

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES OF  
COLLABORATIVE LEADERS IN A PUBLIC-  
PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP  
JaNay Yvonne Queen, Doctor of Philosophy, 2011  
Dissertation directed by: Dr. Thomas E. Davis

The purpose of this dissertation was to determine whether senior leaders of a public-private partnership exemplified the key dimensions of collaboration, recognized the challenges that shaped their experience, and thrived as a partnership. Through qualitative methods and case study design, the current study provides an examination of the collaborative process of a five-member senior leadership board. Semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and a survey with 44 close-ended and five open-ended questions were used to collect data. Three major theoretical perspectives were used to analyze the data: (1) the process of collaboration; (2) the key dimensions of collaboration (governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, and norms); (3) and the adaptive challenges of leaders (Gray, 1989; Gray & Wood, 1991a, b; Thomson, 2001; Heifetz, 1994).

Findings indicated that leaders did exemplify collaboration to some extent, and most certainly recognized adaptive challenges. However, they were unable to recover from the impact of those challenges, which ultimately prevented them from thriving as a partnership. On the other hand, evidence demonstrated that each leader was able to leave

the partnership with valuable lessons and insights to support her personal transformation as a leader.

While collaboration is a welcomed way of working among organization leaders, this study demonstrates there are criteria that must be in place in order to be successful and effective when collaborating, as the absence of these criteria can lead to problems. Thus, recommendations for practice and further research are presented.

THE ADAPTIVE CHALLENGES OF COLLABORATIVE LEADERS IN A PUBLIC-  
PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP

By

JaNay Yvonne Queen

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Thomas Davis, Chair  
Professor Thomas Weible  
Professor Sharon Fries-Britt  
Professor George Marx  
Professor Carol Parham

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## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my ancestors for sacrificing their lives, freedoms, pride, and humanity so that I may have a right to education and experience its privileges.

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## Table of Contents

<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	<b>VII</b>
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>VIII</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Significance of Study.....	7
Overview of Conceptual Framework.....	7
Organization Under Study.....	10
Research Questions.....	12
Overview of Methodology .....	12
Limitations.....	14
Definition of Terms .....	15
Organization of the Dissertation.....	17
<b>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>18</b>
OVERVIEW.....	18
Introduction .....	18
Organizational Culture .....	19
Collaboration Defined.....	20
The Collaborative Process.....	30
Evolution of Leadership Theory.....	37
Collaborative Leadership.....	42
Adaptive Challenges.....	45
Thriving .....	49
Adaptive Leadership.....	49
Identifying the Gaps .....	52
Activating Today’s Leaders (ATL).....	58
Summary .....	61
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</b> .....	<b>63</b>
OVERVIEW.....	63
Research Design & Rationale .....	64
Case Context .....	66
Data Collection Instruments .....	72
Role of the Researcher and Ethical Considerations.....	80
Actors and Organizations .....	82
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS</b> .....	<b>89</b>
OVERVIEW.....	89
Necessity of Venue.....	91
Organizational Fit and Capacity.....	95
Clarity of Process and Role.....	102
Authority and Power .....	116
Civility .....	122
Transformative Leadership .....	125
Summary .....	128

<b>CHAPTER 5: RELEVANCE, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	<b>131</b>
OVERVIEW.....	131
Study’s Relevance.....	131
Discussion.....	133
Recommendations for Practice.....	143
Recommendations for Further Research .....	147
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	<b>149</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1: Identifying Problems.....	46
Table 2: Indicators of Collaboration and Adaptive Leadership.....	56
Table 3: Interview Questions.....	73
Table 4: Survey Questions.....	77
Table 5: Governance Question #3.....	104
Table 6: Governance Question #5.....	104
Table 7: Governance Question #6.....	104
Table 8: Governance Question #8.....	105
Table 9: Governance Question #9.....	105
Table 10: Norms Question #2.....	106
Table 11: Norms Question #4.....	106
Table 12: Norms Question #7.....	106
Table 13: Collaboration: Yes or No.....	107

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: Collaboration and Adaptive Leadership.....	55
Figure 2: Mission Statement.....	111
Figure 3: Formal Agreements.....	113

## Chapter One: Introduction

As American society becomes more sophisticated and its problems more complex, leaders of public and private organizations partner to employ a collaborative approach to address some of the more pressing social issues such as school readiness, college access, and health-care reform (Lipnack & Stamps, 1994; Agranoff & McGuire, 2001).

Collaboration is an interactive process whereby independent stakeholders with an interest in a common problem-domain use “shared rules, norms, and structures to act or decide on issues related to that domain” (Gray & Wood, 1991b, p. 146). The collaborative process is useful for organizations, as it provides a way for leaders to pool their resources and work in tandem to attain a goal that would otherwise be too large for a single organization to achieve alone.

From a socio-political perspective, a national example of multi-sector agencies engaging in collaboration to effect change is the school readiness initiative. When federal leaders learned that more than half of America’s three- and four-year-old children were not enrolled in pre-school and therefore not prepared to enter kindergarten fully ready to learn, they took deliberate action to address what they considered a national crisis (Cheeseman, Day & Jamieson, 2003; National Institute for Early Education Research, n.d.). Accordingly, a policy network was created and President George H. W. Bush, along with the governors from all 50 states, established the National Education Goals under the *Goals 2000* initiative. The very first goal read, “All children in America will start school ready to learn” (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). This agenda item

created a sense of urgency among leaders nationwide to take action and increase the number and percentage of children entering school ready to learn.

Although this goal was not completely achieved by 2000, this initiative prompted a multi-stakeholder collaboration whereby organizations were moved to action based on the need to ready America's children for school. Examples of school readiness collaborative initiatives include: Getting Ready, a 17-state initiative focused on developing indicators to monitor readiness outcomes with sponsorship from the Packard Foundation, the Kauffman Foundation, and the Ford Foundation. Several states also have readiness initiatives, such as First 5 California, Achieving School Readiness (Maryland), and Texas School Ready. Each is a statewide initiative designed to educate families and prepare children ages 0-5 for school, and they all involve public and private agencies working together.

First 5 California Commission is an example of a successful collaboration among key state leaders. In 1998, Californians voted in Proposition 10, a cigarette tax that generated revenue for the Commission. Since its creation, First 5 California leaders have provided millions of dollars to support programs and services designed to attend to the wellbeing of children ages 0-5, their families, and caregivers. Moreover, each of California's 58 counties have established a First 5 Commission, whereby local communities receive funds to support their early childhood endeavors. For more than a decade, the Commission has built a reputation to establish California as the model community for school readiness.

In Maryland, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Subcabinet for Children, Youth, and Families, and the Council for Excellence in Government convened a group of state,

local, and early childhood leaders and service providers to address school readiness. The goal was for leaders to work in collaboration to develop a five-year action agenda to attain a 75% readiness rate for Maryland children entering kindergarten. While they did not achieve the 75% goal, their efforts contributed to a 9% increase in the readiness (AECF, 2006). Moreover, leaders of this effort continue to support readiness initiatives and track state and local progress.

Texas School Ready is a project implemented by the Children's Learning Institute. It uses public and private resources to serve at-risk preschool-aged children. In 2003, the Texas School Ready project served 110 classrooms and 2,140 children. Since its inception, it has increased the number of classrooms served by 93% and children served by 94%. As a result of the Texas School Ready initiative, early childhood leaders in Texas report improvement in the preparedness of at-risk children entering kindergarten.

Like statewide initiatives, nonprofit agencies and community-based organizations have mobilized their resources to support school readiness for children and families. Ultimately, collaboration has proven to be a useful tool, whereby leaders can leverage resources and support to prepare children to enter school.

While collaboration is an avenue for organizations to solve social issues, prudence is necessary; leaders<sup>1</sup> should not underestimate the complexities of collaborating (Walker, 1999). For example, as leaders begin the process of collaborating, they fail to understand and develop the skills necessary to engage effectively in the collaborative process. These

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this study, terms such as leaders, practitioners, actors, partner members, and stakeholders will be used to describe members of organizations who are called upon to participate in and lead collaborative endeavors. Given the range of literature on collaboration, there is no one term used to describe the people who collaborate. Therefore, this study defines leaders as those practitioners, partner members, stakeholders, and actors who have decision-making authority in their respective public or private organizations and who are working on issues related to positively impacting children, families, and communities.

skills include the ability to establish a structure within which to collaborate, understanding how to share authority and accountability, and building new types of relationships within and across organizational boundaries (Gray, 1989; Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Thomson, 2001; Via, 2008). Adopting a new style of functioning and changing behavior is a difficult task and can lead to problems.

Collaborative initiatives are filled with people eager to contribute to social change through collective action, but who lack the ability to be effective in a way that is worth the effort and resources required to collaborate (Walker, 1999). A thorough conceptualization of what it is needed to operate and manage a collaborative effort is missing from these initiatives. Thus, organizational leaders enter into collaborative partnerships and they encounter the challenges that accompany this new arrangement. According to the literature, these challenges appear to be threefold. First, most organizations are bureaucratic with traditional styles of management, where authority typically rests with one central person or entity (Kickert, Klijn, & Koppenjan, 1997; Lewis, Baeza & Alexander, 2008). Engaging in a collaborative partnership where authority and accountability are shared among multiple stakeholders requires a different style of management. Second, leaders casually enter into collaborative partnerships and lack the leadership prowess to effectively negotiate joint ownership (Walker, 1999). With collaboration, leaders must adjust the individual attitudes and practices often present in their respective organizations in order to successfully exist in this new organizational arrangement (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Gray, 1989). Third, too often getting actors with diverse interests to connect, agree, and work towards a common cause while sharing authority is not easily achieved (Ospina & Foldy, 2010).

## **Statement of the Problem**

While organizational leaders need to improve their ability to collaborate, their limited knowledge and skills to collaborate are in large part a consequence of a greater problem (Thomson, Perry, & Miller, 2009). The core challenge with collaboration is its framing. Collaboration is loosely defined in the literature, and the literature does not offer a consistently comprehensive framework for effective collaboration across disciplines (Gray & Wood, 1991a; 1991b; Thomson et al., 2009). Therefore, people from multiple disciplines are limited in their knowledge of collaboration. Although scholars offer a range of suggestions, practices, and theories for defining collaboration, organizational leaders remain in need of a more measureable and practically accessible framework (Gray, 1989; Gray & Wood, 1991a; 1991b; Thomson, 2001; Thomson et al., 2009). The lack of coherence across disciplines lends itself to an array of “definitions and understanding of the meaning of collaboration,” which ultimately leads to confusion among practitioners (Thomson et al., 2009, p. 23). Hence, ineffective and inefficient collaboration occurs when practitioners embrace the notion of collaboration, but remain limited in their understanding of what it entails. Therefore, they enter collaboration using their subjective perception. Inevitably, leaders do not consider the unintended consequences that emerge from the conflict, power, trust/distrust, and interdependence found in collaboration.

To understand how actors exist in a collaborative effort, it is necessary to apply a leadership lens that focuses on how they use leadership skills to adapt to the new organizational arrangement, persist through the collaborative process, and address the challenges that accompany the entire experience (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz, Grashow, &

Linsky, 2009). Additionally, central to understanding leadership is having clarity about the difference between leadership and management. Leadership involves envisioning, influencing, and mobilizing for change (Bennis & Nanus, 1985; Northouse, 2010). Management entails planning, organizing, and providing structures for task completion (Kotter, 1990; Northouse, 2010). While management is necessary to accomplish the tasks at hand, leaders in a collaborative arrangement must be able to empower and mobilize a group of peer leaders in an effort to accomplish shared goals.

Several scholars state that there are varying types of leadership needed to manage collaborative activity (Crosby & Bryson, 2010; Ospina & Foldy, 2010). Ospina & Foldy (2010) suggest taking a “relational” (p. 294) approach, which signifies the interpersonal dynamics that occur among groups together in both hierarchical and heterarchical organizations. Crosby and Bryson (2010) believe in a more “integrative” (p. 1) approach, as collaboration cannot occur “without first connecting across differences” (Ospina & Foldy, 2010, p. 292). Additionally, Heifetz’ (1994) theory of adaptive leadership suggests that empowering and mobilizing people through challenging situations involving change provides a perspective on how leaders function and survive throughout a collaborative process. Each of these approaches can be found in the situational leadership model (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Blanchard, 1985), where a leader assesses the situation, environment, conditions, and follower members involved, and determines the best approach to leading. This model can serve as a larger frame of reference for leaders developing and adapting to a collaborative way of leading. Nonetheless, the purpose of this study is two-fold. First, the researcher determined that this partnership demonstrated some of the aspects of collaboration as laid out in Gray, Wood, and

Thomson's models (1989; 1991a, b; 2001). Second, this study documents how leaders eventually acknowledged and adapted to the challenges encountered in this collaborative partnership.

### **Significance of Study**

Individual organizations are being called upon to address today's social problems at a rate that outpaces their capacity. To address this, leaders of these organizations need to be open to more adaptive and flexible leadership (Cojocar, 2008). The use of collaboration to address complex social problems when traditional mechanisms like bureaucracy and market-based solutions prove unsuccessful is one way that organizations have chosen to respond. Integrating resources and working collaboratively can bring about change that is not easily achievable or affordable if they attempted to do so alone. Given collaborative partnerships are largely being adopted to address social problems that include school readiness, college access, job creation, and health insurance, researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners need to understand what establishing and sustaining this type of partnership entails. It is critical that scholars and leaders have an in-depth and theoretical understanding of the collaborative process, especially given the shift toward solving complex social problems with multiple parties who share authority and accountability.

### **Overview of Conceptual Framework**

In an attempt to resolve the aforementioned problems with collaboration, Gray (1989) and Gray & Wood (1991a; 1991b) began the journey by conducting a theoretical analysis of nine research-based articles that presented case studies of organizations that claim to work collaboratively. Building upon Gray and Wood's work, Thomson (2001)

conducted 11 case studies and administered 1,440 surveys to senior leaders of collaborative programs to develop and test measureable dimensions of collaboration. Altogether, their work is paramount in moving scholarship closer to a more aligned multidisciplinary framework for collaboration. Accordingly, their work served as a theoretical guide for this study.

The concept of collaboration is largely used in the public-private partnership literature to describe the efforts of partners from different organizations working together to address the same issue. While the literature provides rich case data on various collaborative partnerships, much of it focuses on the purposes for entering into a partnership and the outcomes of their collaborative efforts. Further analysis of the activities and experiences during the process of the collaboration is necessary.

Specifically, substantive data on participant experiences, participant interactions, roles, and administrative processes once the partnership begins are not widely available (Gold, Doreian, & Taylor, 2008). Studying the inner workings of the collaborative process will supplement existing data on the purposes and outcomes of these endeavors. Therefore, Gray's (1989) collaboration framework broadly defines the collaborative process, and is complemented by Thomson's (2001) five key dimensions of collaboration, which include governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, and norms. Together, these frameworks will be used to assess a public-private collaborative partnership.

Collaborating entails a change in structure and functioning for those involved. Examining the way in which these participants respond and adjust throughout the collaborative process will offer insights to their leadership behavior and skills. Therefore, to conduct this analysis, the researcher overlaid the collaboration frameworks of Gray

(1989), Gray & Wood (1991a; 1991b) and Thomson (2001) with Heifetz' (1994) theory of adaptive leadership. While the literature on leadership is robust, the conceptualization of adaptive leadership presents new challenges as it requires a change in practices, behaviors, and beliefs for both leaders and their constituents.

Adaptive leadership is defined as “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 14). Heifetz (1994), a scientist by trade, adopted the concepts of adaptation and thriving from evolutionary biology and operationalized them within the context of leadership. Understanding the adaptive leadership concept will allow the reader to understand Heifetz' notion of adaptive challenges, which is a key focus in this study.

Adaptation, as it relates to evolutionary biology, is a living system's response to situations that cause disequilibrium and threaten extinction. The goal of the living system is to adapt so that it might meet the challenge, restore equilibrium, and thrive. Thriving involves “preserving the essential DNA for the species' continued survival, discarding the DNA that is no longer of service to the species, and creating new DNA structures that equip the species for survival in new ways and more challenging environments” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 14). Using these biological concepts to understand social systems, Heifetz (1994) purports that adaptive work requires people to clarify their values in the face of the realities and challenges that loom. In social systems, disequilibrium often results from change, which entails moving from one's current state to an idealized future state (Lawson, Claiborne, Hardiman, Austin, & Surko, 2007). While the idealized state is the goal, achieving the goal requires that people make sacrifices and experience the loss of some aspect of their current state. The notion of loss is often what causes people to resist

change. Conversely, the threats of extinction force some people to opt for survival and eventually make choices that involve change. Thus, clarifying values is key given that it results in survival through the change process, and ultimately thriving thereafter.

Thriving for leaders is the ability to survive through the dynamics of change, while also adopting new behaviors, practices, and skills that allow them to meet the challenges of future change. Similarly, thriving for social systems is the ability to survive through periods of disequilibrium and find ways to operate more effectively and efficiently so that the system is not destabilized by future challenges. This may be in the form of adopting new policies, procedures, and structures.

Generally, leaders doing adaptive work are faced with the challenge of diminishing the gap between the values people hold and the realities they face (Heifetz, 1994). Although the theory is not specifically focused on leaders working in a collaborative arrangement, it has implications for their work. In fact, the adaptive challenges of collaborative leaders may be greater than those not in collaborative arrangements since they have to lead within a heterarchical organizational structure. Therefore, this study will address the adaptive challenges of leaders during the process of collaboration.

### **Organization Under Study**

To conduct this study, the five board members from the Activating Today's Leaders (ATL) partnership, a pseudonym for the purposes of this study, were chosen as the unit of analysis. ATL is a leadership development program for community leaders who work with children, families, and communities. The program was conceptualized, designed, and developed by a senior member of a major private philanthropic foundation

and a senior consultant from a leadership-based consulting firm. Its purpose is to provide community leaders with a methodology and tools that will improve their impact in the communities they serve. The ATL program could be adopted by any community that wanted to bring together community leaders to work in collaboration for change. These community leaders would participate in a series of workshops over a 14- to 16-month period using a results-based leadership curriculum. To implement this program, however, oversight, management, and facilitation were necessary. Therefore, five senior-level members representing the foundation, the university, and two consulting firms joined together and created the Activating Today's Leaders Board (ATLB) to manage the overall partnership. More detailed information about these actors is provided in chapters 3 and 4. In addition to the board, there were at least 19 people who served as coaches, facilitators, project managers, project assistants, documenters, and coordinators who supported the implementation of the program. They represent each of the aforementioned organizations and several leadership-based consulting firms and community-based agencies.

Each of the three main organizational entities - the foundation, the founding consulting firm, and the university - that spearheaded the ATL partnership made a specific contribution to benefit the collaborative endeavor. The private charitable foundation provided the fiscal resources to sustain the administrative costs of implementing the ATL program. These funds supported the costs for the human, technological, and administrative resources that the state university provided, which were necessary to manage and administer the program. The leadership-based consulting firm provided the knowledge resources through curriculum development and workshop

facilitation. These resources were essential to the existence of the ATL partnership, and members of these organizations found themselves in an arrangement whereby they were in need of one another's resources. The very nature of this organizational structure constitutes a public-private partnership. The ATL partnership consisted of public and private agency leaders working collaboratively in service of the public, with agreements in place that required the use of one another's skills and assets (NCPP, n.d.). While this arrangement aligns with the definition of a collaborative, it is necessary to ask if the partnership exemplified the elements of collaboration as defined by Thomson (2001).

### **Research Questions**

To serve as a guide for this study, the researcher proposed the following three questions:

1. Did the ATL partnership exemplify collaboration as measured by Thomson's (2001) five key dimensions: governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, and norms?
2. Did partnership members recognize adaptive challenges?
3. According to the Heifetz framework, did ATL partnership members thrive?

### **Overview of Methodology**

Given the limited empirical research on the actual collaborative process among leaders, particularly from the perspective of adaptive challenges, this study will rely on a case study methodology. Case study methodology is the preferred research design for this study since the unit of analysis is a single unit that is "bounded" by time (Creswell, 2005, p. 61). Furthermore, case study design allows for flexibility in data collection and

analyses. Multiple sources of data, analyzed with both quantitative and qualitative methods, are used to answer the research questions, address the theoretical propositions of this study, and explain the phenomenon of interest within the bounded case. These sources include five one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the ATL board members, questionnaire administered to 24 ATL administrators (including the five board members), primary and secondary document analysis, and personal observations.

As Maxwell (2005) noted, qualitative research, such as interviews, is good for understanding, exploring, and/or studying processes. Even more relevant to the foci of this study (i.e., shared ownership, authority, and accountability) is the notion that qualitative research methods attempt to “illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (Schramm, 1971 as cited in Yin, 2003, p. 12). Therefore, it is necessary to gain an understanding of the process and how the stakeholders experience the process.

The quantitative method employed in this study is a survey adopted from Thomson (2001) administered to members of the ATL partnership. This allows for a cross-sectional analysis of the ATL partnership members and having a snapshot of their experiences will contribute to the overall findings of the study. Moreover, the findings of the study will allow for analytical generalization to the Gray’s (1989) collaboration process model, Thomson’s (2001) key dimensions of collaboration model, and Heifetz’ (1994) conceptualization of adaptive challenges and thriving.

This study:

- Ascertains that the ATL partnership exemplified some key dimensions of collaboration to the extent determined by participants' perceptions of collaboration;
- Identifies and explains the adaptive challenges encountered by key leaders in the partnership; and,
- Reveals the lessons learned and new strategies adopted by the ATL board members.

### **Limitations**

While this study provides analytic generalizations for the meaning and measurement of collaboration, as well as adaptive leadership strategies, it has some limitations. First, it is limited to a case study of one partnership, so the results are not easily generalizable to other partnerships. Second, the study's participants self-define collaboration so the data they provided was based on their own perceptions about collaboration. This is, however, consistent with the literature in that numerous definitions exist for collaboration, making it difficult to measure collaboration (Thomson et al., 2009). Third, given the partnership ended by the time of data collection, participants relied on memory recall to provide information. Finally, the researcher was a member of the partnership, and therefore was subject to bias in interpretation. Nonetheless, steps were taken to minimize bias in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data for this study. Such steps included soliciting peer reviewers, checking for accuracy and clarification with select participants, and thoroughly reviewing documents to triangulate the data.

