihood of organizations formalizing their collaborations. The authors found a positive and statistically significant relationship between having board members who serve on other nonprofit boards and formalized collaborative activities. While they caution this finding may not be a direct effect, it does highlight the relationships between networks and collaboration.

Since the current study examines the internal and external factors related to organizations' adaptation to their environments, Hasenfeld's (1983, 1992, 2000) work is particularly relevant. Some of his core concerns are power, institutional roles, and resources. However, Hasenfeld (1983) (and Gidron, 1993) also noted the necessity of interacting with external actors to obtain resources and their motivation to develop relationships based on their resource dependence. These ideas coalesce with social network theorists' foci on actors, their relationships, and how these relationships affect behaviors and resources. Thus, while Hasenfeld did not directly ascribe to social network theory, his principles align closely enough to provide part of the theoretical framework

for the current study. As mentioned previously, when applying Hasenfeld's (1983, 1992, 2000) theories, Jones (2006) found social network index scores to be one of the pertinent indicators in an organization's adoption of managed care principles. This demonstrates the importance of social networks on organizational decision-making.

Texas Hunger Initiative

This article highlights information gathered from organizations that are active members of THI's HFCCs. THI "...is a capacity-building, collaborative project dedicated to developing and implementing strategies to end hunger through policy, education, research, community organizing and community development" (THI, n.d.a.). It has three main priorities: grow help for families and individuals experiencing food insecurity, boost service utilization for programs and supports that already exist, and gather and disseminate data on best practices. HFCCs, formerly known as food planning associations, are multisectoral collaborative groups focused on a particular location (e.g. cities or regions) focused on improving food security in their location (THI, n.d.b.). THI includes eight regional offices spread throughout Texas and is situated within Baylor University (THI, n.d.a.; THI, n.d.c.). In addition to working towards the end of food insecurity in Texas, THI works to build an evidence-based model that is able to be reproduced across the United States (THI, n.d.a.). THI is part of the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP) (BCHP, n.d.).

Everett and colleagues highlight three foundational issues leading to food insecurity being such a large problem (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015; Singletary, Everett, & Nolen, 2012). First, the plethora of agencies and organizations (literally thousands) working to end food insecurity in Texas alone do not coordinate

efforts amongst themselves (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015; Singletary et al., 2012). Second, there is a dearth of a framework for partnerships across public/private or state/federal lines. Third, as other food policy scholars have noted, the country does not have a strategy or policy big enough to significantly impact an issue as large and complicated as food insecurity.

THI's particular model includes multiple tiers, facets, and layers. The tiers are comprised of cultivating a framework that encourages public/private and state/federal cooperation, community organizing and outreach, marshalling those involved in policymaking relevant to food, and investigating and assessing prototypes and organizations that actively seek to address food insecurity (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015); Singletary et al., 2012). The activities encompass several areas of practice, including: policy, research, evaluation, community organizing, and outreach from the federal to municipal levels. Specifically looking at outreach and community organization, their work is often multisectoral (including, for example, education, business, government, and social service organizations) where individual representatives know their own function in ending food insecurity while also collaborating to bridge gaps and have a greater impact (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015); Hall, 2012; Singletary et al., 2012).

The Current Study

As stated before, the purpose of this article is to highlight THI member organizations' characteristics in order to explore their lived experiences with collaboration in THI. The research question is *What are the relevant characteristics of member organizations, especially regarding resource dependence and social networks?*

This question is modeled after Jones's (2006) testing of Hasenfeld's (1983, 1992, 2000) theories, in which he found political economy (closely related to resource dependence) and social network factors to be the most salient in predicting Georgia child welfare organizations' adoption of managed care principles. Other studies, enumerated above, have also highlighted the importance of resource dependence theory and social network theory when examining how organizations make decisions and interact with others, both of which are foundational to studying collaboration.

The present study uses an organizational level methodology in line with others who have studied FPCs or organizational collaboration (Brass et al., 2004; Bunker, McBeath, Chuang, & Collins-Camargo, 2017; Clancy et al., 2008; Dahlberg, 1994; Edwards, 2012; Gazley, 2010; Harper et al., 2009; Jones, 2006; Polson, 2008; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). Similar to other studies about organizational level collaboration, the researcher focuses on a specific region: the state of Texas (Gazley, 2010, Guo & Acar, 2005, Jones, 2006, Polson, 2008, Suarez, 2011). Though the study is exploratory, it adds to the literature on FPCs by highlighting organizations constituting FPCs. The current study also addresses Schiff's (2007) concern about a lack of research on FPCs that is grounded in organizational theory.

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

The current sample includes organizations that are members of THI's HFCCs in eight locations (Amarillo, Austin, Dallas – leadership only, El Paso, Fort Worth, San Angelo, Tyler and Waco). The sample was purposefully a convenience as these organizations were the target population. Individuals within the organizations filled out

surveys on behalf of their organizations, with no individual-level data gathered. Out of 217 eligible contacts, 33 (15.2 percent) answered at least some of the survey. Twenty (9.2 percent) finished every question, while 13 (6.0 percent) only answered part of the survey. In trying to use as much of the available data as feasible, the incomplete responses are part of the current study. For clarity, and due to each variable having a differing number of respondents, the sample size for that variable is listed in the data tables.

After receiving Baylor Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix A), the researcher sent an email through the online survey tool Qualtrics to both acquaint potential participants with the study and also to give an invitation to participate in the study on February 12, 2015. The researcher sent a follow-up email through Qualtrics on February 25, 2015 to invitees who had not yet responded. While Qualtrics keeps track of email addresses so it can ensure unique survey replies, which also enables participants to utilize several days to finish surveys, the researcher does not have the ability to connect email addresses to responses. The survey did not collect personally identifying information and was confidential. The final reply was recorded April 16, 2015.

Measures

The survey instrument designed to measure the independent variables related to resource dependence theory and social network theory was exploratory in nature. The questions were modeled from Jones (2006) who examined the role these theories (along with institutional theory) had in explaining adoption of managed care principles by child-caring institutions in Georgia.

Resource dependence variables. Jones (2006) developed an index of questions regarding political/economic context of individual organizations, which included measures related to diversity of political resources available to the organization and diversity of economic resources available to the organization. An example of a question related to diversity of political resources available from the current study is, “Is your agency an independent organization or a subsidiary of a larger corporation?”. “Is your agency designated as for profit or not for profit?” is an example question to measure diversity of economic resources. Due to the aforementioned overlap in political economy and resource dependence theories, this index was utilized for resource dependence questions. Appendix B contains the survey questions, with one through seven relating to resource dependence.

Social network variables. Jones (2003) also created an index of variables related to perceived network pressure questions relevant to social network theory. An example question from the current study asks, “To the best of your knowledge, how similar to your organization are the agencies within your food planning association/food policy council/hunger coalition with regard to the number of clients they serve and their operating budgets?”. Appendix B contains the survey questions, with t, with questions eight through twelve relating to social networks.

Results

Since the level of knowledge about THI member organizations’ characteristics was low, as was the sample size, descriptive statistics were the most appropriate form of statistical analysis. Prior to statistical analysis, data were cleaned. Index and median scores were then calculated on variables as reported in the results section.

Organizational Characteristics in Relation to Resource Dependence

The sampling frame included 217 contacts. The first seven questions on the survey captured the degree of resource dependence of the organizations represented by the survey respondents. Thirty-three respondents completed some or all of the survey (completion rate for respondents answering at least one question equals 15.2 percent).

Table 2.1 shows information about all of the dichotomous variables measuring resource dependence.

Table 2.1: Dichotomous Variables Reflecting Resource Dependence Measures

Question Number	Variable	Code 1	Code 2
1	Is your organization for-profit or not-for-profit? (n=33)	0 (For profit)	33 (Not-for-profit)
2	Is your organization a subsidiary of a larger organization? (n=33)	22 (Independent organization)	11 (Subsidiary)
5	Is your organization religiously-affiliated? (n=33)	21 (Not religiously affiliated)	12 (Religiously affiliated)
6	Is your organization a member of a civic or social club? (n=33)	31 (Not a member of a civic/social club)	2 (Member of a civic/social club)

All 33 individuals represented not for profit organizations. Twenty-two respondents were independent organizations; 11 were subsidiaries of larger organizations. Independent organizations are stand-alone organizations that are not under the oversight of another organization; subsidiaries are organizations that are under the oversight of another larger organization. Twelve respondents were part of organizations who identified as being

formally affiliated with a religious denomination or organization while 21 did not. Only two organizations were affiliated with civic or social clubs.

Table 2.2 highlights the results of all continuous variables related to resource dependence, including the number of administrative and service sites, as well as the number of discrete funding sources.

Table 2.2: Continuous Variables Reflecting Resource Dependence Measures

Question Number	Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Median
3	Administrative sites (<i>n</i> =32)	0	3	1
4	Service sites (<i>n</i> =27)	0	8	1.85
7	Number of discrete funding sources (<i>n</i> =32)	0	8	4

After cleaning, the organizations ranged in size from having one site for administration and service provision each to over 200 sites for administration and service provision each. Since most (32) organizations had five or fewer sites for administration and a significant number (26) had five or fewer service locations, outliers were removed. The final minimum number for both administrative and service sites was zero; the maximum number of administrative sites was three while the maximum number of service sites was eight. The median number of administrative sites was one while the median number of service sites was 1.85. The question asking respondents to rank their funding sources was recoded to count the discrete types of funding sources the respondents included. Higher levels indicated greater variety of funding sources, which would indicate less

dependence on any single source (Jones, 2003). Those surveyed reported a range from zero to eight types of funding sources, with a median value of four discrete types of funding sources.

Following Jones (2003), the researcher calculated a mean score among resource dependence variables to create a composite score. Besides building on Jones's (2003) work, mean scores also disregard missing data (adding the existing scores and dividing by the number of scores), rather than counting missing data as a zero (which would happen if the researcher utilized arithmetic sums). Since data were missing, the mean was able to capture the most data. The minimum score for the resource dependence index was 0.86, the maximum score 2.86, and the mean was 1.89. The skewness was 0.097, meaning the numbers were distributed symmetrically. The values were platykurtic with a value of -0.241, meaning the values were similar and the distribution was flat.

Finally, the researcher computed Cronbach's alpha to check for what percentage of variance the index measured (Warner, 2012). As originally intended from Jones (2003), the index counted for less than one percent of the variance ($\alpha=.006$). After using the original religiously-affiliated variable (instead of the recoded variable Jones, 2003, used), Cronbach's alpha increased to 0.315. SPSS results suggested removing religious affiliation completely would increase alpha to 0.365, or still explain only 36.5 percent of the variance in the answers. It is important to note that while this number is low, Jones (2003) did not report Cronbach's alpha, so it is impossible to compare results in explaining variance.

Organizational Characteristics in Relation to Social Networks

The next index attempted to capture information about the respondent's organization's social network. Items eight through 12 constitute the social network index and are comprised of both ordinal and continuous variables. Table 2.3 gives the question numbers, variable names, minimum values, maximum values, and median values for each continuous variable.

Table 2.3: Continuous Variables Reflecting Social Network Variables

Question Number	Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Median
8	Number of collaborations (<i>n</i> =21)	0	60	12
9	Length of time in collaboration (<i>n</i> =28)	0	6	3

As noted previously, the organizations vary greatly on their number of collaborations, ranging from zero to 60, with a median of 12. Given that each of these organizations is a member of a HFCCs, it seems counterintuitive for organizations to claim zero collaborations. It is also unlikely these organizations would have extremely low numbers of collaborative relationships. While it is impossible to know why the data are counterintuitive on this question, it seems likely respondents did not understand the question, were unfamiliar with their organizations' collaborative activities, did not count other HFCC members in their estimates of collaborative relationships, do not view themselves as collaborators, or do not see the HFCC context as collaborative as defined

by this study¹). The median length of time respondents reported their organizations have been members of the HFCC is 3 years, with a range of 0 to 6 years. These numbers are intuitive, given the age of the HFCC program.

Table 2.4 provides results on ordinal variables reflecting social network variables, including similarity to partners, number of collaborators with other collaborative relationships, and how much an agency's decision is influenced by other organizations in the HFCC.

Table 2.4: Ordinal Variables Reflecting Social Network Variables

Question Number	Variable	Response 1	Response 2	Response 3	Response 4
10	Similarity to partners (n=23)	6 (No similarity)	15 (Somewhat similar)	2 (Extremely similar)	0 (Unsure)
11	Number of collaborators who have collaborative relationships (n=28)	19 (3 or more collaborations)	1 (1-2 collaborations with other agencies)	0 (No collaborations)	8 (Unsure)
12	Agency's decisions influenced by other organizations in FPA (n=28)	12 (Greatly influenced)	5 (Somewhat influenced)	4 (No influence)	0 (Unsure)

¹ The definition listed on the survey was, "A process in which autonomous or semi-autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions" and is quoted from how Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2009) conceptualize collaboration.

Table 2.4 shows that 17 respondents report their organization is at least somewhat similar to other organizations in their collaboration (out of 23 respondents for question 10 or 73.9 percent). Twenty out of 28 respondents (71 percent) also identify other organizations in their collaboration as having at least one other collaborative relationship (question 11). Finally, 17 of 28 respondents (60.7 percent) report that other organizations within their collaborations have an influence on their organization's decisions (question 12).

These data tell us that organizations are similar in the amount of time they have been in their HFCCs. They differ, though, in the number of collaborative relationships they have. Organizations also believe they are similar to other organizations in their HFCCs, according to question 10, which asks respondents how similar they perceive their organizations to be compared with other organizations in their collaborations. They also realize their partners have other collaborative relationships. Perhaps most interesting, over half (17 out of 28 responses or 60.7 percent) believe that partners have some effect on their agency's decision-making (question 12).

As with the resource dependence variables, the researcher again followed Jones's (2003) method and created an index for social network variables. The mean was again helpful due to missing data, which could be treated as missing, instead of as zero. The mean score was 4.39, with a minimum of 0.00 and maximum of 22.20. With a kurtosis value of 5.58, it is leptokurtic with a high peak in the center. The skewness value was 2.16, which is highly positively skewed. As with resource dependence, the author calculated Cronbach's alpha to test for how much of the variance the social network index explains. As Jones (2003) constructed it, α was -0.088. After reversing questions about how long organizations had been collaborating (so that longer was a higher

number) and whether decisions about collaborations were affected by larger organizations in the fpa (so that greatly was lower), $\alpha=0.064$. By removing the length of time in an fpa, SPSS indicated Cronbach's alpha could increase to 0.33. Again, Jones (2003) did not report Cronbach's alpha, so it is impossible to know how the current index compares to his in terms of explaining variance.

Discussion

This exploratory study adds to the collaboration literature by investigating a new approach to alleviating hunger, which includes multiple sectors working at multiple levels in collaborative ways. The research question was *What are the relevant characteristics of member organizations, especially regarding resource dependence and social networks?* The survey results elucidate several important findings. Put in context of research about factors leading to successful collaborations, these findings suggest THI's HFCCs are likely to experience effective collaborations.

First, the member organizations view themselves as diverse. For combatting a problem as large as hunger in Texas, Kania and Kramer (2011) assert that large-scale change requires coordination among different leaders trying to alleviate the same problem. As stated before, Arya and Lin (2007) also found diversity to be related to better collaborative outcomes. However, the organizations also reported a low number of discrete funding streams (median was four), which implies they are greatly dependent on those organizations for survival. Sowa (2008) found resource scarcity to be a motivator for collaboration to reduce environmental pressures and increase likelihood of survival. Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) also discuss an organization's goal of maintaining as much independence as possible while also maximizing resources. Hasenfeld (1982, 1992,

2000) highlighted the importance of resource dependence in explaining an organization's decisions about how it structures itself and how it is influenced by others. Jones (2006) also highlighted the importance of resource dependence in organizations' decisions to adopt managed care principles.

