Improving lives by interorganizational collaboration:
A collaboration analysis on a social development project

Anna Lundström
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To organize and implement social development projects through interorganizational collaboration is common, but lack empirical studies from a psychological perspective. The study’s aim was to make a collaboration analysis on the implementing actors within a social development project, to understand how the collaboration was functioning. The study took place within a project for marginalized groups in Tanzania, arranged by a Swedish NGO and implemented by interorganizational collaboration. Eight participants were interviewed on six areas: Environment, Membership characteristics, Process and Structure, Communication, Purpose, and Resources. The findings highlight the complexity of interorganizational collaboration. The studied collaborative network is overall working in the same direction, but has both functional and dysfunctional areas where the dysfunctional need to be improved for the collaboration to work well. The study indicates that interorganizational collaboration brings benefits for social development projects, and the six areas studied seem to cover essential areas of interorganizational collaboration.

Keywords: social development project, interorganizational collaboration, nongovernmental organization, collaboration analysis

Introduction

Although research on interorganizational collaboration within projects has become more prominent during recent years, there are still limited empirical studies, especially on projects from a relational and psychological standpoint, and in relation to community development projects (Franco, 2008; Heath & Frey, 2004; Moliterno & Mahony, 2011; Rapp Ricciardi, 2001). Due to this, there is a need for research to link the relational aspect with the collaborations effectiveness and outcomes, using a qualitative approach and some kind of collaboration analysis (Arya & Lin, 2007; Franco, 2008; Rapp Ricciardi, 2001; Selden, Sowa, & Sandfort, 2006; Shiplov, 2006; Tsasis, 2009). This study has examined an interorganizational collaboration within a social development program for marginalized people in Tanzania. As interorganizational collaboration has become common within nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations, where implementation is about improving people’s lives, it is especially important for researchers to understand what makes an interorganizational collaborative implementation successful.

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Projects and programs

During the last decade the popularity with organizing work within projects and programs has increased and become common as it is seen as a new and more effective and flexible way to work compared to more traditional structures like the functional organization, e.g. the bureaucracy (Rapp Ricciardi, 2001). Due to this, the research literature regarding projects has increased and there are many different definitions on projects used. The American Project Management Institute (PMI) has tried to create a more standardized definition, which is the one used for this study and summarized by Engwall (1995); “Projects are goal-oriented. They involve coordinated undertakings of interrelated activities. They are of finite duration, with beginnings and ends. They are each, to a degree, unique. In general, these four characteristics distinguish projects from other undertaking” (p. 44).

Most of the research on projects has been done from the scientific management point of view, where researchers have focused on economic principles with efficiency and methods of planning and control (Rapp Ricciardi, 2001). Very little research has been done about the behavioral aspects of projects. One attempt to fill that gap is the field of project psychology, which is defined by “the study of human activities that go on in projects” (Rapp Ricciardi, 2001, s. 295). Thus, project psychology especially focuses on the people within the project and how they work together. The research shows that the dynamics of the project team and project leader is basic for a projects’ success (Mattessich & Monsey 1992; Rapp Ricciardi, 2001; Selden et al., 2006). Due to this, more research within the project psychology field is in great need. This study is aiming to make a contribution within this field.

Projects and programs are used within a wide range of areas and industries and have, due to its flexibility, become the most common way to work with development (Svensson, Aronsson, Randle, & Eklund, 2007; Sydow, Lindqvist, & DeFillippi, 2004). Due to this, it has become especially popular in fast changing areas, and markets of specific product development where fast adaptation to clients’ needs is essential to survive (Sydow et al., 2004). It has also become commonly used within community and social development, which often work with complex behavioral and structural needs and problems (Poole, 2008; Selden et al., 2006; Svensson et al., 2007). Sydow et al. (2004) distinguished four contexts in which projects are structured; (a) organizational units, (b) organization, (c) interorganizational networks, and (d) organizational fields. First, the organizational units are when projects are held within one or a couple of specific departments within an organization or business. These are common, for example, in product development projects. The organization is when a project covers all departments within an organization, for example, when a whole organization needs to reorganize their computer systems. In interorganizational networks, the project cuts across and engages several organizations, and lastly, the organizational field is when particular organizations in a specific field within a whole region are involved in the project (Sydow et al., 2004). What all these four project contexts require is that the involved actors work together to reach the specific goals of the project. The last two contexts are common ways to structure work when it comes to community and humanitarian projects, which is the focus of this study (Guo & Acar, 2005; Mattessich & Monsey 1992; Poole, 2008; Selden et al., 2006). Those two require multiple individuals and/or organizations in mutual alliance, which makes the relational aspect of the project even more complex and challenging, and it makes it even more important to study from a psychological perspective (Campbell, 2009; Grabher, 2002; Sydow et al., 2004; Windeler & Sydow, 2000).
To work interorganizationally within projects

To develop interdependence in interorganizational networks and organizational fields has accelerated over the last decade due to political, economic and social demands (Austin, 2000). Budget constraints, downsizing, growing complex social problems are all reasons for organizations trying to find better and more effective ways to deliver services and to survive (Austin, 2000). There are many different ways and levels of working together interorganizationally (Selden et al., 2006). Due to this, researchers within this field have tried to distinguish different forms of it. Most researchers seem to agree on some sort of continuum of interorganizational relationships, which is based on the relationship’s formality, intensity and closeness (Austin, 2000; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Selden et al., 2006). Selden et al. (2006) has reviewed the interorganizational research and created a continuum of four terms that describes the relationships within interorganizational relationships. It’s called the “Continuum of collaborative service arrangements”, and goes from more informal relationships to more formal ones:

Cooperation → Coordination → Collaboration → Service integration

Many theorists often use these four terms interchangeably, but there is a need for research on interorganizational relationships to differentiate and classify them according to their intensity and closeness of relationship (Austin, 2000; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Selden et al., 2006). **Cooperation** is characterized by informal relationships where the different organizations work together, but don’t have commonly defined missions, goals, planning efforts or resources. **Coordination** is described as a more formal relationship whereby there are some shared missions, planning and communication channels established. **Collaboration** is defined as a “mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals” (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992, p. 11). The relationship of collaboration includes a commitment to “a definition of mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards.” (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992, p. 11). The fourth term, **Service integration**, includes a well-functioning collaboration where two or more organizations fully work together for implementing new services to mutual clients (Selden et al., 2006). Mattessich and Monsey (1992) suggest that in order to work effectively within a network of different organizations, the involved actors not only have to be able to collaborate, but to collaborate well. Thus, collaboration is the key element for interorganizational projects to become successful in implementing its goals (The McKnight Foundation, 1991). This also confirms the need of studying the functioning of relationships within the project, as the field of project psychology emphasizes as essential (Rapp Ricciardi, 2001).