## **Definition of Terms**

In an effort to operationalize the concepts used in this study, following is a list of terms and their definitions.

*Adaptive challenge* – People experience adaptive challenges when they do not have the capacity to meet the challenges with which they are faced. For example, an adaptive challenge occurs when people must make decisions given the inevitable realities they encounter, but their values, beliefs, and behaviors get in the way.

*Adaptive leadership* – “the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 14).

*Adaptive work* – Adaptive work “consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values people hold” and work “to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 22). Adaptive work is the ability of leaders to get “people through a sustained period of disequilibrium during which they identify what cultural DNA to conserve and discard, and invent or discover the new cultural DNA that will enable them to thrive anew” (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 303).

*Collaboration* – “Collaboration is a process in which autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions” (Thomson, 2001, p. 110).

*Collaborative partnership* – A collaborative partnership involves integration, commitment, mutual exchange, access to resources and opportunities for the growth of individual members, and the collective membership (Furlong et al., 1996).

*Leader* – practitioners, partner members, stakeholders, and actors who have decision-making authority in their respective public or private organizations and who are working on issues related to positively impacting children, families, and communities.

*Leadership* – Leadership is a process that is values based and involves influence, empowerment, and mobilization of a group of people towards goal attainment (Burns, 1978; Heifetz, 1994; Komives, 1998; Northouse, 1997).

*Collaborative leadership* – Leadership that is shared and exercised among peers. Collaborative leaders are primarily concerned with “promot[ing] and safeguard[ing] the [collaborative] process” (Chrislip & Larson, 1994, p. 138).

*Public-private partnership* – As defined by the National Council for Public-Private Partnerships, a public-private partnership is an agreed upon contractual arrangement between “a public agency (federal, state, or local) and a private sector entity. Through this agreement, the skills and assets of each sector (public and private) are shared in delivering a service or facility for the use of the general public. In addition to the sharing of resources, each party shares in the risks and rewards potential in the delivery of the service and/or facility” ([NCPPP](#), n.d.). Often referred to as alliances and networks, public-private partnerships are considered inter-organizational arrangements that are predicated on exchange (Davies & Hentschke, 2006).

*Thrive* – To thrive is the ability to survive through the dynamics of change, while also adopting new behaviors, practices, and skills that allow you to meet the challenges of future change.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 introduced the topic of study and provided an overview of the study's unit of analysis, problem statement, conceptual framework, research questions, researchable significance, research methodology, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 will include a discussion of the conceptual framework and relevant literature with a specific focus on collaboration processes, public-private partnerships, and adaptive leadership. Chapter 3 will present the research methodology and design of the study. Chapter 4 will outline the findings from the data, and chapter 5 will present the study's conclusion.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **Overview**

This study seeks to explain the adaptive challenges facing collaborative leaders in the context of a public-private partnership involving a university, a private charitable foundation and leadership consultants. To do so, the researcher:

1. Introduces the theoretical principles that ground this study;
2. Defines collaboration based on the way it is conceptualized in the literature;
3. Describes the collaborative process;
4. Outlines Thomson's (2001) key dimensions of collaboration: governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms;
5. Frames collaborative leadership in terms of adaptive challenges, survival and thriving; and
6. Presents the challenges of the ATL partnership.

### **Introduction**

Two particular areas of research influenced the theoretical framework of this study: collaboration and adaptive leadership. Collaboration is a process that consists of independent actors who “interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions” (Thomson, 2001, p. 110). Adaptive leadership involves empowering and mobilizing people through periods of instability and change. Given that

the adaptive leadership literature focuses on people surviving through processes of change, and collaboration requires change, the researcher used this concept as a lens through which to evaluate the collaborative process. As such, the researcher used adaptive leadership as the lens through which to analyze the ATLB members' actions and decisions in leading and managing the partnership.

### **Organizational Culture**

To research a presumed collaborative process, this study will use a public-private partnership as the organizational model. While several organizational theories may be used, the public-private partnership model is germane to this study given the combination of agencies involved. The ATL partnership included a national private-charitable foundation with over \$2.5 billion in assets, a flagship state university with more than 30,000 students enrolled, and several independent consulting firms and contracting agencies. The organizational culture of the ATL partnership was complex, and the combination of these institutions raises the question of the appropriate organizational lens to use for conducting the analysis. Since ATL is made up of public and private organizations, the public-private partnership (PPP) model is used as the organizational lens to analyze the ATL partnership.

The PPP concept is relevant for understanding the ATL partnership's organizational structure in this study for several reasons. First, it is based on the intersectoral initiatives that public and private organizations engage in to impact public goods or deliver public services (Bloomfield, 2006; Provan & Milward, 2001; Trafford & Proctor, 2006). The public good that the ATL partnership attempted to impact was underserved and marginalized children, families, and communities. Second, much of the

public-private partnership literature is grounded in the shift away from bureaucratic and market-based approaches to doing business collaboratively (Agranoff, 2006; Powell, 1990; Trafford & Proctor, 2006). The organization of the ATL partnership reflected this shift. Third, research highlights the challenges that the combination of these types of organizations (i.e., bureaucratic, market-based, private, public) encounter when involved in a joint venture (Bloomfield, 2006). Institutional structure and policy remained obstacles throughout the partnership. Fourth, to create structure, PPPs establish governing groups to manage and monitor the process (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994; Via, 2008). The ATL board was created as the oversight team for the partnership. Finally, complementary strengths are the basis for their operational relationships (Davies & Hentschke, 2006). Each partner organization made a unique and necessary contribution to the partnership, which enabled them to “compensate for gaps in their knowledge and capacity” to implement and sustain the program (Trafford & Proctor, 2006, p. 117). Altogether, collaborative partnerships have emerged as an atypical way of “jointly steering courses of action” and producing results (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001, p. 319). Given the conceptual model for the ATL program is based in results accountability and multi-sector leadership, the public-private partnership lens is appropriate for an analysis of collaboration.

### **Collaboration Defined**

The extant literature on collaboration is vast and offers an array of definitions and uses. In fact, Thomson (2001) notes, “The field of collaboration is far too eclectic in its current state to identify any one theoretical perspective that adequately explains collaboration” (p. 162). For example, collaboration is employed as a means to solve

problems, implement policies, and share resources. Specifically, in the public affairs literature, collaborative networks are formed subsequent to a policy decision. A collaborative network is a collection of agencies that come together, share resources, and implement policies (Agranoff & McGuire, 1998; Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2007). Policy decisions are a result of the policy-making process, which is similar to collaboration in that it involves complex interactions between and among stakeholders who share an interest in matters of public domain and work to influence related policy decisions (Klijn & Teisman, 1997, p. 99). Nonetheless, once the policy decision is made, a collaborative network is formed to implement any programs, services, or initiatives that are a result of the policy decision. The organizations then enter into these collaborative networks since they cannot single handedly create and deliver the “good” and/or the “private sector is unable or unwilling” (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; O'Toole, 1997; Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2007, p. 620).

While the notion of working collectively, which is central to defining collaboration, permeates various disciplines, the key indicator in organizational literature is interdependence. Interdependence has its origins in resource dependence theory, whereby organizations rely on one another to survive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). For organizations, survival depends on their effectively procuring and maintaining resources, such as fiscal, physical, technological, and human, while successfully responding to supply and demand. Given that organizations do not exist in a vacuum, but instead in a complex environment with other organizations, they must create a system of exchange in order to acquire and supply the resources each needs to survive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

One way to create a system of exchange is to partner. As such, the partnership literature characterizes collaboration in terms of exchange, access to resources, joint-ownership, collective responsibility, and constructive management of differences among partners (Davies & Hentschke, 2006; Furlong et al., 1996; Gray, 1989; Gray & Wood, 1991b). The purpose for their collaboration is to address complex problems through resource exchange and information sharing, which will afford them the opportunity to have a broader impact among target populations or in the services they provide. While these partners may extend their reach among communities, they must also be accountable for their impact. The idea here is that collaboration comes with risks and rewards that are distributed among all involved.

Given the investment that organizations make, they must share in the ownership of the partnership, which ultimately entails being responsible for its management and maintenance as well as the outcomes and impacts of their efforts (Gray, 1989). Hence, a system where multiple members share authority lends itself to diverse and/or conflicting perspectives, desires, and concerns. Accordingly, these will need to be resolved in order to achieve the desired outcome(s) of the partnership effectively. Therefore, a system for the constructive management of differences needs to be in place. In addition to establishing a system for problem solving, however, Kanter (1994) recommends that organizations cultivate and nurture relationships among partner members so that managing the differences among them is constructive and effective. Ultimately, Kanter (1994) purports, collaboration is about “manag[ing] the relationship[s] and not just the deal” (p. 96).

**Partnership types.**

One thing to note about partnerships, however, is that they are not all collaborative. The dissonance in the literature results in a number of partnerships being mistaken for collaboration (Bloomfield, 2006). The term partnership is generically used to describe a wide range of arrangements and relationships between two or more people or entities in virtually every field of study from business to health to education to politics and more. Therefore, it is important to operationalize it within the context of this study. Furlong et al. (1996) used case study data to identify different types of partnerships. They noted that all partnerships are not collaborative, but people regularly assume so since collaboration is a common model for partnerships presented in the literature. They provided three different types of partnerships. The first is the “collaborative partnership,” which involves integration, commitment, mutual exchange, and access to resources. The second is “higher education institution-led partnership,” whereby one entity takes on the leadership or steering of the partnership while the other entities provide resources and support in the interest of the partnership. To provide some context, Furlong et al. (1996) used data from a case study that focused on the role of higher education institutions in the changes to teacher training programs over a five-year period. They found that even though the government requested higher education institutions work in partnership with schools to incorporate more practice-based courses for teachers, the higher education institutions remained the dominant partner and led the efforts for curricular reform to the detriment of the teacher training programs.

Finally, there is the “separatist partnership,” where each entity has corresponding responsibilities that serve in the interest of the partnership’s purpose, but there is no

systematic effort to engage the organizations in dialogue regarding their complementary efforts (Furlong et al., 1996). This case study is significant because it provides a foundation for operationalizing partnerships. Even though the way in which partnership is used can be somewhat arbitrary, what remains consistent is that partnerships involve two or more parties that enter into an agreement to *do something* together.

### **Mistaken identity.**

Similar to the use of partnership as synonymous with collaboration, network, coordination, and cooperation are other terms mistaken for collaboration. The challenge lies in sorting through the definitions of the various terms and identifying the distinguishing characteristics for collaboration. Collaboration is only one of several strategies organizations can adopt. *Networking*, *coordinating*, and *cooperating* are other strategies that organizations use to work together and each strategy maintains its own set of characteristics, which distinguishes it from the other (Himmelman, 1994). One position presented in the literature is that the aforementioned strategies lie on a developmental continuum with collaboration on the far right end. *Networking* is described as the most informal of the four since it is defined as simply “exchanging information for mutual benefit” (Himmelman, 1994, p. 2). Caution is necessary here since the literature also provides evidence that even the term *network* needs some clarification because it is used to describe an array of arrangements from technological systems to online networking communities (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001). Moreover, the public affairs literature operationalizes networks and defines them as “multi-organizational arrangements” in collaboration to solve problems that single organizations cannot solve alone (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001, p. 296). Both the collaboration and

network literature regularly use the terms interchangeably. For Himmelman's purpose, however, networking is the precursor to collaboration.

*Coordination* builds upon networking in that the organizations involved will not only exchange information, but also make deliberate changes to their traditional organizational activities for the mutual benefit of all organizations involved. Those organizations interested in a greater formalization of their efforts will advance to the next level on the continuum, which is *cooperating*. Here, in addition to networking and coordinating, organizations share resources. The literature supports this notion, but it is important not to miss the distinguishing factor, which is that in a cooperative and coordinated arrangement, organizations help other organizations achieve their respective goals instead of collaborating to achieve shared goals. For instance, the National Football League cooperates with the United Way and its affiliates to provide athletic resources that support the United Way's youth's physical fitness initiative.

Finally, *collaborating* combines the elements of networking, coordinating, and cooperating with a capacity-building component. In other words, organizations are committed to the development and success of one another. They work together for the express purpose of building one another up so that each organization can succeed while pursuing shared goals (Himmelman, 1994). Significant time commitments, considerable trust, and minimal territorialism are central to a collaborative relationship.

Empirical evidence gathered from a two-phase longitudinal research study that analyzed 46 collaborative endeavors to determine the criteria for successful collaboration supports the distinction that collaboration is more than networking, cooperation, and coordination (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). Mutuality, characterized by interdependence

and exchange, and relationship, which is characterized by trust and commitment, are key considerations for organizations pursuing collaborative efforts.

### **Trust and structure.**

In addition to discipline-specific characterizations of collaboration as noted above, there are two concepts about collaboration that emerge as key to its conceptualization. These are trust and structure. Trust is characterized by the confidence levels organizational members have in one another to act in the interest of the partnership rather than use it as an opportunity to advance their individual interests (Das & Teng, 1998b). Based on values such as “trust and egalitarianism, rather than price and competition” (Lewis, Baeza & Alexander, 2008, p. 281), each organization makes an investment with the expectation of a greater return since collaborating affords them the opportunity to enhance their abilities, expand their reach, and extend their chances of attaining expansive goals. These autonomous organizations are accustomed to having a level of control that they must sacrifice when entering into a collaborative arrangement where sharing power and authority is necessary (Das & Teng, 1998b; Gray, 1989). Therefore, they ultimately need to believe their sacrifices will not be in vain and the strategic partnership will turn out to be greater than the sum of its individual parts.

Initially, Gray (1989) defined collaboration as “a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible” (p. 5). The implications of this definition are that organizations can work together to address exceptionally complex problems, but it does not speak to the fact that there needs to be a structure in place that is grounded in trust, confidence, and mutuality. Collaborative

arrangements exist “outside the lines of formal authority” otherwise known as bureaucracy, which is what most actors are accustomed (Meier & O’Toole, 2001, p. 272). Therefore, in order to be effective in an environment with an ostensibly flat governing structure, practitioners must establish a protocol that supports a heterarchical arrangement where shared authority, accountability, and resources are critical to its survival and success. To establish protocols, practitioners must take a look at the collaborative process from a systems perspective. In effect, they must note the factors at play so that they do not default to employing skills, tools, and strategies that work in a more traditional organizational setting, but rather acquire, develop, and leverage the skills, tools, and strategies necessary to be effective in a collaborative arrangement (Walker, 1999).

Trust and structure are essential to establishing a foundation and parameters for collaboration. These are key considerations organizations must take into account when entering into a collaborative arrangement. Otherwise, their efforts will be in vain.

### **Comprehending collaboration.**

In an effort to capture the essential elements of collaboration and offer a comprehensive definition, Gray & Wood (1991a; 1991b) conducted a theoretical review of nine case studies that used six different theoretical frameworks - *resource dependence*, *corporate social performance/institutional economics*, *strategic management/social ecology*, *microeconomics*, *institutional/negotiated order and political* - to examine types of what was presumed to be collaboration. While definitions varied and no comprehensive framework for collaboration was found, Gray and Wood were able to generate some overarching themes from the case studies that moved them closer to a

more comprehensive definition. Specifically, they better understood the collective organizational unit experience in collaboration rather than focusing on the experience of a single organization in collaboration, which is common in the literature. Furthermore, they gathered additional information about what collaboration means. Their analysis provided insights into the ways in which collaboration is used for social change and interventions. The balance of interests between self and the collective were highlighted. Finally, they discovered more about the complexities of shared control in an interorganizational arrangement.

The results of the studies and their analysis moved Gray and Wood from Gray's (1989) initial definition of collaboration, which is "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible" (p. 5), to develop a more comprehensive definition. The modified definition of collaboration is that it "occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain" (p. 146). This definition encompasses more of what collaboration entails and paves the way for further empirical inquiry that will clarify what it means to collaborate.

Emerging from Gray and Wood's (1991a; 1991b) work are three concepts: precondition(s), process(es), and outcome(s), which can be used to begin framing collaboration. Preconditions are the impetus for collaboration to occur. Next is the actual process of collaboration where agencies come together, determine the problem, create a plan, and execute the plan to achieve a common goal. Finally, collaboration

produces outcomes. In other words, what is the result of the collaboration among organizations? While collaboration involves preconditions, processes, and outcomes, throughout the remainder of this particular study, there will be an explicit focus on the actual process of collaboration (Gray, 1989). Focusing on the process is significant because there is so often a gap in leaders' understanding of collaboration and the reality of actually "doing it" (Thomson, 2001, p. 162). As a result, this ATL partnership case study is about what it takes to go through the process of collaborating and the challenges, rewards, risks, and lessons that accompany it. What is known so far is that a structure needs to be in place and all parties involved must learn how to share. What is not yet explicit is how participating parties actually do this. Fortunately, Thomson (2001) picked up where Gray and Wood (1991a; 1991b) left off and conducted an exhaustive review of the literature as well as an in-depth analysis of the various definitions in the literature. Furthermore, she surveyed 11 leaders who represented their organizations in a national collaborative program. The purpose of Thomson's (2001) work was to "explore the meaning and measurement of collaboration" (p. 56). As a result, a more comprehensive definition of collaboration is offered, which is that collaboration is a "process in which autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions" (Thomson, 2001, p. 110). Given the welter of definitions, understandings, and uses of collaboration found in the literature, there was a need for more specificity in defining collaboration. Thomson (2001) built on Gray and Wood's (1991a; 1991b) work and met this need. The distinction in Thomson's (2001) definition is that she drew upon

a larger body of work and incorporated key dimensions that frame collaboration: governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms (p. 164). Highlighting these key dimensions is important because it offers the most comprehensive framework for understanding and measuring collaboration.

### **The Collaborative Process**

Collaboration is the process, and the inter-organizational arrangement is the form (Gray & Wood, 1991a). In other words, collaborating is what is actually done. It is the interactive process of organizations working in tandem to achieve common goals. The arrangement that organizations create to collaborate can be in the form of a partnership, alliance, or network. To collaborate, stakeholders must identify the problem and together they must determine the direction they will take to address the problem. Once these decisions are made, then plans can be implemented. This three-phase process is described succinctly as *problem setting, direction setting, and implementation* and is fundamental to any collaboration (Gray, 1989).

In order to get through the problem-setting phase it is essential to accomplish the following: agree on a common definition of the problem, identify the key stakeholders, identify necessary resources, and secure a commitment to collaborate (Gray, 1989). Having a common definition of the problem is essential. When stakeholders have divergent perspectives about the problem domain, a failed collaboration is inevitable (Gray, 2004). In an environmental case study of a national park in Minnesota, stakeholders were unable to find a collaborative solution to their problem due to the way in which each framed the issues (Gray, 2004; Lewicki, Gray & Elliott, 2003). For example, one problem was that some of the stakeholders defined nature differently.

Another problem involved the way in which stakeholders were or were not connected to the national park. For some, the park represented loss because it displaced families when it was formed. For others, the park represented nature's essence and was beneficial for the community. The Minnesota park collaborative initiative failed because stakeholders were not in alignment when it came to defining the problem.

Identifying key stakeholders is also necessary to move through the problem-setting phase. Due to the complexity of multi-party issues, however, a high level of expertise among stakeholders is necessary in order to have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the significant matter (Gray, 1989). In addition to stakeholder expertise, the legitimacy of stakeholders is necessary (Bryson et al., 2006). This can be problematic because legitimacy is based on perception (Klijn & Teisman, 1997) and relationship, which are not clearly defined in the collaboration literature (Gray, 1989; Kanter, 1994). Perceptions are mired in personal experiences and prejudice, so to make a determination about which stakeholders are or are not legitimate is presumptuous. One solution is that all potential stakeholders work together to create a set of criteria for determining legitimacy. Regardless, dialogue is necessary in order to get through this problem-setting phase. Concomitant with determining stakeholders is identifying resources since each party involved will bear some costs associated with the collaboration (Gray, 1989; Kanter, 1994). Finally, the problem-setting phase remains incomplete without a commitment to collaborate from all parties involved (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

Once the problem-setting phase is complete, stakeholders must determine how they are going to work together. The direction-setting phase is a time for reflection among stakeholders (Cheek, 2008). Here, they reflect on their individual values, consider

their interests in relation to the interests of others, determine how best to interact with others, and accept and appreciate the sense of shared purpose (McCann, 1983 in Gray, 1989). Consequently, stakeholders are then able to achieve the central objectives of the direction-setting phase, which is to establish governance (Thomson, 2001; Via, 2008). Without reflection and structuring, stakeholders forego the essence and benefits of collaboration and their initiative will likely fail (Cheek, 2008). Stakeholders interested in collaborating must take time to consider how they understand collaboration and the reason it is an appealing method for operating (Cheek, 2008). It may indeed be the case that collaboration is not the best option (Bryson et al., 2006; Cheek, 2008; Morse, 2008). While stakeholders of a problem domain may be in sync regarding the problem to be addressed, if they do not pause, reflect, and determine the *how* of the collaboration, their efforts are dubious.

Upon successful completion of phases one and two, the third phase of collaboration is implementation. In this phase, the threat of “carefully forged agreements” falling apart looms unless stakeholders employ prudence and deliberate attention in implementation (Gray, 1989, p. 86). To carry out the commitment, the structures that stakeholders established in the direction-setting phase are key (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994). Simultaneously, stakeholders must garner sustained support from their respective constituents as well as solicit and build the support of those who may assist in the implementation of the collaboration. Despite best-laid plans, stakeholders can pull out and/or fail to meet their commitments. Therefore, the implementation phase needs a monitoring system in place to ensure the agreements the stakeholders established in the direction-setting phase are fulfilled (Gray, 1989).

The aforementioned phases that Gray (1989) offered are foundational to the collaborative process and are confirmed in the theoretical reviews of the literature and empirical studies of Thomson (2001) and Via (2008). Again, Thomson (2001) built on Gray (1989) and Gray and Wood's (1991a, 1991b) collaboration framework in critical ways. Specifically, in Thomson's theoretical and empirical analysis, she deduced five key dimensions (e.g. governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality and norms) that capture and measure the essence of collaboration.