Second, most of the eight sampled HFCCs were comprised of independent organizations, rather than subsidiaries. Independent organizations are advantageous because they have more power to make their own decisions on their own timelines; however, subsidiaries are able to utilize their parent companies' name recognition and reputation and are also protected against environmental threats such as changes in funding (Bradley, Aldrich, Shepherd, & Wiklund, 2011; Shrader & Simon, 1997). A third important point elucidates more about organizational make up. The sample was split at nearly two-thirds being religiously affiliated and one-third being non-religiously affiliated organizations. Given the prevalence of churches in southern states, this number is not surprising. On a related note about organizational makeup, the organizations are not affiliated with civic or social clubs. This seems to be a group that has not been tapped by HFCCs and would perhaps provide useful partners.

A fifth important observation is that organizations in the sample averaged only three years in their HFCCs, which makes sense due to how new the HFCCs were at the time of the survey. Since these relationships were relatively new at the time of the survey, it will be interesting to see how these relationships progress. Although the formalized relationships through the HFCC were relatively new, member organizations reported feeling influenced by other organizations in their HFCCs (81 percent reported "greatly" or "somewhat influenced"). These results suggest some level of network

integration, which Provan and Milward (1995) identified as being positively correlated with perceived effectiveness.

Future studies should attempt to learn more about THI member organizations' characteristics on a wider scale, such as random sampling of all HFCCs or surveying every member organization. Once more is known about member organizations' characteristics, future research should focus on conceptualizing and measuring effectiveness among HFCCs. After gauging effectiveness, it would be beneficial to study the antecedents leading to effective HFCCs as a means of building stronger HFCCs as well as expanding literature about antecedents to collaborative effectiveness.

The current model should also be compared against other models (especially types of FPCs) to determine the benefits and drawbacks of each model as well as whether one model is more effective. For example, Wiggins, Anastasiou, and Cox (2020) performed a systematic review of multisector alliances in public health to determine common factors making public health alliances successful. This research is the first step in ascertaining what makes FPCs, or multisectoral collaborations specific to food, effective in their work. With this information in hand, policy-makers and program developers would be able to consider which model might work in their location or content area.

Limitations and Conclusion

While the findings give valid insight about the eight HFCCs that were sampled, it is important to understand the limits of the study and findings. First, the sample did not include all 12 HFCCs in existence at the time of the survey and the responses were not randomized, so it is not possible to ensure the findings from this sample are indicative of

the other HFCCs within or outside THI. Second, the study had a response rate of less than 20 percent. Since data are missing on the individuals who did not choose to participate in the study, it is impossible to know if those who answered the questions are somehow different from those who did not respond to the survey. It is possible, for example, that only those who are very involved or very uninvolved in their HFCCs decided to respond, which would skew the data. Third, the low number of responses prohibited a regression analysis, so the study's findings cannot determine any level of causality between the variables.

As noted before, FPC creation and development has increased since 2000, with no signs of reversing this trend, yet the research on FPCs is nascent (Bassarab et al., 2019). Adding to the existing research base about FPCs helps entities like local and state governments make decisions about developing their own FPCs. In a field that has a narrow research base, exploratory studies can provide a glimpse into potential future research areas.

This study also fills a hole Schiff (2007) identified in research about FPC organizational structure that also considers organizational theory relevant to collaboration. Previous research has demonstrated the importance of both resource dependence and social network theories in organizational collaboration and factors related to both theories are presented here.

The present findings detail important information about member organizations' characteristics. These exploratory results suggest organizations are meeting the criteria identified in the literature as antecedents for effective and successful collaboration. Learning more about this particular FPC model of builds a solid research foundation to

help gauge model effectiveness, which could lead to considerations about whether this model might be repeated in other locations or for other problems involving multiple sectors.

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CHAPTER THREE

A Description of Member Experiences with Collaboration

Abstract

Even with exponential growth in food policy councils, much of the research comes from a scant number of researchers and few food policy council sites. There are even fewer articles on the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI), a statewide network of food policy councils. The current study highlights member organizations' experiences with collaboration within THI's Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs), a type of food policy council. This was an exploratory quantitative study utilizing survey data collected from individuals in organizations that were part of THI's HFCCs. The survey utilized Thomson, Perry, and Miller's (2009) conceptualization and measurement of interorganizational collaboration to measure perceived experiences with collaboration. Eighty-two percent of respondents agreed it was more worthwhile to stay in their collaboration than to leave. Across all five domains, organizations rated their collaborations highly at four or five out of five on a Likert scale. The median overall combined index score for collaboration was 4.5, reflecting positive views of collaboration.

Keywords: food policy council, interorganizational collaboration, multisector collaboration, Texas Hunger Initiative, food security

Chapter Three: A Description of Member Experiences with Collaboration

During at least one point in 2018, 14.3 million households in the United States experienced food insecurity – roughly 11.1 percent of the total population (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, & Singh, 2019). Utilizing data based on questions on the Food Security Supplement to the Current Population Survey, Coleman-Jensen et al. (2019) operationalize food insecure as, “...households were, at times, unable to acquire adequate food for one or more household members because they had insufficient money and other resources for food” (p. 6). In attempting to isolate the issue of food insecurity, England (2019) discusses the variety of components leading to food insecurity, such as income, race, and food availability, and how these elements often affect each other and exacerbate one another. This complexity makes it difficult to point to singular, specific factors causing food insecurity.

When discussing food security, the topic of food policy is extremely relevant. Harper, Shattuck, Holt-Giménez, Alkon, and Lambrick (2009) define food policy as, “...any policy that addresses, shapes or regulates the food system” (p. 9). Food policy includes the entire food system from the resources needed to grow food, production practices and policies, distribution, and consumption (Haughton, 1987). Food policy developers examine the entire food system to develop short and long-term goals and solutions to food policy-related issues, such as hunger, sustainable farming, etc. At a federal level, the United States lacks a uniform food policy, instead giving responsibility for different aspects of the food system to different agencies and organizations (Harper et al., 2009; Haughton, 1987). This separation can sometimes cause policies to work against each other, rather than working together to mitigate food system-related issues.

Some local governments and groups have discovered a need for local food policies due to receiving requests for food assistance, balancing unstable levels of federal support related to food, and awareness of a disconnect among local agencies responsible for aspects of food (Borron, 2003; Clancy, Hammer, Lippoldt, Hinrichs, & Lyson, 2008; Haughton, 1987). Additionally, food insecurity is often a community level experience where some of the most innovative and effective solutions come from the community level (Hamm & Bellows, 2003). Community food security uses systems methods to improve food security for entire communities of households, rather than individuals (England, 2019). The food policy council (FPC) is one model that includes a multisectoral, community-level approach that is flexible to a variety of locations and food security topics (Clancy et al., 2008; England, 2019). In the literature, FPCs are also known as food policy networks, food systems councils, food policy coalitions, food advisory councils, and food alliances (England, 2019).

Whether working on a municipal, county, or state level, FPCs examine whole food systems, not just parts (Clancy et al., 2008; Harper et al., 2009). FPCs are generally made up of delegates from a variety of industries including non-profits, food workers, business, and government uniting for multi-disciplinary and multi-sector collaboration to ameliorate food system-related issues. FPCs engage in a variety of strategies, including: providing resources, education, advocacy, and gathering information. In researching six of the first municipal FPCs, Dahlberg (1994) discovered FPCs that engaged the entire food system were more efficacious than those centered around one issue (such as only food security).

In 1982, the city of Knoxville, Tennessee assembled the first FPC (Clancy et al., 2008; Edwards, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). Although some states had already developed nutrition councils, researchers highlight the turning point in FPC development after the Knoxville FPC. FPCs in North America grew extensively in number between 2000 and 2017, going from roughly 25 to 341 in just 17 years (Bassarab, Santo, & Palmer, 2019). In discussing the number of FPCs, it is essential to point out that counting FPCs is a challenging task. There is no one organization that is central contact for all FPCs and even within existing FPC networks, there is missing, incorrect, or incomplete information (Schiff, 2007). To illustrate this point, on August 1, 2020, one of North America's largest FPC directories (Food Policy Council Online Directory) did not encompass a single coalition from the current study's sampling frame, though each of these coalitions engages in activities that could be termed as FPC work (Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, Food Policy Networks, n.d.).

Although the number of FPCs is growing rapidly and interest in forming new ones is clearly high, there is a dearth of research about what role FPCs play in the food policy process and what makes FPCs effective (Calancie et al., 2018; Scherb, Palmer, Frattaroli, & Pollack, 2012). Scherb et al. (2012) highlights the fact that a high amount of the literature and research about FPCs over the previous few decades originates with a small number of food policy experts and a small number of FPCs. One example is Dahlberg's (1994) seminal work on FPCs, which included only six locations. Clancy et al. (2008) were only able to locate eight FPCs that had a multi-issue focus, had been operational for at least three years, and had official government sanction.

In addition to issues with the lack of variety in researchers and small sample sizes, there are other problem areas in the research on FPCs. While Scherb et al. (2012) points to some research on FPC activities, structure, and processes, the amount is still small. Schiff (2007) also draws focus to the dearth of literature on organization theory-centered research on FPCs, especially collaboration research that specializes in multisector collaborations such as FPCs. Finally, while some authors lament a lack of research about FPC effectiveness (see, for example, Scherb et al., 2012; and Webb, Hawe, & Noort 2001), different researchers have pointed out some specific issues in determining FPC effectiveness, such as: being parts of complex systems, large numbers of players, length of time involved in noticeable change, internal complexities, and undue influence or affects from other parts of the same system (Calancie et al., 2018; Hammond & Dube, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Lich, Ginexi, Osgood & Mabry, 2013; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Scherb et al., 2012; Snowden & Boone, 2007).

The present article highlights findings from organizations that are represented in one of the Texas Hunger Initiative's (THI's) regional Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs). These HFCCs are FPCs given a particular name by the organization. The data highlights organizations' experiences with collaboration within THI, as reported by organizational informants. The article starts by highlighting literature related to describing collaboration and effective collaboration. Next the study context and methodology are explained before featuring results, discussion, and steps for future research.

Literature Review

Describing Collaboration

Definitions and conceptualization. Scholars have been writing about organizational collaboration since the 1970s, with an increasing interest in the 1990s (Gazley, 2017; Park & Lim, 2018). Forty years of research has produced a plethora of studies about collaboration's outcomes, yet there is still little consensus on how to define or study collaboration. In their research overview of two special issues on the process and forms of collaboration for *The Journal of Applied and Behavioral Sciences*, Wood and Gray (1991) note the multitude of collaboration definitions, each being incomplete, yet offering something valuable towards a standard definition of collaboration. After examining the various elements of the definitions, they give this definition:

“Collaboration occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain” (Wood & Gray, 1991). Fourteen years later, Williams (2015) again noted the lack of consistency among definitions, conceptualizations, and operationalizations of collaboration across literature within a single discipline (public administration), let alone multiple disciplines.

To help solve these problems, several authors have attempted to bring some clarity to definitions, conceptualizations, and operationalization of collaboration. Bedwell et al. (2012) utilized research from organizational behavior, management, environmental science, communication, education, sociology, anthropology, history, biology, and medicine, along with a pre-determined set of criteria, to develop a multidisciplinary definition of collaboration. They define collaboration as “...an

evolving process whereby two or more social entities actively and reciprocally engage in joint activities aimed at achieving at least one shared goal” (Bedwell et al., 2012, p. 130). This definition is similar to that of Wood and Gray (1991) in the recognition of a group, interaction that depends on some level of shared activities, and a shared goal or issue. Isett, Mergel, LeRoux, Mischen, and Rethemeyer (2011), along with other members of a working group and cross-referencing earlier work in the public administration literature, define collaborative networks as:

...collections of government agencies, nonprofits, and for-profits that work together to provide a public good, service, or “value” when a single public agency is unable to create the good or service on its own and/or the private sector is unable or unwilling to provide the goods or services in the desired quantities. (p. 1158).

This definition shares Bedwell and colleagues’ (2012) and Wood & Gray’s (1991) inclusion of multiple entities working together and focusing on a goal. However, it highlights an important distinction of a single agency being unwilling or unable to reach the same end result that the collaboration can bring. Provan and Kenis (2008), in a frequently cited article, echo the previous definitions’ inclusion of the concepts of both multiple organizations coming together and achieving a common purpose. They define networks as “...groups of three or more legally autonomous organizations that work together to achieve not only their own goals but also a collective goal” (Provan & Kenis, 2008, p. 231).

Types of collaboration research. Along with differences about how to define or conceptualize collaboration, authors have approached researching collaborations in a

variety of ways. At the very simplest level, Provan, Fish, and Sydow (2007) differentiate between network research from individuals or individual organizations (actor level) perspectives from perspectives at the network level. Kilduff and Tsai (2003) label these egocentric networks (the links around individuals) versus whole networks (all of the ties among every actor in a network). In a similar way, Galaskiewicz and Wasserman (1994) distinguish between micro and macro-level network research.

Moving beyond simple binary constructs, Provan and Milward (2001) assert three distinct levels of analysis are necessary when considering networks and their effectiveness: community, network, and individual/participant. In a corresponding way that also recognizes different levels of collaboration, Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, and Tsai (2004) organize literature about the antecedents, consequences, and benefits of networks and organizations on interpersonal, interunit, and interorganizational levels. Similarly, Park and Lim (2018) utilize existing network literature and their own analysis of a hypothetical network to demonstrate networks are both multi-level and multidimensional. The authors propose future research should examine inter-sector, inter-level, and within-level relationships present within networks. This research coalesces with Provan and Milward (2001) and Brass et al. (2004) in their multi-level approaches, yet it expands to include multidimensionality. Isett et al. (2011) affirm the benefits of studying networks at various levels (from individual to whole network), as long as the researcher is clear about what level of analysis is being utilized. Provan et al. (2007) assert studying networks at the organizational or whole network level can provide insights not only about the entire network but also about individual actors.

Utilizing the organizational level approach to collaboration, Bunger, McBeath, Chuang, & Collins-Camargo (2017) utilized data from the National Survey of Private Child and Family Serving Agencies (NSPCFSA) where directors rated how intensely they engaged in four collaborative activities and how intensely they competed with other agencies for four major resources to test for how collaboration and competition sometimes overlap. The authors found all four measures of collaboration were positively correlated with competition for private funds and personnel, demonstrating the complex overlap that can happen with collaboration and competition. They also found that competing for public funds was positively correlated with three measures of collaboration; however, competing for clients had no correlation with any form of collaboration. Overall, the authors found 91% of the agencies engaged in both collaboration and competition with other private child welfare agencies.

Gazley (2010) utilized a similar methodology by studying individuals within organizations, reporting on behalf of their respective agencies as a whole, to explore perceived barriers to collaboration. As noted previously, she found larger and older organizations with existing collaborative experiences as well as shared professional experiences and female executives to have the fewest perceived barriers to collaborating with local government. Jones (2006) employed a similar sampling strategy to test the effects of institutional and political economy pressures on organizations' adoption of managed care principles, finding factors related to political economy and other organizations' influence were strong predictors of organizations' adoption of managed care principles. These studies are mentioned as specific examples of how researchers have studied organizations on the whole, instead of individuals or groups within the

organization reporting on their intraorganizational dynamics. For a more complete review of how multilevel actions and structures affect entire networks, see Provan et al., 2007.