**Interorganizational collaboration.** Working together interorganizationally has become popular within all areas of society (Jaskyte & Lee, 2006). Selden et al. (2006) have conducted a study on interorganizational collaboration within a project working with early child care and education services. The results showed that the greater and more intense the collaboration was between organizations, the better implementation of services was provided, and the target groups also became more positive to the project’s goal and objectives. Governmental organizations, nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations (NGO), and private businesses have all discovered multiple benefits, opportunities and advantages by working together (Austin, 2000; Jaskyte & Lee, 2006; Selden et al, 2006). It has become especially common within nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations that receive governmental funds and
work with community development and delivering human services (Arya & Lin, 2007; Guo & Acar, 2005; Mattessich & Monsey 1992; Poole, 2008; Provan, Fish, & Sydow, 2007; Selden et al., 2006). The actors involved are usually developing formal collaborative relationships because of their collective goals, and to create flexibility to implement solutions to complex problems (Guo & Acar, 2005; Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips 2002; Selden et al., 2006). Some funders of projects within nonprofit and nongovernmental organizations even require organizations within the same field to work together (Campbell, 2009; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992).

Studies have shown that collaboration within nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations can be very effective and useful (Luque et al., 2010). It’s a way for them to cut costs and share resources, but it’s also a way to make a better implementation that better meets their target groups needs (Austin, 2000; Guo & Acar, 2005; Ostrower, 2003). For example, strengthening society and helping people is usually very complex and diverse, and working together enables the more effective delivery of services that can cover the whole area of purpose (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Also, interorganizational collaboration can be a good way for organizations to enhance knowledge and expertise about local traditions and norms, as well as gaining legitimacy and trust from the local society (Austin, 2000; Ostrower, 2003). By reducing uncertainty in complex settings you are also able to create stability within the project (Campbell, 2009; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). This can help organizations to improve their coordination of activities, engage new target groups, and to minimize the risk of time losses and service duplication. Indeed, interorganizational collaboration decreases fragmentation, increases access and enhances the coordination of services to better respond to local premises and individual needs of target groups (Austin, 2000; Barnett, Hall, Berg, & Camarena, 1999; Ostrower, 2003).

Other researchers are less positive and suggest that the benefits from collaborations are not actually empirically tested due to the difficulty of studying the final results (Kagan 1993; Martin, Chackerian, Imechein, & Frumkin, 1983). Depending on the different goals of projects and interorganizational collaboration, they believe it’s difficult to determine whether or not interorganizational collaboration has the benefits that have been pointed out by some researchers (Selden et al., 2006). Another implication is that all actors within the collaborative network have a history of traditions, norms, values and roles that they bring into the common work area, which can cause more problems than effectiveness (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). Due to the different perceptions it can become very difficult to reach a common understanding (Franco, 2008). What makes it even more difficult is that problems usually do not come to light until the program has started or has been going on for a while. McCloughen and O’Brien (2006) emphasize that this is due to the lack of research on difficulties and failures within interorganizational collaboration. They argue by understanding the difficulties that can occur and learning how to solve them effectively, there is a chance that these challenges can be overcome. Naturally, collaboration requires the need for individuals to work collectively which can often become quite complex, inevitably making it almost impossible to plan all activities and predict all challenges from the beginning to end. If we understand and have knowledge about the essentials and problems to overcome for collaboration success, we will at least have a chance to be prepared for them as well as to prevent them in the future (McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006). Thus, it needs to be studied further.

**Influential factors of successful interorganizational collaboration.** There are some researchers that have tried to come up with areas that are of great importance for interorganizational collaboration to work efficiently. Mattessich and Monsey (1992) have produced a rigorous literature review of the existing research on interorganizational
collaboration working with delivering human services in communities. Their focus was to find the fundamentals that were needed for successful collaboration within projects. They began with studying 133 articles and eventually selected 18, choosing to carry out an in-depth analysis of the ones that met the research criteria and collaboration standards. Their findings have identified all together 19 factors that influenced collaboration success, grouped into six categories: (a) Environment, (b) Membership characteristics, (c) Process and Structure, (d) Communication, (e) Purpose, and (f) Resources. The first category, Environment, consists of three factors: there is a history of collaboration or cooperation in the community, the network is seen as a leader within the specific community in the areas of implementation, and the political and social climate is supporting or at least not opposing to the mission of the network (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). McCloughen and O’Brien (2006) have pointed out the culture of the environment as one of the most important factors of successful collaboration. They emphasize that change is not possible without the local environment’s agreement. This means that the people implementing the program need to have knowledge about the culture’s traditions, norms and values so they can understand the power relationships and work methods used (Engwall, 2003; McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006; Wright, Smith, & McLaren, 2001). In this way they have to work together with the local people, as change and a common understanding will otherwise be resisted (McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006; Tsasis, 2009). This is especially important when it comes to projects within nonprofit organizations (Tsasis, 2009). As Ennis and West (2010) have written, “Relationships are what creates a community and, logically, are the cornerstone of community development” (p. 416). They emphasize that it’s through people and their relationships you succeed in working with community development. They highlight the importance of collectivist empowerment, which means that all people have the strength and capacity to change their lives if they are given the chance (Ennis & West, 2010; Saleebey, 2006).

The second category, Membership characteristics is about mutual respect, understanding and trust between members. There should be appropriate cross-sections of members so that the network includes representatives from each segment that will be affected by its activities. Also the members should see the benefits of collaboration more than the losses, and that members have the ability to compromise (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). McCloughen & O’Brien (2006) therefore suggest creating a common understanding and collective motivation, especially if the actors within the projects come from different backgrounds and conditions and possess different skills. It can be good to take some time in the initial stages to discuss expectations of the project, as well as of actors involved, in order to create a collective identity (Franco, 2008; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). The need of working with people at all levels that will be affected by a project is supported by Ennis and West (2010) and also by recent directives from Paris declaration on aid effectiveness and Accra Agenda for Action about how to work with social development in developing countries (OECD, 2005/2008). They highlight that implementation should be done with and for locals, and adapted to the specific environment.

The third category, Process and Structure, is about the importance that all members feel ownership with both the process and outcome, and that roles and guidelines should be clear and well understood by everyone. Members should be flexible and open to varied ways to organize and work, which enables them to adapt and manage changes and challenges well. There should also be multiple layers of decision-making so everyone is involved, for commitment and mutual work of direction (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). In order for this to be achieved there is a need for transparency, with clear job descriptions and outspoken expectations about the work and each other (McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006). Also the openness towards new ideas and ability to give and take constructive criticism is important. Everyone needs to know their role and responsibility for the collaboration to work smoothly
and efficiently, and to be able to quickly adapt to new conditions (Austin 2000; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006).

