Facilitating Interorganizational Collaboration Initiatives

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Executive Summary

The current business atmosphere is going through global changes that require organizations to adapt to their immediate socioeconomic environment. This has led organizations to emphasize the importance of interorganizational collaboration (Agota, 2010). Collaboration is seen as one of the most efficient strategies for organizations to accomplish their goals and meet the needs of their stakeholders. (Agota, 2010).

In their work on organizational dynamics Kinicki and Fugate (2012) seek to find processes and structures that aid organizations in meeting their goals. One such strategy they recommend for organizations is collaboration. Collaboration is especially important for organizations in the industry of parks and recreation to understand so they can effectively and efficiently apply it to their agency to reach their goals. Wollenburg et al. (2013) established that seeking partnerships is an integral way of life for recreation agencies and not taking advantage of such opportunities is irresponsible in an ever-growing complex and diverse environment with resource constraints at every turn. For organizations to understand how to successfully facilitate interorganizational collaboration they first must recognize the motives behind partnerships, how to identify compatible alliances, what models and structures can lead to their success, their role in managing and keeping the partnership thriving, how to evaluate the success factors of interorganizational collaboration, and ethical concerns.

This research seeks to lay the groundwork for organizational understanding in each of these five areas for creating positive collaboration and expand on them to give organizations the knowledge needed to foster successful facilitation of partnerships. By applying this knowledge organizations will be able to more effectively problem solve and deal with resource constraints to meet their goals.
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Facilitating Organization Dynamics of Collaboration Initiatives

Kinicki and Fugate (2012) introduce several main objectives throughout MSA 601. An important part of MSA 601 and what this research paper will focus on is the issue of identifying key factors and structures that assists organizations in more effectively achieving their mission. Finding an effective approach to aid in fulfilling goals is essential as organizations now act in a modern and ever more global business environment where they are faced with newer and more complex problems, diverse customer bases, resource shortages, ethical concerns, and fiscal pressures that make it difficult to accomplish their mission (McNamara, 2012). To get ahead of these problems and increase organizational effectiveness, interorganizational collaboration is highly encouraged as it creates new solutions by bringing diverse stakeholders to the same table (McNamara, 2012).

Furthermore, collaboration initiatives lead to knowledge sharing that allows for a continual process of improvement for how an organization operates (Kinicki and Fugate, 2012). Understanding how to effectively facilitate partnerships and knowledge sharing is vital if organizations desire to carry out their mission in a business environment where new and ever increasingly challenges present themselves (Kinicki and Fugate, 2012).

The collaboration lessons in MSA 601 are especially important for parks and recreation organizations as partnerships are an essential part of their existence if they are to effectively provide their services to the public. Rathi, Given, and Forcier (2014) identify eight categories of partnerships which are business, government, community, sector, expert, endorsement, charter, and hybrid. What makes understanding collaboration and its facilitation so indispensable for parks and recreation organizations is that using all eight of these collaboration categories is often
a daily part of their reality if they are to be successful. Wollenburg (2013) confirmed this in a
study of partnership agreements for parks and recreation and stated, “partnership agreements
between municipal parks, recreation departments, districts, and outside like-minded agencies
such as sport associations are an integral part to providing life enriching opportunities for the
communities served and offer monetary assistance in today’s economy” (p. 17).

**Literature Review**

A review of literature about interorganizational collaboration focused on six important
areas that organizations need to be aware of to effectively facilitate partnerships. These are
motivations for partnership, identification of appropriate partners, structures/models of
collaborative initiatives, management processes/roles of strategic alliances, success factors, and
ethical concerns.