Collaboration Experiences

Collaboration benefits. After reviewing 26 network level studies across a variety of sectors, Provan et al. (2007) assert that most studies found networks enhance organizational performance. Being more specific about these enhancements, Lawson (2004) categorizes the organizational benefits of collaboration to be gains related to effectiveness, efficiency, resources, capacity, legitimacy, and social development. In a review of several streams of collaborative literature, Hardy, Phillips, and Lawrence (2003) focus on strategic, knowledge creation, and political effects on organizations that collaborate. After reviewing the relevant literature on specific outcomes, the authors highlight their own findings that high levels of involvement with collaborators lead to distinctive high strategic effects, high levels of involvement and embeddedness lead to high knowledge creation effects, and highly embedded collaborations lead to high political effects. Collaboration has also been associated with increased adaptability, social learning, access to information and resources, ability to achieve more objectives, network ties, institutional political clout, innovation, survival, and performance (Brass et al., 2004; Gulati, Nhoria, & Zaheer, 2000; Kraatz, 1998). Similarly, Suarez (2011) also found that organizations within collaborations are more likely to receive government funding. Along with these specific benefits, Alter and Hage (1993) assert collaboration leads to better service delivery and interorganizational networks will become the most common service delivery models (p. 13).

Effective collaboration. Aside from demonstrating collaboration's benefits, several authors have studied what factors make collaboration effective or successful. Einbender, Robertson, Garcia, Vuckovic, and Patti (2000) confirmed existing literature on four factors to be requisite for effective collaboration: incentive, willingness, ability, and capacity. Utilizing independent variables based on Thomson's (2001) work, Chen (2008, 2010) found resource sharing or building and trust building to be the two most important processes to building effective collaborations. Provan and Milward (1995) compared four community mental health systems in different areas of the United States, assessing for both client/family views of effectiveness and case managers' views of effectiveness. When combining the two sets of opinions, the authors found the following to be positively correlated with perceived effectiveness: centralized and integrated networks, direct and non-fragmented forms of external control, and general system stability. Other networks factors also have high impacts on effectiveness, regardless of whether or not the network is situated in a resource-scarce environment or not.

Arya and Lin (2007) studied one network of 62 organizations providing HIV/AIDS-related services in Dallas, Texas to study how organizational characteristics, partner attributes, and network structures affect collaboration outcomes (combined into a single measure for this study). The authors found service generalism (variety) and status of the focal organization to positively and significantly impact collaboration outcomes. Funding overlaps and greater centrality of the focal organization were negatively correlated with collaboration outcomes. Finally, the authors found that high status focal organizations were able to benefit more from exploiting gaps in the service network than low status focal organizations when it came to collaborative outcomes. Moving from

more objective measures to subjective report, Lantz, Viruell-Fuentes, Israel, Softley, and Guzman (2001) interviewed board members and key stakeholders of the Detroit Community-Academic Urban Research Center (URC) to discern factors that facilitated growth and achievements (effectiveness) as well as ongoing challenges. The interviewees identified four main areas they believe contributed to their success: infrastructure and processes for collaboration and decision-making, trust-building among partners, community partners who were both committed and active in leadership, and receiving support from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC).

Texas Hunger Initiative

The organizational context for the present study is the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI). THI, "...is a capacity-building, collaborative project dedicated to developing and implementing strategies to end hunger through policy, education, research, community organizing and community development" (THI, n.d.a.). The initiative works to increase utilization of existing programs, research emerging practices, and expand supports for food insecure families and individuals. One of THI's signature and largest efforts are Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs), formerly known as food planning associations, which are location-based interdisciplinary and collaborative teams aimed at increasing food security in their respective location (THI, n.d.b.). THI is housed at Baylor University with eight regional offices across the state of Texas (THI, n.d.a.; THI, n.d.c.). Beyond ending food insecurity in Texas, THI aims to create an evidence-based model able to be replicated across the United States (THI, n.d.a.). THI is part of the Baylor Collaborative on Hunger and Poverty (BCHP) (BCHP, n.d.).

Everett and others note three main contributing problems to widespread food insecurity (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015; Singletary, Everett, & Nolen, 2012). The first was a lack of coordination among literally thousands of organizations working to help provide food security in Texas (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015; Singletary et al., 2012). A second issue was a lack of infrastructure encouraging private and public partnerships, especially involving both state and federal resources. Third, the country lacks a large enough scale plan to address a problem as complex as food insecurity.

THI's model is multitiered, multifaceted, and multilayered. The tiers include community outreach and organizing, developing infrastructure to facilitate public-private collaboration, researching and evaluating programs and models, and organizing policymakers who combat food insecurity (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015; Hall, 2012; Singletary et al., 2012). The interventions include several practice areas, such as community organizing, outreach, policy, research, and evaluation from municipal through federal levels. In addition, community organizing and outreach involves multiple sectors (including education, social service agencies, education, government, and businesses) coming together in their locations to serve local individuals and families where each stakeholder organization is aware of its own role and responsibility (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015; Hall, 2012; Singletary, Everett, & Nolen, 2012).

The Current Study

The purpose of this article is to highlight THI member organizations' experiences with collaboration in order to explore their lived experiences with collaboration in THI. The research question is *What are member organizations' experiences with collaboration*

within THI? Specific instrumentation is discussed later; however, the author builds upon the previously discussed extant literature on components of successful and unsuccessful collaborations and compares member organizations' experiences to this literature.

Previous sections have included studies pointing out the difficulties in conceptualizing and operationalizing collaboration, identified types of collaboration research, cited benefits of collaboration, and listed some traits found to positively affect collaboration.

The methodology builds on the work of these authors and others who have utilized organizational level research methods in studying collaboration or FPCs (Brass et al., 2004; Bunker et al., 2017; Clancy et al., 2007; Dahlberg, 1994; Edwards, 2012; Gazley, 2010; Harper et al., 2009; Jones, 2006; Polson, 2008; Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). Like other studies, it also focuses on a specific region: the state of Texas (Gazley, 2010, Guo & Acar, 2005, Jones, 2006, Polson, 2008, Suarez, 2011). While this study is exploratory in nature, it adds to the collaboration literature by examining a specific type of FPC that involves multiple sectors of business, non-profit, and government realms as well as multiple levels of government.

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

The convenience sample for this study consisted of organizations in eight of THI's HFCCs (Amarillo, Austin, Dallas – leadership only, El Paso, Fort Worth, San Angelo, Tyler, and Waco). The unit of analysis was the organizations that are part of HFCCs, with individuals in the organizations reporting on data for their respective organizations. No individual-level data was recorded. A total of 217 contacts were eligible for completing the study. In total, 33 respondents (15.2 percent) completed part

of the survey while 20 (9.2 percent) answered every question. The 13 incomplete responses were included in the study to utilize as much of the responses gathered as appropriate. This means each question has a differing number of responses, ranging from 20 to 33. For each variable, the sample size for that variable is included in the discussion of findings.

The researcher received Baylor Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval on July 19, 2014 (Appendix A). Using the online survey tool Qualtrics, the principal investigator sent an email on February 12, 2015 to each contact introducing the study and inviting contacts to participate. On February 25, 2015, the researcher sent a follow-up email through Qualtrics to contacts who had not responded. Qualtrics keeps a database of unique survey links that are sent to respondents and tracks responses that have or have not been completed. The survey was confidential with no personally identifying information collected. While Qualtrics tracks email addresses to unique survey responses (to allow for surveys to be finished at later dates), the principal investigator is unable to match specific email addresses to specific responses. The last response was recorded April 16, 2015.

Measure

Survey questions utilized those Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2009) found to be significant in a conceptual model measuring collaboration, including five factors (governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms) with 17 statements measured by a 7-point Likert scale. Governance involves rules around jointly making decisions that affect the collaboration. The first statement instructs the respondent to circle the number that most closely reflects the statement, “Partner organizations take

your organization's opinions seriously when decisions are made about the collaboration?" (Thomson et al., 2009, p. 40). Administration looks at how the collaboration is implemented. The first statement for administration declares, "You, as a representative of your organization in the collaboration, understand your organization's roles and responsibilities as a member of the collaboration" (Thomson et al., 2009, p. 40). Autonomy examines how much an organization maintains an identity and ability to function separate from others within the collaborative network and is measured with statements like, "The collaboration hinders your organization from meeting its own organizational mission" (Thomson et al., 2009, p. 40). "Your organization achieves its own goals better working with partner organizations than working alone" (Thomson et al., 2009, p. 40) highlights one statement of the mutuality factor, which reflects how interdependent member organizations are within the collaboration. Finally, norms, which investigate issues relevant to reciprocity and trust, are examined with statements such as, "The people who represent partner organizations in the collaboration are trustworthy" (Thomson et al., 2009, p. 40). The factors and statements are enumerated fully in Appendix C. The authors originally used these five factors and 17 statements as part of a larger survey in an attempt to validate a theoretical model to measure collaboration. Their results indicated these 17 statements were significant measures of collaboration. As such, the principal investigator utilized these 17 statements as a unified index in the current survey.

Results

The current analysis utilizes descriptive statistics due to both low sample size and a lack of existing knowledge about collaboration among THI member organizations.

Following the work of Thomson et al. (2009) index scores were created based on each of the five factors. Minimum, maximum, median, and Cronbach's alpha is also listed for each factor. No individual statement-level data is presented in lieu of focusing on factor-level data.

As noted earlier, the conceptual model for collaboration included five separate factors: governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms. To measure the five factors, the instrument included 17 statements with a 5-item Likert response set ranging from 1 representing "not at all" to 5 representing "to a great extent" for each statement (Thomson et al., 2009). In the present survey, these are questions 13 through 29. After cleaning data, the statements from each factor (see Appendix C for a list of statements and factors) were combined and the researcher computed a median score, which is less sensitive to data outliers (Warner, 2012). The researcher then computed a median score across the five categories to develop an overall collaboration score. The maximum possible score for any category, or overall, was five; the minimum score was zero, indicating the respondent was not sure about any of the questions. The number of valid responses (*n*) for each of the categories and total collaboration index is 27. Table 3.1 gives the minimum, maximum, and average scores for each dimension of collaboration, as well as the number of valid responses. Although Thomson et al. (2009) did not compute Cronbach's alpha for each sub-scale, this author did to test for how much variance each scale was able to capture. Those scores are also in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Collaboration Scores

Questions	Domain	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Median Score	Cronbach's Alpha
13-14	Governance (n=27)	0.00	5.00	4.5	0.820
15-18	Administration (n=27)	0.75	5.00	4	0.864
19-21	Autonomy (n=27)	1.67	5.00	5	0.406
22-26	Mutuality (n=27)	1.00	5.00	4	0.878
27-29	Norms (n=27)	0.33	5.00	5	0.551
13-29	Total Collaboration Index (n=27)	1.26	4.96	4.5	0.905

As Thomson et al. (2009) note, both governance and administration describe structural dimensions of collaboration. Governance specifically addresses the *how* of decision-making, including who makes decisions and what information is considered. Respondents gave a high score related to how their collaborations are governed, based on responses to questions about how seriously partner organizations take the respondent's organization's opinion and how the organizations brainstorm to develop solutions. The sub-scale also has a high α at 0.82.

Administration, while structural, "...moves from governance to action" (Thomson et al., 2009, p. 26). The authors later explain, "...focus is less on institutional supply and more on implementation and management—doing what it takes to achieve a goal" (Thomson et al., 2009, p. 26). While still high, the responses for administration were slightly lower than for governance (4.0 versus 4.5). The questions focused on role clarity, coordination, agreed upon goals, and meetings what is needed for the

collaboration to function well. The sub-scale is also able to account for 86.5 percent of the variance in administration ($\alpha=0.864$).

Autonomy and mutuality describe social capital among partners in a collaboration (Thomson et al., 2009). Autonomy is the difficult balance between an organization's ability to maintain a personal identity and self-interest versus sharing a collective interest with collaborators. Respondents gave their collaborations a perfect score on autonomy, implying they consider their organizations to maintain important organizational identity while also sharing a collective identity. Autonomy had the lowest Cronbach's alpha, with the ability to explain less than 50 percent of variance ($\alpha=0.406$).

Mutuality addresses the interdependency necessary for a collaboration, whether that interdependence is rooted in similar interests or complementary different interest (Thomson et al., 2009). These questions included sharing resources and information, being able to achieve an organization's goals better due to a collaboration, and resolving differences in a way that benefits everyone. While still a good score, mutuality (along with administration) tied for the lowest score among the five domains. Mutuality had the highest Cronbach's alpha of any of the sub-scales at 0.878.

Regarding norms, Thomson et al. (2009) predominantly focused on reciprocity and trust. Reciprocity relates to obligations that are reciprocally shared between organizations; what Thomson et al. (2009) call an "I-will-if-you-will" mentality where organizations may be willing to undergo risks believing that at a different time partner organization would be willing to undertake other risks. The current study presented questions related to how trustworthy partner organizations are, if an organization could count on its partner to fulfill obligations, and how worthwhile it was to stay with the

collaboration. With autonomy, norms had a perfect score of five. The norms sub-scale was only able to explain 55.1 percent ($\alpha=0.551$) of variance.

Overall, it would seem respondents look favorably at their organization's collaborative relationships. In fact, the last question of the collaboration index (question 29) says, "Your organization feels it is worthwhile to stay and work with partner organizations rather than leave the collaboration." 23 out of 28 (82 percent) responded with a score of four or five, meaning their organization thinks the collaboration is worthwhile. For each category it is also important to note there were no more than two respondents (7.4 percent) who chose "I'm not sure or I don't know" as a response, meaning unsure respondents minimally impacted the scores. Respondents report lowest scores (meaning the statements are less true about their organizations) regarding administration and highest scores (meaning the statements were very true about their organizations) with how their organization's autonomy is respected within the collaborative network. It is also important to note that taken together, the individual questions taken together explain 90.5 percent of variance ($\alpha=0.905$). See Appendix C to see the indicators that comprised each of these domains.

Discussion

The research question asked *What are member organizations' experiences with collaboration within THI?* The results again offer important insights, even if they are of an exploratory nature. As stated in the results section, 82 percent of respondents responded with four or five (out of five) in agreement with the statement in the Autonomy factor, "Your organization feels it is worthwhile to stay and work with partner organizations rather than leave the collaboration."

Perhaps the most important finding from the study is that organizations rate their collaborations very highly. Overall, these organizations gave high scores (4 or higher, out of 5) in the areas of governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms. These high scores suggest the organizations represented by the respondents think their collaborative relationships within their HFCCs are positive and beneficial. In fact, the median combined index score for collaboration is 4.5, again indicating overwhelmingly positive views of their collaborations within the HFCC.

While the author did not test for every variable in the literature found to be correlated with effective collaborations, several variables were tested (see Appendix C for full list of domains and factors). Governance findings were related to Provan and Milward's (1995) centralized and integrated networks and Lantz et al.'s (2001) findings about infrastructure and processes for collaboration and decision-making. Administration also shared themes from Provan and Milward's (1995) results concerning processes for collaboration and decision-making. Autonomy is reflected in Arya and Lin's (2007) findings that having more service generalism and less centrality in a focus organization. Mutuality is reflected in Einbender et al.'s (2000) insights on incentive and ability as well as Chen's (2008, 2010) findings on resource sharing and building. Finally, norms are reflected in Einbender et al.'s (2000) assertions about willingness, Chen's (2008, 2010) results concerning trust building, and Lantz et al.'s (2001) conclusion about trust building. Overall, these results are in line with literature suggesting these collaborations should be effective in their goals of decreasing hunger.

In looking at THI's HFCCs specifically, more information is needed about member organizations' experiences with collaboration. This could include a survey of

every organization within the network or at least a sufficiently large, randomized sample of the organization's members. After determining more about member experiences with collaboration, more information is needed about how effective HFCCs are. Measuring effectiveness would also provide foundational information in investigations into antecedents of successful collaboration, which would improve THI's (and other organizations') ability to help organizations have successful collaborations and recruit organizations.

While this information would be helpful for THI in particular, it would also answer previous calls to investigate what makes FPCs effective (Calancie et al., 2018; Scherb, Palmer, Frattaroli, & Pollack, 2012). Following Scherb and colleagues (2012) critique, future researchers should also examine HFCCs' structure, processes, and activities. This would provide crucial insight both to entities considering FPCs and also help existing FPCs function better and have a greater impact.