The fourth category, Communication, consists of two factors: the importance of open and frequent communication and interactions, and the establishments of both informal and formal communications links (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Communication is something that all researchers seem to agree on as one of the bases of collaboration (Austin, 2000; Heath & Frey, 2004; Luque et al., 2010; McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006; Rogers, 2009). Effective and frequent both formal and informal communication helps to create trust and ease the information flow between the involved actors. McCloughen and O’Brien (2006) have stressed that even if face-to-face communication is the optimum way of sharing information and ideas, there is also a need for other communication channels like e-mail, telephone, facsimile and post. Communication is also the base for other essential areas of collaboration (Austin, 2000).

For example the creation of clear roles and responsibilities, mutual expectations and goals of the project, and focused attention for motivation and greater implementation are all dependent on efficient communication. Even if communication between all actors is basic, some stress that it can lead to slow adaptation (Barnes, Maclean, & Cousens, 2010). Closely connected actors where all or almost all actors have contact can lead to slow mobilization because they together have created stronger roles and norms which make them less open to new ideas and changes. The creation of clusters can solve this if they are created in a way to ease the implementation, for example that people within a specific expertise area or geographical area work closer together. However, clusters should not be created in a way that they limit the communication and information sharing. This could cause the network to become segregated and to make some members isolated (Barnes et al., 2010).

The fifth category, Purpose, is about having concrete and attainable goals and objectives that are clear and unique to all members, where the vision, mission, objectives and strategies are shared and agreed upon (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). The project’s vision, mission, goals and objectives should also be well based on the local environment’s conditions (Ennis & West, 2010; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006; OECD, 2005/2008). The actors within the project should have a common understanding of, and agree on the work they are doing and what they want to achieve. The strongest commitment is created when goals are created on mutual grounds where actors feel ownership of them (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). However, the actors involved need to find a balance between dependence and autonomy within the collaboration (Tsasis, 2009).

The last category, Resources, is about having sufficient funds, and that the network has a legitimate leader with organizing and interpersonal skills. Thus, a secure financial base with adequate and consistent funding and resources is essential for the interorganizational collaboration to exist (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Milward & Provan, 1995, 1998). Wright et al. (2001) also highlight the positive outcomes for funders to in the beginning support activities for getting to know each other. Also, the leader of the collaborative group needs to be trusted and possess characteristics that can keep the actors align with the goals, activities and roles (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). Milward and Provan (1995, 1998) have found that the network effectiveness is improved when members are integrated through a central authority and control function. Another advantage of highly centralized projects with a central authority is their capacity to easily adapt to changing environments and circumstances within a program, due to one member’s power and influence (Luque et al., 2010; Valente, Chou, & Pentz, 2007). Also, networks with a central member seem to work more effectively in carrying out results because directives only come from one central and leading authority (Milward & Provan, 1995, 1998; Selden et al., 2006). Other researchers instead underline the importance of having shared leadership, where different leaders can emerge when the role is needed (Nowell & Harrison, 2011). McCloughen and O’Brien (2006) agree and stress that a
non-hierarchical interorganizational collaboration is the ideal project form, based on the different expertise the actors involved possess.

Description of the study object

This study was carried out within a Swedish nongovernmental organization (NGO) that is operating as an umbrella organization, and working in developing countries worldwide. Their overall vision and mission is to improve democracy and human rights, and to decrease poverty. This study took place in one of the bigger cities in Tanzania where the Swedish NGO is working with an extensive social development program in three different districts. The program is being implemented during three years, and started in summer 2010. For this program to achieve its goals there is a need for strong relationships between policy makers, service providers and citizens. One of the program’s projects is to set up centers for marginalized groups in the Tanzanian society. Their four target groups are disabled, people living with HIV/Aids, women, and youth. The centers purposes are to support, educate and empower these groups, as well as change their perceptions of themselves, their abilities and their role in the society. The centers should function as a place where people can access quality information and knowledge, and get skills and tools in order to claim their rights and enhance their influence in the society. By implementing these centers, they are working according to the Paris declaration and Accra Agenda for Action (OECD, 2005/2008) and also the philosophy of Ennis and West’s (2010), where development should be implemented by the local people and on local objectives instead of using an already finished concept. Because of this, the NGO is implementing the program for, with and through local organizations and people in the three districts. In other words they collaborate interorganizationally for implementing the program.

Aim of study

One of the most common ways to study interorganizational projects is by using a social network analysis (SNA) (Arya & Lin, 2007; Luque et al., 2010). SNA’s are mostly used as a tool for data about the organizational structure, having a quantitative approach and using statistical data. What the SNA lacks is an in-depth analysis of the relational aspects, which a collaboration analysis better enables (Arya & Lin, 2007; Moliterno & Mahony, 2011; Salancik, 1995; Shiplov, 2006). A collaborative analysis uses a more qualitative approach, and analyzes the ability of people and organizations to work together for a specific purpose more in depth (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Selden et al., 2006). Because the project’s result, implementation, and success are depending on how well the collaborative actors are working, there is a need for qualitative case studies using some kind of collaboration analysis. They have also been proven to be specifically useful when studying interorganizational collaboration (Arya & Lin, 2007; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Rapp Ricciardi, 2001; Selden 2006; Shiplov, 2006). Collaboration analysis is therefore the chosen methodology of this study.

The overall purpose of this study was to make a contribution within the area of project psychology, specifically within the relational aspects of interorganizational collaboration of development projects organized by NGO’s. The aim of this study was to make a collaboration analysis which examined how the key actors in the interorganizational collaboration perceived their collaboration to be functioning when implementing the centers. Due to the time and frame limits of this study, only the implementation of centers in one district of the program
was studied, which consisted of three wards with one center in each ward. The above review on interorganizational collaboration, with Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) literature review as the base, served as a foundation of the collaboration analysis. Out of Mattessich and Monsey’s six categories, eight research questions emerged:

- Environment: (1) Is there a favorable environment for the collaborative network to implement the centers in the district?
- Membership characteristics: (2) Does the collaborative network view collaborating together within the implementation as beneficial?
- Process and Structure: (3) Are roles, responsibilities and guidelines clear and well-understood for an effective and flexible implementation? (4) Is everyone involved and do they have ownership of the process of implementing the centers?
- Communication: (5) Is the communication and documentation sufficient for an effective implementation?
- Purpose: (6) Is there a clear, shared and agreed purpose for the project and collaboration?
- Resources: (7) Are there enough funds for a good implementation? (8) Does the project and collaborative network have a functioning leadership structure?

Method

Participants

The study included eight participants, two women and six men, all working on the implementation of three centers in one of three districts within the social development program of an NGO in Tanzania. The participants were aged between 27 and 46 years with a mean age of 36.9 years old. Eight key actors of the implementation were identified based on observations and key documents about the centers in relation to the aim of the study. The key actors included three single persons and five organizations, and were chosen as key as they were identified as the eight most central and essential actors of the implementation. All eight key actors were requested to participate, and seven, all single persons and four organizations participated. One interview with one of the organizations included two persons, which makes a total of eight interviewed participants in seven interviews. The five participants from the four organizations represented their organization as a key actor in the interviews, and not as single persons. All participants were Tanzanians. Five of them had worked with community development before, and three had not, however they had worked with education within the community. All had been trained within the project by the NGO, in order for them to get knowledgeable about the projects purpose and process, and how to work with social development within the community. The participants had different roles for the implementation ranging from three more operational roles within the centers, to five both operational and managing roles, that for example were planning, organizing and executing activities like seminars and trainings for target groups.