**Motivation for Partnership**

The first step in collaboration efforts is to understand why organizations desire them.
Organizations seek collaboration when they face common threats or desire fiscal benefits they
cannot realize alone (Quatrin and Pereira, 2017). Quatrin and Pereira (2017) found five
motivation factors that lead organizations to seek interorganizational collaboration. These were
required formation, cost minimization, access to resources, learning/knowledge sharing, and
strategic position (Quatrin and Pereira, 2017). Quatrin and Pereira (2017) declared the two most
important criteria to lead organizations to start the collaboration process is to find partners that
are committed and motivated to cooperate. This motivation comes in the form of one of the five
factors that motivate the search for a partner previously listed. Gray and Stites (2013) found
similar results and established that collaboration motives come from legitimacy, competency,
resource, and society concerns.
Kinicki and Fugate (2012) build off these ideas and discuss how motivation is based on a theory for needs. These organizational needs could be the need for achievement, affiliation, and power. Furthermore, Kinicki and Fugate (2012) established a model for these needs of motivation and recognized that both personal and contextual factors need to be considered for understanding how actors in the collaboration may be motivated to pursue cooperation.

**Identifying Potential Partners**

After being motivated to seek a partner, the next step in successful facilitation of collaboration efforts is choosing the right partner (Quatrin and Pereira, 2017; Henderson and Smith-King, 2015). Henderson and Smith-King (2015) identify that the start of this process involves finding partners whose values and goals align. This is essential for integrated solutions to be developed during the problem-solving stages. Gray and Stites (2013) confirm this and state that a shared vision is a cornerstone for building alliances.

A shared vision was a common theme throughout the literature for being the main factor for finding partners (Henderson and Smith-King, 2015; Gray and Stites, 2013). However, Hibbert and Huxham (2010) express that while a shared vision of the future is important it may be even more crucial to find an alliance with an organization that has a common past as it better serves both parties for a long-term relationship. It is also important to match the type of collaboration for a partnership to be effective. Henderson and Smith-King (2015) recognize four distinct types of collaboration: philanthropic, transactional, integrative, and transformation.

Once a type of partnership and common goal is discovered the next step to identifying partners is ensuring that trust can be established between the two organizations (Henderson and Smith-King, 2015). Henderson and Smith-King (2015) state that trust is of the utmost importance if decision making within the partnership is to occur. They identified three
characteristics of trust that need to be addressed for collaborative efforts to move forward. Those characteristics are vulnerability, risk, and expectations

Models of Collaborative Initiatives

Once an organization identifies a partner it then becomes important to construct an agreed upon partnership model for successful alliance facilitation (Krathu et al., 2015). Krathu et al. (2015) states that to “design and manage” collaborative systems organizations must understand the “structure and dynamics of the relationship” (p. 553).

Kinicki and Fugate (2012) further this understanding by discovering that organizations can often perform better when they share resources towards achieving a common goal. They offer three interorganizational collaboration structures: hollow, modular, and virtual. Hollow structures focus on outsourcing whole organization competencies, modular is the outsourcing of a part or product, and virtual is partnering with an organization to meet a temporary market need (Kinicki and Fugate, 2012).

Agota (2010) found that such collaboration models are built on the principles of involvement, participation, commitment, personal/group responsibility and take form in both horizontal and vertical interactions. While both horizontal and vertical models can be used in organizational alliances Kinicki and Fugate (2012) found that if an organization wanted to focus on collaboration a horizontal structure is better suited at encouraging shared responsibility.

Agota (2010) proposed three different types of interorganizational models for effective organizational interaction. These were the process model, context model, and mixed/integrated model. The process model focused on conceptualizing the partnership first and then determining the stages of the alliance (Agota, 2010). The process model is an internally focused approach that ignores external factors and seeks to just address the role each organization will take. On the flip
side the context model seeks to analyze both the internal and external environment of all collaborating organizations. The integrated model builds off the first two while also seeking to discover the systemic principles that tie the organizations together and breaking down the process into a series of agreed upon phases (Agota, 2010).