### **Governance.**

Governance involves joint decision-making whereby authority and accountability are shared among the stakeholders (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Gray, 1989; Thomson, 2001; Van de Ven & Ferry, 1980). In tandem with governance are the "capacity for collaboration" and the ability to negotiate (Bryson et al., 2006; Gray, 1989; Gray & Wood, 1991b; Via, 2008, p. 63-64). The idea here is that in order for collaboration to occur, stakeholders and participants need to determine if they are of like mind regarding the problem, process, and their respective roles (Gray, 1989; Via, 2008; Cheek, 2008). To get to a place where stakeholders confirm their capacity to collaborate, some negotiations may need to occur. Even though the collaborative process is fluid (Via, 2008) and cyclical (Ansell & Gash, 2007), these two activities often occur at the governance level where stakeholders make the decisions. Key stakeholders in the ATL program were aligned with the problem they sought to address, which was to enhance community leaders' capacity to improve conditions for children, families, and communities. Such conditions might include school readiness, math proficiency, economic stability and community safety. Moreover, to some extent governance was

established when members of the private charitable foundation, the state university, and the principal leadership consulting firm agreed to partner together to carry out the ATL program. To cement their agreement, they created the ATLB.

### **Administration.**

To achieve the goals of the collaborative effort, organizations must establish a structure for operating in their new organizational arrangement (Thomson, 2001). Together, stakeholders need to coordinate the delegation of roles, responsibilities, and tasks as well as determine a monitoring system for sustainability and accountability. One way to ground the administrative processes is to establish boundaries of authority, role, and task (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002). Stakeholders can set up boundaries that delineate members' roles, the authority they maintain within their roles, and the tasks associated. In Via's (2008) framework, she situates Gray's (1989) concepts of structuring, enhancing control, and reducing complexity in close proximity to the administrative function. Clarity throughout the duration of the collaborative effort is key since collaborations are ever-evolving (Gray & Wood, 1991b). In this interactive process, stakeholders must be explicit in their agreements about the roles, responsibilities, boundaries and norms of the collaborative relationship. The network literature strongly supports this notion given that multiple parties are involved and careful management is necessary (Agranoff, 2006; Agranoff and McGuire, 2001; Klijn, Koppenjan & Termeer, 1995; Klijn and Teisman, 1997; Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2007). Without careful attention to the administrative requirements, a collaborative endeavor is at risk for failure. If administrative structures were not appropriately developed, then ATL board members can expect a breakdown in their collaborative partnership.

**Organizational autonomy.**

While a collaborative partnership is a new organizational arrangement, “collaboration, to be collaboration, must include partners who maintain their own distinct identities and organizational authority separate from (though simultaneously with) the collaborative effort” (Thomson, 2001, p. 87). The notion of organizational autonomy is significant because stakeholders maintain a desire to know that their contributions matter in the shared undertakings of a collaborative alliance (Gray & Wood, 1991b). The desire for organizational autonomy, however, fosters tension between “self interest... and collective interest...” (Thomson, 2001, p. 87).

Similarly, this tension is also found in policy networks, where stakeholders strategize to mediate their self-interests (Klijn & Teisman, 1997). Their efforts involve a very strategic use of power, role, and resources in order to enhance: the position of their respective organization, its experience in the process of the network, and/or how it is impacted by the outcome of the network (Klijn et al., 1995; Lynn, 1981). In other words, stakeholders are in a constant state of preserving their resources and fighting for their agenda, which can create tension and strategic maneuvering to ensure they are protected within the network and that their own goals are met. Even though the stakeholders are working concomitantly to influence policy decisions, there is no commitment to collaboration, so they are not held to the same standards as those in a committed collaboration. Nonetheless, the lesson to note here is the impact that tension can have when stakeholders are faced with balancing their self-interests with the interests of the collaborative.

**Mutuality.**

The benefits that the stakeholders receive as a result of their association with the others in the collaboration describe the mutuality dimension. “Heterogeneity of interests and resources creates a state of interdependence among the actors” and they join together in partnership to mediate their interests through resource exchange and sharing (Börzel, 1998, p. 258). Mutuality is situated in interdependence, whereby organizations rely on one another to survive (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), and must be grounded in trust.

Collaboration can become a survival mechanism for organizations working to achieve a purpose or effect change at a level that may be beyond their individual reach (Gray & Wood, 1991b). Mutuality is necessary for organizations with aspirations beyond their purview (Chrislip and Larson, 1994). However, it brings with it a level of vulnerability since otherwise autonomous organizations are at the mercy of one another, hence, the significance of trust. Consequently, the mutuality dimension calls for stakeholders to develop coping mechanisms to deal with the power, politics, and change that collaboration can evoke (Gray, 1989; Via, 2008). Without establishing such strategies, a collaborative alliance can go awry. While there is an advantage to knowing the need for coping mechanisms, there is an apparent lack of evidence-based strategies available in the literature to cope with the power, politics, and change that accompany collaboration.

**Norms.**

Norms are characterized by reciprocity and trust, and stakeholders must determine what standards they will abide by to reinforce the administrative criteria established. Quid pro quo is often at work in this dimension. Organizations will bear burdens necessary for collaboration to work, but only when they know their counterparts will do

the same when the opportunity presents itself. Underlying this reciprocity is trust. If trust is not present, then stakeholders have cause for hesitation in their commitment to collaborate. Trust is gained through relationship-building (Kanter, 1994). If stakeholders come together and work on building relationships with one another then trust is fostered and collaborative efforts are strengthened (Das & Teng, 1998b). However, the significance of relationship-building is understated in collaboration literature (Kanter, 1994). The consequence of this oversight is that organizations lack a key ingredient for carrying out a successful collaborative endeavor. Relationships beget trust, which then begets communication. Communication permeates the collaboration frameworks presented in the literature (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Gray, 1989; Gray & Wood, 1991; Thomson, 2001; Via, 2008). Without communication, stakeholders cannot determine the problem, make agreements, create operating structures, provide meaningful contributions, conduct resource exchange, or build trust.

### **Evolution of Leadership Theory**

Leadership is the ability to empower and mobilize a group of people towards the achievement of a common goal (Burns, 1978; Heifetz et al., 2009; Northouse, 2010). While leadership has been conceptualized in a variety of ways, consistent with its characterization is that it occurs in groups and involves a process, influence, and shared goals (Northouse, 2010). These characteristics are found in traditional leadership theories, such as the trait (Stogdill, 1948, 1974), behavioral (Hemphill & Coons, 1957), transactional (Burns, 1978), transformational (Burns, 1978), and situational (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969a), which will be explained in greater detail for the purposes of this study.

Each of these theories is relevant for understanding the approaches and behaviors of leaders.

Trait theories suggest that leaders are born with innate capabilities that make them great leaders. Stogdill (1948) eventually challenged these theories and found that there was “no consistent set of traits [that] differentiated leaders from nonleaders across a variety of situations” (Northouse, 2010, p. 15). When there was a set of consistent traits among those considered leaders, it was dependent on the situation. As a result, the focus of leadership abilities shifted from one’s traits to the relationships developed between people in various situations. While empirical studies have shown that leadership can be learned and exercised by anyone (Komives, 1998), Kirkpatrick and Locke (1991) propose that there are traits associated with leadership that one can be born with, learn, or a combination of both (Northouse, 2010). Altogether, one’s traits can influence her leadership; they are just not the determinants for whether or not one can be a leader.

The behavioral theory of leadership, also known as the style approach to leadership (Northouse, 2010), is exemplified by leaders’ actions towards their follower group. Effectively, it is the study of “what leaders do and how they act” when it comes to accomplishing tasks and working with their group members (p. 69). From a task perspective, a leader will determine the actions suitable for accomplishing the task at hand and initiate the appropriate structure (Hemphill & Coons, 1957). Regarding relationships, the behavioral approach posits that a leader take into consideration how best to make her followers comfortable. Ultimately, these leaders “provide structure” and “nurture” for their followers (Northouse, 2010, p. 70).

Transactional leadership is predicated on exchange between leaders and followers. For example, a politician makes promises for votes (Northouse, 2010). Citizens vote and the politician works to make good on his promises. This style of leadership is largely focused on managing tasks and expectations.

More than exchange, however, is transformational leadership, whereby followers are changed and transformed (Burns, 1978; Northouse, 2010). Transformational leadership is typified by empowerment in that leaders are attuned to the “needs and motives” of their followers (Northouse 2010, p. 172). These leaders, therefore, create opportunities to connect with their followers and develop their capacity to acquire skills and tools that will maximize their potential.

Finally, situational leadership, a key focus of this study, is determined by circumstances. To determine the best course of action in a particular situation, a leader must evaluate the competence and will of his follower group members. Although the situational leadership model has been modified and improved over the years, it does have origins in the Ohio State studies, drawing upon their two main concepts of *initiating structure* and *consideration*. In the revision of the situational leadership model, its labels changed from initiating structure to task behaviors (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969), and finally to directive behaviors (Blanchard et al., 1985). Directive behaviors are the extent to which a leader provides group members detailed guidance for accomplishing tasks. Effectively, a leader provides the what, when, how, and who for members so that they are clear. The consideration label has changed from relationship behaviors (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) to supportive behaviors (Blanchard et al., 1985). A leader displaying supportive behaviors takes into consideration the extent to which a group member is

socially and emotionally comfortable receiving direction (Blanchard et al., 1985; Hughes et al., 2006; Northouse, 2010). Therefore, supportive behaviors include listening, soliciting input, encouraging, facilitating, shared problem solving, and empathizing (Hughes et al., 2006; Northouse, 2010). Both directive and supportive behaviors are components of a leadership style that a leader chooses when attempting to influence a group and bring about change (Blanchard, 1991; Northouse, 2010).

The situational model sets out four leadership styles, which include direction, coaching, supporting, and delegating (Blanchard, 1985; Blanchard et al., 1985; Northouse, 2010). Direction is a high directive-low supportive style whereby the leader's behavior is focused communication on the tasks necessary to accomplish the goals set forth. Coaching is a high directive-high supportive style whereby the leader's focused communication is on both task behaviors and supportive behaviors. In addition to outlining the what, when, who, and how of the task, the leader is careful to consider the emotive response a follower may exude. Therefore, the leader will be certain to facilitate, encourage, listen, and solicit input from the follower group member. The third style is supporting, which is high supportive-low directive. With this style, the leader does not have to clearly outline the what and how of the task in order for it to be completed. Alternatively, the leader displays relational behaviors and focuses communication on shared problem solving, encouraging, praising, and listening. Finally, the fourth style is delegating, which is a low supportive-low directive style where the leader's tasks directives and social support are minimum due to the follower's skill and competence level for completing the task.

In addition to leadership styles, another element of the situational leadership model is the development levels of follower group members. A development level is the extent to which a follower is capable and willing to complete the specified task or function (Blanchard et al., 1985). In other words, it is a matter of skills and attitude (Northouse, 2010). Having this information enables a situational leader to determine the best approach for leading group members in different situations. Development levels are represented on a continuum by a combination of skill and commitment levels. Follower group members in development level one may have little skill, but be highly committed to achieving the goal. Those in development level two have some skill, but relatively low commitment. As Northouse (2010) explains, these group members “have lost some of their initial motivation about the job” (p. 93). Follower group members in development level three are fairly skilled, but are without commitment in that they know they can complete the tasks, but are insecure about their ability to do it alone. Finally, the members in development level four are highly skilled and highly dedicated to accomplishing the set goal with little to no direction or support.

Given the leadership styles and development levels, leaders must take into account the situation at hand, the types of follower members involved, and the goals to be accomplished, so that they may adjust their style accordingly. The situational leadership model has been widely adopted, and especially by organizational leaders and practitioners. In Northouse’s (2010) review of the literature, he found that the model’s strengths lie in its marketplace endurance, practicality, accessibility, flexibility, and ease of use. While these strengths allow situational leadership to be a popular model, Northouse (2010) also outlined its limitations. Critics question the model’s validity due

to a limited number of research studies that have tested it and published their results. Other criticisms include a weak theoretical basis for the indicators that designate a leader's change in behavior and a follower's development level. Critics have also called to question whether the model takes into account the development level of the whole group rather than just individual members. Finally, the model fails to consider the influence of demographic characteristics in the leader-follower relationship. Even with its limitations, however, the model remains one of the most widely recognized approaches to leadership.

The situational leadership model is relevant to this study because it can be used as a guide for collaborative leaders. Collaborative leadership is highly relational, but there are tasks to be accomplished and everyone is presumed to have an equal stake, and thereby, commitment to accomplishing the shared goal. Unlike situational leadership where there is a leader-follower relationship, collaborative leaders are peer-to-peer given the heterarchical arrangement that characterizes collaboration. Nonetheless, collaborative leaders can adopt the situational leadership concepts to work effectively with their peers in achieving the goals set forth by understanding one another's development level. Consequently, collaborative leaders can adapt their leadership behaviors to match the development levels of their peers. Given that each person brings something different to the collaboration, they can fill in the gaps where there is a lack in capacity, skill, and confidence (Trafford & Proctor, 2006).

### **Collaborative Leadership**

To shepherd the collaborative process, the public management literature suggests that collaborative networks require a manager or facilitator (Agranoff, 1999; Meier &

O'Toole, 2001). In other words, there needs to be a central figure whose position is to encourage or move the collaborative along. She does not have to participate as a member, but can serve, more or less, as an external accountability agent. Often, she is connected to the program, organization, or initiative that the collaborative has been formed to impact or improve (Meier & O'Toole, 2001). Thus, the public management literature assumes that collaborative efforts will have a network manager. Since it may be indeed a necessity and/or common practice in the public administration field, in theory, the presumption is reasonable.

It is important to note, nonetheless, that all collaboration is not a result of a policy network mandate, and therefore, does not have an external accountability figure to manage it. This, however, inspires the question as to how members in collaboration manage through the process.

Collaboration operates on a model of shared power...where problem-solving decisions are eventually taken by a group of stakeholders who have mutually authorized each other to reach a decision. Thus, power to define the problem and to propose a solution is effectively shared among the decision makers. (Gray, 1989, p. 119)

Arguably, given the multidimensionality of collaboration, it requires more than just management, which is typically characterized by the ability to plan, organize, staff, direct, coordinate, report, and budget (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001). Rather, collaboration requires leadership. More than management, leadership entails a process that is values-based and involves influence, empowerment, and the mobilization of a group of people towards goal attainment (Burns, 1978; Heifetz, 1994; Komives, 1998; Northouse, 2010). Considering this definition of leadership, one does not need to have a management role to lead. Moreover, given the model of shared power, members must determine how to

simultaneously lead and share in leadership. For instance, some members have never been in a leadership role, and therefore, will encounter leading for the first time.

Alternatively, other members will have a history of leadership experiences, and as a result, will need to learn to share the authority that accompanies being in a leadership position.

Leadership is necessary for practitioners who are collaborating since they experience a parallel process, which in part, consists of the work it takes to adjust to and exist in the collaborative process. Like situational leadership, collaborative leaders will exemplify relationship and task behaviors in their work together. Such work includes learning to share authority, being interdependent, and being accountable to peers. The other part of the parallel process is carrying out the work and all related tasks, such as attending meetings, reporting data, and communicating with partners. However, the conceptualization of leadership in terms of the collaborative process is missing from the literature.

In addition to the disjointedness in the literature for defining collaboration, there is little to no intersection between the divergent collaboration scholarship and leadership scholarship. Only recently has there been a surge in interest among leadership scholars, in particular (Bryson, Crosby & Stone, 2006; Crosby & Bryson, 2010; Ospina & Foldy, 2010). Still, the primary focus is on the relational ties among leaders within or across organizations (Ospina & Foldy, 2010), rather than a holistic conceptualization of the role of leadership in the collaborative process, which is requisite, given the tenets of collaboration (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Gray, 1989; Ospina & Foldy, 2010).

Implications are made, but a specific focus is absent in leadership literature, public

administration literature, business literature, and partnership literature to name a few. Therefore, to identify the presence or absence of leadership, the researcher adopts Heifetz' (1994) theory of adaptive leadership as an overlay in order to study the ATL collaborative partnership.

### **Adaptive Challenges**

Leading in a collaborative arrangement is challenging since stakeholders are dealing with complex matters while leading in what is arguably the most difficult context, which is when all share authority (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). The reality is that collaborative leadership is both uncommon and unfamiliar, and as a result requires leaders to make some adjustments in their practices, values, and beliefs. Working towards solving complex problems with a diversity of constituents from across sectors while having to share authority and accountability in the decisions can become an adaptive challenge for the members of the collaborative effort. An adaptive challenge occurs when the current capacity and/or tools to solve problems are inadequate for meeting new challenges (Heifetz, 1994). If leaders are accustomed to unilateral authority when addressing and solving problems, then having to work in partnership with others can pose a threat (Bryson et al., 2006, Gray, 1989). In collaboration, however, leaders must determine how to work concomitantly with their peers and constituents to address problems and find solutions as they relate to both the challenges they encounter throughout the process, and the shared outcomes they seek to achieve.

To illustrate the adaptive challenge in terms of problems and solutions, Heifetz employs a situational approach in Table 1.

Table 1: Identifying Problems				
<i>Situation</i>	<i>Problem definition</i>	<i>Solution and implementation</i>	<i>Primary locus of responsibility for the work</i>	<i>Kind of work</i>
<b>Type I</b>	Clear	Clear	Expert leader	Technical
<b>Type II</b>	Clear	Not clear: Requires learning	Expert leader & constituent	Technical & adaptive
<b>Type III</b>	Not clear: Requires learning	Not clear: Requires Learning	Constituent > Expert leader	Adaptive

(Taken from Leadership without easy answers, by Ronald Heifetz, 1994, p. 76).

Heifetz distinguishes adaptive problems by defining them in comparison with technical problems. A technical problem is clear and there exists a person with the expertise and/or authority to fix the problem. For example, a facilitator for the ATL partnership needs to submit an invoice for leading a workshop, but does not know the appropriate protocol. He may approach the fiscal manager and inquire about the protocol, to which she can provide answers. The problem is clear; the solution is clear and rests within the repertoire of an expert leader—the partnership’s fiscal manager. Heifetz would deem this a Type I situation.

A Type II situation occurs when the problem is clear, but the solution is not. A member of the ATL partnership is approved to travel monthly as the project manager for one of the ATL sites. However, this particular member is also a graduate student working on a tight timeline to complete her dissertation. The problem is finding a balance of time to complete both tasks. Therefore, she seeks answers from her supervisor and faculty advisor. However, it is up to her to make a determination about budgeting her time. She may seek support and guidance from her supervisor and/or faculty member,

who may have ideas, but neither of them can implement them. While the onus of making the final decision rests with the graduate student, the supervisor and faculty member still maintain a role in supporting her through the process of determining how to balance her work and dissertation. Both the supervisor and faculty member have a library of knowledge, from which they can pull to guide the process. This meets the technical aspect of the problem in that the faculty member knows what it takes to complete the dissertation and the supervisor knows what it takes to provide the project management. Nonetheless, if project manager/graduate student does not do the work and find a balance then the problem is not solved. Ultimately, she and both her faculty advisor and supervisor share the responsibility for finding workable solutions.

Finally, in a Type III situation, neither the problem nor the solution is explicit. In order to understand the problem and generate applicable solutions, learning must occur. Even in the absence of a solution, leadership is necessary so that this learning can occur (Heifetz, 1994). If the ATL partnership unintentionally dissolves due to lack of fiscal resources, then to define the primary problem as having no money is futile. This is a matter of circumstance rather than the actual problem. While funding is a critical component of the partnership, to put effort into finding more funding distracts partner members from putting their energy in doing the “real work” (p. 75). The real work consists of partner members who address the realities of the problem and exhibit flexibility in their work towards finding solutions. These realities may include many potential problems such as: making the best out of the relationships with all partner members, preparing the constituents served by the partnership for the transition, attaining priority goals of the partnership, acknowledging the life-altering impact on partner

members employed by the partnership, and considering what each organization may need once the partnership ends. Unfortunately, Type III situations pose the most difficult problems and the solution rests with all involved. However, the more problematic the reality, the more people seek authority for solutions (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009). In the ATL partnership, the authority is shared across a collective body so their situation is complicated by the fact that they have no central authority figure from which to seek answers. They are all responsible for clarifying the problem and finding and implementing solutions. Based on Heifetz' (1994) recommendation that ownership rests with each person, however, leaders in the partnership may be ahead of the curve. The real challenge for them is in determining how to do the adaptive work with each other.

The adaptive challenge concept is derived from Heifetz' (1994) adaptive leadership framework, which involves a leader's ability to motivate, empower, and organize her followers in handling tough challenges. The qualifier adaptive stems from concepts in evolutionary biology that describe how living systems survive through periods of stress. Survival is the work of living systems to regain equilibrium, which can be defined as balance or a steady state, when threatened with a lack of stability. When a person starves himself, for example, his body responds and begins to store fat as a source of energy for survival. When a person sweats, it is because her body seeks to keep its internal temperature at 98.6 degrees (Heifetz, 1994). "Knocked out of equilibrium, living systems summon a set of restorative responses" (p. 28). This metaphor can be applied to social systems because they, too, seek to regain stability and survive, for it is on the brink of destruction that human beings acquiesce to change (Derrickson, 2008).

## **Thriving**

Survival, however, is not the end all for living systems. Once they overcome the threat of instability, they must then learn to thrive. Thriving involves preserving the essential DNA for the species' continued survival, discarding the DNA that is no longer in service of the species, and creating new DNA arrangements that equip the species for survival in new ways and more challenging environments (Heifetz, 1994, p. 14).

Effectively, survival is restoring equilibrium and thriving is developing new ways to exist and evolve. To rid the threat of disequilibrium, which in social systems is typically characterized by “increasing levels of urgency, conflict, dissonance, and tension generated by adaptive challenges” (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009, p. 304), and thrive, social systems need to adapt by adopting new ways to meet the problematic challenges encountered. Effectively, thriving is the ability to survive through the dynamics of change, while also adopting new behaviors, practices, skills, and even values that allow for the challenges of future change to be met.