The participants were given a small amount of money for their participation as compensation for their travel and time losses.

Materials

The study used a qualitative approach and structured/semi-structured interviews to obtain more in depth data regarding the participant’s perceptions. The interviews took between 51
and 83 minutes. Each transcript was between 9 and 14 pages. The interview schedule was designed based on the aim and the eight research questions of the study. The interview was divided into four areas of study: (a) Introduction and Background, (b) Environment, (c) Purpose and Process, and (d) Communication and Collaboration. These four areas were created due to the fact that many of the research questions interrelate with and affect each other, and were therefore best suited to be asked and/or put together.

Example questions of the first category Introduction and Background with five main questions are: Could you please briefly describe your role/your organization? What is your/your organizations’ experience in working with these kinds of goals and strategies of implementation that is needed within the centers? Example of questions in the category of Environment that contained five main questions are: In this district, is it common for organizations to work together for a specific purpose, for example social development or some kind of service delivery? How do you perceive the social development environment in the district, are the citizens open to change? Examples of questions in the category Purpose and Process which contained seven main questions: How would you briefly describe the vision and goals of the centers? Do you have some kind of timetable for when activities and goals should be made and achieved? Examples of two questions out of 15 in the category of Communication and Collaboration: In what ways and how often do you share information about the implementation of the centers with each other? In what ways are you working together with other members/people when implementing the centers?

The fourth category Communication and Collaboration also included an exercise where the participants were requested to write down on separate papers the actors they see as key within the implementation of the centers. Then first organize those actors ranging from the one(s) they have most contact with to the actor(s) they have least contact with, and then secondly organize them after the one(s) who has the most power and influence in the implementation of the centers, to the actor(s) that have least power and influence. The material from the exercise consisted of, for each of the interviews, written papers with the key actors identified, and two photos of when participants had put the paper of key actors in order according to contact, and power.

Procedure

The first contact with the NGO was made through email with a request to study their program, which led to a meeting where this was approved by the program manager. The study and interviews were conducted in Tanzania in June and July 2011. The finalized interview schedule and identification and selection of key actors were based on three weeks observations, and a review of the project’s key documents. The observations were made by participating in the projects daily activities of implementing the centers in the chosen district, with the aim of understanding the project’s structure and network, in order to identify the most relevant, central and essential actors involved. Perceived information concerning this was written down during and/or after each observation, and when analyzing the document. All data was after three weeks analyzed and compared, after which eight key actors emerged and were identified. The key actors were then requested to participate by telephone and a written letter of information. The letter contained brief information about the aim of the study and the code of research ethics about confidentiality and that the participation was voluntary (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002). The interviews were then arranged through agreements by telephone.

A test interview was made prior to the study to make sure that the interview schedule was functioning and followed the aim of the study. The test person worked at the same NGO and
had worked with the implementation of the centers before but had now changed role. Only minor corrections were made after the test interview.

All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim with the consent of the participants. The interviews took place in environments where the participants felt relaxed and where they could talk freely. Before starting, the code of ethics was informed again and they were able to ask questions. All interviews were made individually except for one where two participants from the same organization were interviewed together. A neutral translator was used in two of the interviews due to language barriers. The exercise was made as an introduction for the category Communication and Collaboration.

The small amount of money given to participants was not acknowledged until after finishing the interviews.

Data analysis

Kvaløs (1997) meaning concentration and meaning categorization guided the data analysis. Meaning categorization is the analysis of material in relation to categories already set based on existing research literature, which in this study was the eight research questions based on Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) study. The meaning concentration analysis was then made in relation to each of the research questions (categories), which were given different colors. This was implemented due to some interview answers being interrelated to several research questions, so each transcript was marked with the eight colors based on what research question the data related to. The transcripts were first read individually several times in order to gain familiarization with the data, and marked with colors in relation to each research question. Then each transcript was compared to the others. Patterns were identified, described and collated in relation to each research question, whereby themes and subthemes were created. Each theme and subtheme was then compared with the original data to make sure they matched.

When analyzing and summarizing the results of each research question, a continuum of four levels was developed which consists of; Well-functioning, Sufficient, Deficient, and Problematic. These levels describe how well the examined interorganizational collaboration network seems to be functioning. They were created when analyzing and comparing the summary of each research question in relation to Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) description on how these areas of studying should be functioning to be effective. The categorization was then made by comparing the results of each research question in relation to the created continuum. Well-functioning is when the research question is fulfilled, without difficulties; Sufficient is when the research question is mostly fulfilled, with some difficulties but still functional; Deficient is when the research question is partly fulfilled, with difficulties that cause dysfunctions, and Problematic is when the research question is not fulfilled, with many difficulties that cause major problems. See table 1.

A collection of citations were chosen to demonstrate and highlight the results, and to improve the validity. Those were made anonymously according to each transcript, randomly coded between P1-P7.

Results

The actors within the interorganizational collaboration were composed directly or indirectly by the NGO. All participants had worked with social development or education in the community before this program, but the strategies and way of implementing were new to six
participants. They had all got trainings within the program, about their target groups, and the programs vision, mission, goals and strategies. The collaborative network consisted of actors with different roles and responsibilities for the implementation, where all had formal agreements of working with the centers. Out of the eight participants three were single employees, and five of them were representatives from four organizations, one of which was the NGO. As three of the participants had more operational roles, and five of them had both managing and operational roles, they together covered the implementation in the three wards within the chosen district.

The results of the collaboration analysis are presented in relation to each of the eight research questions covering the six areas of study. In Table 1 each research question is summarized for an overview of the results. Findings on each research question are described more in detail after the summary.

Table 1
Summary of the eight research questions, in relation to Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) six categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories and research questions</th>
<th>Participants perception</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Well-functioning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environment:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(1) Is there a favorable environment for the collaborative network to implement the centers in the district?</td>
<td>Sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Membership characteristics:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Does the collaborative network view collaborating together within the implementation as beneficial?</td>
<td>Sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process and Structure:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Are roles, responsibilities and guidelines clear and well-understood for an effective and flexible implementation?</td>
<td>Sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Is everyone involved and do they have ownership of the process of implementing the centers?</td>
<td>Deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Is the communication and documentation sufficient for an effective implementation?</td>
<td>Deficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(6) Is there a clear, shared and agreed purpose for the project and collaboration?</td>
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Environment

(1) Is there a favorable environment for the collaborative network to implement the centers in the district? The people and especially the authorities had previously been resisting change, and people were not interested due to a lack of knowledge. But through the implementation of the program and the centers, both the political and social climate had started to change and become more open towards changes. Through education, the program had even managed to make formal agreements with the local authority at district level. Therefore the authority was now an important actor in the implementation, and also provided the project with buildings for the centers. Most resistance seemed to lie within the authorities on ward and village level, and especially the local leaders. They were scared of what was going to happen and feared losing their power over the people. But this resistance was something the collaborative actors worked on to change, with positive outcomes, as P6 said:

“When they start to understand the concept and what it means, they resist less."