While Agota (2010) provided a loose framework for guiding organizations in building models that work for them, Franco (2008) proposed the problem structuring method (PSM) as the optimal approach to facilitating collaboration. As defined by Franco (2008), PSM is “a family of model-based approaches to group decision and negotiation support and are a form of intervention which can provide a balanced attention to both the process and the content of inter-organizational collaboration” (p. 2). Franco (2008) said PSM is also known as a “soft approach…intended to assist groups of diverse composition gain a shared understanding of a problematic situation of common interest through modelling and group facilitation to generate consensus on a problem structure and commitments to consequential action” (p. 6).

The essential component to this method is the use of a third party “to design and facilitate the interactions between actors representing the collaborating organizations” (Franco, 2008, p. 3). This third-party approach allows a structured set of procedures to be developed that are vital to overseeing the partnership processes. PSM is structured in a visual form of the organizations own language to embody the problem. It is important that during these group meetings nothing is hidden as the model will represent the “relationships between concepts, activities or stakeholders, relationships of similarity or influence, and relationships between options” (Franco, 2008, p. 6).

An important component of PSM is to look at the cause and effect of the variety of elements that make up the problem the collaboration is trying to solve. Franco (2008) goes
further by explaining that any organizational alliance model must first agree on the problem to build a structure of shared understanding that addresses the problem. The key components of the PSM approach are open communication, accommodation of organization’s stakeholders, high support level, and ownership of roles (Franco, 2008).

The key to this model is the use of a third-party actor to oversee the group facilitation efforts. Henry (2015) built off this idea of a third-party overseer for partnerships and described such actions as boundary leadership and the people that oversaw the collaboration as boundary spanners. These boundary spanners are essential for collaboration efforts as the modern organizational environment has become more complex in a quickly changing global environment where coordination with many different organizations is now a daily part of organizational operations. Boundary spanners are vital actors that help agencies navigate these intricate dynamics and share knowledge (Henry, 2015).

Boundary spanners are excellent solutions to deal with changing organizational dynamics and managing the alignment of objectives, curating interactions, and establishing a partnership structure all while maintaining a neutral stance. This is a vital process when building the required trust and outlining the roles/rules for successful collaboration (Henry, 2015).

Organizational Roles in Strategic Alliances

Once a partnership model is established the next step is understanding the organizational/management roles in the collaboration process. One of the primary responsibilities is knowledge management and decision making (Werr and Runsten, 2013). Agota (2010) goes so far as to say that “the success of collaboration is determined by knowledge management” (p. 5). Werr and Runsten (2013) confirm this and found that effective knowledge sharing was the key to understanding partners.
Rathi, Given, and Forcier (2014) define knowledge management (KM) as “a process involving the creation, capture, organization, storage, and dissemination of knowledge to enhance organizational performance by better use of organizational resources” (p. 4). This KM process comes in two forms: directionality, where knowledge/resources are shared uni, bi, or multi directionally, or formality which dictates if knowledge is formally or informally managed. (Rathi, Given, and Forcier, 2014).

Henderson and Smith (2015) identified how knowledge management and the decision-making process could be done vertically, horizontally, or with multiple channels. Like Kinicki and Fugate (2012), they saw horizontal management as one of the best approaches as it helped facilitate reliable and consistent decision making, which limited conflicts by restricting the numbers of individuals and information channels involved (Henderson and Smith, 2015).

To guide organizations/managers knowledge management and decision-making roles, Henderson and Smith (2015) laid out a collaboration design overview with processes that, when working together, allow structure to be formed and decisions to be made. This design included procedural processes, setting objectives, forming rules, drafting memorandum, establishing roles, choosing a structure, and agreeing on management.