## **Adaptive Leadership**

Values are central to the adaptive challenges construct. They are often the source of threat. They are “shaped and refined by rubbing against real problems, and people interpret their problems according to the values they hold” (Heifetz, 1994, p. 22). In social systems, disequilibrium presents itself as a gap between what people value and the reality they face (Heifetz, 1994). As a result, Heifetz offers leaders a place to start through the adaptive leadership framework. His perspective on leadership takes into account the role of authority, whether formal or informal, since it is critical to social systems (Burns, 1978; Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002; Heifetz, 1994). Authority is central

to the adaptive leadership framework since the presence or absence of it must be taken into account when constructing leadership strategies for adaptive challenges. Formal authority is based on the assignment of a position or role and the expectations that accompany it. It has its roots in history as being “legitimated by tradition, religious sanction, rights of succession, and procedures” (Burns, 1978, p. 24). People willingly comply with the command of authority figures since the need for stability is fundamental to their survival. Informal authority is having personal power and social influence (French & Raven, 1959). Regardless, the possession of authority, whether formal or informal, can both benefit and hinder leadership (Burns, 1978; Gray, 1989; Heifetz, 1994). Therefore, it is deemed a key consideration in the adaptive leadership framework.

Heifetz (1994) offers a set of criteria for leaders to effectively work through adaptive challenges.

1. Identify the adaptive challenge. Diagnose the situation in light of the values at stake, and unbundle the issues that come with it.
2. Keep the level of distress within a tolerable range for doing adaptive work. Keep the heat up without blowing up the vessel.
3. Focus attention on ripening issues and not on stress-reducing distractions. Identify which issues can currently engage attention; and while directing attention to them, counteract work avoidance mechanisms like denial, scapegoating, externalizing the enemy, pretending the problem is technical, or attacking individuals rather than issues.
4. Give the work back to people, but at a rate they can stand. Place and develop responsibility by putting the pressure on the people with the problem.
5. Protect voices of leadership without authority. Give cover to those who raise hard questions and generate distress – people who point to the internal contradictions of the society. These individuals often will have latitude to provoke rethinking that authorities do not have (p. 128).

In an empirical analysis to determine the legitimacy of Heifetz’ adaptive leadership framework, Cojocar (2008) deduced the following:

Adaptive leadership achieves positive change through provoking debate,

encouraging rethinking, and applying processes of social learning. Adaptive leaders mobilize parties to work towards a solution, rather than directly imposing one, with the goal of creating an environment that enables a shift in mindset, while providing incentives for interested parties to invent and internalize solutions to the problem (Cojocar, 2008, p. 22).

While Heifetz' (1994) adaptive leadership theory is emergent, it does maintain characteristics of traditional leadership styles, such as *transformational* (Burns, 1978), *situational* (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969a), or *contingent* (Fiedler & Chemers, 1984) that inform the adaptive leadership approach. More recently, William Cojocar (2008) employed grounded theory to conduct an analysis of adaptive leadership in an effort to determine if it is an accepted leadership approach and can stand alone in the face of other well-established leadership theories. In his study of leaders representing the corporate, military, and academic fields, Cojocar (2008) derived two implications. First, the adaptive leadership approach provides leaders with a collection of skills that encompass the spectrum of leadership theories and approaches. Second, adaptive leadership strategies are increasingly being incorporated in our modern institutions (e.g. public agencies, private corporations, military and academic institutions, etc.). The implications derived from Cojocar's study provide support for the adoption of this framework as a guiding tenet of this study.

Heifetz' theory of adaptive leadership is geared towards a general audience of leaders. Although the theory's focus is not specifically on collaborative leaders, it has implications for leaders conducting collaborative work. Since collaboration necessitates a shift in organizational structure and the way in which people typically work together, overlaying this study with an adaptive challenge and adaptive leadership lens facilitates the opportunity to assess how ATL members survive and thrive in the partnership.

### **Identifying the Gaps**

While there exists empirical evidence that provides a framework for collaboration, more research needs to be conducted to enhance the concepts of collaboration and make them practically accessible for organizations that seek this method of operating. While there are some common themes present in the literature regarding what it takes to successfully collaborate, the research on collaboration remains incomplete (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001, Thomson et al., 2009). More studies need to be conducted with the central purpose of testing the common themes and key dimensions of collaboration that have emerged. As a result of this lack in the literature, organizations have a limited understanding of what successful collaboration entails (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Behn, 2001).

What can be deduced from the literature is the need for very clear agreements, guidelines, and norms. It is also clear that the confluence of organizations cannot occur without mutuality. Although there is mention of relationship building and leadership in the collaboration literature, both are understated and need further inquiry to highlight their significance (Ospina & Foldy, 2010). Relationships among stakeholders that are grounded in trust are fundamental to collaborative endeavors (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). The absence of relationships results in a lack of trust. A lack of trust impacts stakeholders' ability to develop and maintain the governance, administration, mutuality, and norms dimensions of collaboration. Also, a lack of trust increases stakeholders' desire to adhere too tightly to their autonomy and disconnect from the collaborative endeavor (Gray, 2004).

Leadership is also central to collaboration. Stakeholders exercising leadership

among their peers find support in working together to solve complex matters. Leadership fosters relationship building (Northouse, 2010), encourages communication (Kouzes & Posner, 2007), and facilitates a well-established collaborative process (Chrislip & Larson, 1994). Adaptive leadership goes a step further and manages the evolving nature of collaboration and supports the stakeholders as they experience and adapt to it (Heifetz et al., 2009). Strong leadership can also prevent stakeholders from wielding power and leveraging influence. Specifically, if all stakeholders accept the idea that they share in the authorization of the collaborative endeavor, they can exercise their heterarchical authority when other members seek unilateral power and restore equilibrium to their work together.

The problem with the ATL partnership is their weak governance structure and the ability of members to leverage influence based on the resources they bring to the partnership. While their objective is to operate collaboratively, their actions are inconsistent. Based on what has been derived from the literature, the source of their problems may very well be embedded in the relationships and leadership among members. To reiterate, relationships and leadership are central to the collaborative process. Without these core principles, the collaborative process is weakened.

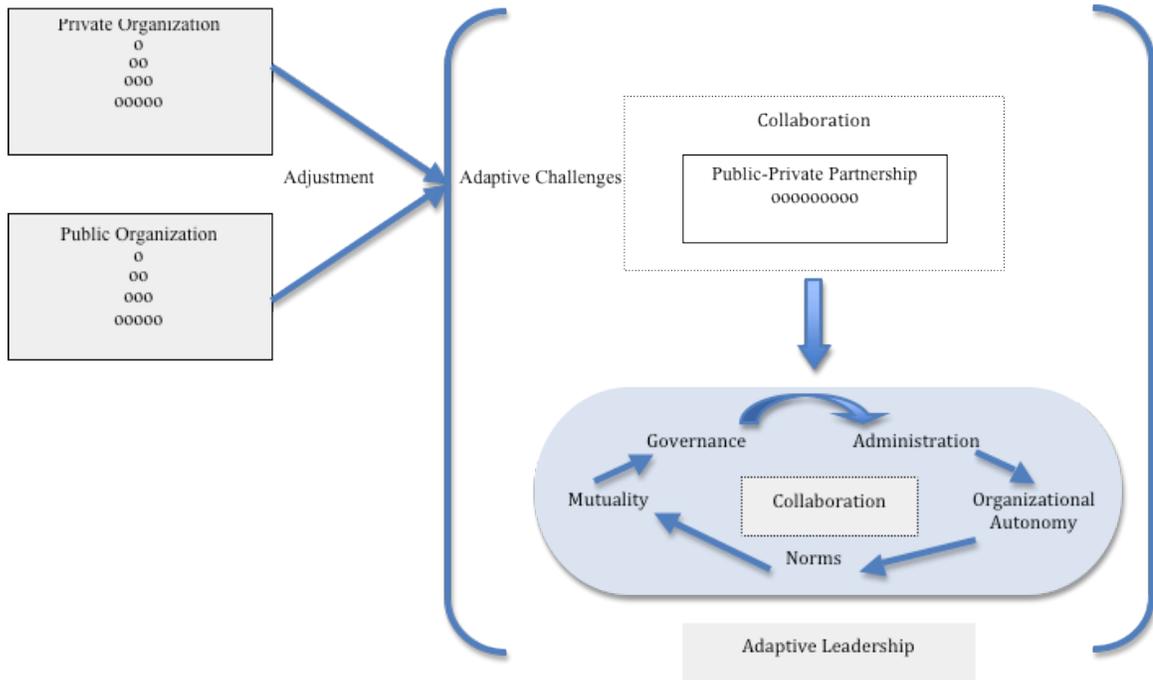
### **Measuring collaboration.**

Organizations have their independent ways of operating, but when entering into a collaborative partnership where authority is shared, the standard operating procedures change, which may cause some adaptive challenges during the adjustment. In order to maintain a collaborative partnership, agreements must be made and be clear among all members; new operating procedures must be established; reconciliation between one's

organizational interests and collective interests must occur; and interdependence and trust must exist (Agranoff & McGuire, 2006; Gray, 1989; Gray & Wood, 1991b; Thomson et al., 2009). Establishing and maintaining these key elements is possible for participants who can exercise adaptive leadership in a new organizational environment.

Drawing upon data gathered from the literature and the guiding questions for this study, the researcher will utilize the key dimensions: governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, and norms (Thomson, 2001), for collaboration and the adaptive challenge and leadership concepts to assess the ATL partnership (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009) (see Figure 1). To test these concepts, the researcher will search for indicators to serve as evidence that elements of collaboration, adaptive challenges, and adaptive leadership exist in the ATL partnership (see Table 2).

Figure 1: Collaboration and Adaptive Leadership



Guiding Concepts	Indicators
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreements</li> <li>• Joint decision making</li> <li>• Shared authority</li> <li>• Shared accountability</li> <li>• Alignment</li> <li>• Capacity to collaborate</li> </ul>
Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boundaries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Role clarity</li> <li>○ Task assignments</li> <li>○ Authority</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Structure</li> <li>• Complementary strengths</li> <li>• Coordination</li> <li>• Communication</li> </ul>
Organizational Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgement of organizations involved</li> <li>• Contributions matter</li> <li>• Tension between competing needs/interests</li> </ul>
Mutuality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interdependence</li> <li>• Reciprocity &amp; exchange</li> <li>• Support</li> </ul>
Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Relationship</li> <li>• Confidence in one another</li> <li>• Commitment</li> </ul>
Adaptive leadership Heifetz, 1994 Heifetz et al., 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support others in finding a solution to their problem rather than impose a solution upon them</li> <li>• Address the realities of the problem and exhibit flexibility in work towards finding solutions</li> <li>• Motivate, empower, and organize one another to handle tough challenges and find solutions</li> <li>• Learn new ways to meet the problematic challenges</li> <li>• Manage how authority leveraged within a collaborative arrangement</li> <li>• Identify and diagnose a problem and its accompanying issues</li> <li>• Manage the stress that a problem poses so that it isn't overwhelming, but allow some stress so that people can work through their discomfort</li> <li>• Maintain focus on the real issues and resist avoidance behavior and blaming</li> <li>• Allow people to take ownership of the problem and</li> </ul>

the work necessary to solve it

- Provide space and protection for those leaders who don't have formal authority

The concepts are not mutually exclusive, and in fact, have an interdependent relationship. For example, while mutuality occurs during the process of collaborating, it is also necessary before collaboration begins because the participating organizations recognize and decide they need one another in order to achieve a particular goal in which each independent organization has an interest. Governance is necessary to solidify the decision and capacity to collaborate. Without governance, administration cannot occur. If no agreements are in place then there are no guidelines for setting up a structure to collaborate. Organizational autonomy is unique in that it represents the tug of war between the individual organizations' interests and the interests of the collaborative. Nonetheless, organizational autonomy remains important, since it may influence the behavior of partner members, which can impact the collaborative. Therefore, norms are necessary to establish relationships, trust, and confidence among the partners and reinforce each partner's commitment to the collaborative process. Moreover, the level of commitment partners make in regards to norms (i.e., building relationships & trust) can impact the level of mutuality. In other words, greater exchange and resource sharing can occur when there is an increase in relationships that are predicated on trust and commitment among partners. Ultimately, these concepts are couched in the notion of adaptive leadership since the collaboration requires leaders who can mobilize and empower partner members through the process, through the challenges, and to workable solutions.

### **Activating Today's Leaders (ATL)**

The ATL program is chosen as the organization for study since it provides insight into a collection of agencies that self-organized into a collaborative partnership.

Practitioners from a private charitable foundation, leadership consulting firms, and a state flagship university comprise the membership of the collaborative partnership. The purpose of their work together is to improve conditions for children, families, and communities. Examples of improved conditions include preparing children for academic success, facilitating opportunities for economic stability among families, and creating safe places in communities. The way in which they seek to effect such change is to develop the leadership capacity of practitioners who work with children, families, and communities by offering a year-and-a-half-long workshop for community leaders. Given the desired ends, members of the private charitable foundation and one of the leadership-based consulting firms created the leadership program, ATL. They then entered into partnership with members from the university to implement and sustain the program. While the organizations work together, each organization makes a unique contribution to the ATL program. The private charitable organization provides fiscal resources. The leadership consultants provide knowledge resources. The state university provides administrative resources. Together, these organizational administrators make the ATL program work.

The ATL program aims to build the leadership capacity of public and private agency practitioners who are closely connected to programs that serve children, families, and communities. Invitations are extended to select practitioners to participate in a leadership program that provides an opportunity for professional development and cross-sector collaboration among the participants to leverage their capacity to impact the community. Ultimately, the goal is to accelerate and improve leaders' work with communities, families, and children.

To foster collaboration and capacity building, the ATL consists of a series of nine two-day workshops that take place over a course of 14 to 16 months. Consultants who are coached and trained by two of the senior board members facilitate these workshops. Project managers and assistants, trained by senior board members and university implementation team members, help with the on-the-ground administration and management. In these workshops, participants must work collaboratively and strategically to develop achievable tasks pursuant to the goal(s) set forth by the group. Any status or prestige associated with a particular participant's position at her respective organization may be acknowledged, but confers no authority in the decisions made by the group. The premise in ATL is that each participant has an equal voice. At the end of each session, participants list and commit to tasks to complete by or before the next session. When they return to subsequent sessions, they report on their progress in an effort to maintain accountability.

Participants must develop four specific competencies to meet the leadership capacity building requirements of the program. The first competency is the ability to use the Friedman (2005) Results-Based Accountability™ model in their decision-making. Friedman's seven-step model poses who, what, and how questions about constituents, goals, environments, resources, capacity, and progress. Second, leaders develop the ability to work collaboratively with other participants when creating and implementing ideas related to their goals. Third, leaders learn the role of race, class, and culture as it relates to the people with whom they work as well as among the target population they serve. Fourth, all of the participants must learn to lead from the middle, which is the ability to enlist those who work for you and for whom you work in the implementation of

the strategies developed to achieve the set goal (Pillsbury, 2008). One thing to note about the concept of leading from the middle is that the participants hold positions in their respective organizations that afford them authority to make autonomous decisions that contribute to achieving set goals.

To manage, administer, and maintain the ATL program and its process, the senior administrators from the private charitable foundation, two leadership-based consulting firms, and state university organized themselves into a governance committee called the Activating Today's Leaders Board (ATLB). The ATLB members employ collaboration as their way of partnering and adaptive leadership as a strategy for leading, which allows them to experience a process parallel to that of the participants enrolled in the ATL workshops.

### **Summary**

The notion of collaboration is appealing and trendy, and the word, is used often. In the literature, collaboration is vast and spans the disciplinary spectrum. It is defined loosely and used to describe a range of structures that involve at least two parties working together in some capacity. The literature lacks a universal definition as well as a framework for collaboration. However, it does contain some key factors that contribute to effective collaboration. In spite of the fact that there is no universal definition, it is clear that in order for an individual collaborative effort to be successful, a clear definition of and verifiable framework for collaboration is necessary (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Thomson, 2001). Nonetheless, given its amorphous nature, it is easy for organizations to adopt the notion and lack a clear definition and framework for operating collaboratively. Consequently, some organizations may intentionally adopt the

ideal with no intentions of truly collaborating and other organizations may adopt the framework, but ineffectively implement it. Regardless, the consequences include a partially effective, if not ineffective, collaborative effort.

Since collaboration often occurs “outside the lines of formal authority” (i.e., bureaucracies) to which most people are accustomed (Meijer & O’Toole, 2001, pp. 272-273), a new way of thinking and working is required. Unfortunately, the limited empirical knowledge of partnerships’ inner workings has led to misconception and lack of awareness about the collaborative process. Thus, there is need for further insight into their operations in order to have an enhanced understanding of the process, people’s understanding of the process, and the challenges collaborators encounter (Agranoff, 2006). The need for further insight into collaboration presents an opportunity to explore not only its process, but also whether there is a relationship between the way in which members lead and the effectiveness of the collaborative process. Hence, this study is a step in acquiring these insights.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Overview

Guiding this study were three major research questions that addressed the collaboration process as well as the way in which Activating Today's Leaders' senior leaders recognized and met adaptive challenges throughout the partnership. They are as follows:

1. Did the ATL partnership exemplify collaboration as measured by Thomson's (2001) five key dimensions: governance, administration, autonomy, mutuality, and norms?
2. Did partnership members recognize adaptive challenges?
3. According to the Heifetz framework, did ATL partnership members thrive?

The ATL partnership represented inter-organizational relationships established in an effort to address social problems and opportunities by building the leadership capacity of people who work with children, families, and communities. The goal of the partnership was to make a measurable difference among the groups served. As such, the design, implementation, management, and sustainability of the ATL were a result of public-private agency partnership. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to determine whether leaders and members of the ATL partnership exemplified key elements of collaboration, recognized adaptive challenges, and employed leadership strategies to thrive. Data derived from members involved in the partnership provided insights about the challenges of inter-organizational relationships.

The remainder of this chapter outlines the research design and rationale, followed by the case context, sampling, and rationale for site selection. Next is an explanation of the data collection instruments, data analysis, and role of the researcher in this study.

### **Research Design & Rationale**

Case study was the design used to determine the collaborative and leadership experiences among members of the ATL partnership. It is a qualitative research methodology that allows for exploration of “little-understood phenomena,” derivation of salient themes, and discovery of connections among those involved (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 34). More specifically, case study allows for in-depth analysis and exploration of a single event that occurs within a set time, place, and space (Creswell, 1998). Furthermore, it involves multiple ways to collect data, and therefore presents a great complexity of design as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2006).

Altogether, qualitative research was a natural fit for this study since it involved building a complex but holistic picture through exploration of the lived experiences of the participants involved. First, this case study sought to explore and describe the process of organizational leaders partnering together. Second, the phenomenon occurred within the span of three years, from 2007-2010, and was focused on the activities around one leadership program. Finally, this case study recognized that each person in this study had her own reality about the course of events that occurred. As such, a goal of this study was to piece together these realities to create a larger and more integrated picture of the phenomenon being studied. Case study was an optimal methodological design for the researcher to conduct this research, given the ultimate goal was to elicit “multiple

constructed realities” from a group of participants and situate them holistically to understand the phenomenon at large (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 53).

This study exemplified some other key characteristics of qualitative research, which included the following: (1) the data were collected in a natural setting; (2) the researcher was the chief instrument for collecting data; (3) most, if not all, of the data were collected as words; (4) there was a particular focus on participants’ perspectives and the underlying or obvious meanings of their perspectives; and finally (5) data had room to emerge (Creswell, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As Maxwell (2005) noted, qualitative research is good for understanding, exploring, and/or studying processes. Since central to this study was the process of collaboration among the members involved in the ATL partnership, qualitative research proved to be the most appropriate course of methodological action.

While there were several qualitative methods available to conduct this study, there were three particular reasons that contributed to the final determination of which qualitative method to use. First, this study met all three of the criteria for using case study methodology as set out by Yin (2003), in that 1) the research questions were “exploratory”; 2) the researcher had no control over the events; and, 3) ATL was a contemporary program (p. 5). “The essence of case study...is that it tries to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result” (Schramm, 1971 in Yin, 2003, p. 12).

Second, the context of this case met the criteria for Yin’s (2003) description of a “critical case” (p. 40). A critical case involves a set of theoretical propositions being tested. In this case, Thomson’s (2001) key dimensions of collaboration were used as the

framework for understanding whether or not true collaboration existed within the partnership. Thomson (2001, 2009) has established the clearest meaning<sup>2</sup> and measurement for collaboration in an exhaustive review of the literature that included a survey of 440 directors of programs participating in a national collaborative initiative and case study research including interviews with 20 organizational leaders. The theoretical propositions set out by Thomson's theoretical framework and empirical results were well formulated, transferrable, and available to be tested for "analytic generalization" in this particular study (Yin, 2003, p. 10).

Finally, the case study design lends itself to flexibility in data collection. Since it is a methodology that requires researchers to delve deeply into the events and circumstances surrounding a unit of analysis, access to a range of data tools is advantageous. Therefore, both qualitative (interviews and document analysis) and quantitative (questionnaire with 44 close-ended questions scored on a seven-point Likert scale) methods were used for this study.

### **Case Context**

Leaders from a private charitable foundation, two consulting firms, and a state flagship university joined together in partnership to create positive change in the school readiness for children, education of families, and empowerment of communities. To achieve these ends, they developed and implemented the Activating Today's Leaders (ATL) program for community practitioners who work closely with children, families, and communities. According to the foundation's 2008 investment summary report, ATL

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<sup>2</sup> "Collaboration is a process in which autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions" (Thomson, 2001, p. 110).

was described as a “leadership development program...that mobilizes leaders to rapidly accelerate results for children and families” (p. 1). The ATL curriculum was based on the theory of aligned contributions, which posits that leaders who are working collaboratively must be skilled, committed to improving the quality of life for children, families, and communities, and maintain a sense of urgency around what it takes to accelerate change efforts (Pillsbury, 2008). Therefore, the ATL program was designed as the space for community practitioners to develop leadership skills, collaborate with other community practitioners, and have designated time to focus on strategies that would support their change efforts.