In addition to looking at HFCCs' structure and processes, the THI model needs comparing against other models (particularly FPC models) to compare benefits, drawbacks, and effectiveness. Knowing this information would help improve existing models and also give more information to those considering starting FPCs in their own communities. Wiggins, Anastasiou, and Cox (2020) utilized a systematic review to ascertain what made multisector public health alliances effective. This type of study of multisectoral food alliances (such as FPCs) would be crucial in determining what makes FPCs effective. Finally, this intersectoral, multidisciplinary model should be compared against other similar models in other topic areas to elucidate common themes, successes, and failures. For example, could the FPC model add to existing intersectoral and

multidisciplinary models on combatting human trafficking – another complex issue involving a range of sectors and actors?

Limitations and Conclusion

The current study, while highlighting important information about the sampled eight HFCCs, also has limitations. First, at the date of the study beginning, there were 12 HFCCs. A previous section explained the reasoning for not including all 12 HFCCs. Second, the organizations represented in the eight HFCCs included were not randomized, so the findings cannot be generalized to other HFCCs or FPCs either inside or outside the THI network.

Third, the survey response rate is less than 20 percent and no data is available on individuals who chose not to respond to the survey. It is possible those who responded to the survey are somehow categorially different from those who did not respond. For example: perhaps only the most involved organizations had someone fill out the survey. This type of categorical difference would misrepresent the data. Fourth, the low response rate also precluded any sort of regression analysis, meaning the study is unable to examine causality between variables.

FPCs research is still developing and the existing literature base is somewhat small given the rampant growth in creating and developing FPCs (Bassarab et al., 2019). Studies that add to the knowledge base about FPCs assists decision-makers in thinking about FPCs in their areas. Exploratory studies like the current one offer a glimpse into a one model of FPC and start a trail for future studies to follow.

The current study also addresses the issue raised by Scherb and colleagues (2012) that much of the published research about FPCs is written by a few experts and derived

from a few FPC sites. This study did not include any of Dahlberg's (1994) six original locations, which have also been utilized in other studies (such as Borron, 2003). In fact, very few existing studies report on this particular group of FPCs.

Lastly, the present research offers valuable insights about organizations' experiences with collaboration inside their FPCs. Existing literature highlights several factors leading to effective collaboration, such as willingness, trust building, lack of resource scarcity, and service variety (Chen, 2008; Chen, 2010; Einbender et al., 2000; Provan & Milward, 1995; Thomson, 2001). Learning more about these organizations' experiences begins to provide groundwork for future studies to examine how these experiences correlate with previous research about effectiveness.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Member Perceptions of Collaboration

Abstract

Although the number of food planning councils (FPCs) has grown vastly in the last 20 years, very little research exists about them. What research does exist comes from a small number of experts and a few FPCs – even fewer studies examine the Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs). The current study is a phenomenological inquiry of members' experiences of collaboration within THI. Participants are 10 informants representing organizations who participated in one of THI's regional HFCCs. The interview data generated six major themes: collaboration is difficult, valuable, expands and improves services, requires intentionality, requires diversity united towards a common goal, and lessons learned from HFCC participants. The value in the form of expanded and improved services shows promise in addressing gaps related to a lack of coordinated local, regional and national food policies. The diversity that participants noted as a requisite for healthy collaboration brings unique perspectives both to see challenges and to develop solutions for them.

Keywords: food policy council, interorganizational collaboration, Texas Hunger Initiative, Hunger Free Community Coalition

Chapter Four: Member Perceptions of Collaboration

From 2016 to 2018, on average, over 14.9 million households (11.7 percent) in the United States experienced low or very low food security (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, & Singh, 2019). Texas alone counted for 1.45 million households (14 percent of the state's population and nearly 10 percent of all food insecure people in the United States). The United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Economic Research Service (ERS) (2016), who is responsible for measuring food security in the United States, defines low food security as, "...Reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet. Little or no indication of reduced food intake," and very low food security as, "...Reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake" (Food Insecurity section).

Harper, Shattuck, Holt-Giménez, Alkon, & Lambrick, (2009) define food policy as "...any policy that addresses, shapes or regulates the food system" (p. 9). In simple terms, food policy developers make both short and long-term goals aimed at solving issues relevant to food policy. As early as 1987, Haughton highlighted the United States' lack of a united, singular food policy; in its stead is a complex web of policies run by different departments and impacting different areas of the food system. Because the policies are not integrated as parts of one singular, united policy, they can be contradictory and work in opposition with one another instead of congruously.

Because there is no united federal policy and federal-level support for local or state needs is changing despite increased needs, many local governments and vested groups have realized the need for local or regional food policies (Clancy, Hammer, Lippoldt, Hinrichs, & Lyson, 2008; Haughton, 1987). Community food security is

concerned with ensuring the entire *community* has access to food and it incorporates local systems to increase food security (Hamm & Bellows, 2003). One specific model that brings community stakeholders together to address community food security and is highly flexible to different communities and a variety of food security-related issues is the food policy council (FPC), also known as food policy network, food systems councils, food advisory council, food alliances, or food policy coalitions (Clancy et al., 2008; England, 2019). FPCs work at city, county, or state levels to engage the entire food system to increase food security (Clancy et al., 2008; Harper et al., 2009). They are multi-sectoral, often include representatives from food industries, business, non-profits, and business sectors, and attempt to develop solutions in a collaborative or coordinated effort. Their activities can range from information-gathering and public education to providing resources and policy recommendations. In a seminal work about some of the first FPCs, Dahlberg (1994) noted the most successful FPCs examined the entire food system, instead of concerning themselves only with anti-hunger efforts.

Although the number of FPCs has increased from roughly 25 in 2000 to 341 in 2017, very little research exists on the role of FPCs in the food policy system and what makes FPCs effective (Bassarab, Santo, & Palmer, 2019; Calancie et al., 2018; Scherb, Palmer, Frattaroli, & Pollack, 2012). Most of the literature on FPCs is based on a few FPCs and a paucity of experts in food policy (Scherb et al., 2012). Scherb et al. (2012) also highlights the need for exploration on FPCs' structure, processes, and activities. Schiff (2007) calls for more research on organizational structure that specifically highlights organizational theories relevant to multi-sectoral collaborations like FPCs. Other researchers critique the lack of evidence about FPCs' effectiveness (see, for

example, Scherb et al., 2012; and Webb, Hawe, & Noort 2001), while some have noted the unique challenges researchers face in measuring FPC effectiveness. These include belonging to complex systems, the length of time it takes to see change, internal complications, being affected by other parts of the system, and the number of actors in the system (Calancie et al., 2018; Hammond & Dube, 2012; Harper et al., 2009; Lich, Ginexi, Osgood & Mabry, 2013; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000; Scherb et al., 2012; Snowden & Boone, 2007).

This article features phenomenological data gathered from organizations participating in one of the Texas Hunger Initiative's (THI's) regional Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs), which is THI's name for an FPC. The phenomenology seeks to answer the question *What have been member organizations' experiences with collaboration in the Texas Hunger Initiative?* The article begins with an overview of collaboration literature, followed by an explanation of the study's context and methodology, and concludes with a discussion of the major themes and directions for future research.

Literature Review

Describing Collaboration

Definitions and conceptualization. Research on nonprofit collaborations began in the 1970s and intensified in the 1990s due to increasing privatization among social service sectors (Gazley, 2017; Park & Lim, 2018). Borgatti and Foster (2003) assert this drive came from a shift in research from individual explanations of phenomena towards more relational and network perspectives across several fields. This shift happened in a

variety of disciplines and provided fertile ground for collaboration research Gazley (2017).

Sonnenwald (2007) notes the breadth of definitions, synonymous terms, and subject areas related to scientific collaboration (incorporating both natural and social sciences). She points out the sheer volume of information and interchangeable terms makes it difficult for researchers attempting to study this phenomenon to even define search parameters. Because of this difficulty, they are often unaware of relevant research in other disciplines and have difficulty synthesizing results across methodological types. Williams (2015) again points out that one of the major problems in collaboration research is the lack of a consistent definition or concept of collaboration across literature, which makes it difficult to develop any sort of aggregate understanding of collaboration. This difficulty is compounded even more by the breadth of disciplines interested in studying how organizations work together.

After reviewing several definitions of collaboration, Wood and Gray (1991) develop the following definition to encompass the various parts they found salient: “Collaboration occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain” (p. 146). Although Provan and Kenis (2008) are defining *networks*, their definition and conceptualization aligns closely with Wood and Gray’s (1991). Networks are “...groups of three or more legally autonomous organizations that work together to achieve not only their own goals but also a collective goal” (Provan & Kenis, 2008, p. 231). Both of these definitions focus on the ideas of autonomy and working together towards a shared goal. Bedwell et al. (2012) attempt to

conceptualize collaboration across 10 disciplines, including social sciences, education, natural sciences, and business. Their definition of collaboration, "...an evolving process whereby two or more social entities actively and reciprocally engage in joint activities aimed at achieving at least one shared goal" (Bedwell et al., 2012, p. 130) aligns with Wood and Gray's (1991) and Provan and Kenis's (2008) emphasis on multiple organizations, shared activities, and a shared goal or issue.

Isett, Mergel, LeRoux, Mischen, and Rethemeyer (2011) define collaborative networks in a way that focuses highly on organizations providing services. They define collaborative networks as:

...collections of government agencies, nonprofits, and for-profits that work together to provide a public good, service, or "value" when a single public agency is unable to create the good or service on its own and/or the private sector is unable or unwilling to provide the goods or services in the desired quantities.
(p. i158).

It is also important to note Isett et al. (2011) specifically define collaborative networks as forming when single public agencies and/or the private sector are unable to meet the need or demand on their own. This is important because it implies collaboration is not a first choice; it is a choice used only when other options are unavailable. Contrast this definition with Wood and Gray (1991), Provan and Kenis (2008), and Bedwell et al. (2012), none of whom imply in any way that collaboration is a less desirable mode of operating. In fact, the other definitions highlight working on a *shared* goal or issue *together*. Wood and Gray (1991) and Provan and Kenis (2008) highlight organizations' autonomy. Bedwell et al. (2012) included reciprocity, active engagement and joint

activities, which points to an ongoing choice and likely an ongoing perceived benefit from the collaboration.

Types of collaboration research. Just as authors define and conceptualize collaboration in a plethora of ways, researchers examine collaboration from a wide variety of perspectives. Stokols (2006) and Sonnenwald (2007) point to literature examining collaborations based on discipline/analytic scope, geography (e.g. remote, international, or collocated), focus (e.g. organizational or community). Moving from categories, Galaskiewicz and Wasserman (1994), perhaps most simply, identify micro level network research and macro level network research. In a similarly binary fashion, Kilduff and Tsai (2003) differentiate between egocentric networks that focus on individual organizations or people and whole networks that examine the nodes and ties of an entire network. Provan, Fish, and Sydow (2007) also discuss only two perspectives: individuals or individual organization level (actor level) and network level. Provan et al. (2007), interestingly, do make the point that studying whole networks may, in fact, lead to more understanding about individuals within the network as well as the whole network itself.

Provan and Milward (2001) move beyond binary constructs and propose three separate levels necessary in network analysis: individual/participant, network, and community. In a similar way, Brass, Galaskiewicz, and Tsai (2004) study networks along with their antecedents, consequences, and benefits, at the interorganizational, interunit, and interpersonal levels. While these levels are not the same as Provan and Milward (2001), both recognize the complexity of relationships and the necessity of examining the ties from different leveled perspectives. Park and Lim (2018) take this

belief a step further and assert networks are both multi-level and multi-dimensional, meaning there are both horizontal and hierarchical relationships involved. A classic example of this would be government at local, state, and federal levels, where each level interacts both with itself and with levels above and below it. Park and Lim (2018) argue many networks function similarly, especially if they involve government partners. While Isett et al. (2011) do not list specific categories of network research, they affirm the benefits of each level of analysis and implore researchers to be clear about what perspective they are using.

Collaboration Experiences

Collaboration benefits. Provan et al. (2007) find most research involving networks, which, again, are closely linked to collaborations, demonstrates that networks improve organizational effectiveness. They note that in some cases research identifies negative outcomes on the entire system or competition instead of collaboration. The authors cite research stating networks are affected by both their internal substructures and external legitimacy; only when these two are healthy can the entire network be healthy. Alter and Hage (1993) assert collaboration allows for greater coordination, flexibility, adaptability, and innovation. Hardy, Phillips, and Lawrence (2003) review research from strategy, learning, and network and interorganizational politics domains demonstrating the breadth and depth of benefits of collaboration. These benefits include gaining resources, transferring knowledge, creating knowledge, producing solutions, and achieving better positions within their field or domain. In a case study of one organization and its collaborative activities over a four-year period, the authors find embeddedness and involvement to be most salient in increasing a collaboration's ability

to achieve these benefits. While Jang and Feiock (2007) agree and cite much literature on the benefits of collaboration, they caution that although collaboration's benefits are collective to the entire collaboration, the costs are often shouldered by one or few individual organizations.

Borgatti and Foster (2003) create a two-by-two table to categorize research on the consequences of networks. One axis is concerned with explanatory goals (performance versus homogeneity) and the other deals with explanatory mechanisms (structuralist versus connectionist). The resulting four categories are structural capital, social access to resources, environmental shaping, and contagion. Structural capital studies at the network level demonstrate how the collaborative group's performance is tied to the architecture of the group. Borgatti and Foster (2003) assert this is the oldest and most common type of network study. While Borgatti and Foster (2003) state most studies relating to resource access are at the individual level, other studies point to the benefits of organizations in obtaining access to resources due to joining networks (Brass et al., 2004; Hardy et al., 2003; Lawson, 2004). Convergence studies how separate entities may develop common ideas and practices through similar network environments, even if they are not directly tied to each other (Borgatti & Foster, 2003). Contagion takes convergence a step further and asserts repeated interactions lead to sharing attributes, practices, or objects.

Effective collaboration. Butterfoss, Goodman, and Wandersman (1993) study coalitions, which are closely related to collaborations as the authors defined them, and find the following to predict successful coalitions: higher formalization of rules, roles, and procedures; strong and supportive leadership; pooling of diverse and valuable

member characteristics with high member participation; member satisfaction and commitment; member skills and training; positive organizational climate; and strong links to external resources. Butterfoss et al. (1993) also point to the importance of accomplishing success quickly to build support and increase member motivation.

Despite its breadth, the literature points to a common variety of factors related to individuals, organizations, and intersectoral collaborations that lead to motivation to collaborate as well as to successful collaborations. Individual motivations may include personal traits, experiences both in and out of collaboration, ideology, and prospect of greater efficiency or reducing environmental concerns. These coalesce with Butterfoss et al.'s (1993) findings regarding both member and leader traits. Effective collaborations come from individuals willing to risk, be flexible, and form deep relationships centered around common goals. Organizationally, leaders are often motivated by capacity. Organizational size is also more salient than organizational age. To quote Gazley (2017), "Success depends on resources, patience, and hard work."

Sonnenwald (2007) looks at scientific collaborations, both in natural and social sciences. Using a four-stage model of scientific collaboration, Sonnenwald (2007) notes factors that are particularly salient at each stage. The stages, in order from emergence to conclusion, are foundation, formulation, sustainment, and conclusion. The foundation stage is particularly influenced by scientific, political, socio-economic, resource accessibility, and social network and individual factors. At the formulation stage, the following are important: clearly defined research vision, goals, and tasks; strong leadership and organizational structure; adequate technology for both information and communication; and clarity about intellectual property and other legal issues. In the

sustainment stage, responding to emergent challenges, learning, and communication all affect a collaboration's effectiveness. Finally, a clear (and achieved) definition of success and effective dissemination of results mark the factors necessary to the conclusion stage.

While many of these factors show a bent towards more natural sciences, they offer important insights to social service organization collaboration in thinking through the different challenges at each stage and how to resolve these challenges for successful collaborations. For example, at the foundation stage, it is important for social service organizations to think about their environmental and internal context. Moving into the formulation stage, they need to ensure a clear vision with adequate structures to make the vision happen. Sustainment is about how the collaboration responds to challenges while learning from and communicating with each other. In the final stage, conclusion, it is important for collaborations to make sure they achieve their definition of success and disseminate results as needed and applicable.