Before this program, it was uncommon to collaborate in the district. Even if there was a civil society network prevalent where some efforts of working together were made, it wasn’t effective. All participants agreed that collaboration had been enhanced through the implementation, and not only had it become more common, the involved actors had also become more positive:

“I think organizations have already now got more understanding and knowledge that it’s better to have a common issue and work together.” (P2)

The actors also seemed to have an overall trust from the local society when it comes to social development in the district:

“Yes, people respect us, they appreciate our work. This simply means that they allow us to show the way how to do it together.” (P7)

The ones who disagreed to this meant that some key actors were not yet fully trusted within the community. Because of this, the centers were not yet fully implemented, yet they agreed it has been improved.

In sum: overall, it seems like the participants experienced a work environment that had a favorable climate for the collaborative network to implement the centers. There was some resistance left within some levels in the society, but because the actors knew it is important, and also were working on reducing both the political and social resistance in a way that had shown to be successful, the resistance that was left would probably be reduced even more.

Membership characteristics

(2) Does the collaborative network view collaborating together within the implementation as beneficial? They all emphasized that working together with implementing the centers was good. P7 described it like this:

“We get a strong power when we are together.”
They all brought up both positive and negative outcomes, but all together thought that there were more advantages than disadvantages in working together. Positive outcomes brought up were information and idea sharing, learning from each other, reduced time and work load, and a better and faster implementation. One reason for this was that there were a variety of actors, from different levels in the society, involved in the implementation, ranging from village up to district level. They also described an overall good and smooth relationship between the actors, where there was support, and they could discuss issues, compromise and come up with common conclusions. But, the mutual understanding and trust between actors in implementing the centers were not yet fully established. P2 for example brought up the key actors difference in capacity:

“Other organizations are still weak, they are weak in facilities, weak in managing plans, weak in expertise, and weak in ability to work.”

Yet, everyone agreed that their relationships and trust had been improved by the training made within the program. Other negative aspects of collaboration mentioned were different perceptions about the implementation, misunderstandings and broken dependencies. There were also some tensions where actors were described to sometimes be a little dominant, instead of showing respect and flexibility, which P3 described as:

“Some actors tend to think that they know much more than others, which becomes like a stone you will hit and a weakness.”

Explanations to these problems are that not all actors started working with the project at the same time, they did not have the same perception of who the key actors were, and they were not working in all three wards. This meant that all the key actors that were implementing the centers did not collaborate or have direct contact with each other. These broken connections between participants within the network of actors also existed within each ward. This is something that not all participants knew or were aware of.

In sum: there are some weaknesses within the collaborative network, but the benefits seem to be valued more so than the weaknesses, which overall makes all actors positive in working together.

**Process & Structure**

(3) Are roles, responsibilities and guidelines clear and well-understood for an effective and flexible implementation? The knowledge of roles, responsibilities and guidelines for the project and implementation had by training and education been improved since the project started. They now knew their overall role and the overall guidelines for the centers. But, they did not fully understand what responsibilities that included within the implementation, and how to collaborate around the centers. This is not something that the participants were fully aware of. Also, not all participants fully knew the roles and responsibilities of other key actors within the implementation. This indicates that they were not clear and well-understood by all. However, they all seemed to know who to contact and how to handle problems and challenges they faced in a flexible way. When there were minor problems the participants tried to solve them on their own or in discussion with the involved actors. They always informed the NGO, which served as a central point. If the problem had a bigger impact on the implementation of the centers, they did as P3 described:
“We can raise it to the steering board when we have meetings quarterly. If we have to make a fast decision about a problem we can call for an urgent meeting.”

In sum: even if the actors of the collaborative network knew their overall roles, responsibilities and guidelines for the project, there were some deficiencies of performance in the implementation and how to collaborate with others. This indicates that the roles, responsibilities and guidelines were workable, but not fully understood, or at least not fully practiced. Fortunately their understanding had been improved since the project’s launch, and will hopefully be enhanced in the future.

(4) Is everyone involved and do they have ownership of the process of implementing the centers? There were big differences in both feelings of ownership and influence in decision-making for the centers. The participants can be organized in three levels, first the NGO, then the organizations, and lastly the single actors. The NGO and organizations with both managing and operational roles felt that they had more impact on processes, and influence in making decisions. The three single actors with more operational roles were not involved to the same extent, though they had gotten more and more involved since the implementation started. Participants overall felt that they had the ability to initiate and influence what activities were made at the centers, but as P2 described:

“Yes we have ability to influence, but we need to increase more.”

This quote indicates that their ability to organize the centers was not sufficient in relation to their wishes. Some of the other actors expressed similar concerns for this. For example, the program had constructed a steering committee concerning the implementation, which supposedly served as a discussion, sharing and decision-making focal point for the centers. P6 described it like this:

“In that meeting we try to collaborate more, talk about concepts, activities, sharing ideas, and goals to achieve. The aims are to advice and support each other.”

This steering committee met quarterly, but not all participants in this study or actors within the collaboration were members of that board. This means that not all actors at all levels within the collaboration were included in the information sharing and decision-making process. Fortunately not all decisions were brought up or made by the steering committee. It seems like many of the operational ones were made in discussion between the involved actors. For example when activities were made at the centers, plans and decisions were made by the actors working in that specific ward. Another example of this is how they used work plans and timetables. There was a timetable and work plan made by the NGO for the program concerning the centers with expected outcomes and activities. But this was not used by the whole collaborative network. Most of the participants made their own timetables and work plans for outcomes and activities, but they were not always shared with others. P3 thought it was positive to make their own timetable, but highlighted the importance of sharing it:

“If the timetable would be planned by other actors or the NGO, it would be difficult to implement some of the issues, because we know the village situation of the place better. But they should be shared with partners.”

Some actors did not have set timetables at all, mostly because they didn’t have the influence to decide on their own what to do and when. As P4 described:
“We do not really have a timetable. When an organization wants to have training here at the center, they inform me in advance so I can provide and arrange for the setup.”

In sum: the NGO had tried to set up the steering board as a shared platform for key actors, where bigger decisions and discussions for the implementation could be made. But this does not seem to be satisfactory. The actors still believed they lack influence in implementation which caused problems regarding involvement and ownership. They did seem to have a better impact and involvement in decision-making on lower levels, for example when planning concrete activities at the centers.