To facilitate capacity building, collaboration, and disciplined working, the ATL program consisted of a series of nine two-day workshops that took place over a course of 14 to 16 months. In these workshops, participants worked collaboratively and strategically to develop achievable tasks pursuant to the goal(s) set forth by the group. The premise in ATL was that each participant had an equal voice and was expected to make meaningful contributions to the work of the group. Any status or prestige associated with a particular participant’s position at her respective organization may have been acknowledged, but conferred no authority in the decisions made by the group. At the end of each workshop, participants listed and committed to tasks to complete by or before their next session. Upon their return to subsequent sessions, and in an effort to maintain accountability to one another and to the goals they sought to achieve, they reported on their progress.

During their participation in the workshops, participants were expected to develop four specific competencies to meet the leadership capacity building requirements of the

program. The first competency was the ability to use the Friedman (2005) Results-Based Accountability™ model in their decision-making. Friedman's seven-step model poses who, what, and how questions about constituents, goals, environments, resources, capacity, and progress. Second, leaders developed the ability to work collaboratively with other participants when creating and implementing ideas related to their goals. Third, leaders learned the role of diversity as it related to the people with whom they worked as well as among the target population they served. Fourth, all of the participants learned to lead from the middle, which was the ability to enlist those who work for you and for whom you work in the implementation of the strategies developed to achieve the set goal (Pillsbury, 2008). Note that the participants held positions in their respective organizations that afforded them authority to make autonomous decisions that contributed to achieving set goals, so they were, in fact, able to lead from the middle.

Altogether, the ATL program aimed to build the leadership capacity of select community practitioners who hailed from both public and private agencies, and who were closely connected to programs that serve children, families, and communities. Participation in the ATL program provided an opportunity for professional development and cross-sector collaboration among the participants to leverage their individual and collective capacity to impact positive change in the community.

To manage, administer, and maintain the ATL program and its process, two senior leaders from the private charitable foundation, two consultants, and a senior administrator from a state university organized themselves into a governance committee called the Activating Today's Leaders Board (ATLB). These five ATLB members employed collaboration as their way of partnering and adaptive leadership as a strategy

for leading, which allowed them to experience a process parallel to that of the participants enrolled in the ATL workshops. While they worked together, each of their organizations made a unique contribution to the ATL program. Specifically, the private charitable organization provided fiscal resources, the consultants provided knowledge resources, and the state university provided administrative resources. Together, these organizational administrators made the ATL program work.

### **Sampling.**

The unit of analysis was the five-member senior leadership team that comprised the ATL board and managed the ATL program. They each provided a one-hour long interview, which provided the core data for this study. Each member represented the interests of her organization and was fully authorized in her capacity to do so. While the ATL program's origins dated back to 2000, the collective working of the leaders being studied in this case dates back to the spring of 2007. Representing the foundation was a senior level administrator and a senior consultant for the foundation's leadership development unit. Representing the state flagship university was an assistant director for leadership programs. Finally, representing each private consulting firm was its chief executive officer, who specialized in leadership development. As such, the interviewees were selected based on their role and expertise in both their home organization and the partnership.

By January 2008, the partnership evolved into a collaborative relationship whereby an inter-organizational governing group, the ATL executive board (ATLB) was established, and all endeavors were joined (Davies & Hentschke, 2006). The ATL program was a self-organized public-private partnership that adopted collaborative

practices and drew upon concepts from Heifetz' adaptive leadership framework to function. Given that the principles for this study's conceptual framework were similar, purposeful selection was the appropriate sampling method (Creswell, 2009).

In addition to the five-member leadership team, there were 19 other professionals who had a level of expertise that allowed them to participate in the work of the partnership. All 19 professionals were not involved throughout the life of the partnership. Rather, different professionals were involved at various times prior to the inception of the coordinated efforts, as well as throughout the evolution of the partnership. However, central to this study was the process of collaboration, and therefore, these 19 professionals were selected to participate in this study since they had some level of involvement in the collaborative process through assistance with the development, management, implementation, and/or sustainability of the partnership. The purpose for gathering data from these 19 professionals was to support, refute, and/or triangulate data gathered from the five-member senior leadership team, which is the unit of analysis for this study. While these 19 professionals are not a part of the unit of analysis, data derived from them allowed the researcher to create a more complete picture of the partnership. Specifically, these participants were asked to provide their perspective on the partnership as it related to the collaborative agreements, organizational structure, collective working, and the benefits and challenges of partnering. Each offered information that contributes to the significance of this study.

ATLB members serve as the ultimate collaborative decision-making body for the partnership. However, the partnership is tiered and there are other members of the partnership who assist in the implementation, management, sustainability, and research

agenda. The second tier of the partnership is the National Capacity Building and Implementation team (NCBI). The NCBI is comprised of all of the ATLB members except the senior level administrator of the private charitable foundation, an additional five members from the leadership academy, and two members of the foundation. These members served in one or more of the following roles for the partnership: project manager, project assistant, fiscal manager, capacity building coordinator, and/or research assistant. The role of NCBI members was to manage the implementation of the ATL workshops and research agenda of the entire program. At times, members of NCBI also participated in the on-the-ground implementation of the actual program. Essentially, there was overlap at all levels. Those on the ground implementing the ATL program included consultants from private agencies who served in one or more of the following roles: coach, facilitator, project manager, project assistant, documenter, and site captain. The role that each member played supported the implementation of the actual ATL workshops for community leaders throughout the country.

This study addressed both the use of collaboration as a process for partnering and the adaptive work of leading a partnership, and therefore, data collection was diversified. Given the flexibility of case study design (Yin, 2003), a survey consisting of 44 close-ended questions, scored on a seven-point Likert-scale, and five open-ended questions was administered to all 24 members. Information collected from this survey was meant to be descriptive and speak to the collaboration process. These data addressed the research question that inquires about the key dimensions of collaboration. The second phase of data collection was a 60-minute or less in-depth, semi-structured interview involving only the ATLB members (Creswell, 2009; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The purpose for

collecting these data was to answer the research questions on the adaptive challenges and leadership strategies employed for thriving.

### **Rationale for site selection.**

The impetus for this study originated with an interest in the role of private philanthropic organizations leveraging their resources to impact positive change for children, families, and communities. Upon further exploration, the literature revealed that public-private partnerships, collaboratives, and/or networks have been mechanisms employed to achieve public objectives (Agranoff, 2001; Bloomfield, 2006). Finally, leadership was required to organize and sustain these working relationships. As a result, four considerations guided the selection of the ATLB for this study. First, as previously stated, the ATLB was a self-organized collection of public and private organizations whose representative leaders sought to make a difference for children, families, and communities. Second, they employed collaboration as their approach for partnering. Third, they adopted adaptive leadership principles as a strategy to work through challenges they encountered. Finally, they encountered several adaptive challenges that impacted their relationships and work together.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

A major strength of the case study design is the opportunity to use an array of data sources. This range of sources allowed for “data triangulation,” in order to substantiate the phenomenon of interest (Yin, 2003, p. 99). Therefore, interviews, a survey, and document analyses were the instruments used to gather data for this study. While multiple sources of data were used to allow for triangulation, the primary data source for this study was individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the five senior

members of the partnership. The central theme of this study was the adaptive challenges that leaders' experience working through their perceived collaboration process. In-depth interviewing allowed for a conversation-like process and was structured to facilitate responses from the participant's perspective rather than the interviewer's perspective (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Interviewing these five leaders was intentional in that they were considered the "elite" members of the partnership (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 105). Based on their role and expertise, elite interviewees could provide an overall perspective about the organization, the relationships between and among organizations, the complexities of leading, and the benefits and challenges of partnering across sectors.

The purpose of the interviews was two-fold. First, using this data collection method fostered the opportunity for participants to expand upon the survey topics, since prior to being interviewed, they were asked to complete the administered survey. Second, the interview questions allowed for the participants to speak to the adaptive challenges encountered and adaptive leadership strategies employed in their working together.

To schedule the interview, a phone call was made to request a one-hour in-person interview. Also, each participant was provided a copy of the interview questions (Table 3) so that they could follow along as well as take time to reflect upon their answers. The goal was to be transparent about what was being asked of them as well as to garner substantive responses from the interviewees.

Table 3: Interview Questions

1. How did you get involved in the partnership?
2. To what extent have the terms of the partnership been explicitly verbalized, discussed and/or written down in detail?

- a. Is there documentation?
  - b. Are all members privy to the terms of the agreement?
  - c. Does this impact the partnership?
  - d. What does this mean for you and your organization?
3. Do you believe it to be collaborative? Why or why not?
  4. Describe your role in the partnership.
  5. How is authority shared within the partnership?
  6. Describe your typical leadership style outside of the partnership?
    - a. Did it change once you entered the partnership?
    - b. What about it changed?
  7. Are there any particular leadership styles you tend to draw upon?
    - a. When in the partnership vs. in your own organization?
    - b. How so?
  8. How do you work with members of partner organizations who are on the Board? Not on the board?
  9. Have you had any value conflicts with other members of the partnership?
    - a. If so, how have you resolved these values conflicts?
    - b. If not, then are you suggesting that the group is harmonious? If yes or no, please provide some examples.
  10. Have you made compromises in order to fully participate as a leader in an inter-organizational arrangement where authority and accountability are shared?
  11. Have you encountered situations in this partnership that required a change in the way you typically address conflicts?

- a. What was that change?
  - b. What was your strategy for dealing with the change?
  - c. Provide examples.
12. As a member of ATLB, what strategies have you employed to advance the goals of the partnership?
13. What is the value add of your organization? Do partner organizations recognize your value? If so, how? If not, why?
14. What about the partnership do you value?

The secondary data source was one survey administered through Survey Monkey<sup>3</sup> to 24 members of the partnership, including the five ATLB members who were interviewed. Using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree* and a measure for *don't know*, participants were asked to answer 44 questions regarding the governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, and norms of the collaboration (See Table 4). Moreover, five additional open-ended questions were asked to solicit the participant's explanation of role, participation, time in partnership, and any additional thoughts. The survey was adapted from Ann Marie Thomson's (2001) dissertation<sup>4</sup>, titled *Collaboration: Meaning and measurement*, which specifically address the key dimensions of collaboration. The items selected from Thomson's survey instrument are most relevant for assessing whether the partnership's process for working

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<sup>3</sup> Survey Monkey is an online tool used to create, administer and analyze surveys ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)).

<sup>4</sup> Permission has been granted.

together was collaborative. However, to speak specifically to the ATL partnership's context, the wording of some of the questions has been modified.

The style of questions has roots in Van de Ven and Ferry's (1980) Organizational Assessment Instrument (OAI). Through the Organization Assessment Research Program, Van de Ven and Ferry (1980) produced a "scientifically valid and practically useful...framework, set of measurement instruments, and process" to assess organizations (p. 4). Van de Ven and Ferry discussed the work of Herbert Simon (1946), who recognized early on that a substantive and effective assessment of an organization takes into account all of the key components of an organization's structure and environment and the impact on performance (Van de Ven & Ferry, 1980). This argument was couched in the notion that organizational theorists focus primarily on the functions of the bureaucratic organization as an entity in the larger social system and less on the "performance effectiveness or efficiency of alternative organizational designs" (p. 1). Consequently, Van de Ven & Ferry (1980) developed a set of instruments to measure the "dimensions of context, structure, and behavior that are important for explaining the performance of organizations, work groups and individual jobs" (p. 4).

Thomson's (2001) survey questions were very similar in meaning and structure to items in the *interunit module* of the OAI, which assessed interdependence, coordinated efforts, and organizational control to measure pair-wise relationships. Given that the ATL had sets of pair-wise relationships and was engaged in a process, acknowledgement of the OAI *interunit module* was appropriate for this cross-sectional analysis. While the participants in this study represented either the public or private sector, they were still representative of a range of other organizations (i.e. consulting firms, foundations, state

agencies). Therefore, for the survey assessment, the participants were split into three thematic categories: state university, private charitable foundation, and private leadership consulting firms, with an option of a category labeled for other in case a participant did not want to be defined by the categories listed.

Table 4: Survey Questions

Category	Questions
<b>Introduction</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How is/was your organization identified in the partnership?</li> <li>2. When were you involved in the LAP partnership and for how long?</li> <li>3. What role do/did you play in the Leadership in Action Program?</li> </ol>
<b>Governance</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Your organization relies on a formal agreement that details the relationships between LAP partner organizations.</li> <li>2. The conditions of the partnership have been explicitly verbalized or discussed.</li> <li>3. Your organization relies on a mission statement created specifically for the partnership.</li> <li>4. Your organization relies on standard operating procedures created by partner organizations (including yours) to coordinate each other's activities in the partnership.</li> <li>5. Your organization participates in decisions that are made about the partnership.</li> <li>6. Your organization has a representative who participates on a board specifically designed for making decisions about the partnership.</li> <li>7. Partner organizations take your opinions seriously when decisions are made about the partnership.</li> <li>8. Partner organizations (including your organization) formally evaluate the success of the partnership.</li> <li>9. All partner organizations must agree before a decision is made about the goals and activities of the partnership.</li> <li>10. Your organization is clear about why each partner organization is involved in the partnership.</li> <li>11. Your organization knows what resources (money, time, expertise) each partner organization contributes.</li> <li>12. Your organization relies on informal personal relationships with partner organizations when making decisions about the partnership.</li> </ol>
<b>Administration</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Partner members rely on a manager to coordinate the partnership's activities.</li> <li>2. Administrative procedures have been established to coordinate activities with partner members.</li> <li>3. To coordinate activities with partner members, administrative procedures are followed.</li> <li>4. You bring conflicts with partner members out in the open to work them out among the members involved.</li> </ol>

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. You use formal communication channels when contacting partner members about issues related to the partnership.</li> <li>6. You understand your role(s) and responsibilities as a member of the partnership.</li> <li>7. Partner members agree about the goals of the partnership.</li> <li>8. Your tasks in the partnership are well coordinated with those of other partner members.</li> <li>9. You feel partner members pay close attention to your organization's activities to ensure your organization is meeting its commitments and expectations.</li> <li>10. You pay close attention to the activities of partner organizations to ensure they are meeting their commitments and expectations.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Organizational Autonomy</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Your organization's independence is affected by having to work with partner organizations on activities related to the partnership.</li> <li>2. You feel pulled between trying to meet both your organization's and the partnership's expectations.</li> <li>3. Your organization is clear about what it can and cannot contribute (i.e., time, money, and other resources) to achieve the partnership's goals.</li> <li>4. As a representative of your organization, you have the authority to make commitments to the partnership without having to get your organization's approval.</li> <li>5. Your organization protects its own organization's integrity in matters concerning the partnership.</li> <li>6. Your organization believes it is worthwhile to stay and work with partner organizations rather than leave the partnership.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Mutuality</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. For your organization to meet its deliverables, as they relate to the partnership, it requires resources and support from the following (Please answer for each organization):</li> <li>2. The partnership has had a positive impact on your organization's services.</li> <li>3. The goals and activities of your organization are similar to goals and activities of partner organizations.</li> <li>4. Partner organizations (including your organization) have combined and used each other's resources so all partners benefit from working together.</li> <li>5. Your organization shares information with partner organizations that will strengthen their operations and programs.</li> <li>6. You believe that your organization's contributions to the partnership are appreciated and respected by partner organizations.</li> <li>7. Your organization achieves its own goals better working with partner organizations than working alone.</li> <li>8. Partner organizations (including your organization) work through differences to arrive at win-win solutions.</li> <li>9. Your organization sends clients to or receives clients from partner organizations.</li> </ol>

**Norms**

1. The people from partner organizations are trustworthy.
2. Partner organizations take advantage of other partner organizations that are more vulnerable.
3. My organization can count on each partner organization to meet its obligations to the partnership.
4. My organization will work with partner organizations only if they prove they will work with us.
5. My organization will not pursue its own interests at the expense of partner organizations.
6. Even if they do not always meet their obligations to us, my organization has a duty to meet its obligations to partner organizations.
7. Developing long-term personal relationships with partner members is the most important part of working together.

Another data collection method used in this study included the examination of partnership documents. Marshall and Rossman (2006) noted, “Knowledge of the history and context surrounding a specific setting comes, in part, from reviewing documents” (p. 107). The document analysis for this study included examining the university grant applications and reports, ATLB meeting notes, consultant contracts, concept papers, and web sites for select organizations. Because the documents for this partnership are easily traceable to the organizations and some of the actors, they were given generic and/or fictitious names. Documents were used to provide the researcher with a more comprehensive outlook on the partnership processes, structure, member interactions, and communication. Additionally, these documents were used to support interview data and fill in gaps for topics that might not have been fully covered.

**Data analysis.**

Yin (2003) claimed, “data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombining both quantitative and qualitative evidence to address the initial propositions of a study” (p. 109). In this study, survey data were used to test whether Thomson’s (2001) key dimensions of collaboration existed within the

partnership. Data from both the interviews and documents were used to identify and examine the adaptive challenges encountered by ATLB members and determine whether the partnership ultimately thrived. Finally, the analysis of all data sources consisted of generating and categorizing emergent themes.

NVIVO, the computer aided qualitative data analysis (CAQDA) software tool, was used for this study, and allowed the researcher to sort, code, organize, and manage data collected (Wickman & Woods, 2005). Specifically, NVIVO permitted the researcher to organize raw data into thematic categories so that patterns and relationships could be identified, examined, and used to answer research questions. Deriving patterns, finding intersections and aligning findings with research questions were key in this case study analysis as they supported the internal validity of the case (Yin, 2003).

### **Role of the Researcher and Ethical Considerations**

It is important to note that I was a member of the partnership. I served as a fiscal and project manager on the NCBI team. In my fiscal role, I developed and managed the finances for the national program, which included the preparation of proposals, contracts, reports, and budgets. As a project manager, I contributed to the development of site-based project managers and assistants, supported the implementation of the leadership program, and assisted the ATLB by documenting their meetings and carrying out assignments. While I did not have any decision-making authority at the ATLB committee, my involvement afforded me the opportunity to work in what was ostensibly a collaborative arrangement.

Given my role in the partnership and access to the senior leadership team, I developed some impressions about its structure, function, and interactions. As opposed

to making judgments about my impressions, I sought to explore and better understand the observed phenomena using the collaboration process (Gray, 1989; Gray & Wood, 1991) and key dimensions (Thomson, 2001) frameworks with Heifetz (1994) adaptive challenges and leadership concepts as a lens for analysis.

In addition to the observed phenomena, I had an express interest in the adaptive work and challenges of leaders working in collaboration. Maxwell (2005) recommends the researcher consider personal goals for her study. For this particular study, “understanding context” and “understanding process” were the two intellectual goals that resonated with me (Maxwell, 2005, p. 22-23). Specifically, I was interested in the collaborative method of addressing issues and solving problems, as well as the adaptive leadership necessary to be successful in such endeavors. Therefore, my personal interests were influenced by the phenomena I observed during my involvement in the ATL partnership.

### **Checks and balance.**

My commitment to understanding the dynamics of the partnership through the aforementioned theoretical frameworks served as a check to my biases and a balance to my interpretation of the data. While being human comes with inherent subjectivity and bias, the recognition of these limitations was a reminder for me to exercise great care in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data for this study. As another check and balance, I commissioned a peer reviewer to offer a fresh perspective. Through this alternative lens, the peer reviewer’s role was to inquire about method and process and to challenge claims and conclusions. The ultimate purpose was to decrease the potential biases in the data interpretation and presentation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

To minimize any impact that my role in the partnership may have had in collecting data from my colleagues, I collected data once I was no longer involved in the partnership. Moreover, I made clear to participants that the study was not an evaluation of their performance. Rather, it was based on the concepts of collaboration and adaptive leadership that they employed to work together. Nevertheless, informed consent was obtained, and participants were fully briefed on their role and their significance to the study. Participants were also reminded of my commitment to confidentiality, as the ultimate goal was to gain their trust in an attempt to garner unfiltered information to complement this study. Finally, for additional protection, I used pseudonyms for all of the actors and organizations in the study. Following is a brief introduction and some background on the senior leadership team members and their respective organizations. Having some historical and contextual information about the unit of analysis (senior leadership team) supports a more comprehensive understanding of the case.

### **Actors and Organizations**

As previously mentioned, several different organizations were represented in the data collected. They included consulting firms, independent contractors, universities, foundations, community organizations, local management boards, and state government agencies. The people who represent these organizations came in contact with the ATL program at some point during its existence. However, given the unit of analysis for this study is the ATL senior leadership team, or otherwise known as the ATLB, the focus will be on their particular roles and organizations. Represented among them were a foundation, a university, and two different consulting firms.

*The foundation.* The Building Better Futures Foundation (BBFF) was an organizational member of the ATL partnership. BBFF was founded in the late 1940s with an express mission to improve the lives of disadvantaged youth in the United States. To achieve that end, it works to influence policies and reform initiatives as well as generate national and local community supports for their efforts. BBFF is one of America's largest private charitable foundations with assets exceeding \$2.5 billion in 2010. Each year, it distributes more than \$120 million in grants and is lauded as one of the premier philanthropies for charitable giving.

Angela and Brooke represented BBFF on the ATLB. Angela has been with the foundation for more than 20 years and served as the director for the foundation's leadership development division when ATL was first conceived. Since that time, she has been promoted to the vice presidency for the leadership development unit. As her role changed, so did her involvement with ATL. However, she was central in the conceptualization of the ATL program and primary in the funding of it.

Brooke was hired as a consultant to support the foundation in preparing ATL sites and transitioning the implementation for these sites to the university. In her role, and along with Angela, she represented the foundation's interests in the partnership, thereby gaining a position as a member on the senior leadership team. Brooke's authority evolved as Angela's role within the foundation changed. While Angela maintained an interest and final authority on behalf of the foundation, she entrusted Brooke to represent their interests and make decisions when meeting with the other ATLB members. Eventually, Brooke was hired as a full-time employee and currently serves as a senior associate for the leadership development division. A note of interest, however, is that at

one point Brooke worked as a full-time employee for the foundation, but left to pursue other interests. However, she returned and began working with the ATL program.