However, Werr and Runsten (2013) found that sharing knowledge was not enough but integration of that knowledge was the true role of organizations/management. This integrative process was made up of three parts which were constructing action, collective system, and envision system that when working together create a collective mind and environment for true collaboration. Werr and Runsten (2013) identified the behaviors of help seeking, help giving, and reflective reframing as roles organization collaboration representatives need to manage to create problem solving and integration of knowledge management systems. One such way for
organizations to encourage knowledge integration is to purposely create redundancies in the partnership efforts between their respective workers, tasks, and information systems (Werr and Runsten, 2013). This “invading others space” approach can help increase the knowledge integration process. If managers do a proper job coaching and understanding their organizations partnership representatives and create a horizontal environment with knowledge sharing redundancies, then collaboration efforts will be well on their way to properly managing knowledge to make effective decisions (Werr and Runsten, 2013).

**Success Factors**

Once organization’s roles in collaborative initiatives are understood, it then becomes important to know the success factors of partnerships so organizations can look for these to evaluate if they are on the right path (Krathu et al., 2015). Krathu et al. (2015) identifies a balanced scorecard as a primary way to measure interorganizational success. This identifies key performance indicators (KPI’s) that compare with the goals and objectives of the partnership to see if the problem that created the need for collaboration is being addressed.

In addition to more tangible and numerical based KPI’s, Krathu et al. (2015) also identified relationship orientation, relational capital, relation norm, and atmosphere as the four primary success factors for partnerships. Krathu et al. (2015) further focused the research and identified relation capital, which includes credibility, shared vision, trust, and loyalty, and relational norm, which includes information sharing, communication, and cooperation as the two most important success criteria for interorganizational collaboration.

**Ethical Concerns**

Kinicki and Fugate (2012) identify how ethics are a concern for all organizations. Interorganizational collaboration can multiply this concern as more agents are involved making
ethical issues more complex. To assist in managing ethics in a multinational/global business environment with a growing number of partnerships Kinicki and Fugate (2012) present a model of corporate responsibility concerns. The model has four levels which include economic, legal, ethical, and philanthropic responsibilities (Kinicki and Fugate, 2012). Before entering a partnership, organizations should align their partnership goals with these four levels. For example, will the partnership create value for our stakeholders, is the partnership and its knowledge sharing aspects all legal, do the collaborating organizations each hold themselves to high ethical/moral standards and teach these standards to their employees, and will the alliance maintain good corporate citizens standards as defined by all stakeholders and consumers of the agency product/service (Kinicki and Fugate, 2012).

Wood (2002) discovered that partnerships and commitment can be used as a model to increase ethical behavior (Appendix B). For this to be successful organizations must wisely choose their staff, create a code of ethics, train/continually educate staff on ethics, appoint an ethics ombudsman/ethics committee, protect whistleblowers, conduct ethic audits, and match ethics with partners to ensure a strategic match (Wood, 2002).

Summary

The literature review gives organizations a guideline for what to look for and understand if they are going to successfully facilitate effective interorganizational collaboration. First, they must identify what the driving motivation is for seeking a partner, then they must identify the right partner, after that a mutual model must be applied, once a partnership model is agreed upon they must actively manage the knowledge sharing and decision-making process. Throughout the process from motivation to seek an alliance to managing the alliance an organization should constantly evaluate collaboration success factors and ethical concerns to help guide their
decision-making process. This is done to increase the effectiveness and success rate of their partnership so the original problem that created the need for collaboration is being addressed in a way that brings about positive change for both parties.

**Application to Concentration**

As identified earlier, the concept of collaboration and understanding its facilitation is an essential ingredient to the lifeblood of parks of recreation. Recreation agencies frequently enter partnerships in sports, sponsorships, land/facility use, programming, and equipment to achieve their mission (Wollenburg et al., 2013) In their research of partnerships for parks and recreation organizations Wollenburg et al. (2013) had this to say:

Partnerships are a very powerful tool in the field of parks and recreation in that they help alleviate costs and provide more recreational opportunities for all parties involved...Partnerships make it possible for parks and recreation agencies with limited funds or knowledge of a specific program to create new attractions/venues for the community they serve. Bringing in an outside organization with a similar mission as the organization they are partnering with allows both parties to support their visions...For parks and recreation, departments dedicated to the promotion of particular services and the commitment to enhancing the quality of life for people, it is necessary to explore the creation of relationships with outside agencies for how they may be able to better this mission. It would be irresponsible for publicly funded agencies to not understand how to utilize the expertise and knowledge of like-minded agencies. (p. 1-2, 5)

Wollenburg et al. (2013) identified the process of collaboration for parks and recreation and found it reflective of the review of literature. Steps to partnerships for parks agencies included education/research of partners, identification, comparing/contrasting resources, and
locating the needs of stakeholders (Wollenburg et al., 2013). The challenges for recreation collaboration are a lack of planning, shared vision, unclear roles, and lack of human resources/support. Wollenburg et al. (2013) saw that these organization structural/dynamic challenges could be addressed by first clearly defining all partnerships roles and making communication/consultation strategies a top priority.

In addition, organizations can make the partnership process easier by getting to know each other’s leadership, by a willingness to teach/learn from each other, identifying the resources to be shared and roles to be taken, and having an official agreement. If recreation agencies can find a partnership with the characteristics of mutual objectives, agreed problem and resolutions, and together actively search for continuous improvement then they set themselves up for success (Wollenburg et al. 2013). A real-world example of how such partnerships commonly work in the recreation field can be seen in Appendix A.

**Conclusion**

If parks and recreation organizations are going to be able to more effectively accomplish their mission in an increasingly complex and diverse environment with ever growing constraints on resources, then seeking interorganizational collaboration is recommended. To effectively facilitate these partnerships, parks and recreation agencies would be wise to follow the steps outlined in the review of literature. They must understand their motivation for an alliance, identify appropriate partners, choose a model for the collaboration, know theirs and the partners role, and be able to evaluate success factors and ethical concerns. If a parks and recreation organization follow this guideline for successfully facilitating partnerships they will set themselves, their stakeholders, and their target markets up for success by accomplishing the mission they stand for.
References


Appendix A
Real World Application

A Unique Partnership Provides Recreational Summer Camp to 1,000 Children

Yuba City, CA | January 2013 | By National Recreation and Park Association

Tags: Collaboration, Building, Nutrition, Physical Activity

The local school district and the parks and recreation department in Yuba City faced challenges that seemed unrelated. The school needed funds to install a playground at an elementary school and maintain the grounds. The recreation department provided a summer camp to local children at local parks, but weekly changes to the location of the camp created confusion among staff and families. A creative solution was found that helped both groups and paved the way for a long-standing and mutually beneficial partnership.

The parks department agreed to fund both the improvements and ongoing maintenance at the school playground site. In return, the school district provides a site for the summer camp, ensuring consistency for families and staff. As a result, enrollment in the summer camps has risen dramatically, from 724 participants in 2008 to over 1,200 youth in 2011.

The camps are active, providing participants with access to the local pools, water parks, and other recreation activities. They also provide free breakfast and lunch through the federal migrant-education program.

A partnership that was at first limited to a joint-use agreement between the schools and the parks has since expanded to include a larger group of stakeholders. The local hospital is now on board, providing wellness prescriptions enabling obese children to participate in a 6-week program at the public pool. One member of the collaborative has worked to remove colored milk from the school lunch menu. The larger group, including the hospital and local businesses, is also looking at ways to improve access to fresh food and outdoor activities for a high-risk population in one low-income neighborhood and to provide health education to parents.

Creative solutions to local issues that impact health now have a platform from which they can be launched. With key leaders as part of a formal coalition, any individual has the opportunity to advocate for policy and environmental changes that can impact long-term health. The diversity of the coalition—public health department, parks and recreation, local hospital, local businesses, and police chief—assures that there is an audience for any change a member is willing to take on.

(“The National Recreation and Parks Association”, 2013)
Appendix B

A Partnership Model of Corporate Ethics