Texas Hunger Initiative

Interviewees from the present study are members of THI, and all but two are members of one of THI's Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs). According to its director, Jeremy Everett, "THI is a collaborative, capacity-building project that develops and implements strategies to end hunger through research, policy, and community engagement" (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015). THI accomplishes this in several ways, including building community capacity through collaboration, researching best practices to improve access and availability of local resources, and advocacy for policies affecting food insecurity as well as for individuals and families experiencing food insecurity. One of THI's signature programs is the Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs), which

are collaborative groups from a diverse background of settings in one geographic location brought together to end food insecurity in their communities. THI works to start, train, and facilitate these groups as well as giving them access to research and expertise (THI, n.d.b.). The headquarters for THI are located at Baylor University and includes eight regional offices across Texas (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015; THI, n.d.a.; THI, n.d.c.). Although primarily focused on food insecurity in Texas, THI's goal includes creating an evidence-based model other states and groups can use to fight hunger (THI, n.d.a.).

THI's model involves multiple tiers of government and includes individuals and organizations from business, government, nonprofit, and faith sectors (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015; THI, n.d.a.). THI utilizes this model based on three main reasons for continued child food insecurity (though THI's efforts include food security across the lifespan) (Singletary, Everett, & Nolen, 2012). The first problem was a lack of a framework for coordinating the efforts of the private and public sector in regard to food insecurity (Singletary et al., 2012). The second difficulty was an absence of a plan large enough to address the scale of the problem. The third issue was a deficiency in coordination or collaboration among the thousands of groups already working to ameliorate food insecurity (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015; Singletary et al., 2012).

THI functions on the basis of three assumptions (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015). First, cross-sectoral collaboration is the only way to address the complexity of hunger. Second, both public and private resources are needed to increase access to federal nutrition programs, which are also only one part of the overall solution

necessary to combat hunger. Third, evidence-based solutions to childhood hunger that are also practically sound come from research and evaluation of existing knowledge and practices.

Utilizing these assumptions, THI put together a toolbox of strategies to address the issues contributing to food insecurity. They work on all levels of government, from local to federal, to change policies and build collaborative capacity with faith-based and private organizations (*Past, present, and future of SNAP*, 2015; Hall, 2012; Singletary et al., 2012). THI helps local communities organize themselves and develop structures to clarify roles and goals relating to food insecurity. Since they assist HFCCs across the state of Texas, THI is able to gather data and research about evidence-based practices from a variety of contexts that benefit other localities. Beyond giving practical tools to communities and providing research and evaluation, THI advocates with organizations and government entities both for program and policy changes. THI's model brings multiple tiers (local to federal) and multiple sectors together to fight food insecurity at its source and from several angles.

The Current Study

As stated before, the purpose of this article is to highlight the phenomenon of member organizations' experiences with collaboration in the Texas Hunger Initiative. To better understand this phenomenon, two supplemental research questions help to inform the primary research question:

Primary Research Question: *What have been member organizations' experiences with collaboration in the Texas Hunger Initiative?*

a. Supplemental Question 1: *What have been their experiences?*

b. Supplemental Question 2: *What are their lessons learned?*

These questions are rooted in the extant literature available about organizations' experiences with collaboration, which include benefits and factors leading to effective collaborations.

Methodology

Research Design

Since the research question asks about member organizations' *experiences*, phenomenology is the most appropriate choice (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenology seeks to utilize individuals' collective experiences to develop a universal description of some phenomenon or object. The researcher must first interview several people who have directly experienced the same phenomenon and then develop a cumulative description that captures common themes. For this study, the phenomenon of interest is experiences with collaboration in THI's HFCCs. Phenomenology guided the design as well as data collection and design. Questions were based on previous research concerning collaboration effectiveness and benefits of collaboration. During data collection, one question was added based on a regional director's request, which aligned with the purposes of the study. These questions, in alignment with phenomenology, asked about both the *what* and the *how* of collaboration within THI's HFCCs.

Data Collection

The researcher first received Baylor Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval in July 2016 (letter available in Appendix D) and approval for the revised project in June 2017 (letter also available in Appendix D). In August 2016, a research project manager for THI sent emails to each of the eight regional directors introducing the project and

asking them to please contact the principal investigator/author with names of organizational representatives they would recommend for the study. The author contacted those suggested by regional directors with information about the study. If potential interviewees asked for more information or indicated willingness to be interviewed, the author sent both the interview guide (discussed below and available in Appendix E) and informed consent. From this initial round of emails and follow-ups, the author was able to interview two individuals from two organizations. Interviews took place over the phone via secure conference calling software, allowing both interviewer (author) and subject to be in places that felt comfortable. In August 2017, the author again reached out to regional directors for potential interview subjects. and gained eight additional interviews, again, via conference calling. Interviews were completed by March 2018.

Sample/Units of Analysis

The sample for this study included 10 informants from 10 separate organizations within four regional HFCCs. It was a convenience sample, with snowball sampling procedures utilized as regional directors were asked to identify potential subjects and interviewees were asked about others who would be beneficial for the author to contact. The organizations represented included two religious institutions, one governmental entity, one coalition, one education institution, and five non-profit organizations. Two of the participants were male and eight were female. The researcher did not ask further demographic questions about the individuals or organizations they represented.

Interview Guide

In keeping with phenomenological research methods, the author developed an interview guide (Appendix E). These questions focused on how the participants experienced collaboration within the Texas Hunger Initiative, what effects the experience had, how they collaborated, and lessons learned about collaboration. Creswell (2007) refers to these questions as the *what* and *how* of the phenomenon being studied, which is organizational collaboration in the current study.

While the author did utilize an interview guide, questions were not asked verbatim in every interview. The author utilized the interview context and flow to make determinations about order of questions and use of follow-up questions, in accordance with Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interviewing model. The author asked other researchers to look at the interview guide prior to using it with subjects to examine it for clarity, conciseness, and the ability to capture desired phenomena.

Data Analysis

Creswell (2007) outlines a six-step method, based on the work of Stevick, Colaizzi, and Keen (as cited in Moustakas, 1994). First, the author must set aside personal experiences with the phenomenon by describing the author's own experiences. Second, the author develops a list of important or significant statements that do not compete with or overlap one another, known as horizontalization. Third, these statements are grouped together into meaning units or themes. Fourth, the author writes the textural description, including quotes and examples, which describes the *what* of the phenomenon the interviewees experienced. Fifth, the author focuses on the *how*, which is the structural description. This includes the setting and context for the phenomenon of

interest. Sixth, the author writes a composite description which includes both the structural and textural descriptions. This captures the *essence* of the phenomenon, combining the *what* with the *how*. The present study followed this six-step process with some added preparation work.

After initial interviews, the author listened to each interview again before sending the interviews to a transcriptionist. This assisted both with the author gaining familiarity with the recording. After receiving the transcribed interviews, the author began a process of constant comparison of the data, reading each interview, making notes, highlighting important themes, looking for similarities and differences, and summarizing major themes, which provided some basis for the later, more formal steps of open coding and horizontalization. All of these initial steps provided foundation for later utilizing Creswell's (2007) six-step method of phenomenological data analysis. Following this initial set up, the author utilized open coding. This serves to highlight major categories or themes of data within transcripts (Creswell, 2007). The researcher predominantly used descriptive codes while also capturing quotes to be used at later stages of data analysis. After reviewing codes and quotes, the author noted significant themes. The author utilized these themes in developing the textural and structural descriptions, which were later combined for the composite description.

Results

The data gathered from the 10 participants yielded six major themes, as well as informing a discussion of how to define collaboration. The major themes are: collaboration is difficult, collaboration is valuable, collaboration expands and improves

services, collaboration requires intentionality, collaboration requires diversity united towards a common goal, and lessons learned from HFCC participants.

Defining Collaboration

To set the stage for interviewees to describe their phenomena of experiences with collaboration, the interviewer first asked eight participants to define collaboration. The interviewer gave no parameters or suggestions – only asked how the participant would define collaboration. Seven out of eight participants mentioned “coming together” (5, 6), “working together” (8), or “common goal” (3, 7, 8, 9, 10). This implies a coalescing, where organizations or individuals are moving in the same direction towards an agreed upon destination. Finally, four participants mentioned having a stronger, better, or more successful outcome working together than an individual or organizational could without collaboration. It is important to note the participants were not merely commenting on the assets collaboration brings; they included its value as part of the definition of collaboration.

Collaboration Is Difficult

Every participant told a story of a time when their collaborative relationships encountered a difficulty, though not all were directly related to their collaboration with THI. Among these difficulties were inefficiency, lack of preexisting relationships, practical issues in running the collaboration, competitiveness, problems coming together to brainstorm, and funding. One participant discussed how collaboration naturally takes longer because more people are involved in the decisions:

And another thing, I think it's important, is that collaboration takes time and it's not always the most efficient way like with decisions and that kind of thing. I

think sometimes I've worked with people that say, 'It's taking so long for us to implement this plan or to make changes' because you're trying to do it in a collaborative way. Of course, if one person works on a thing, everything goes faster than working with three or four. So be okay with the fact that it's going to move slower than an individual is going to move, and it takes time. I do think the investment is worth it, but that's probably one of the drawbacks in collaboration is the time it takes. (1)

In a similar vein, two participants noted it is hard when organizations do not have pre-existing relationships. One participant observed:

It's not a good idea in collaboration to jump off into the middle of a collaboration with someone if it's a significant collaboration. Smaller ones are okay, but if it's a significant collaboration, you need to have some previous relationship and trust to be able to do that because it's not easy to get collaborations off the ground... You are taking two different organizations, sometime three, and you're melding them together with different cultures, different missions - there may be some alignment in places, but there are aspects of each agency that may or may not meld. So, the big issue is that you are able to communicate effectively... (4).

Another participant brought up practical issues in the collaboration due to a lack of existing relationship between the organizations.

...it was so green between the organizations. We never did a team building exercise, per se, between the two organizations, so I think that really affected us and I think there were already some dynamics going into this project that affected the working relationships. Working through these coalitions and sharing roles

between the two organizations, in terms of getting the coalition off the ground, who are we going to invite, and who's going to be facilitating the meetings beforehand – all of that wasn't very clear sometimes. (2)

Aside from requiring more time and a lack of knowing each other, participants also pointed out difficulties related to lack of openness in collaboration, difficulty in implementing collaborative ideas, competition for funding, and getting the work done.

Participant 8 noted:

People in [my] community are very competitive... everyone will sit at the table to be seen, but they hold their information very close to their chest. They're very careful in what they share and in working together. I think everyone kind of wants to do it on their own and get the big win on their own... Collaboration is hard in actual action. Collaboration's all good, fine and well when you're just sitting around a table and doing stuff, but I see a huge barrier in making those conversations and discussions that are happening in our collaborative efforts sitting at a table together or going to lunch together to actually transition into having good outcomes. (8)

Another participant agreed that getting work done can be a problem in collaborative relationships, though the participant experiences this difficulty in a different way from Participant 8. "Once you've identified what you want to do and you have a specific ask, people in the community are generous and step up. They're not so good at just coming together and trying to brainstorm, that kind of stuff" (10). Whereas Participant 8 expresses struggles both with others being open and sharing in collaboration and with collaborators following through with decisions made during table talks; Participant 10

highlights hardship in having people conceptualize ideas about collaborative activities, even among partners who are generous and willing to collaborate.

Another participant described a difficulty related to funding, similar to Participant 8's comments about competition. Participant 6 recognized:

A lot of times funding is an issue... A lot of times people are very protective of the area that they serve. I know a nonprofit and even though we do work together in [our city], it's a small community. We are all fighting for those business partners that send funding and there are only a few foundations here in town, so we're all gathering the same funding dollars and things, so there is a little bit of competition even though we are all working together for the greater good... (6).

Collaboration Is Valuable

All ten respondents recognized collaboration as valuable. One respondent chose a very intimate relationship (marriage) as a metaphor for collaboration, highlighting both the intense struggles as well as the intense benefits that come out of both relationships.

I am very pro-collaboration because even though they've been difficult, they have helped us achieve our mission. They've made us better as an organization – stronger, richer, more informed... it's kind of like being in a rocky marriage – you stay in it and you get to the other side and you're like, “Boy, I'm glad we didn't give up. We could have but look where we are now.” I think collaboration is a lot like that, and because of that we've been able to stick with some really tough, very intensive collaborations and we're on the other side saying, “This is

phenomenal.” Was it painful? Oh, yes! But it achieved, and is achieving, the goal that we had when we started out and, in many cases, even more. (4)

This respondent summed up the tension between the difficulty and value of collaboration well.

One of the benefits participants listed was an increase in the quality of relationships and communication among organizations within a community. One participant observed:

...I do believe that collaborations made a difference in the quality of the relationships between individuals and individual organizations. I think that for me, personally, I’ve met many people and I feel totally comfortable picking up the phone and saying, “Hey, I’ve got this question” or “I’ve got this concern and I know you’re an expert and so give me your feedback.” So, I think the coalition has improved the relationship between individuals and the organizations that they represent. (1)

While the participant directly highlighted the improved quality of relationships, she also indirectly credited the collaboration with improving her ability to perform her job by way of having a network of other service providers and experts she can call on to ask questions and solicit feedback.

While Participant 1 was more indirect about crediting collaboration with improving her ability to do her job, other participants, such as Participant 3, directly noted that collaboration made them better at their jobs:

I think I am better [at my job] because of these collaborations, because I know more, and I know more people. Because of these collaborations, I know a lot

more about what's going on in the city than an average worker who is not out there in a collaborative mode in the city. I also think it has given our association name recognition in the city... all of a sudden, they know about an organization maybe they have never heard of before. All of these groups that we're working with, you know when I say my name and who I'm with, at first they ask, "Who are you?". I'm able to tell them and then we get invited to be at the table on a lot of things that we would have never been invited to before. (3)

Others agreed that collaboration is essential to their organization. In fact, some respondents implied or stated outright that they would have no organization without collaboration. One participant observed, "All of our programs have some significant collaboration, or we wouldn't be here" (4). Another participant stated:

Our organization is built on collaboration. We work with 150 different churches and social service agencies in a twenty-county area. If we weren't collaborating with them, we couldn't get our food out. Our partners are our eyes, ears, hands, and hearts that are out in these communities. Where it's in both our interests to work together to focus on issues of food insecurity, we do. (9)

While these two participants note the centrality of collaboration in providing services, another participant highlights other benefits collaboration brings, which also helps her organization stay operational. "...because of the collaboration, and because of the community support, it helps put money in our budget, develop our program and sustain it" (7). She later went on to say, "I wouldn't work without it [collaboration]" (7).

Whether or not organizations would survive without collaboration, it certainly has expanded their reach and been advantageous to the organizations that are collaborating.

As a final observation on how collaboration brings value to organizations and those who work for them, one respondent noted how collaboration changed his and his church's mindset. He acknowledged, "[Collaboration] has changed our mindset of our community, and it's helped us to realize that church doesn't happen within the walls of the sanctuary; church for [us] is outside the walls of what goes on at [our address]" (5). By collaborating with social service organizations, this local church staff member (and, later, his church) changed his definition of what church was. In changing their definition of church, collaboration also expanded this church's reach and impact by encouraging members to *reach out* to their community.

Collaboration Expands and Improves Services

One particular value of collaboration that all 10 participants mentioned was how collaboration helps expand or improve services. One participant tells of how her organization would have had difficulty even starting some projects without collaboration:

I think it definitely helped to expand our reach and impact. Some of these projects we were able to do with these coalitions were because we partnered with community-based organizations. [We] wouldn't have been able, even though some of it came to us with our grant funding, to get many of those projects off the ground because they really required collaboration among a broader network of stakeholders. That really did help expand those relationships to leverage the funding that we had to do those projects. (2)

Another respondent emphasizes how coming together means expanding reach and impact.