***Kennedy Consulting, Inc.*** Founded in 1992, Kennedy Consulting, Inc. (KCI) was established to provide results-based training and leadership tools for public and private sector leaders who work with children, families, and communities. The goal was to improve the capacity of these leaders to make a positive impact in communities. Caroline, a senior member of KCI, has over 30 years of combined management and consulting experience in both the public and private sectors. She has provided technical assistance and consulting to more than 50 federal, state, local, and private philanthropic agencies. Her areas of expertise include executive team building, strategic planning and management, organizational development, and system reform.

Caroline had a longstanding personal and professional relationship with Angela and BBFF, such that they viewed their relationship as a partnership. In fact, Caroline noted that while she had a “contractual relationship with the foundation,” she was “actually in a partnership” with Angela. Together, they worked on state-level systems-reform initiatives and adopted the results accountability framework by Mark Friedman (2005) to do much of their work. Therefore, when Angela commissioned a research firm to coordinate a panel of experts and design a results-based training program for middle managers, Caroline was invited to participate. According to Caroline, however, the proposal that the research firm submitted to Angela, while satisfactory in quality, did not meet Angela’s need to teach middle managers results accountability and develop their leadership skills. Coincidentally, Angela asked Caroline, “as the consultant [whom] she trusted,” (per Caroline), to redesign the program to include a results framework and

leadership tools and training. The outcome was the ATL program curriculum. While the foundation was “catalytic in starting it,” says Angela, Caroline was considered the “architect” since she held “most of the intellectual capital.”

***DDT Consulting, Inc.*** Much, if not all, of the services provided by DDT Consulting, Inc. are a result of Denise Day Turner’s consulting. Denise has over 30 years of combined experience in nursing, child health and human development, family wellness, quality improvement, strategic planning, systems reform, and leadership development. Because of her consultation with an affiliate foundation of the BBFF around state and local systems reform, Denise met Caroline. For this affiliate foundation, Denise conducted peer-to-peer consultation and Caroline served as a facilitator for one of their programs. Denise exhibited a skill set that was very similar to what was required for the ATL program facilitators. When Caroline observed Denise’s facilitation skills during a peer-to-peer consultation, she shared information with Denise about the ATL program.

Denise stated, “out of curiosity,” she “got involved in the ATL program.” Accepting Caroline’s invitation to join a facilitation training session, and later an actual ATL workshop, Denise’s involvement and role in the ATL program evolved as a facilitator and coach. She eventually became a trusted partner to the foundation and Caroline, and an expert voice for the ATL program and Board. She was often referred to as Caroline’s “thought partner” (personal observation) and regarded as a lead knowledge consultant for the program.

**The university.** Coast University (CU) is the flagship institution in its state. It enrolls approximately 37,600 students and is classified by the Carnegie Foundation for

the Advancement of Teaching as a Doctoral/Research University-Extensive. Through its 12 colleges and schools, it offers 127 undergraduate majors and 112 graduate degrees.

CU became a part of the ATL partnership by way of the Office of Senior Leadership Programs (OSLP), located in the School of Public Policy. For more than 25 years, OSLP has been in partnership with public, private, and non-profit agencies to offer educational programs for public-sector leaders. One of its staff members, Roger, was connected to BBFF through his participation in the very first ATL workshop. Given his involvement and interest with the results accountability work as well as his role in OSLP, he was introduced to Caroline as a potential custodian of the ATL program. For Caroline, this was a prime opportunity since she was interested in the ATL program being connected to an academic institution. Through this connection, Caroline negotiated a deal with Roger for OSLP, on behalf of the university, to become the institutional home and implementation manager for the ATL program, and the foundation funded it. In 2007, Roger left the university to pursue other interests, and the question about who would take on the ATL program on behalf of the university and the OSLP loomed.

In order to make sure that the ATL continued to have a university connection outside of OSLP, before he left Roger connected Angela and one of her assistants with Evelyn, the assistant director for the Leadership Institute, which was another department in the School of Public Policy. The Leadership Institute's mission was to cultivate outstanding leadership "among students, faculty, and other professionals from all walks of life" (Source: Leadership Institute Mission Statement). Education and scholarship were central to its mission and the programs and courses that were a part of the Leadership Institute focused not only on leadership theory and research, but also on the

practical application to real-life situations. While the ATL program focused mostly on community leaders, being housed in the Leadership Institute was suitable given its mission to impact leaders on and off campus.

The connection was opportune given that Evelyn's role was changing and she was in a position to take on a new project. Moreover, she read some of the literature related to the ATL framework and attended a workshop that they held. For Evelyn, leadership was the common factor between the Leadership Institute and the ATL program so she saw a connection to her work. Throughout her 20-year career, she has been directly engaged in developing leadership education curricula, planning leadership development programs, and teaching undergraduate and graduate leadership courses. Although her work was primarily with college students, she was able to see the connections between the ATL program and the Institute's core mission. She was convinced that it was a good fit. As a result, Evelyn accepted the invitation to converse about taking over the implementation contract for the ATL program. Eventually, Evelyn had a conversation with Angela, the funder in the spring of 2007, and they made a "friendly agreement" (per Evelyn) to transition the implementation contract from OSLP to the Leadership Institute and under Evelyn's management. However, by January 2008, the partnership evolved into a collaborative relationship whereby an inter-organizational governing group, the ATL executive board (ATLB) was established and consisted of Angela, Brooke, Caroline, Denise and Evelyn (personal observation). While others were involved in the management, administration, facilitation, and research for the ATL program, the ATLB served as the senior leaders and overseers for the partnership. Together, their goal was to

align commitments, principles, strategies, and resources to positively impact children, families, and communities. Following is an account of their collective activity.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Overview

Senior leaders<sup>5</sup> of a philanthropic foundation, leadership consulting firms, and a state university entered into a partnership with the expressed intent to positively impact children and families' lives. To achieve their desired ends, the combination of these leaders designed, funded, implemented, and managed the Activating Today's Leaders (ATL) program. ATL was an intensive leadership program for middle managers who were positioned to have a positive influence on children, families, and communities. The aim of the ATL program was to equip these middle managers with a set of leadership skills, tools, and a conceptual framework to improve their capacity to lead. In an effort to govern the program, the senior leaders formed the Activating Today's Leaders Board (ATLB) and adopted collaboration as their way of working together. In their partnership, the impetus for employing a collaborative approach stemmed from longstanding relationships that existed among some members, as well as their desire to uphold the principles of the ATL's conceptual framework, one of which was collaborative leadership.

This study seeks to determine whether the senior leaders of the Activating Today's Leaders partnership truly exemplified collaboration, as measured by Thomson's (2001) five key dimensions: governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, and norms. It also seeks to determine whether the partnership members recognized the adaptive challenges that occurred as a result of their attempts to

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<sup>5</sup> Full descriptions of the senior leaders and their respective organizations can be found in the Actors and Organizations section at the end of Chapter 3: Methodology.

collaborate. And, to culminate these inquiries, this study answers whether the ATL partnership ultimately thrived (Heifetz, 1994).

Like many organization leaders engaged in a collaborative partnership, there was a lack of understanding/knowledge about the requirements of a collaborative process (Thomson et al., 2009). Due to this lack, leaders were unable to capitalize on the full benefits of collaboration, calling into question whether it was indeed the best way for them to work together (Cheek, 2008). Additionally, working in an inter-organizational arrangement characterized by shared authority and accountability led to adaptive challenges and impacted their success as a collaborative entity. Using data from interviews, surveys, document analysis, and personal observation, this chapter further expands on the adaptive challenges that this case study research reveals. What follows is an analysis of five adaptive challenges that ATLB members encountered, which include:

1. Necessity of venue,
2. Organizational fit and capacity,
3. Clarity of process and role,
4. Authority and power, and
5. Civility.

These challenges were chosen in an effort to capture the essence of the partnership, as experienced by the leaders, through their relationships, challenges, lessons learned, and leadership strategies. Following the analysis of the adaptive challenges is the story of how participation in the program impacted their leadership in transformative ways and a final summation of the chapter.

## **Necessity of Venue**

One of the first adaptive challenges for the ATL program was institutional stability. CU's Leadership Institute was the program's fourth host site. The data indicate that program leaders continued to develop partnerships with individuals rather than establish alignment with an organization's mission, and secure the institutional adoption of the ATL program. Structure is an indicator of Thomson's administration dimension, and its absence left them unable to anchor the partnership effectively.

Upon creation of the program, it quickly became clear that the foundation was in no position to house the program. This raised the question about who would be a good partner. Both Angela and Caroline agreed that a non-profit organization that could receive grant funding to manage the program seemed appropriate. Since Caroline and Angela's values were "highly aligned" due to their long history of working together, Caroline was a "trusted partner," and therefore, "given the authority, literally, to implement...the ATL" (Caroline's interview). Hence, based on Caroline's recommendation, the first organization that housed the ATL was a non-partisan and non-profit council that focused on improving government effectiveness by working with current and former public-sector leaders. Part of the reason for this recommendation was the fact that Caroline was running a leadership program there and had connections to people who could support the ATL. Angela was also familiar with some of their staff and had an indirect connection to the woman who would manage the ATL program. Eventually, ATL left the council due to a personnel matter with the person managing the program on the council's behalf. While the council was "good, it did not add any value," noted Caroline, and it ended up simply serving as an "intermediary." As such, the move

did not appear to be a loss to the council. The loss to the program was that it did not have a home.

The second organization that temporarily housed the ATL program was North University (NU), a private research university in the northeastern United States. Based on the interview data, the founders chose this location for two reasons. A personnel change at the council was one reason. Specifically, the woman who managed the program had to leave the council and the ATL program was without a project manager. The second reason the ATL program was relocated from the council to NU was due to Angela and Caroline's relationship with a senior level administrator at NU who had participated in the ATL program and was familiar with it. Essentially, the contract got shifted from one organization to another primarily based on relationships with individuals.

What is important to note here is that housing the program meant receiving a grant contract from BBFF to manage and implement the ATL program, but as it evolved and lessons were learned, it meant being a partner. A partner meant an individual and his or her organization aligning with and making a commitment to the partnership and the program that involved sharing in its leadership and providing resources. Based on the interview data, the founders experienced challenges when seeking an institutional home because they were getting commitments from individuals without complete buy-in from or alignment with the organization as a whole. The literature on public-private partnerships highlights this phenomenon by noting that in theory, the idea is that organizations should share in creating opportunities to make a positive difference in communities through "improved service quality, risk sharing with the private sector, and cost savings," but in practice, it is really a contract between and among public agencies

and private companies to accomplish a set of tasks (Bloomfield, 2006, p. 400). The collaborative component is often lost during implementation (Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2008).

When ATL was moved to NU, Caroline noted that she tried to “form a partnership with [NU]” but it did not work given that the institutional mission was not focused on achieving results. For the partnership, this meant that the institutional mission should be based on improving and changing life conditions for populations (e.g. children, families, elderly, etc.). NU’s mission and purpose were not based on results, the framework upon which the ATL program was built. Rather, per Caroline, NU was focused on “systems reform, and they didn’t define systems reform as producing results.” Thus, Caroline and Angela recognized that a granted contract did not necessitate change in the organizational mission and principles.

Eventually, the ATL program was moved from NU and temporarily returned to the foundation until they could determine where best to house it, since the foundation lacked the capacity to manage such a program. In fact, while BBFF maintained very close relationships with their funded agencies, they did not serve as the institutional home for those programs. At this point, there was no institutional home for the program, and the foundation had to make a decision about next steps. Consequently, Angela hired a business model consultant to outline all of the options about how and where best to house and run the program. Simultaneously, Caroline worked with a program manager at the foundation to develop a set of criteria for selecting an appropriate institutional home. These criteria included an institution with a “culture of accountability” (Source: Caroline’s interview) and a commitment to results-based leadership. Ultimately, the goal

was to make ATL a “social enterprise,” said Angela, which is having a non-profit organization managed and run like a for-profit business. Nonetheless, a third opportunity emerged through another relationship. Roger from CU’s Office of Senior Leadership Programs at Coast University (CU) was introduced to Angela and Caroline through a mutual colleague/friend.

As previously mentioned, Roger had experience with ATL and bought into its framework so ostensibly, he was a good fit for taking on the management of the program. The problem, however, was that he eventually left the university, and the search for an institutional home resumed. To be considered a home for the ATL partnership meant that an institution would take ownership of the program and provide long-term physical, human, technological, and fiscal resources. Before too long, the ATL program ended up being transferred to a fourth location, which was CU’s Leadership Institute in the School of Public Policy, where Evelyn became a partner member on behalf of the university.

Again, the challenge here was determining whether Evelyn and CU’s Leadership Institute could become ATL’s institutional home. While it appeared to be a technical issue (i.e., clear problem definition), with a technical solution (i.e., clear solution and implementation), it was in fact a Type II problem. The ATL leaders found themselves in an adaptive struggle trying to find an institutional home where it could permanently remain (Heifetz, 1994). The placement of the program primarily followed individuals, which prevented it from receiving institutional buy-in and support beyond the individuals’ commitments. Moreover, at the organizations where the program landed, there was a lack of alignment between the particular organization’s mission and the program’s founding principles. Thus, there was never any real partnership with an organization,

rather a relocation of the grant contract based on relationships or connections to individuals. Finally, the data suggest that the criteria for determining an appropriate institutional venue for the program were established after the foundation and consulting company learned from their experience. Even though the learning necessary for a Type II problem occurred, they did not take heed and the program ended up following another individual. As a result, the leaders continued to encounter challenges around organizational fit and capacity.

### **Organizational Fit and Capacity**

A second adaptive challenge encountered by senior members of the partnership was organizational fit and capacity. This challenge brought about the problem of governance and organizational autonomy. Although they eventually found an institutional venue, they continued to have alignment issues, whereby the tenets of the program were not directly aligned with the tenets of its newest institutional venue. The lack of alignment led to ineffective governance. Also, each institution had its particular organizational priorities that did not necessarily align with the priorities of the partnership. Ultimately, this organizational dissonance caused tension and left the leaders with another challenge to face.

#### **Fit.**

The data indicate two particular reasons that CU was not a good fit for implementing and managing the ATL program. First, the university's bureaucratic infrastructure did not change to accommodate the needs of the ATL program. Rather, the ATL program had to adjust to the university's infrastructure. Second, while CU seeks to positively impact the global community through research, teaching, and technological

innovation, its mission is not focused on results leadership and accountability for community leaders in the same vein as the ATL program. Per Caroline, these were the specific criteria for being an institutional home and CU did not meet them. Nonetheless, by the end of their third year together, ATL's senior leaders learned that the best role for the university was to serve as the teaching and research resource for the ATL program. Notably, the challenge of fit could have been avoided, but the values of relationship and commitment trumped Angela's hesitation to authorize CU as the implementation home. In other words, rather than making a decision that was primarily based on the mission alignment between the program and CU, a decision was made based on Angela and Caroline's relationship. Caroline and Angela had a longstanding professional relationship based on trust and commitment. Therefore, Angela authorized the program's move to CU because of Caroline's advocacy. While Angela had some reservations, she trusted that Caroline would effectively manage the program and adequately address any challenges.

Based on the experience with NU and a personal history with large research institutions, Angela "didn't have a high level of confidence" (Source: Angela's interview) that the ATL program could thrive in such an environment. As she noted, ATL "needs to move fast sometimes" and this was not necessarily consistent with any university structure. Angela's reluctance was based on her personal experience with universities, in that they are institutions that can be quite inflexible at times. Document analysis (Source: ATLB Meeting Notes) revealed that ATL experienced major challenges due to the university's structure including: payment processing, contract acquisition, sole sourcing requirements, hiring policies, salary guidelines, and grant processing time. Given that

these processes were a part of the infrastructure, an organizational shift needed to occur in order to accommodate the program's need. It was clear that these challenges existed even when ATL was housed in OSLP. As noted by Caroline, "there were good people at OSLP" working on the ATL program, but they "couldn't organize the infrastructure to make anything work smoothly." Here, the adaptive challenge of how to be in partnership with a large institution, or even a unit within the institution emerged as it did in trying to determine a venue. Nevertheless, they chose to stay with the university.

Fit impacts the balance of interests among organizations. Leaders who enter a collaborative arrangement must strike a balance between upholding the purpose and mission of their respective organization and meeting the interests of and their commitment to the collaboration (Gray & Wood, 1991; Thomson, 2001). This is challenging when, from the outset, fit is lacking. It also creates tension for the organizations. Effective organizational autonomy, a necessity for productive collaboration, exists when there is little to no tension between the competing needs and interests of one's organization and that of the collaboration. As one of the foundation's leaders framed it, "I have to represent the foundation's interests. I have to be transparent about my observations, and I have to be...fair and considerate." While not explicitly stated, each leader of the ATLB concurred with this sentiment based on her commitment to her respective organization. In this particular partnership, the missions were not compromised for each representative organization. Yet, they were met with great operational challenges due to organizational infrastructure.

In light of the obvious challenges, the decision to stay at CU and be transitioned to the Leadership Institute stood. Looking at the relationship from Caroline's point of

view, what emerged from the data was that the value of relationship and commitment served as the driving factor for the final decision. Upon hearing about the opportunity for the Leadership Institute to take over the contract, Caroline advocated on its behalf. In fact, she made a comment about how Angela and she differed regarding the decision to host the program at the university.

“She [Angela] felt that...[staying at the university] just made doing our work very, very hard, but I, still, as one of...the partner[s] in this, would dream that for ATL to grow, it had to have a different kind of an institutional viability. And the best case scenarios would be that there would be an academic dimension to it and research...otherwise, it could never really influence the real work in a particular way...So, based on my...advocacy for that, it went to the Leadership Institute.”  
(Caroline)

While Caroline’s advocacy and position as a “trusted partner to Angela and BBFF” (Source: Caroline’s interview) may have been a driving factor, Angela noted that she was also motivated by the opportunity to support one of her staff members, Mark. Mark had invested time and energy into the ATL program and was interested in seeing it move to the university where he would join and have the opportunity to further develop it. As a result of Angela’s commitment to Mark’s personal and professional growth, she acquiesced. “Well, we’ll just try this. Maybe it’ll work, maybe it won’t” (Source: Angela’s interview). As such, the challenge of fit loomed, but the foundation, consulting firm, and the university accepted this decision.

### **Capacity.**

The ATL is a complex program that requires an enormous amount of resources and demands the full attention of its administrators (Source: ATLB meetings notes; NCBI meeting notes). When the university did not have the capacity nor did they make contributions to build their capacity and grow the program, it caused a major conflict

among the leadership team. The data indicate three primary expectations of the university members as the ATL program's administrators and implementation team. First, they were asked to learn and embrace the conceptual framework upon which the program was founded (Source: Caroline's interview; Evelyn's interview). Second, the grant contract between the foundation and the university required that they complete a set of tasks related to the implementation and management of the program (Source: Grant Contract). Third, there was an expectation that they aid in developing ATL as a social enterprise, which included a commitment to raising money for the program (Source: Angela's interview, Caroline's interview).

The university team commissioned to administer and manage the program's implementation was completely new to its framework, so they experienced a steep learning curve. This was an adaptive challenge because having a team with no real experience or exposure to the program model was completely outside the parameters of the criteria that the founding leaders established for selecting a partner. Nonetheless, the strategy for addressing the problem was two-fold. First, the Leadership Institute director, Evelyn, was told by Caroline, "...for this to work, you...and whatever staff you bring onboard, have to immerse yourselves in the method, because that's the one thing we require for this to be successful."

The second solution was to train the university staff in the program's framework. This was also the case for other members of the partnership, such as coaches, facilitators, project managers, and project assistants who were not a part of the university, but were contracted to work with the ATL program at its various sites. The underlying issue was that the foundation had to pay for the training and capacity building, rather than

professionals coming to the program already equipped with the skills to lead, manage, coach, or assist. Partnership budget reports indicate that more than \$500,000 (of a million dollar budget) were spent on training and development. While it was clear that some training was necessary due to the complexity of the program, the foundation invested more than they wanted in capacity building, and did not feel they were getting the results they sought. The foundation wanted to “produce a cadre of coaches...as talented as Caroline”; they wanted the university to “raise money”; and they wanted to have more than enough sites to implement the ATL program (Source: Angela’s interview).

Although the university members were in the habit of meeting the deliverables that were set out in the grant contracts, the expectation that the university would raise money to support the program, thereby allowing the foundation to fiscally phase out was not met. An explanation about why the university neglected this task was not explicit in the data. However, in taking a close look at the data and considering my personal observations, I offer the following hypothesis to explain the lack of university fundraising. From the university’s standpoint, they had already raised money by receiving the grant from BBFF for a program that BBFF created (in partnership with Kennedy Consulting, Inc.) and wanted implemented. Secondly, the university did not share the same level of investment. The program concept, design, and implementation plan were established prior to CU joining as the implementation arm. While they accepted the responsibility, the university mostly saw itself as a contracted agency whose role was to meet a set of deliverables as it related to administering and implementing the program (Source: Personal observation and Evelyn’s interview). Evelyn and her team did not believe they

ever had any real authority in the partnership. “It [shared authority] wasn’t authentic,” said Evelyn. According to Evelyn, authenticity in a partnership meant a more “genuine integration of work and ideas...as opposed to...just [pieces of a] puzzle...next to each other, getting something done.” As such, there was no incentive to raise money for a program that was not theirs and for which they had no real stake. Finally, given the inordinate amount of time that the program consumed, university members made a choice to focus on the management of the program and not the funding of it.