**Communication**

(5) *Is the communication and documentation sufficient for an effective implementation?* All participants seemed to communicate through both discussions and written information, and overall, most of them felt they had good contact with each other. The NGO had done several trainings to inform and educate the actors about the implementation of the centers. But still, important information about the centers did not seem to have reached all actors involved, and not all actors communicated with each other. Also, the communication and documentation seemed to be mostly about informing each other, instead of actually discussing the best way to collaborate and to come up with common ways to work with the implementation of the centers.

There were both informal and formal communication channels created within the collaborative network, but they were not all well-functioning for a good collaboration. Formal communication channels created were set meetings with various actors on different levels within the implementation, and to produce and conduct different reports and evaluations in written format. The methods of communication seemed to differ within each ward, for example they did not have the same meeting structure. All participants brought up the steering committee meetings which met quarterly as a communication point for sharing, which should also be documented through written reports. However, not all participants were members of that board and therefore the things communicated on these meeting were not shared, as P7 says:

“We don’t have any copy from the meetings, I think it’s verbally […] only mouth to mouth information. It’s not enough, we need written documents.”

Every actor should make quarterly budget and monthly work reports, and submit them to the NGO, but it seemed like the work reports were not always shared with or reached those who it affected. All participants seemed to keep good track of their own work by writing evaluations after activities, but even those were not always shared with others. One actor brought up a planned way of sharing information with the collaborative actors which could improve the communication, called a networking meeting. This does not seem to have been communicated well, as none of the other participants brought this up. The networking meeting would consist of all key people and organizations concerned with the implementation of the centers in the district:

“We will have the meeting locally at the end of every month, where we will plan together in order to review all activities for next month.” (P7)
The more informal communication forms of information sharing were telephone calls and physical visits between actors if they needed to discuss, plan or inform something. The participants thought this informal contact was good, and they seemed to think it worked well overall. But as P1 described his relation to another key actor within the same ward, the informal communication does seem to have some difficulties:

“I heard that they came to visit one day and wanted to meet us, but I wasn’t there and because of that we don’t have contact.”

In sum: good attempts had been made to create effective communication and documentation, and some of it worked well, but some didn’t seem to be fully embedded within the actors. As a collaborative network, they seemed to be working too much as separate units for the communication and documentation to be adequate, especially as not all members had contact with each other. They also seemed to lack knowledge in how to use communication and documentation not only as informative tools, but also as a tool to improve their collaboration. So even if most of the actors thought they had good contact, there were problems in communication and documentation that reduced the implementation’s effectiveness.

**Purpose**

(6) *Is there a clear, shared and agreed purpose for the project and collaboration?* The NGO has made a detailed description about the centers, with their vision, mission, and concrete goals, objectives and strategies. The participants overall had an agreed and common understanding of the vision on how the centers should help and strengthen the people and local society. They also had a clear understanding of who their target groups were, and most of them knew the different strategies required to attain their goals. This common understanding seemed to have been reached mostly through training and education launched by the NGO. But even if they understood the big picture, the majority of them did not know details on how the centers should be functioning and structured. For example, one basic aim for the centers was to have four corners with specific purposes for their target groups, but only one of the participants described these. Also, they did not have a common knowledge or fully understood the strategies and approaches of implementation, or in how to collaborate together to achieve the centers purpose. This is described by P7:

“We have the same goals […] and I think we can reach our goals, but we have to correct some things. We have different understandings and approaches, also when it comes to collaboration, we have to strengthen. […] The differences are not so big but they cause hinder in our implementation. […] […] The only answer to do this together without collision is by sitting together, to plan together, implement together and evaluate together.”

In relation to this, there seemed to be very little joint planning where the collaborative network could be fully shared and have agreed objectives, goals, activities and plans concerning the implementation of the centers. P3 described it like this:

“There is no joint planning, each of the partners and organizations plan on their own, but there is some sharing of some of the things, during the monthly and quarterly meeting.”

If there was joint planning, it was usually for a specific activity in a specific ward where only two or three actors planned together.
In sum: there seemed to be an overall clear, shared and agreed vision for the project and activities which made the collaborative network work in the same direction. But, there were different views on approaches and most effective strategies to use, and there was not enough knowledge and shared understanding on how the centers should be structured. Even if they shared the same overall purpose which made them work in the same direction, they didn’t seem to perceive their collaboration well enough to create a clear mutual understanding of how to work together and implement the centers in the most efficient way.

Resources

(7) Are there enough funds for a good implementation? All actors participating in this study agreed that they did not have adequate funding for a good implementation. P6 said:

“It is not enough funds, it is not. For example, we had the idea to have three centers, but up to now, we only have one, and the time is short. So it is not enough. If we have had enough money, we should have been implementing the other two centers also.”

The most developed center did generates small amounts of money on its own, because it had received some equipment like a photocopy machine, which people paid to use. The other centers lacked this equipment and other materials like computers, books and newspapers. They also lacked money for building toilets and good water supplies, as P7 described:

“I think we have narrowed our budget to the maximum. It’s very very little […] for example, the budget is for 3 years, but when buying stationary, example a pen […]. You can’t buy a pen for the same price during three years. […] there are some challenges, and I think that if we could have been involved in the budgeting, and say our opinion, we could have come in a good position, but now we are implementing but with a very narrow budget.”

Not only did they lack funding, participants also raised concerns about the insufficient information on delivering materials, and that funds received were not always on time, which they thought, made it even more difficult to make the best out of the things they had.

In sum: It seems like the NGO and program had not released enough funding for the project of implementing the centers. There also seemed to be both delays, lack of information and miscommunication in relation to this. These issues all contribute to poor implementation.

(8) Does the project and collaborative network have a functioning leadership structure? There were mixed views on whether or not the implementation had a good convener who possessed the organizing and leadership skills required. A slight majority thought that there was need for better organization and leadership within the collaboration. The project initiator and convener was the NGO, which had appointed a person on field who worked as a coordinator for the implementation. All participants seemed to agree that the NGO had a leading function, but there seemed to be some confusion about how the leadership should work, mostly because the NGO had entered different partnership in order for them to implement and run the centers. Due to this, the implementation depended upon many actors, which created question marks on how the leading function should be distributed on these actors. A problem in relation to this is that a couple of participants also described that some key actors lacked good organizational and leadership skills.
The steering board was also mentioned as one of the leading structures for the implementation, but as mentioned before, not all key actors were members of that board. P2 described their view on the leadership structure and how it should look:

“For now the leadership setup is with the program, which the NGO established. But we don’t think it’s enough. We think it’s better to have an innovative way to create and have a leadership which will assist the sustainability and the impact better. Because when the NGO arranged the program, they did not know the culture or tradition and the norms and things like that of the people of this district. Because key actors like us are working directly with the local people, and knows what happen here, it’s better to use a new, innovative leadership structure that is more local.”

This shows the need for a discussion about the organization and leadership structure, which was something the slight majority agreed was necessary for the future implementation to work well.