We are always stronger together, and there are always perspectives or ideas you don't even think about until you talk to somebody else. You also learn things to do or things not to do; it's just we're better together. I don't know how else to say that. A hungry child speaks all of our hearts. We all want to do something, but we can only do what we can do by ourselves. When you come together, it's just better and there are more resources, knowledge, and a better chance of impacting whoever you're serving in your service area. (6)

This participant went on to say how even just asking questions sometimes gets a conversation started that ends up leading to a fruitful collaboration. Another participant succinctly observed, "[Collaborations] help us reach more people and be more efficient" (7).

In addition to expanding programs, several participants highlighted how collaboration made existing services and efforts more effective. "I have zero doubts that collaborations are the way to go...Because as we all know, more people doing something are going to be more effective. So, I'm all for collaborations. I believe collaborations are very effective" (5). Another participant states, "You can't quantify your work with a time in a collaboration. However, one reason I'm so grateful for [a specific] partnership is because my work is so much better and I'm so much more effective. I think our funders are happier because our reach goes so much further because of our collaborative partners" (8).

Collaboration Requires Intentionality

Nine out of ten respondents mentioned that successful collaborations require intentionality. One of the most common responses regarding intentionality was being

clear about the mission and goal of the organizations and the collaboration from the beginning. One participant observed:

We are very clear on what we can and cannot do, to the best of our ability. Since then, misunderstandings don't happen very often... We choose our collaborative relationships based on what our needs and goals are. If they have very similar goals, needs, aspirations, and plans as we have, then it's going to make a good collaboration. (7).

Another participant agreed and prioritized being able to say no to good ideas that are not within an organization's mission. "I'm an equal opportunity collaborator. If people align with our interest, and we can collaborate, we'll do that. Sometimes people have ideas about starting a furniture bank. That's an interesting idea, but it's not in my mission or scope" (9).

Another respondent emphasized the importance of being clear about the collaboration's goal, not just individual organizations' goals:

I think that it's important to be really clear about what you're trying to accomplish and how you're trying to go about it. That way you can explain it to people and then people who are interested and like-minded, they step up and help you. (10)

A different participant agreed with the importance of clarity in the collaboration's mission.

Our [religious organization] collaborating with [our HFCC] ... we don't all think the same way, but we have one common goal. I may not think like you do, but I care about the same thing you care about. We care about hunger - that brings a lot of different people to the table. (3)

This participant went on to point out the perils that can happen when a collaboration starts to focus on issues outside of that mission, especially where different social or religious norms and ideas are present:

The minute a group starts having a theological argument, it's going to fall apart.

Then we are not going to be able to help the gay fifteen-year-old quit couch surfing, we're not going to help that guy because we started arguing theology.

Not that there's not a place for theological arguments, but this wasn't it. (3)

She emphasized the importance of concentrating on the work the organizations have already *united* on, rather than taking on social, political, or religious issues that are tangential to the collaboration's purpose.

Collaboration Requires Diversity United Toward A Common Goal

Each participant mentioned diversity among those they collaborated with. Although accompanied by tensions, diversity also brings a breadth of perspective about a common goal. One participant stated:

I think even though there will always be issues when you're dealing with two organizations that are very different and have different ways of working, you owe it to the community you're working with to overcome those challenges. The coalition we've been working with in reaching out to these other local, grassroots organizations, they've been able to accomplish some really good things and do a service for the community. There's a lot of value in bringing together those different, diverse thoughts and stakeholders and leveraging collective resources.

There's a lot of power in that, a lot of potential for change. (2)

Another participant recognizes how diversity, with the help of collaboration, can result in increased coordination of services within communities.

Since we do a wide variety of issues, most of the people we collaborate have something to do with what we are working on. We collaborate with several other education-based organizations and we collaborate with several other human trafficking organizations. I would say that's a great example of collaboration. We don't do direct services. We work with a lot with human trafficking organizations to help make their job more effective. Sometimes we're working with police officers and the police department will say, "We can't arrest this person for trafficking because of this, this, and this. The law has to be changed for us to be effective at our job." So, we go and try to get a policy passed. Many of the organizations that we work with are either other advocacy organizations or they are completely grassroots organizations that need our help around the research... We don't want people doing the exact same thing as us because then we're not really expanding our outreach. (8)

Another participant notes that diversity also potentially fosters greater change. "There's a lot of value in bringing together those different, diverse thoughts and stakeholders and leveraging collective resources. There's a lot of power in that, a lot of potential for change" (2).

One participant pointed to the natural tendency of finding groups who have a similar interest, yet collaboration can also highlight potentially beneficial relationships with organizations a group may not have thought about collaborating with previously.

I think you gravitate to people who have an interest in things you're interested in. I think that's human nature. However, I've been saying that being a part of the Texas Hunger Initiative has helped us identify people in other parts of our service area, where we have mutual interests. We built some new programs with them, and that's been good. We also work with organizations that are social service organizations, but not necessarily in the hunger arena. Maybe not as close to our work, but there's always best practices that we can work with each other, and challenges. (9)

In collaborating around issues that are central to hunger, this participant found new avenues of partnership that expanded services and also informed how his organization operates.

Lessons Learned by HFCC Participants

Towards the end of each interview, the researcher asked the subjects what they wished their organizations had known at the beginning of their collaborative relationships or what they would tell an individual or organization just starting to collaborate. The answers fell into two broad categories: things internal to individual organizations and suggestions for the collaboration.

Two internal lessons were that the organization needs to “do your homework first” (10), that is, think about who the key players are around the topic and then start in smaller collaborations. Another respondent mentioned the importance of a mindset shift in organizational management towards sharing credit for projects.

I also think, as much as I wish it wasn't true, I really think collaboration has a lot to do with individuals. I mean everything from leaders who are open and not

territorial and board members who are not pushing their leaders to take credit for everything that happens like “Oh so you brought two new programs” instead of having a collaborative mindset where it’s not about your agency having new programs, it’s about how we’ve improved our community. I think a lot of collaboration is successful because of the individuals that are involved and the individual characteristics of those people. (1)

One participant also expressed the importance of avoiding “false expectations” (9) by being clear and transparent with collaborators.

As far as the collaboration as a whole, respondents again brought up the importance of being clear about the mission and goal from the beginning. Several also pointed out the importance of having a similar interest and goal in general (such as ending childhood hunger), not just signing on for a collaboration. Just as some implored organizations to be intentional about forming collaborations, others encouraged collaboration partners to be intentional about who they invite after the collaboration has been launched. A few participants also pointed to the importance of having and consistent communication in multiple ways among all partners, including meetings, to make sure everyone is on the same page and headed toward the same goal.

Discussion

Data from the 10 participants yielded six themes, as well as common threads in defining collaboration. The six themes are: collaboration is difficult, collaboration is valuable, collaboration expands and improves services, collaboration requires intentionality, collaboration requires diversity united towards a common goal, and lessons learned from HFCC participants. While the participants offer several benefits to

collaboration, they also listed some clear difficulties, including the extra time and effort needed. Interestingly, only two participants mentioned that collaboration can be difficult when the same organizations an agency might seek out to collaborate with are those it might compete with for things like funding or volunteers. However, one participant noted collaborative activities can be difficult for individual organizations to count when reporting to funders, especially when both the funds and the activities are shared. These types of concerns highlight the issues that are both micro to an organization and macro to how service organizations are funded. Jang and Feiock (2007) succinctly noted that while the benefits of collaboration are often collective, the costs and burdens are generally individual to single organizations. Building on others' findings that collaboration can come with a cost, the authors note that organizations with private funders are less likely to collaborate than those with government streams of funding; organizations with private funders are less likely to need to stretch limited funds or have a mandate to collaborate from the private funding agency.

In highlighting the value that collaboration brings, several respondents mentioned not only benefits to their personal work but also benefits to their organizations. This came in the form of learning and improving but also in expanding services. This service expansion is particularly important at a time when funders are asking for more collaboration and organizations are trying to stretch their funds. Service expansion is of particular interest in the food policy council field due to the aforementioned problems when a food policy system lacks a unified system, leading to cracks and exploitations of existing holes in the food safety net (Clancy et al., 2008; Harper et al., 2009; Haughton, 1987). The type of collaboration necessary to expand services shows promise for

bringing together all of the parts of a locality's food system and plugging holes in that food system.

Nearly all respondents discussed the importance of the FPC being intentional. In describing intentionality, participants mentioned being clear about the collaboration's mission and goals and staying focused on the agreed upon common purpose. At first glance, this may seem to conflict with Dahlberg's (1994) findings that single issue FPCs focusing solely on hunger were less successful than those who worked on the entire food policy system (such as ameliorating sources of hunger). However, this researcher would point out the current findings and Dahlberg's (1994) findings can be true at the same time; FPCs need to focus on the entire food policy system, not just issues of hunger but also be clear and intentional about maintaining attention on food policy issues without getting sidetracked into companion issues, such as fair housing. Perhaps in its work on food policy, an FPC might identify areas where other multisectoral collaborations are needed; however, the council also must remember its mandate is to address the full spectrum of *food* policy.

In addition, remaining focused on mission and goals is essential due to the inherent difficulty of implementing multisector collaborations (Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer, 2012; Vangen, Hayes, & Cornforth, 2015). Often, they must overcome differences or competition in orientations, cultures, and structures (Babiak & Thibault, 2007; O'Regan & Oster, 2000; Selsky & Parker, 2005, as noted in the diversity theme. Other challenges include difficulty communicating, requiring more trust between sectors, and the increased likelihood of conflict as well as difficulty quantifying their

effectiveness (Agranoff, 2006; Babiak & Thibault, 2007; Roberts, 2010; van Tulder, Sietanidi, Crane, & Brammer, 2016).

In discussing the *how* of effective collaboration among FPCs, members from organizations focused on the benefits of having diverse perspectives united towards a common goal. As previously mentioned, this coming together can sometimes result in expanded services to a location. Previous research has also demonstrated that an absence of a food policy in a region leads not only to gaps in service but also to policies counteracting each other and providing more strain on the system (Clancy et al., 2008; Harper et al., 2009; Haughton, 1987). The same diversity that lends itself to increased services provides assorted viewpoints that enable participants to see problems and holes in a location's food policy system from a range of angles. Only in seeing problems and holes can an FPC have a chance to mitigate problems and plug holes.

All ten participants highlighted the value collaboration brought to their organizations and their personal work, including improved communication and relationships as well as increased services and effectiveness. Although the participants had stories about times when collaboration was difficult or unsuccessful, each of them also endorsed collaboration and said they would recommend it to another individual or organization. The benefits were worth the difficulties they encountered.

Since collaboration has been demonstrably effective for organizations, social workers need to be competent to initiate and participate in collaborations. The Council on Social Work Education's Policy and Accreditation Standards includes three competencies (6, 7, and 8) that underscore the importance of inter-professional and inter-organizational collaboration when engaging with, assessing, and intervening with

individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities (Council on Social Work Education, 2015). First, foundation-level social work classes at the bachelor's and master's levels, such as Human Behavior in the Social Environment, Practice with Groups, and Practice with Organizations and Communities, need to include basic concepts about the definition, type, development, and practices of effective collaborations. Second, generalist practice classes also need material on individual collaboration, especially across professions or outside of organizations. Third, concentrations in community practice or administration should include in-depth training on how to start, facilitate, and manage effective collaborations. These should especially include cross-sectoral collaborations, which are particularly necessary for issues like food security that cross many sectors (Schiff, 2007).

Limitations

The study was meant to be exploratory and, as such, provides a valuable first step in learning more about collaboration within THI member organizations. While the findings give valid insight about THI members' experiences with collaboration, its small sample size and study design limit the generalizability of findings, even to other THI member organizations. Since the study participants were exclusively drawn from a pool of THI member organizations, they are also not representative of other organizations in collaborative relationships.

Second, the study did not include organizations that had such negative experiences with collaboration that they were averse to participating again nor did it include organizations without experience in a formal collaboration. This may have impacted the results.

Third, the respondents are all residents of Texas. While the interview guide did not ask demographic questions beyond what the participants' jobs were at their organizations, all participants had to live in Texas to be part of THI and, therefore, part of the study. This may indicate more shared experiences or similar cultural norms than would be found in a more geographically diverse population.

Conclusion

In conclusion, researchers considered collaboration to be two or more entities (in this case, organizations) coming together around a common goal and combining their efforts to create the best outcome around that goal (Bedwell et al., 2012, p. 130; Provan & Kenis, 2008; Wood & Gray, 1991). For this study, collaboration was about coming together to decrease childhood hunger and ameliorate its effects. After years of collaborating, the THI member organizations offered lessons learned or advice for new collaborators centered around intentionality, clear goals, and staying mission-focused (Butterfoss et al., 1993; Gazley, 2017; Sonnenwald, 2007). From the outset, collaboration requires intentionality both from the individual organizations and from the collaboration as a whole as a collaboration's goal must be so clear that organizations can know whether it aligns with their individual organizational goals or not. In being clear about their goal, collaborations are also better equipped to be intentional about bringing diverse organizations together. This intentionality is necessary at every step because collaboration is difficult. The greater the diversity of the organizations and their perspectives, the more important it is to focus on the singular goal and passion that brought everyone together. If collaborations are able to stay the course and focus on the goal with intentionality, they will be successful in bringing high value both to the

organizations that comprise them, and to the people they are meant to serve (Alter & Hage, 1993; Brass et al., 2004; Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Hardy et al., 2003; Lawson, 2004; Provan et al., 2007). All 10 respondents recommend collaboration, even with all of its difficulty.

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Chapter Five: Conclusion

Purpose

Multisector or cross-sector collaborations are essential components of strategies dealing with large public problems or when problems are too big for one sector (Bryson, Crosby, & Bloomberg, 2014; Rasanathan et al., 2017). Food policy councils (FPCs) are a type of multisector collaboration that brings together stakeholders from the business, government, and nonprofit sectors among others. The number of food policy councils (FPCs) has grown exponentially since Knoxville, Tennessee founded theirs in 1982 (Bassarab, Santo, & Palmer, 2019, Clancy, Hammer, Lippoldt, Hinrichs, & Lyson, 2008). These multi-sectored, community-level collaboratives show promise in their ability to bring together stakeholders to address the gaps in local food systems (Clancy et al., 2008; England, 2019;; Houghton, 1987). Since food insecurity is commonly experienced at a community level, it is reasonable to expect that *community*-level collaborations would generate inventive ideas likely to work in their *community* (Hamm & Bellows, 2003).

Among the benefits FPC strategists and participants have expected from their efforts are those documented by research into multisector collaborations, which include coordination among stakeholders, sharing responsibility and information, and leveraging knowledge, skills, and other resources across sectors as well as increased responsiveness and innovation (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2003; Kickbusch & Behrendt, 2013; O'Regan & Oster, 2000; Salunke & Lal, 2017). In addition, interorganizational collaboration in general has been found to lead to improved performance, knowledge creation, strategic and political effects, efficiency, resources, social development, and

capacity (Hardy, Phillips, & Lawrence, 2003; Lawson, 2004; Provan, Fish, & Sydow, 2007). Other studies have reported collaboration to be positively associated with ability to achieve more objectives, access to information and resources, increased adaptability, innovation, institutional political clout, network ties, performance, social learning, and survival (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Gulati, Nhoria, & Zaheer, 2000; Kraatz, 1998).

While FPCs may *assume* their particular type of collaboration would also demonstrate these benefits, there is little empirical evidence either supporting or refuting this assumption. Although research has shown some *promise* in FPCs' effectiveness, empirical evidence is lacking (see, for example Calancie et al., 2018; Scherb, Palmer, Frattaroli, & Pollack, 2012; and Webb, Hawe, & Noort 2001) and not based on theory relevant to multisector collaboration, such as FPCs Schiff (2007). What evidence does exist comes from a small number of FPCs and a few food policy experts (Scherb et al., 2012).