Organizational capacity and fit are determinants in the governance dimension of collaboration. Without the capacity to collaborate, leaders set themselves up for failure, as they did not enter into a collaborative arrangement with the necessary ability to fully engage as a member and stakeholder. It was clear that having the capacity to collaborate was a challenge from the beginning when the foundation and consulting firm sought out an institutional home. Absent was the realization that in order for the ATL program to be optimally successful, it could not simply become a part of someone’s portfolio of responsibilities. At minimum, comprehension of the conceptual framework, program model and leadership tools were necessary. While all parties involved were aligned around the larger issue, which was to make improvements in education for children, economics for families, and safety in communities, there was some misalignment about the process of achieving their goal since the university had no real experience with either the results accountability framework or the leadership program that was designed and already in place. This disconnect emerged in the foundation and program designer’s expectation that the university leader and her staff become experts or “fully immersed” and well versed in the framework, raise money and have a major leadership role in

managing the ATL. Conversely, the university representative understood her role as a contracted organization that provided administration and implementation of the program. The organizational cultural difference presented challenges for the leaders. Some of this could have been avoided had the senior leaders been more thoughtful about each organization's role, its capacity and limitations, and shared in the decision making about how each organization could bring its best self to the table. This adaptive challenge remained consistent throughout the partnership until there was a change in roles among the institutions represented.

### **Clarity of Process and Role**

In order to effectively pursue shared goals, organizations in an intersectoral arrangement must be clear about the process and their roles. As a former member of the partnership, I observed that the partnership purported, to be collaborative. However, what was said and what was done did not always align, hence, the onset of this study. Using the collaborative lens, this challenge exemplified another aspect of Thomson's administration dimension. Clarity is paramount to operating efficiently. While the data indicate that there was some level of clarity as it related to partner members' roles, there was a lack of clarity regarding the type of process employed to partner together.

### **Collaborative or not?**

Although partner members claimed collaboration as their process for partnering, there were some inconsistencies in their perceptions about whether they were collaborating. Therefore, to determine whether the ATL partnership exemplified Thomson's (2001) key dimensions of collaboration, which are governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, and norms, partner members were

administered a survey with five open-ended questions and 44 close-ended questions, scored on a seven-point Likert scale. This survey was used to provide descriptive statistics only. Unlike Thomson's analysis, there was no covariance structure model with confirmatory factor analysis to analyze the survey data.

The responses to the survey by the ATL partnership members indicated that Thomson's key dimensions of collaboration existed to some extent. While this study employs Thomson's (2001) definition for collaboration, it is important to note that there was no definition of collaboration provided to respondents when they were interviewed and surveyed. Therefore, respondents answered the questions using their own understanding and definition for collaboration, which mainly consisted of people working together to achieve a common goal. Nevertheless, the data revealed a majority point of view, which was partner members somewhat agreed, agreed, or strongly agreed that collaboration existed. Administration, organizational autonomy, and mutuality were the dimensions in which respondents were mostly in agreement. While the majority decision affirmed the governance dimension existed, there was obvious disagreement related to the partnership's mission statement, decision-making authority, and partnership evaluation in 41.7% (n=5 of 12) of the questions (See Tables 5-9). At least 40% of the responses indicated some level of disagreement in all five of the questions. This represents nearly half of the respondents. Moreover, in three (Tables 5, 7, 9) of the five questions, more than 65% of the responses indicated some level of disagreement. Do note that somewhat agree was included in the calculation because it is a tepid form of agreement, which indicates some level of doubt or disagreement.

**Table 5: Governance Question #3**

**Your organization relies on a mission statement created specifically for the partnership.**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Strongly Agree	0.0%	0
Agree	18.2%	4
Somewhat Agree	13.6%	3
Somewhat Disagree	13.6%	3
Disagree	36.4%	8
Strongly Disagree	4.5%	1
Don't Know	13.6%	3
<i>answered question</i>		<b>22</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>1</b>

**Table 6: Governance Question #5**

**Your organization participates in decisions that are made about the partnership.**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Strongly Agree	18.2%	4
Agree	40.9%	9
Somewhat Agree	13.6%	3
Somewhat Disagree	9.1%	2
Disagree	13.6%	3
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
Don't Know	4.5%	1
<i>answered question</i>		<b>22</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>1</b>

**Table 7: Governance Question #6**

**Your organization has a representative who participates on a board specifically designed for making decisions about the partnership.**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Strongly Agree	23.8%	5
Agree	9.5%	2
Somewhat Agree	19.0%	4
Somewhat Disagree	0.0%	0
Disagree	33.3%	7
Strongly Disagree	9.5%	2
Don't Know	4.8%	1
<i>answered question</i>		<b>21</b>
<i>skipped question</i>		<b>2</b>

**Table 8: Governance Question #8****Partner organizations (including your organization) formally evaluate the success of the partnership.**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	9.1%	2
Agree	31.8%	7
Somewhat Agree	22.7%	5
Somewhat Disagree	9.1%	2
Disagree	22.7%	5
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
Don't Know	4.5%	1
	<i>answered question</i>	<b>22</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>1</b>

**Table 9: Governance Question #9****All partner organizations must agree before a decision is made about the goals and activities of the partnership.**

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Strongly Agree	4.8%	1
Agree	14.3%	3
Somewhat Agree	38.1%	8
Somewhat Disagree	4.8%	1
Disagree	28.6%	6
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
Don't Know	9.5%	2
	<i>answered question</i>	<b>21</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>2</b>

For the norms dimension, 42.9% (n=3 of 7) of the questions indicated a sizeable level of disagreement (see tables 10, 11, 12). The deviation was related to trust and relationships, with 31.8% of respondents agreeing to more vulnerable partner organizations being taken advantage of, and 13.6% who answered did not know, rather than disagreeing. Additionally, 40.5% of respondents disagreed that developing long-term relationships was not an extremely important part of working together.

**Table 10: Norms Question #2****Partner organizations take advantage of other partner organizations that are more vulnerable.**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Strongly Agree	0.0%	0
Agree	9.1%	2
Somewhat Agree	22.7%	5
Somewhat Disagree	27.3%	6
Disagree	22.7%	5
Strongly Disagree	4.5%	1
Don't Know	13.6%	3
	<i>answered question</i>	<b>22</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>1</b>

**Table 11: Norms Question #4****My organization will work with partner organizations only if they prove they will work with us.**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Strongly Agree	22.7%	5
Agree	13.6%	3
Somewhat Agree	18.2%	4
Somewhat Disagree	13.6%	3
Disagree	22.7%	5
Strongly Disagree	0.0%	0
Don't Know	9.1%	2
	<i>answered question</i>	<b>22</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>1</b>

**Table 12: Norms Question #7****Developing long-term personal relationships with partner members is the most important part of working together.**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Strongly Agree	9.1%	2
Agree	22.7%	5
Somewhat Agree	27.3%	6
Somewhat Disagree	4.5%	1
Disagree	31.8%	7
Strongly Disagree	4.5%	1
Don't Know	0.0%	0
	<i>answered question</i>	<b>22</b>
	<i>skipped question</i>	<b>1</b>

While the survey responses to the close-ended questions indicated the partnership was collaborative, respondents were given the opportunity to elaborate. In an open-ended question, respondents were asked “Was the work of the partnership collaborative? Why or why not?” Of the 23 people who completed the survey, 82.6% (n=19) answered this question with a “yes,” “yes but,” “somewhat/not really,” “no,” or “other” (See table 13). In other words, their expanded statements began with or included one of the aforementioned responses.

Number/Percent of respondents	Was the work of the partnership collaborative?	Select why or why not responses
n=6 (31.6%)	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, it was definitely collaborative and at times some partners were more accountable than others.</li> <li>• The work was collaborative because the partners worked together toward a shared, common result and also supported and encouraged local leaders to do the same.</li> <li>• Yes. We are aligned towards the result and in high action towards the result.</li> <li>• Yes, the work could not have been done without a collaborative partnership.</li> </ul>
n=5 (26.3%)	Yes, but...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It was mostly "collaborative" in name and concept only. There were decisions made without full consensus. And some people and organizations had more power than others in the partnership.</li> <li>• I believe it to be collaborative, but not without challenges. Some of the challenges come from personalities and trust issues.</li> </ul>
n=5 (26.3%)	Somewhat, not really	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some members of the partnership were not represented in national conversations or decisions that impact how the work is</li> </ul>

		rolled out at the site.
n=2 (10.5%)	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One central authority figure made the decisions for the partnership.</li> </ul>
n=1 (5.3%)	Can't answer yes or no	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ATL requires myriad complex relationships to be successful in each site and nationally...It is not possible to say yes or no to this question. Many partnerships were collaborative. Some were not. Most were established to serve a purpose and partners played roles necessary to support the implementation of programs. In some instances, partners were clear on their roles. In others, they were not.</li> </ul>

To triangulate this inquiry, one of the questions in the interview protocol for the senior leaders inquired about whether or not they believed the partnership to be collaborative. While senior leaders mostly believed it to be collaborative, there was a caveat for each respondent. One respondent claimed that the partnership was collaborative, but it had “rough spots...and there were power relationships,” while another respondent claimed, “I think everyone was striving to be collaborative.” Interestingly enough, another respondent shared that she “didn’t think deeply about what it all meant” until this study came about, which prompted her to “read some stuff about ...collaboration, which should exist [in the ATL].” However, based on what she learned, her answer to the collaborative question was “no, we weren’t a collaboration, but prior to that [the onset of this study],” she notes, “maybe I was just loosely using the word ‘collaboration’ without understanding what the experts were saying.” Another respondent framed her collaborative efforts in terms of the “development of decisions.” In other words, each ATL member “had the capacity to have input...at what seem[ed] like an equal level...so there was some kind of shared decision making.”

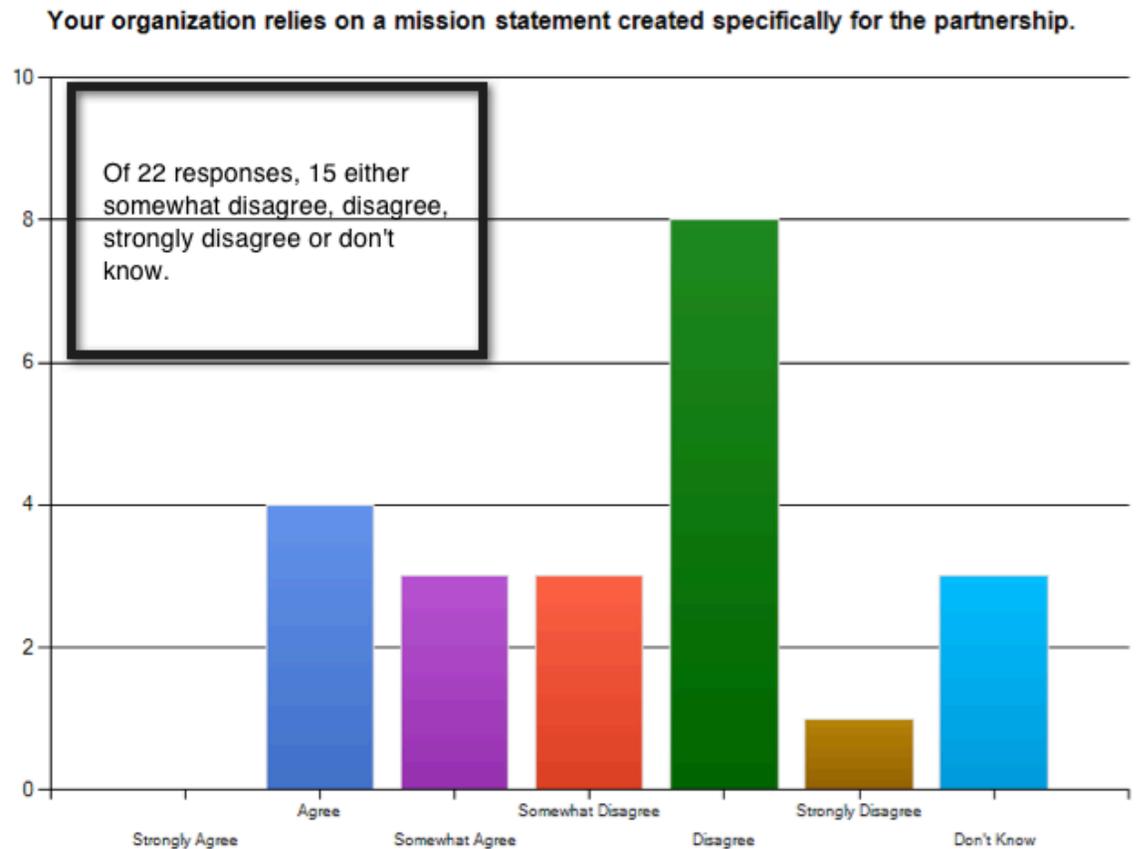
Finally, one of the leadership consultants shared how the goal was to be collaborative, especially since collaborative leadership is a method used to develop the capacity of the community leaders who participated in the ATL programs. Furthermore, she framed true collaboration within her definition of partnership, which is when “a partner puts [his] resources on the table...and [his] own stake in.” A partner is accountable for, and impacted personally, by the success and/or failure of the partnership in that his investment is at stake no matter what. Simultaneously, she went on to say, “you can only have partnerships between equals, not necessarily hierarchical equals, but equal to the task, and each making aligned contributions for the common result.” Upon reflection, she realized that the “university and the foundation being in partnership was not structurally possible.” Moreover, she stated, “it wasn’t really possible for me [as a consultant] to be in partnership with the university,” which is what she sought in this endeavor. From her perspective, the university could not be a “true partner” because it only knew “how to spend money” and it was not “in the position to be a co-investor because they had no money.”

Throughout the interviews, participants seemed to waver about whether it was or was not a partnership, or whether it was or was not collaborative. Here is a clear indication that partnership and collaboration were not defined by or for the group. Each member entered the partnership with her own lens about what partnering and collaborating meant. This lack of alignment contributed to the adaptive challenges of these alleged collaborative leaders. In fact, there were moments where the interviewed participants stated outright, “it wasn’t a partnership” or “it wasn’t collaborative.” Nonetheless, decisions among the leadership team about whether or not the partnership

was a “true partnership” or “collaborative” seemed to emerge in their reflection of the events as opposed to how they established their terms of agreement in the very beginning.

Although the majority decision was in the affirmative, the vacillation in responses from the interview data and the survey data indicate a lack of clarity and definition among all respondents about what it meant to collaborate. In taking a more in depth look at the data, only six survey respondents answered “yes” definitively. Moreover, the interview respondents differed in their responses to settle on an absolute “yes” or “no” as to whether their partnership was collaborative. The data indicate that the events of the partnership determined whether an interview participant agreed or disagreed to their work being collaborative, rather than it being clearly defined in the beginning as to what it meant to be in collaboration (Thomson, 2001, 2009). Furthermore, no set vision or mission was established to outline what it meant to work together in collaboration to achieve the goals set forth. In fact, survey data revealed that the majority of respondents (n=15 of 22 who answered) disagreed to some extent (n=12) or did not know (n=3) whether there was a mission statement created specifically for the partnership (see Figure 2). This lack of clarity and absence of framing posed the threat of partnership extinction, thereby leaving the leaders to face another adaptive challenge.

Figure 2: Mission Statement



### **Role expectations.**

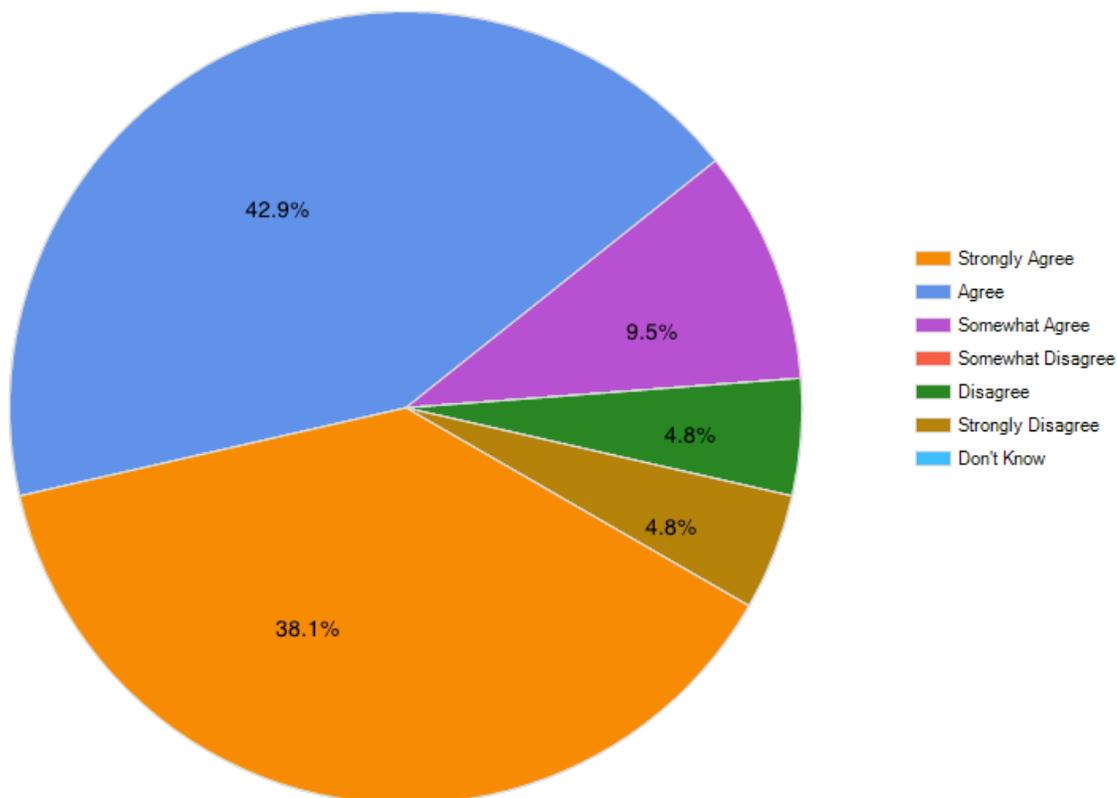
What was clear from the interview and survey data was that a set of task-related expectations provided the framing for what it meant to work together in collaboration. Additionally, as it related to tasks, the data confirm that most members of the ATL partnership were clear about their roles and responsibilities (Source: Interviews with Angela, Brooke, Caroline, Denise and Evelyn; Survey data). The conflict existed in the unwritten expectations that required a level of commitment to the program beyond completing tasks and meeting deliverables. What emerged was that the university was not carrying equal weight as a partner because they did not raise additional funds, nor were they immersed in the program's framework. For all intents and purposes, the

university appeared to be the villain. However, the data reveal that the university was more akin to the victim given they had no say in the design or development of the program, neither were they given an opportunity to determine how they maximize their strengths as a university and be a solid partner (i.e. expertise in research and teaching). Moreover, they were expected to be collaborators in a program that came prepackaged with implementation instructions. The data show that they carried out their tasks, and therefore, did hold up their end of the bargain, but it was never deemed good enough by other partner members. This nuance created tension among leaders and challenged their trust and sincerity with one another.

The clarity that did exist, whether in the form of grant agreements, contracts, or verbal handshakes, was in the role that each organization played. The foundation provided the funding, the leadership consultants provided the program design and curriculum, and the university provided the management and implementation. With each organization came a cadre of workers. The cadre of workers held a variety of roles, which included project managers, project assistants, coaches, facilitators, documenters, site captains, and coordinators. Collectively, their primary role was to run a successful series of workshops for the community leaders. To support the coordination of their work, the ATLB commissioned the National Capacity Building and Implementation (NCBI) team to carry out and manage the decisions of the leadership board. The operational structure was critical to the administration of the ATL program, as it provided a basis for functioning. The delegation of tasks was clear, and there appeared to be strength in the clarity around roles and duties.

Figure 3: Formal Agreements<sup>6</sup>

**Your organization relies on a formal agreement that details the relationships between LAP partner organizations.**



This evidence was supported in the qualitative data collected from interview participants.

In fact, one of the senior leaders, Denise, made clear:

I think my...[role], as an independent consultant, has always been clear.. Even when there were aspects of the role that we would have to either change or develop together, it was more...of the developmental nature of the program, that then would look and say, 'So, in this role here would be your responsibilities,' or 'here are your tasks,' or, 'here's what you have the authority to do.' So, I think that that piece, as far as related to my job and in that contractual way, was very clear.

<sup>6</sup> In case this document is printed in black and white text, note the percentage breakdown for Figure 3: 38.1% Strongly Agree; 42.9% Agree; 9.5% Somewhat Agree; 0% Somewhat Disagree; 4.8% Disagree; 4.8% Strongly Disagree; and 0% Don't Know.

While ATLB members were clear about their tasks, when asked to what extent were the terms of the partnership explicitly verbalized or written down, the answers varied. One participant shared that any formal agreement was in the form of a grant agreement. She was not sure who got to see it or not, but as far as she was concerned, it was “a matter of public record.” Another participant stated, “I don’t remember seeing anything written down, other than ‘what is ATL, and what the roles of the different parties are,’ but not ‘we are a partnership to do x, y and z.’” On the other hand, one of the interviewees claimed that the terms were “discussed, but not written down. It was more like a friendly agreement.” With the exception of clarity regarding the official grant agreement and contracts, the answers about documentation varied. As previously mentioned, there was no central statement or document that outlined the terms of their partnership, stated a central mission, or detailed how their roles were supposed to function together and share in the leadership of the partnership.

### **Disconnect and tension.**

Based on expectations and the history of relationship building and grant making, the relationship between the university and the foundation was assumed to be more than technical. In other words, their relationship consisted of more than the proposal and contract that was a necessary procedure between the two institutions. This was problematic since there was no articulation of what it meant to be in full collaboration outside of the expectations set. What emerged in the data was a disconnect. From the foundation’s perspective, they were providing an array of resources that included funding, staffing, and capacity building for all of the administrators, coaches, and facilitators. “We were paying people enormous sums of money...and I...didn’t feel like...[it was] the

right way to invest BBF's money" (Source: Angela's interview). From the lead knowledge consultants' perspective, she offered the necessary tools, training, support, and coaching for everyone to be aligned in their thinking and action around what was necessary to implement the programs effectively. However, Caroline's sentiment was that things got "very rocky" after she laid out the expectation that the university staff fully "immerse" themselves in the ATL program's framework. From the university's perspective, they provided the administration and implementation as was requested. However, they felt as if they were constantly being "tested" (Source: Evelyn's interview). This feeling aligns with Evelyn's belief that some of the interactions among leaders as well as partnership members were not always genuine, which, for Evelyn, is key in true partnerships. While everyone recognized one another's contributions, there seemed to be an underlying sentiment of dissatisfaction among them. Interview data by the senior leaders revealed that the source of dissatisfaction among the senior leaders was a result of confusion about the right relationship with the university.