In sum: Even if some actors felt the implementation had an organization and leadership that worked well, the majority didn’t believe it was satisfactory. Due to the many actors involved, and the unclear situation about how the leadership structure should function, the collaborative network was in need of discussing the issue in order to come up with a mutual solution.

Discussion

Usability of method

This study has explored a new approach in studying and understanding the relational aspects of a project. It is a contribution within the field of project psychology, a relatively new perspective that lacks empirical studies (Rapp Ricciardi, 2001). The findings specifically contribute to the research on interorganizational collaboration which also lacks empirical studies from a psychological standpoint with aims of linking and understanding relational factors that affect collaborative success and outcomes (Arya & Lin, 2007; Franco, 2008; Rapp Ricciardi, 2001; Selden et al., 2006; Shiplov, 2006; Tsasis, 2009). The results underline the great complexity of relationships within projects, which confirms the need for more research on projects from a psychological standpoint (Mattessich & Monsey 1992; Rapp Ricciardi, 2001; Selden et al., 2006).

This study confirms that making a qualitative case study, and using the method of collaboration analysis on an interorganizational project can be a useful method for understanding interorganizational collaborations on a deeper relational level (Arya & Lin, 2007; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Rapp Ricciardi, 2001; Shiplov, 2006). It also shows the importance of including this relational perspective when planning and organizing projects. The use of Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) literature review has, for this study, been a functioning tool for analyzing collaboration, using a qualitative approach and interviews. The framework seems to have covered many important aspects of collaboration, which can make it useful both as an analyzing tool for interorganizational projects, and act as a guide when planning projects. But even if the Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) framework is based on a covering literature review of research articles on collaboration, more empirical studies are needed to test the framework as a tool for studying projects. There is also a need to study how other areas affect collaboration. The collaborative actor’s education and experience within the area of implementation could for example affect their ability to collaborate
interorganizationally. More empirical research is needed to see if and how the framework can be improved as a collaboration analyzing tool within research on social development projects, and also in other settings. The best way to test the framework would be to conduct longitudinal studies that follow interorganizational collaboration networks from the beginning to the end of projects, to see how well the areas of study actually relate to the project’s success. Longitudinal study results can also be used to confirm that interorganizational collaboration is a good way of implementing development projects. This would respond to the critique saying that benefits from collaboration within projects are not empirically tested due to difficulties in studying collaboration in relation to project outcomes (Kagan 1993; Martin et al., 1983).

Validity

The focus on reliability in qualitative studies is not as apparent when compared to quantitative studies (Bryman, 2011). This is due to the fact that the methodology is difficult to replicate, and results are not measurable and quantifiable in the same way. However, it would have been preferable if the categorization of each research question in relation to Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) theory, in Table 1, would have been made by two researchers independently, and then compared and discussed. This would have increased the inter-rater reliability, that the results would have been the same regardless of who conducted the study (Bryman, 2011). Also, using two independent researchers would have increased the validity, in terms of dialogical intersubjectivity where the analyses are made both individually and by reciprocal interpretations and discussions that double check the results (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). When it comes to validity in qualitative studies it’s important that the study has examined the specific aim of the study, and that the results match and give a fair picture of the participant’s perceptions (Bryman, 2011; Kvale, 1997).

Some limitations that threaten the validity of this study will be discussed below. Because the study was carried out in Tanzania, language problems could affect the study. Translators were used on two occasions, which worked well and the participants seemed to be relaxed. There were a couple of interviews where the participant’s answers were not as detailed and specific. This was probably due to their linguistic limitations. To reduce these problems as much as possible, the interviewer tried to verbally repeat and summarize what the participants were saying, to make sure the answers were correctly understood.

One issue with this study was the time and frame limits, which affected several other aspects. Firstly, the sample of eight participants in seven interviews is small, and it would have been good to have interviewed a larger number of people within the implementation. As the key actors of this study were identified as the most central and essential actors within the implementation, the results could have been affected. Perceptions of less central actors could have differed to central ones. For example, by not including less central actors, the results could have been biased more positively, as central actors may have closer contact and more intense collaboration than less central actors. Because of this, the validity could have been improved if the study also would have had the possibility to include other less central actors within the network. It also would have been better if all eight identified key actors had participated in the study, but even if only seven participated and the picked sample was small, the different participants had diverse roles for the implementation. Thus, given the small sample group, their contributions were plentiful, covering as many aspects as possible. Making initial observations within the collaborative network had several benefits. By understanding how the collaborative network was functioning, it was possible to identify and pick the key actors for the implementation in the study. It also made sure that the participants
had different roles and responsibilities, and on different levels within the society. This enabled the gathering of comprehensive data about the collaboration.

Secondly, the study could have been improved by studying each area and research question more in-depth, and also more extensive observations would have been a good complement to the interviews, thus further improving the study’s validity. This also could have enabled studying how big impact the participants’ previous experiences, education and knowledge had on their level of collaboration. Thirdly, a longitudinal study which follows the collaborative network from start to end would have been the best way to test the methodology and analyzing tool of this study. It would have enabled a better examination of how well the areas of studying based on Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) actually affect collaborative effectiveness. A longitudinal study would also enable predictions on collaboration effectiveness in interorganizational collaboration projects in general.

Fourthly, it is difficult to generalize when it comes to small studies like this, especially using an analyzing tool and interview guide that hasn’t been used as an established measurement instrument within empirical research before. Even though this could have implications on the validity, the analyzing tool and interview guide were established on a comprehensive literature review based on research made on collaboration (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992). In addition, a test interview was made to make sure that the interview guide matched the aim of study and research questions, as this is something that strengthens the validity (Kvale, 1997). During the interviews, the interviewer perceived the participants to be answering questions freely and uninhibited, which indicates that they answered the question in an honest way. Thus, according to the aim and psychological approach of this study, the analyzing tool and interview guide have been functional and useful tools in analyzing interorganizational collaboration. This indicates that there is validity and that the findings of this study are significant also in a bigger perspective.

**Findings**

Research shows that collaboration arranged by nonprofits and NGO’s can be a very effective way to work (Luque et al., 2010). The results confirm that working with interorganizational collaboration within projects seem to be a good way of implementing community development projects, but with some implications for it to work well. The findings of this study highlight both how beneficial and challenging it can be to organize work in interorganizational collaboration within development projects. The challenges are the problems that occur when many actors are involved. A basic factor for collaboration even to begin is that the actors have the will and motivation for collaboration (McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006). If this will and motivation is strong, it can compensate small deficiencies within other areas of the collaboration, which is what’s happening in the collaborative network studied. Although the studied collaborative network had both functional and dysfunctional parts within their collaboration, they were overall positive in collaborating together and were keen to emphasize the benefits gained, rather than the problems that arose. This indicates that it might be good to take some time off in the beginning in order to establish a mutual solid ground for the collaboration and project, thus creating a collective identity, as suggested by several researchers (Franco, 2008; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Wright et al., 2001).