This dissertation addresses a few of these gaps. First, the author is not one of the few food policy experts Scherb et al. (2012) mentioned nor is Texas Hunger Initiative (THI) one of the FPCs that regularly appears in research articles about FPCs. Also, while the literature base is growing, THI's Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs) are still an emerging area of research. Second, Chapter Two directly answers Schiff's (2007) concern about a lack of theory-centered research, especially in organizational theories relevant to multisectoral collaborations. Third, the dissertation lays a foundation for future studies of THI-specific FPC effectiveness by starting to understand member experiences with collaboration in their HFCCs. It would be difficult to measure how

effective something like FPCs are without first understanding *what* FPCs are; that is, defining the construct needs to precede operationalizing the measurement of it. The studies for this dissertation attempted to do this by addressing the following research questions:

- *What are the relevant characteristics of member organizations, especially regarding resource dependence and social networks?*
- *What are member organizations' experiences with collaboration within THI?*
- *What have been member organizations' experiences with collaboration in the Texas Hunger Initiative?*

Methodology Review

The same methodology was used for Chapters Two and Three since data for them were collected by a single quantitative survey. THI is organized into 12 regions, eight of which were selected by THI to participate in the study. A THI research project manager informed the regional directors from these eight regions about the study. Then individuals from member organizations in the eight regions that had begun collaborative activities were invited to participate in the study. The survey did not capture which region the individual represented, so it is unknown how many regions were represented. The researcher sent an email to all potential participants with relevant information, including a link to the survey and an informed consent letter. This resulted in a convenience sample of 33 individuals from organizations completing at least part of the survey.

The survey instrument included questions designed to capture information related to resource dependence, social networks, and collaboration. The questions related to resource dependence and social networks were based on the work of Jones (2006) who

used the questions to examine whether an organization adopted managed care principles. These two topics are the focus of Chapter Two. Data related to collaboration, the focus of Chapter Three, came from the work of Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2009) who developed a 17-item Likert scale measure, to assess five factors: governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms.

Chapter Four is a phenomenological inquiry. Originally, the study was designed as a grounded theory since there is a plethora of literature on interorganizational collaborations. However, after two interviews, it became apparent that the participants knew very little about THI's member organizations, thus making grounded theory an inappropriate design. With approval by the dissertation committee and the IRB, the researcher pivoted to make the study a phenomenological inquiry for the remaining eight interviews.

As with the survey, the qualitative research process started with a THI research project manager informing the regional directors of the eight selected regions about the study. The researcher then asked these directors to send the names of individuals they recommended for the study. The researcher also reached out to regional directors who had not responded to ensure that every region had a chance to be represented. The researcher received names from six regional directors. Once the researcher received names, she contacted individuals to request their participation and schedule interviews. Fourteen people consented to be interviewed, though the researcher was unable to schedule interviews with two participants and two other participants decided someone else in their respective organizations would be more appropriate for the researcher to interview.

The research utilized an interview guide about participants' experiences collaborating with THI, how the experience affected them, how members collaborate, and lessons learned. The interviewer did not follow the guide verbatim but tried to keep the flow of conversation natural by asking follow-up questions that were congruent with the natural order of the conversation. After being denied an interview or completing an interview, the researcher asked participants if there were other individuals they knew from their HFCC whom they would suggest the researcher talk to. This resulted in one more interview. In total, the researcher completed 10 interviews, representing 10 distinct organizations from four regions.

Summary of Results

Chapter Two

Chapter Two was an exploratory study meant to describe member organizations, specifically regarding variables aligned with resource dependence and social network theories. The research question was, *What are the relevant characteristics of member organizations, especially regarding resource dependence and social networks?*

One important finding was that members found themselves to be at least somewhat different from their partners, implying a level of felt diversity. Arya and Lin (2007) found more diversity led to better collaborative outcomes while Kania and Kramer (2011) assert large-scale change requires diverse organizations tackling a problem from several different angles. Second, organizations reported factors that increased their resource dependence: having fewer discrete funding streams (median $n=4$) and being independent organizations instead of subsidiaries (22 of 33 responses). Having fewer sources of funding means being more dependent on each funding source than if there

were more sources. Also, while independent organizations have more autonomy, they also lack the name recognition and organizational protections from external environmental threats such as inconsistency in funding (Bradley, Aldrich, Shepherd, & Wiklund, 2011; Schrader & Simon, 1997). Sowa (2009) found that resource scarcity, such as few funding streams, motivated organizations to collaborate to improve survivability. Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) also highlighted an organization's balance between remaining as autonomous as possible while also increasing resources. Hasenfeld (1983, 1992, 2000) also found resource dependence to be correlated with how an organization operates and is influenced by others

A third set of findings relate to social networks. Member organizations reported a wide range of collaborators from zero (this unexpected response is examined in Chapter Two) to 60, with a median of 12. Although these collaborative relationships were new, 81 percent of organizations reported being “greatly influenced” or “somewhat influenced” by their HFCC partners. This suggests some level of network integration, which Provan and Milward (1995) found to be highly associated with effectiveness. Since THI was a relatively new organization, the results provide insight about the organizations and also providing a foundation for future research about the organizations and model.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three was another exploratory study meant to describe member organizations' experiences, this time with collaboration in THI's HFCCs. The research question was *What are member organizations' experiences with collaboration within THI?* Although not generalizable due to small sample size, the results provide valuable

data about THI member organizations' views of their own collaborative works. One of the most important insights gleaned was that 82 percent of participants agreed with the statement "Your organization feels it is worthwhile to stay and work with partner organizations rather than leave the collaboration," with a four or five (out of five). Equally as important, respondents generally ranked their collaborations high (four or five out of five) across all five domains (governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms). These results affirm previous work that concluded these five domains are positively correlated with effective collaborations (Arya & Lin, 2007; Chen, 2008, 2010; Einbender, Robertson, Garcia, Vuckovic, & Patti, 2000; Lantz, Viruell-Fuentes, Israel, Softley, & Guzman, 2001; Provan & Milward, 1995).

Thomson et al. (2009) organized the 17 statements around five factors: governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms. This author combined responses for each factor and computed a median, repeating this process across all five factors to determine a total collaboration score. For each factor (and total collaboration score), the minimum possible score was zero and the maximum possible score was five. All five factors and the collaboration total median score were at least 4. The overall Collaboration Index score was 4.5. Taken together, respondents have a high view of their collaborations with 82 percent agreeing or agreeing strongly that it is more worthwhile to collaborate than for their organization to be on its own.

Chapter Four

Chapter four was a phenomenological inquiry about member organization's experiences with collaboration in THI. The primary research question was, *What have been member organizations' experiences with collaboration in the Texas Hunger*

Initiative? Supplemental questions were (1) *What have been their experiences?* And (2) *What are their lessons learned?*

The researcher began exploring member experiences examining how participants defined collaboration. Realizing the varieties of ways to both conceptualize and operationalize collaboration, the author found it important to begin with an analysis of how respondents defined collaboration. The interview data generated five main themes: collaboration is difficult, valuable, expands and improves services, requires intentionality, and requires diversity united towards a common goal. In addition, the researcher identified two common themes among the lessons learned: advice internal to organizations (such as having collaborative mindsets) and advice external to the entire collaboration (such as being clear about the mission). The chapter also includes the *essence* (combining the textural and structural descriptions) and contextualizes the results based on the extant literature.

Linking the Three Articles

All three chapters coalesce around the topic of member experiences with collaboration within THI's HFCCs. Chapter Two examines member experiences through the lenses of resource dependence theory and social network theory. Resource dependence theory explains organizations' motives to form collaborations and influences how they form these collaborations (Guo & Acar, 2005; Hasenfeld, 1983, 1992; Sowa, 2009). Social network theory explains the preceding relational factors leading to collaborations, how they are formed, and their results (Brass et al., 2004; Guo & Acar, 2005; Hasenfeld & Gidron, 1993; Kadushin, 2012; Kraatz, 1998). These theories

describe the entire collaboration experience, from beginning to end and, therefore, make sense as a starting place to understand experiences.

Chapter Three details the ways in which two factors, autonomy and mutuality, relate both to how organizations interact (such as with *mutual respect*) and to their ability to maintain independence, which is the central goal in resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Sowa, 2009). Chapter Four highlights the difficulty in collaboration of competition for funding (resources). However, respondents reported some values of collaboration including increasing their budgets due to grants obtained through their collaboration, being able to expand their reach, and improving services. Each of these benefits and challenges discussed in Chapter Four relate back to the ways collaboration benefits or hinders *resources*. Chapter Three also describes how three of the five factors (governance, administration, and norms) explain how organizations relate to each other, which is a central aspect of social network theory (Kadushin, 2012; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Respondents in Chapter Four also highlighted one of the difficulties of collaboration is the time it can take to establish relationships; yet collaboration also leads to better relationships and more coordination. To put it in social network language, collaboration takes time to build the social network, but once it does, it builds social networks in a way that lead to improved services.

Qualitative data in Chapter Four expands and deepens the outline of member experiences of collaboration contained in Chapter Three. For example, a major finding from Chapter Three is that 82 percent of respondents felt it was worthwhile to stay in their collaborations. Chapter Four starts to elucidate why participants feel this way, one reason being better relationships and communication with other organizations in the

community. Another reason was staff being able to do their individual jobs better because of the relationships formed in their collaborations. Some organizations went so far as to assert they would not have certain programs or even exist as an organization without collaboration.

Dissemination Plan

In 2015, the author submitted a preliminary report of quantitative findings to THI as a deliverable for its funding of the research. In October 2017, the author presented a paper based on Chapters Two and Three at the Annual Program Meeting of the Council on Social Work Education in Dallas, Texas.

Looking ahead, the author has identified the *Journal of Community Practice (JCP)* as the target journal to which all three articles will be submitted. The *JCP* is interdisciplinary but focused on social welfare issues. According to its website, the *JCP*, “...articulates contemporary and emerging issues, providing direction on how to think about social problems, developing innovative approaches to dealing with them, and outlining ways to implement these concepts and approaches in classroom, research, and practice settings” (n.d., para. 3). Each of these articles would fall under the category of full-length original research manuscript. Also, these articles describe a newer model for addressing the social problem of food security through community practices.

Implications and Recommendations

The National Association of Social Workers’ (NASW) *Code of Ethics*, Ethical Standard 5.02(b) states, “Social workers should promote and facilitate evaluation and research to contribute to the development of knowledge” (n.d., Ethical Standards section, 5.02(b)). At the same time, the Preamble to the *Code of Ethics* clarifies, “The primary

mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people...” (NASW, n.d., Preamble section, para. 1). Together, these statements suggest that social work research should focus on the primary goal of the profession – making people’s lives better. To contribute to this lofty aim, findings from these studies need to stimulate future research and be integrated into social work teaching, practice, and policy. The following sections outline implications and recommendations for doing this..

Social Work Research

First and most important for the future of collaboration research in general is the need for a singular definition and term (Isett, Mergel, LeRoux, Mischen, & Rethemeyer, 2011; Williams, 2015). Clarity about what collaboration means would enable researchers and practitioners alike to develop the models that are prerequisite to evaluating the operations and effectiveness of collaborations (Bedwell et al., 2012). On a related note, Williams (2015) lamented the issue of how often collaboration is either used interchangeably with other words (such as coordination, cooperation, network, alliance, or interorganizational interaction – just to name a few) or used to encompass a broad variety of activities and relationships. *Collaboration* research would benefit from one term and a clear definition, with equally clear wording for related terms such as cooperation and coordination.

A second need for general collaboration research is a valid, reliable instrument to measure or assess collaboration. This instrument needs to be tested across several organizational domains or one appropriate specifically for social service organization collaborations. There has been some advancement on this front recently, such as two

articles about factor analysis of two new collaboration or coalition assessment tools (Brown, Feinberg, & Greenburg, 2011; Marek, Brock, & Savla, 2014). Roberts, van Wyk, and Dhanpat (2017) also tested Thomson et al.'s (2009) by both adding more items, as Thomson et al. (2009) suggested, and surveying a South African population. Also, the National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools (2002) in Canada developed the Partnership Self-Assessment Tool, which has been shown to be sufficiently valid and reliable. However, this tool was specifically designed for a public health context and the tool is no longer supported. Also, none of these collaboration instruments has been specifically developed for nonprofits or social service organization-driven collaborations.

A third call for social work research relates to studying FPC effectiveness, the lack of which has been well documented in the literature (see Bassarab et al., 2019; Calancie et al., 2018; England, 2019; Scherb, Palmer, Frattaroli, & Pollack, 2012). A major obstacle to measuring FPC effectiveness is the absence of instrumentation. Calancie et al. (2017) developed the Food Policy Council Self-Assessment Tool to measure FPC perceptions of the following: leadership, breadth of active membership, council climate, formality of council structure, knowledge sharing, relationships, member empowerment, community context, synergy, and impacts on the food system. Note that while concepts such as knowledge sharing, member empowerment, and impacts on the food system might be widely considered measures of *effectiveness*, other concepts in this instrument might be considered to be conditions *leading* to effectiveness – such as leadership, formality of council structure, or community context. The instrument also does not appear often in searches about FPC effectiveness, indicating it has not become a standard.

Social Work Practice and Education

Although there is a paucity of research on the effectiveness of FPCs, it is clear organizational collaboration in general is effective (Brass et. al, 2004; Gulati, Nhoria, & Zaheer, 2000; Hardy et al., 2003; Lawson, 2004; Provan et al., 2007). The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) also recognizes collaboration as an essential aspect of professional practice (NASW, n.d., Ethical Standards section, 1.01; NASW, n.d., Ethical Standards section, 2.03(a)). Furthermore, the Council on Social Work Education includes collaboration in Competencies 6-8 of the Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (Council on Social Work Education, 2015).

Linley, Mendoza, and Resko (2014) highlight the disconnect between social workers utilizing collaboration in practice yet not often being given the chance to collaborate in the classroom. A search of the journal *Social Work Education* did not find any articles on pedagogical strategies of how to educate students about collaboration. Most of the relevant articles were about university-community partnerships. A similar search of the CSWE website revealed only two resources, one book called *A Guide to Interprofessional Collaboration* (Iachini, Bronstein, & Mellin, 2018) and another book called *Practicing as a Social Work Educator in International Collaboration* (Butterfield & Cohen, 2017). If collaboration is being taught sufficiently by the profession, the content is not coming from the CSWE website or CSWE's magazine about teaching social work – two places a social work educator would expect to find content on how to teach topics that researchers, NASW, and CSWE have identified as important.

At the most basic level, students need instruction on what collaboration is, different types and levels, and best practices. They need to know what factors make

collaboration most effective and when collaboration is a recommended service model. As the problems facing social workers grow in scope, size, and complexity, Kania and Kramer (2011) argue that change will require several different leaders from several sectors working together towards a common goal. To do this, students need practice both in the classroom and scaffolded experiences in field education in how to work with professionals and leaders in other sectors on both small- and large-scale problems. Students on the micro level, for instance, might need to collaborate with a client's psychiatrist, medical doctor, physical therapist, and personal care attendant to ensure the client's well-being. On the macro level, students might choose to engage a collaboration like an FPC to help alleviate hunger in the communities where they are working. Collaboration is important at every level of practice.

Social Work Policy

In addition to other benefits, collaboration helps improve organizations' resources and survivability in difficult times (Sowa, 2009). Yet, few interviewees (Chapter Four) mentioned funding being an issue when collaborating – either due to competition for funds or difficulty counting collaborative activities for individual organizations' grant activities. To encourage organizations to collaborate, grant-making entities could reformat their activity reports in ways that encourage, or at the very least do not discourage, collaborative activities. For example, allow funded projects to include participant numbers on grant reports when an event is co-sponsored by another organization not involved in the grant, rather than making them parse out what percentage of the event was paid for with grant funds and what percentage of attendees that translates to. Making it easier for organizations to gain credit for their collaborative

activities would be an impetus to do more of them, which also improves their effectiveness (Alter & Hage, 1993; Borgatti & Foster, 2003; Provan et al., 2007).

The participants in Chapter Four highlighted the difficulty that comes with the diversity and intentionality required to collaborate effectively. Part of this difficulty comes from managing groups that can be very different and may not have pre-existing relationships. When a few participants were discussing their lessons learned, they also mentioned the importance of regular and consistent communication (including meetings) to keep all of the collaborators on the same page. This level of intentionality and communication requires a person, group, or organization to take on administrative duties within the collaboration. These administrative duties entail a cost to organizations (Graddy & Chen, 2006). Jang and Feiock (2007) assert that while the benefits of collaboration are shared by everyone, the price tag is often paid by individual organizations. To address the unequal burdens of administering a collaboration, collaborations or designated organizations within collaborations could ask grant-making institutions for funds to help cover administrative costs. Also, the organizations in a collaboration could ensure all the partners are clear about (via formal or informal understandings) and comfortable with how administrative costs will be shared.

Limitations

The research underlying the three articles in this dissertation had limitations that are primarily inherent in their exploratory and descriptive designs. The entire population of HFCCs, at least at the time of gathering information for the quantitative study, was small – with only 238 initial contacts. The current quantitative study also had low response rates with 33 individuals (15.2 percent) answering at least some of the

questions. Also, there is no information about non-respondents to check for differences between respondents and non-respondents, so it is impossible to know how representative the sample was of HFCC members. Additionally, the findings are not generalizable either to the rest of the THI population or outside of THI.

The researcher also asked no individual-level questions about the person either filling out the survey (for the quantitative studies) or answering the qualitative questions. Different people from the same organization likely have different viewpoints about their organization, some of which may be impacted by demographic factors. There is no way to know if the individual-level demographics are similar or dissimilar to demographics in the wider THI network or the geographic region.

Another limitation is the bias towards organizations that collaborate. The researcher only contacted organizations that were already members of THI; this necessarily means the organization was collaborating. The investigator did not reach out to any of the organizations that had left THI, elected to not join THI, or are known to not have collaborators. This likely means all of the findings are biased towards individuals and organizations that are collaborating.

Future Directions

The current findings support several directions for future research. First, THI needs larger, more in-depth studies about its population to learn more about who makes up its HFCCs. This should include both individual and organizational-level data to help give a clearer picture about both the individuals and organizations in the HFCCs. For example, questions might include:

- What are the personnel demographics among member organizations in THI's HFCCs (such as gender, race, educational attainment, etc.)?
- What are the sectors represented in HFCCs (e.g. business, agriculture, academia, social services)?
- What activities are member organizations engaged in as part of their HFCCs?

Second, THI and other FPCs need to pilot a collaboration tool, such as Thomson et al.'s (2009) to test its reliability and validity in measuring collaboration within the FPC model. HFCCs need such a model to measure both dimensions of their collaborations (such as governance or autonomy) and their effectiveness. Once they can measure collaboration and effectiveness, they can test different methods for improving collaboration effectiveness. Third, the THI model needs to be compared with other FPC models for outcomes such as effectiveness and sustainability. Dahlberg (1994) and others have studied different types of FPCs, but no one has compared THI's model with other FPC models.

Conclusion

FPCs have been in existence for over 50 years and quadrupled in growth between 2000 and 2017 (Bassarab et al., 2019; Clancy et al., 2008; Harper, Shattuck, Holt-Giménez, Alkon, & Lambrick, 2009; Scherb et al., 2012). This dissertation contributes to awareness about member organizations' experiences with collaboration in the Texas Hunger Initiative's (THI's) Hunger Free Community Coalitions (HFCCs). These organizations report being influenced by others in their collaboratives (median $n=12$), and those collaborators have other collaborative relationships. THI members view their collaborations as worthwhile and ranked them high across the domains of governance,

administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms. Their lived experiences affirmed that collaboration is difficult, valuable, expands and improves services, requires intentionality, and requires diverse members united by a common goal.

Several implications emerge from the findings. The concept of collaboration needs a clear definition and a valid, reliable tool to assess its various dimensions when engaged in by social services organizations. Second, FPCs need an evidence-based conceptual model or framework that can guide their attempts to evaluate their operations and effectiveness. Third, social work education institutions need to teach students about collaboration and how to do it effectively. Fourth, social workers need to collaborate as a regular part of their professional practice. Fifth, grant-making organizations need to ensure their policies encourage rather than discourage collaboration. Sixth, collaborating organizations need to be clear about the costs of administrative burdens and how these costs will be shared.

Though the studies were exploratory with small sample sizes, this dissertation adds to the FPC literature in a few ways. First, it addresses Schiff's (2007) lament about the dearth of organizational theory-grounded research about FPCs. Second, it expands both the number of researchers studying this topic and the number of FPCs that are the subjects of empirical studies (Scherb et al., 2012). Third, it expands the knowledge base about THI and its HFCCs. This exploratory study provides a foundation for this future work.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Baylor Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letter for Combined Quantitative Study



BAYLOR
UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

One Bear Place #97310 Waco, TX 76798-7310 • (254) 710-3763 • FAX (254) 710-7309 • WEBSITE: www.baylor.edu/research/irb

DATE: 07/18/2014

TO: Leah Gatlin, MSW

FROM: Office of the Vice Provost for Research, Research Compliance
Baylor University Institutional Review Board

STUDY TITLE: Salient Factors Leading to Strong Collaborations

IRB REFERENCE #: 570898

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: 07/18/2014

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

Thank you for your research study submission. Your research has been determined to be EXEMPT from IRB review according to federal regulation 45 CFR 46.101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

This exemption determination is based on the protocol and/or materials submitted. If the research is modified, you must contact this office to determine whether your research is still eligible for exemption prior to implementing the modifications.

If you have any questions, please contact Deborah Holland at (254) 710-1438 or Deborah_L_Holland@baylor.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Deborah L. Holland, JD, MPH
Assistant Vice Provost for Research
Director of Compliance

APPENDIX B

Resource Dependence and Social Network Variables

Resource Dependence Variables

1. Is your agency designated as for profit or not for profit?
 - For Profit
 - Not for Profit
2. Is your agency an independent organization or a subsidiary of a larger corporation?
 - My agency is a subsidiary of a larger corporation.
 - My agency is independent.
3. How many separate physical sites does your agency operate for administrative purposes?

4. How many separate physical sites does your agency operate for service provision?

5. Is your agency formally affiliated with a religious denomination or organization?
 - Yes
 - No
6. Is your agency formally affiliated with a civic or social club (e.g., Masons, Shriners, etc.)?
 - Yes
 - No
7. Please estimate the rank of each of your current and past funding sources based on the percentage each source provides or provided to your total budget. Rank each funding source by placing a number (1=Highest Percentage, 2=Next Highest Percentage, etc.) in the columns to the right of the source.
_____ Federal Government
_____ State Government
_____ County Government
_____ Municipal Government
_____ Private Foundations
_____ Religiously Affiliated Organizations
_____ Fundraising
_____ Other

Social Network Variables

8. With how many other organizations does your organization currently have a collaborative relationship? _____ organizations
9. How long has your agency been a part of your food planning association/food policy council/hunger coalition? (Please indicate the number of years rounding up to the nearest whole year, e.g., 1 year and 6 months = 2). _____ years
10. To the best of your knowledge, how similar to your organization are the agencies within your food planning association/food policy council/hunger coalition with regard to the number of clients they serve and their operating budgets?
 - Extremely Similar
 - Somewhat Similar
 - No Similarity
 - Do Not Know
11. To the best of your knowledge, how many of the organizations in your food planning association/food policy council/hunger coalition have other collaborations with other agencies?
 - They have several (3 or more) collaborations with other agencies.
 - They have a few (1-2) collaborations with other agencies.
 - They have no collaborations with other agencies.
 - I do not know if they have any collaborations with other agencies.
12. Has your agency's decisions about developing and/or continuing collaborative relationships with other organizations, at least in part, resulted from the influence of larger and/or more prestigious agencies within your food planning association/food policy council/hunger coalition?
 - Yes, it greatly influenced our decisions.
 - Yes, it somewhat influenced our decisions.
 - It had no influence over our decisions.
 - I do not know if it has influenced our decisions.

APPENDIX C

Five Factors and 17 Indicators for Collaboration Instrument from Thomson, et al. (2007)

Factor One: Governance

1. Partner organizations take your organization's opinions seriously when decisions are made about the collaboration.
2. Your organization brainstorms with partner organizations to develop solutions to mission-related problems facing the collaboration.

Factor Two: Administration

3. You, as a representative of your organization in the collaboration, understand your organization's roles and responsibilities as a member of the collaboration.
4. Partner organization meetings accomplish what is necessary for the collaboration to function well.
5. Partner organizations (including your organization) agree about the goals of the collaboration.
6. Your organization's tasks in the collaboration are well coordinated with those of partner organizations.

Factor Three: Autonomy

7. The collaboration hinders your organization from meeting its own organizational mission.
8. Your organization's independence is affected by having to work with partner organizations on activities related to the collaboration.
9. You, as a representative of your organization, feel pulled between trying to meet both your organization's and the collaboration's expectations.

Factor Four: Mutuality

10. Partner organizations (including your organization) have combined and used each other's resources so all partners benefit from collaborating.
11. Your organization shares information with partner organizations that will strengthen their operations and programs.
12. You feel what your organization brings to the collaboration is appreciated and respected by partner organizations.
13. Your organization achieves its own goals better working with partner organizations than working alone.
14. Partner organizations (including your organization) work through differences to arrive at win-win solutions.

Factor Five: Norms

15. The people who represent partner organizations in the collaboration are trustworthy.
16. Your organization can count on each partner organization to meet its obligations to the collaboration.
17. Your organization feels it is worthwhile to stay and work with partner organizations rather than leave the collaboration.

APPENDIX D

Baylor Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval Letters for Qualitative Study

Original Letter for Grounded Theory



BAYLOR
UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD – PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FROM IRB REVIEW

Principal Investigator: Leah Gatlin
Study Title: A Grounded Theory Perspective on Readiness for Collaboration
IRB Reference #: 724481
Date of Determination: 07/29/2016
Exemption Category: 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

The above referenced human subjects research project has been determined to be EXEMPT from review by the Baylor University Institutional Review Board (IRB) according to federal regulation 45 CFR 46.101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The following documents were reviewed:

- IRB Application, submitted on 07/29/2016
- Protocol, dated 05/11/2016
- Consent Form, dated 05/11/2016
- Recruitment Email, submitted on 07/19/2016
- Questionnaire, submitted on 05/11/2016

This exemption is limited to the activities described in the submitted materials. If the research is modified, you must contact this office to determine whether your research is still eligible for exemption prior to implementing the modifications.

If you have any questions, please contact Deborah Holland at (254) 710-1438 or Deborah_L_Holland@baylor.edu.

Sincerely,

Deborah L. Holland, JD, MPH
Assistant Vice Provost of Research
Director of Compliance

OFFICE OF THE VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH

One Bear Place #97310 • Waco, TX 76798-7310 • (254) 710-3708 • FAX (254) 710-7309 • <http://www.baylor.edu/research/irb/>

Letter for Revising Study to be Phenomenology



BAYLOR
UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD – PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FROM IRB REVIEW

Principal Investigator: Leah Gatlin
Study Title: A Phenomenology of Readiness for Collaboration (formerly A Grounded Theory Perspective of Readiness for Collaboration)
IRB Reference #: 724481
Date of Determination: 06/12/2017
Exemption Category: 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

The above referenced human subjects research project has been determined to continue to be EXEMPT from review by the Baylor University Institutional Review Board (IRB) according to federal regulation 45 CFR 46.101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The following documents were reviewed:

- Change to Research Protocol form, submitted on 06/06/2017
- Protocol, dated 06/04/2017
- Consent Form, dated 06/04/2017
- Recruitment Emails, submitted on 06/06/2017
- Interview Guide, submitted on 06/06/2017

This exemption is limited to the activities described in the submitted materials. If the research is modified, you must contact this office to determine whether your research is still eligible for exemption prior to implementing the modifications.

If you have any questions, please contact Deborah Holland at (254) 710-1438 or Deborah_L_Holland@baylor.edu.

Sincerely,

Deborah L. Holland, JD, MPH
Assistant Vice Provost of Research
Director of Compliance

OFFICE OF THE VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH

One Bear Place #97310 • Waco, TX 76798-7310 • (254) 710-3708 • FAX (254) 710-7309 • <http://www.baylor.edu/research/irb/>

APPENDIX E

Interview Guide

I'm going to ask you some questions about the organization where you work. I'm interested in how organizations work together collaboratively and what made the organizations decide to collaborate.

- Let's start with a story. Can you tell me about a time where your organization collaborated with another organization and it worked well? Can you tell me about a time your collaborative efforts had difficulty?
- How would you define collaboration?
- How does your organization collaborate with other organizations?
- How would you describe the other organizations you collaborate with?
(Example: similar, not similar, what do they do?)
- How would you describe your relationships with the organizations you collaborate with?
- How do these collaborations affect your organization?

I am going to ask about what was happening inside your organization and outside your organization when your organization first started working with other organizations.

- Let's start on the inside- within your organization. Please describe for me what was happening within your organization when your organization first entered into collaborative relationships? Please use as much detail as possible. (Ask about organizational dynamics, leadership, policies, resources, social networks, strategic plans, etc.).

- What did your organization's resources (money, volunteers, donations, etc.) look like before your organization started collaborating? How do they look now?
- What types of collaborative relationships did individuals within your organization have with other organizations?
- Now let's talk about what was happening outside of your organization. Similarly, please describe what was happening outside of your organization when your organization first entered into collaborative relationships? Please use as much detail as possible. (Ask about external social networks, requirements from funding or governing bodies, what was happening in the community and in the substantive area, etc.).
 - What did your organization's social network look like before you started collaborating? By social network, I mean other organizations that you have regular contact with, be it formal or informal. These can include other organizations who provide similar services, you communicate with regularly, or give you advice or have influence on your organization. Did you have relationships with other organizations that didn't meet the criteria for collaborating? Were there organizations with which your organization regularly interacted? Those are the types of social networks I am looking for. How does your social network look now?
 - Describe what was happening in your organization's field and community around the time you entered your hunger coalition/food council/food planning association.

- How did the topic of collaboration first come up for your organization? (For example: did the CEO or another organizational leader bring up the topic or was it someone else?)
 - Did a governing body or funder suggest or mandate collaborations? If so, what were they telling your organization?
- What was the process from first mention of collaboration until the first collaborative relationships were formed?
- How did you choose the other organizations your organization chose to collaborate with? What were your existing relationships like with them?
- What do you wish you or your organization would have known or thought about when you first started collaborating? What would you tell an organization that was thinking about collaborating with another organization?
- What barriers do you see to collaboration in your community or action-based collaboration instead of solely information sharing?
- Some collaborative partnerships include organizations that are religiously-affiliated and organizations that are not. Sometimes the religiously-affiliated organization comes from a particular faith tradition or denomination. Does this describe your partnership?
 - How has having religiously-affiliated organizations affected the collaboration?
- What effect does your organization's history of collaborative relationships have on your thoughts about future collaborations? What effect do your current collaborations have on your thoughts about future collaborations?

This concludes my questions today. Is there anything you'd like to add?

If you have questions later or would like to follow up any of your answers, you can email me at [Insert email address]. You should have already received an email from me, which also has my contact information.

As a reminder, your interview will be transcribed. From all of the transcribed interviews, I will develop a report and a theory about collaboration for THI. If I quote any part of this interview, I will make sure it does not include any identifying information. Also, this information will be used as part of my dissertation at Baylor University. Your information will be kept confidential and secure.

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