It’s also important to create a favorable political and social climate for the project, as change and development will otherwise be resisted (Engwall, 2003; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006; Tsasis, 2009). The results of this study confirm this, as the collaborative network had managed to change many persons’ resistance to the project by
Informing and educating them in ways that adhere to the local tradition and norms. The studied network is also an example of the importance of working with all levels in the society, which falls in agreement with the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action directives (OECD, 2005/2008). Ennis and West (2010) suggest this leads to successful implementation, especially when it comes to community development projects such as this. The fact that the implementation was made locally and worked with locals, helped the studied collaborative network to coordinate activities in a more efficient way, responding better to individual needs. These are all reasons as to why the collaborative network managed to gain trust and change people’s attitudes (Austin, 2000; Ostrower, 2003).

In order to understand and solve collaborative problems in the best way possible, the participants need to gain an understanding about them as they occur during the implementation (McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006). The methodology used, based on Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) framework helped identifying problematic areas within the collaboration that needs to be improved for the implementation to be successful. What the findings show is that the collaborative network in the studied project was overall working in the same direction. They were making progress in implementing the centers, but with some areas that were both deficient and problematic, which seemed to cause misunderstandings, confusions, delays and problems for the implementation to be effective. It’s therefore essential for the NGO and program to pay attention to and work on resolving them.

At the point of study, the collaborative network was in relation to Selden’s et al. (2006) “Continuum of collaborate service arrangements” not having a functioning collaboration. The studied project was aiming for delivering services to mutual clients, which, to become successful, includes a well-functioning collaboration. The most important areas for the project is to clarify and discuss how their approaches, structures and processes of the project should be organized and functioning, how the collaborative network could be organized to collaborate in the best possible way, and what the implementation should look like. According to research it’s very difficult to make a successful implementation without clear, agreed and mutually created approaches to collaborate (Ennis & West, 2010; Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006).

Also, a discussion and clarification about how the leadership structure should work is needed as the majority of the participants thought it needed to be improved. The possibilities are either to restructure a more centralized leadership, which for example Mattessich and Monsey (1992) and Milward and Provan (1995, 1998) suggest is best, or to implement a more non-hierarchical and shared leadership, as McCloughen and O’Brien (2006) and Nowell and Harrison (2011) find ideal in collaboration. Lastly there is great need of making sure that the funding is adequate and consistent, as this was causing problems and delays for the project, yet is vital to the project’s existence (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992; Milward & Provan, 1995, 1998). All areas of improvement are also interrelated with the need for better and more efficient communication, which is the foundation of collaboration as it affects all other essential aspects of it (Austin, 2000; Heath & Frey, 2004; Luque et al., 2010; McCloughen & O’Brien, 2006; Rogers, 2009). Information concerning the project should reach everyone involved, and there is a need for openness so that question marks and constructive criticism can be aired and discussed.

One way to reorganize dysfunctional interorganizational collaborative networks is to create clusters that consist of certain actors, for example actors within a specific geographical area (Barnes et al., 2010). These clusters enable those specific actors to collaborate closer and on a more intense level, which can make the implementation better and more effective. Clusters can ease communication flow and adaptation, and also enable the implementing actors to work closer to target groups (Barnes et al., 2010; Selden et al., 2006). The used methodology in this study could act as an analyzing tool that can provide a basis to detect such
opportunities. For this study, the NGO and collaborative network could clarify the key actors within each ward, and let them work closer as clusters. Then each ward could have representatives who could function as a bridge between the network as a whole, and the key actors within each ward. This could improve all aspects of the collaboration, as it could enhance the possibilities of working even closer within the local society, and ease communication and information sharing. This interrelates to the creation of clear goals, responsibilities and budgeting, and helps create mutual goals and approaches which help create feelings of ownership.

The findings do question some of the previous research. For example, some researchers emphasize that interorganizational collaboration can often lead to more problems than gains (Franco, 2009; Simpson, 2008). And although most of the actors in the studied center were from the same district, they still had different backgrounds, values and approaches which affected their way of working. This put a very challenging aspect into the project in creating a common understanding, which the results clearly convey. But the results also emphasize that even if it’s difficult, the interorganizational collaboration still brought more positive aspects to the implementation than causing difficulties.

Another issue is the shared funding, which is one of the biggest reasons as to why many projects within NGO’s are structured as interorganizational collaborations. It’s believed to cut costs and ease the distribution of funds (Arya & Lin, 2007). This study shows that it might not be effective as problems can occur when one actor has the power to distribute all money, and the others don’t have influence. It can limit the whole implementation. From the results of this study, one suggestion to overcome this could be to let all key actors within the implementation have a say in how the budgeting should be organized. It not only creates more transparency in to how money is kept and distributed, the collaborative network also have better possibilities to adjust the economy in relation to specific needs that comes along within the implementation. If this would serve as a better alternative should be tested and studied in future research.

It’s according to Mattessich and Monsey’s (1992) study possible to use their created framework as a planning and analyzing tool of collaboration. They argue that if the analysis is done early enough in relation to the length of a project, the collaborative network has possibilities to correct the deficiencies and improve the collaboration in such manner that the project will have a chance to succeed. The analyzing tool could then, if further tested and validated, be an effective evaluation tool for interorganizational projects to use during the implementation. In relation to this study, as the results show, three out of six areas of studying, which are four out of the eight research questions, were having deficiencies that caused dysfunctions for the implementation of the centers. These are: (a) the key actors lacked feelings of ownership of the implementation, (b) communication and documentation was not sufficient, (c) the leadership structure was not functional, and (d) the implementation lacked sufficient funding. The functioning areas are: (a) an environment favorable enough for the project to implement the centers, (b) the key actors saw collaborating as more beneficial than problematic, (c) roles, responsibilities and guidelines were understood, and (d) the program’s purpose was shared and agreed upon. However, because there was almost two years left of the project at the point of study, and the collaborative network both had some dysfunctional areas of improvement, and some parts that function sufficient, the collaborative network could, if they put the effort in, correct and improve the deficiencies that were prevalent. As the NGO and collaborative network seemed to work continuously on improving their collaboration, they had according to Mattessich and Monsey (1992) a good chance to eventually implement a successful project.

Finally, more research is needed to validate the methodology used for this study. It would be useful to develop a well-functioning analyzing, planning and evaluation tool for studying
interorganizational collaboration. This is increasingly important within social development projects as they work to strengthen civil society by helping and empowering marginalized groups. Indeed, the importance of interorganizational collaboration should be viewed in a bigger perspective. If the implementation and project success could be improved, the social development would also be greater. If the research manages to create an effective analyzing tool for collaboration within social development projects, the implementation can become more powerful, leading to an improved and more successful development. This would eventually then lead to a world where more people can be given the strength and resources to create a better life for themselves.
References