***Right relationship.*** BBFF, Kennedy Consulting, Inc. and DDT Consulting, Inc. were aligned in the principles, methods, and purpose of ATL. However, the underlying sentiment was that the university was not aligned or fully on board to be engaged as a partner. For example, Evelyn shared that she was "consistently accused of not being committed to the work, or not fully understanding the work because [she] wasn't on the ground [ATL sites with community leaders]." On the contrary, she said,

All you have to do is read the work, you understand the work...I didn't agree with a lot of the methodology and their interpretation or re-interpretation of my behavior was that I didn't get it. I get it. I just didn't like it and they would not accept that. And I think...those are the moments where I probably should have just pulled out. [In fact], I had a conversation with [two of the other board members]...where I felt like they wanted me to demonstrate something. I [said] no,

I'm not going to go around and act in a certain way to prove to them... So I put my foot in the sand, and dug [it] in, and drew my little line and that was that. So...I know that I probably could have made things very easy if all of a sudden I started doing a certain thing and talking a certain way...and [it would have] demonstrated that I embraced this [methodology]. And I didn't want to do that because I didn't feel like I needed to do anything to prove myself to them. (Evelyn)

From the perspective of both foundation members, however, the issue was not with the people from the university, the issue was with the impediments caused by the institution. One of the senior leadership consultants noted that “it was never a true partnership.” In her opinion the university would not view their work together from a partnership perspective. Instead, she believed that the university simply saw the contract from the foundation as another grant being acquired. “The university knows how to spend money [but] doesn't see itself, really, as a partner because a partner actually puts [his] own resources on the table” (Source: Caroline's interview). Regardless of these statements, which placed the burden on the university, Evelyn believed that she was the source of blame since she represented the university and that they did not believe she was fully committed to the partnership. This conflict permeated the partnership and continued to show up in the struggles to share authority and minimize power relationships.

### **Authority and Power**

The challenge of authority and power encountered by the senior leaders indicates the minimal existence of mutuality in the partnership. There was a lack of true interdependence among the key organizations represented, which contributed to some of the leaders' struggles with shared authority. Again, interdependence is when organizations rely on one another to survive. However, in this case, each organization's

survival was not determined by any of the other organizations. Therefore, no threat of extinction for the key organizations involved existed.

The interview and survey data suggests that participants struggled to establish a shared culture around authority, which was largely due to power access and leverage by some members. “It takes a lot of work for authority to be shared in this collaborative. It’s got its rough spots [and] within the partnership there are power relationships,” said one of the foundation representatives. A key indicator in collaboration is shared authority. It is the modus operandi whereby leaders mutually authorize each other to make decisions (Gray, 1989, 2004). Yet, as a result of their struggles with power, reports about shared authority in the partnership varied.

Each of the leaders had a different perspective about how authority and power showed up in the partnership. Angela spoke about it from a negotiation perspective.

There are stronger partners at the table...and I mean everybody...brings something; there’re lots of strengths. But in the negotiating table, I would say that one partner is stronger, and so, you have to fight for your space and your voice...And so...authority gets here in this partnership when people can hold their own. (Angela)

Since Angela was investing the money, she had a particular stake in how things worked. Moreover, she knew that she could leverage her role as the funder and decide, “I’m not doing this anymore,” which, in turn, would discontinue the program until other funding was secured. On the other hand, Brooke understood authority in the partnership as it related to each of the members’ roles. For example, the university, as the implementation arm, had authority to make related decisions. However, she noted that there was “a fine line...If they went too far, I’d have to assert my authority...So it was a very delicate balance of finding the line.” Therefore, in the spirit of being collaborative, Angela and

Brooke reminded themselves that “it’s not always our way, just because we have the money there [at the university and invested in the program],” and decided, “We are going to try this out and see if it works.”

For the leadership consultants, sharing authority was a precarious matter. Given that the grant contract was between the university and the foundation, the consultants ended up being hired as contracted workers for the university, and under the oversight of Evelyn, as the principal investigator on the grant contract. As a matter of departmental protocol, Caroline and Denise technically reported to Evelyn. However, since they were in a partnership, their work together “had a kind of life separate from any specific contract.” Here, Caroline was pointing out a “distinction between a contractual relationship, and a grant from a funder to an organization or consultant in partnership.” Essentially, the contracts were a technical necessity per the institutions involved, but the relationships could be defined according to the members involved. Yet, Caroline recognized that although Evelyn was willing to share authority with her and Denise, they did not have authority to share with Evelyn given their positions at the university. “We only had the authority at her [Evelyn’s] authorization” (Caroline). Regardless, Caroline acknowledged Evelyn’s efforts to create a culture of shared authority. “It really worked beautifully for awhile [until] it disappeared.” OSLP got rid of the Leadership Institute and most of its programs due to budget cuts and major organizational restructuring. It “completely changed Evelyn’s life,” explained Caroline.

While Caroline viewed her authority based on her contractual role with the university and Evelyn’s authorization, another member of the leadership team alluded to the power Caroline held.

You know, Caroline's a very intense, intellectually powerful, personally powerful person, and so...to be able to be a peer with Caroline in a partnership like this, you've got to be smart, you've got to be tough, you have to be assertive...um...and she enjoys the good intellectual debate...And if you're uncomfortable with that kind of position, she just does what she wants...but not that she doesn't welcome the pushback. But, you have to have that in you. And so, I think for both Evelyn and Caroline, a lot of the work in the partnership was around building their own capacity to be full partners. (Angela)

This power struggle showed up in the shaping and influencing of the partnership.

Denise communicated her thoughts about shared authority from the perspective of her position as a member of the senior leadership team. "There was always a place to have an opinion" because she had been a member of the ATL board since it was instituted. "So as a part of that team," explained Denise, "I can inform a decision. It wasn't my authority to make the final decision, although I think there was voting, but I don't remember it being that tacit." For Denise, the collaboration around shared authority was in developing decisions.

Each person [ATLB member] had the capacity to have input, I think, at what seem[ed] like an equal level...so decisions that came to ATLB could be decided within ATLB, by the people there. So, there was some kind of shared decision making, which is one of the ways that I would define a collaborative. (Denise)

Upon further reflection and processing the question about shared authority during the interview, Denise made a distinction between personal authority and decision-making authority.

So, I think [having] the personal authority, which is being able to show up with your own body of knowledge, your own experiences, and having a place to share that where it was heard, was very powerful in there. I think the decision-making authority was shared on the board. We actually developed consensus-based decision making to make the major decisions about how we did what we did in the partnership. (Denise)

Conversely, Evelyn viewed sharing authority in this partnership as being authorized to, and accountable for, managing "our own pieces of it." She went on to note,

I don't know if that's a true collaboration because I don't really see all of the intersections. I just felt like there were different components of it that worked side by side...[whereas], this is my thing, and I did my thing. For instance, Caroline...got the CFs [coaches and facilitators], that was her thing, and [she] was a good facilitator. So, we each had a different thing that we did. I don't think I felt like I would have had authority to identify and develop a good facilitator. [Furthermore], I wasn't going to go to the BBF Foundation and tell them how to spend money or raise money. It just wasn't my domain so I stayed within my lanes in order to provide what I provide...as a member of a team. I didn't see myself as a partner or collaborator, I saw myself as a member of a team of individuals who had work to do. (Evelyn)

Similar to Brooke's perception about shared authority, what emerged from Evelyn's statement was that authority was related to assigned tasks. Essentially, she was assigned a role and associated tasks, thereby, authorizing her to complete those tasks. Absent was a statement about how and whether they had input in one another's decisions. While Caroline was responsible for training facilitators, the question remains whether the other leaders could have input in the content and process of the training. More importantly, if they did have some input, would it have been genuinely received? Evelyn actually answered this question when she looped back to it before concluding her interview and shared the following:

I don't remember my answer about authority, shared authority within the partnership, but I want to make sure that was clear....The intent of it [partnership] was shared authority, but I don't think that intention was ever authentic. So even if we had written it down, I don't believe it would have been real because I never walked into an ATLB situation, whether it's a meeting or function, where I felt like we were being authentic with each other. (Evelyn)

Notably, shared authority is also couched in the notion that organizations in collaboration are interdependent. In other words, they need one another to survive, and this mutuality is characterized by reciprocity and exchange. While there was some level of interdependence due to their decision to try and make the partnership work, it became clear that they did not necessarily need each other to survive, which is the crux of

interdependence. “They could have done this at any university,” says Evelyn. Nevertheless, they chose to partner together, develop relationships, and invest money, time, and resources. Thus, interdependence became a necessity. The impact that did exist on the university was related to personnel hired specifically to work for the ATL program. As a result, the university leader, Evelyn, stayed in the partnership to protect her staff members’ employment: “I followed the money. I tried to make sure that we did everything we could to just receive funding for the next year, and to keep enough people happy that we would receive the funding again” (Evelyn). Given this, there was a *de facto* assignment of power to the foundation. But also, the foundation was clear that they had more power. As Angela put it, “I have the money and some of the intellectual capital. Caroline had most of the intellectual capital...and so, it always felt like we were sort of the managing, more powerful partners, and quite frankly could use that...to shape the collaborative.” Simply stated, they were the “catalytic initiators” of the program’s concept, design, development and early implementation.

Even as these senior leaders attempted to share authority in concept and practice, at times, everyone knew who held the power. As Caroline explained,

I have a great relationship with Evelyn, [and] I understand the circumstances. But, if I had to talk about the difference between...high alignment, high action, and a really solid partnership, I think that the university in the person of [represented by] Evelyn holds it [the partnership] more like, ‘well, this is the funder...and if a funder wants something, you leap to it.’ (Caroline)

Again, although the board (ATLB) was created as the vehicle for sharing authority, accountability, problem solving, and decision making, what emerged in the analysis of the data was that the foundation and the leadership consultants still maintained much of the authority.

## Civility

Civility is an indication of Thomson's norms dimension. Norms are similar to a moral code in that they are the guiding principles for how partner members behave and relate to one another. In collaboration, they are the standards to which partner members agree. During the interviews, participants had reflective moments. One reflection that had a similar ring among all of the participants was related to the way in which some members of the partnership were treated. While explicit statements were few, each participant acknowledged something about her experience with treatment of partnership members and the lessons learned.

The ultimate purpose of this partnership was to have a positive impact on communities and the lives of children and families. The methodology adopted by the partnership required them to be accountable for their work. Angela acknowledged the unique nature of the ATL program's framework of results accountability when she compared it to other collaborative endeavors in which she was involved.

Everybody [in the other collaborative endeavors in which she was involved] sat around a table, tried to get stuff done, but were very very nice and couldn't move stuff from talk to action...And what I think this partnership and collaborative had that was unique, but very, very hard was the talk to action coupled with accountability, and letting the accountability be the highest standard to which we ascribe. So if it meant a hard conversation at the table,... [such as] 'well...last time we committed to get this part done, and we didn't get it done. [Name], you had the lead. So, like, what's up?' (Angela)

She went on to acknowledge the "frank conversation[s] about accountability" to which they subscribe, since accountability was the "cornerstone in all of this work." The lesson for Angela was that they needed to "live what [they] were asking other people [the leaders they trained] to do. If we can't do it, why would we expect anybody else to do it."

The problem, however, was the approach by some partner members. Having hard

conversations already put people in an uncomfortable place, but the way in which these conversations were facilitated or people were being held accountable was unpleasant (Source: personal observation, survey data, interview data). “We could be hard on each other...[and] I would say that there are other partners who thought, ‘who cares,’ but [I] was like, we don’t want to leave dead bodies along the way” (Angela).

From Brooke’s perspective there were very “painful” moments for the implementation team members. The conflict that was often brought into the room to facilitate discomfort and get people to action was not always necessary and the approach often inappropriate. Brooke later learned that the methods being used to teach accountability were adopted from the A.K. Rice Institute and their group relations workshop. This workshop takes participants through the process of learning the concept of boundaries of authority, role, and task (BART) (Hayden & Molenkamp, 2002). Conflict is central in this process given its aim is to facilitate discomfort so that people will grow and develop. Given this experience, Brooke understood why conflict was sparked in the partnership at times. However, the difference, according to Brooke, was that

One pays [and] signs up to go to A.K. Rice to learn about BART. In ATL, that’s not the same thing, and so I still do not see a need for it to be painful. I understand where she was coming from and why. And think there are important lessons to it, but I still do not believe it needs to be painful to people. (Brooke)

Similarly, Evelyn was displeased with the way that some people were treated, and believed it was a values conflict that went unresolved. “Our biggest values conflict [in the partnership]...would be the treatment of project managers in the system...At least four of the five partners had a strong conflict over how they were being treated.” While Evelyn agreed with raising stress levels for people to create a sense of urgency around the

work that needed to be done to help children, families, and communities, she did not believe it needed to be “torturous.”

Even Denise acknowledged the one value conflict she held was the way “we approached...people [members of the site teams who were responsible for implementing the program] who were doing the work with us.” She further noted,

There was a need that I felt in relationship to how we engage people. And then, how we build capacity. And then, how we hold BART in the way that...managed the boundaries of civility. (Denise)

For Caroline, the lesson learned was that “at the university, that’s not what people signed up to do. They didn’t sign up to take on adaptive challenges and change their own behavior or values and beliefs to accomplish something.” Essentially, when they took a job with the Leadership Institute, their job description did not mention having to experience intentional conflict as a part of encouraging growth through the implementation of ATL. As a result, there was some pushback because people were not happy with how they were being treated (Source: Interviews with Angela, Brooke, Caroline and Evelyn). “I realized that a lot of my assumptions were false. What I was interested in doing was to use the same method that we would use in a lab to solve and address the issues in the university and Caroline relationship” (Caroline’s interview).

The treatment of partnership members resonated with each member of the senior leadership team. Moreover, this conflict was a major adaptive challenge that called the senior leaders to task. Consequently, they had to acknowledge and resolve this problem in order to survive the process of partnering together. Additionally, as the senior leaders, they were accountable to each other and to all of those involved in the partnership. Therefore, they were expected to model the way for resolving conflict. To begin the

process, they used their own leadership tools to facilitate the many difficult conversations it took to get to resolution. Ultimately, they decided that discomfort and conflict are acceptable as long as they stay within the realm of learning, development, and capacity building for team members and not simply a painful experience where the learning is lost.

### **Transformative Leadership**

Being involved in the partnership impacted each participant's leadership style. When asked if their leadership styles were different outside of the partnership, the answers varied. However, each ATLB member noted the value she received as a result of her participation in the partnership. In light of the adaptive challenges encountered throughout their partnering together, the senior members individually modified their leadership styles, adopted various strategies and tools to support their work, and held fast to the lessons learned.

Angela admitted that her leadership style was the same in all of her professional roles because she had an express interest in building relationships “so it [the relationship] can withstand some of the tough negotiations.” Being in the partnership, nonetheless, did have an impact on how she interacted with the partner members. “I had to find my leadership in a different way,” said Angela. This was largely due to her attempt to be collaborative and avoid making any unilateral decision that could end the partnership. In spite of her reservations to house the ATL program at the university, and because of her commitment to and support for those with whom she was in relationship, she agreed to engage in the collaboration process. For Angela, relationships were central to her decision making in the partnership and the personal lessons learned from her experience.

In fact, Angela explicitly acknowledged how she was personally impacted by her experience in the ATL program partnership.

Because of this work, I have grown and changed in very, very transformative ways, and yes, the work in ATL, the work in the partnership, the work with Caroline,...and with Evelyn. So, I think the bigger question for me in my leadership here at the foundation is, what did we learn and how do we bring that learning forward to other work at the foundation. (Angela)

Brooke and Caroline focused more on the benefits of the tools used in the program to support their work together. As a part of the ATL program curriculum, there were training instruments and tools, such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), that were used to help leaders better work together and improve their effectiveness in the communities they served. To experience a parallel process and model what they promoted, ATLB members employed these tools to support the work they did with one another. As Brooke noted, “My typical leadership style did not change, but my [leadership] content knowledge changed.” Brooke took advantage of the tools and developed new skills that she used both inside and outside of the partnership. For Brooke, the tools that proved most useful were those that helped her better understand others, better understand conflict and better understand her reactions to conflict. “The greatest tools are about naming that there is a conflict [and] figuring out what it is.”

Like Brooke, Caroline found that having all members share a common language such as MBTI or “naming” conflict helped clarify issues and ease tension at times. Using tools “actually created a little bit of release in the system.” For Caroline, the tools were competencies and she used them in all of her work, in and outside of the partnership, to solve problems and meet adaptive challenges.

Evelyn and Denise admitted that their styles were different. “I think I was a different person and a different leader when I was in that role...[and] in that world as opposed to the rest of my world,” said Evelyn. In the world outside of ATL, Evelyn shared that she “operated totally different – as a leader, as an employee, as a person.” She went on to note “...that’s not to say that I don’t see the value in those other things [referring to ATL], because I do. And I see how it’s influenced my work.” Evelyn’s statement was interesting given the evaluation of her typical leadership style, which was “very inclusive and collaborative.” “I was different inside the partnership,” acknowledged Evelyn, “because I don’t think I exerted my authority the way that I would with my team of individuals who weren’t part of the partnership or in my relationships with colleagues outside of my results-based leadership work.” This could be attributed to the fact that she did not see herself as a “partner or collaborator,” but as a member of a team fulfilling her assigned role. Regardless of her sentiments, Evelyn was clear that she would do it all again because the by-product was her connection to the BBF Foundation and the relationships she developed with Angela and Brooke, especially. “I value the relationships, [and] I would not trade my connection to the BBF Foundation for anything in the world! I love what they stand for, what they do, and any association I could have with them” (Evelyn).

When reflecting upon her leadership style inside versus outside of the partnership, Denise pointed out that she “didn’t have a particular leadership style.” In fact, her professional experiences were “more grounded in management than [they were] truly in envisioning and leading.” Thus, she did not think of herself as a leader, rather as “a manager who leads.” However, in reflection, Denise admitted that her “leadership was

transformed through this work.” Since her involvement with the ATL program, she regularly asks herself the following:

Am I being a leader who transforms the work in some kind of way, and the people involved in the work?...Are people able to move from just seeing the basics to then being able to do something that’s relational? And then, building from that relational, where they can say “this belonging...kind of catapults me to really seeing something broader, and believing in the people who I’m working in service of. (Denise)

Denise further explained that “knowing the agenda, understanding a result...[and] being clear” about the work they were doing was significant to their success and effectiveness as leaders who sought to make a difference. “Sometimes [our work] was to make a decision; sometimes it was to know something; sometimes it was to inform or impact.”

Whether their leadership styles remained the same or changed, there was still something transformative about their experience in this program. Through conflict, challenge, leadership, and relationships, something about their lives changed. Survival in this partnership can be best described in Evelyn’s statement.

I’m not working for you. I’m working on behalf of you. I’m working on behalf of this change. And that was ever present in everybody’s mind no matter what we [experienced]. We all were committed to the result, which was to positively impact children, families, and communities. (Evelyn)

## **Summary**

Overall the data revealed that the ATL partnership did exemplify some key dimensions of collaboration in their work together. The extent to which they demonstrated collaboration is not clear based on inconsistencies in the responses collected from the study’s respondents. Furthermore, respondents answered the questions based on their understanding and definition of collaboration, which can be problematic when measuring collaboration. As revealed in the literature, there are a myriad of definitions for collaboration from simple to complex, which makes it difficult to

determine with confidence whether these organizations are effectively collaborating (Das & Teng, 1998; Gray & Wood, 1991a; 1991b; Thomson et al., 2009). Given the data from this study, however, it is reasonable to conclude that collaboration occurred in the partnership, but it was not without a number of adaptive challenges.

Although the senior leaders recognized the adaptive challenges encountered during their partnering together, they attempted to adapt in an effort to keep their commitment to one another and to the process of collaborating. Relationships were key in decision making even when it meant increased challenges. Eventually, they decided that the partnership structure did not work and change was necessary in order for the program to remain in existence. Finding the right roles for all partner members involved supporting leaders in determining a new direction and structure for the partnership. The ATLB disbanded after three years, but the senior leaders remained in contact with one another. Furthermore, the ATL program remained intact, but not as a collaborative partnership. The implementation and administration for it was contracted out to a private consulting firm. Because of relationships that were built as well as the desire to learn from the ATL program's methods, the university was granted a contract to conduct research and teaching using the program's conceptual framework.

Ostensibly, the aforementioned decisions resolved the following adaptive challenges: necessity of venue, organizational fit and capacity, and authority and power. Moreover, with its current structure, it is not a collaborative partnership. It is a funder/grantee relationship whereby the contracted agency is simply responsible for meeting the terms of the agreement. "It's not a true partnership the way it was before," said Brooke. Finally, as previously mentioned, senior leaders resolved the matter of

civility in their approach to building the capacity of the project managers, project assistants, coaches, facilitators, and the administrative support team members who worked for the program.

Ultimately, the ATL program survived in that it was not discontinued. Rather, it was contracted out to a consulting firm. However, given the challenges encountered by the senior leaders, individually and collectively, each leader developed new skills and abilities that allowed her to thrive during and after the partnership. Thriving did not occur immediately, but with each challenge, senior members experienced personal growth in her leadership capacity. The experiences were transformative, whereby each leader walked away from the partnership with new ideas, perspectives, behaviors, values, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and tools. Their ability to learn and grow allowed the partnership to survive the disequilibrium that characterized it since its creation.

## **CHAPTER 5: Relevance, Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Overview**

The intent of this study was to examine the adaptive challenges of leaders in a public-private partnership who adopted collaboration as their process for working together. This study was conceptualized within a combination of three theoretical frameworks. The collaboration frameworks used to examine the partnership were based on Gray (1989) and Gray & Wood's (1991a, b) process model, and Thomson's (2001) key dimensions: governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, and norms. To understand the challenges experienced by the senior leaders of the partnership, Heifetz' (1994) adaptive leadership framework was used as a lens. Employing the aforementioned frameworks and case study methodology, I examined the senior leadership board of the Activating Today's Leaders (ATL) partnership as the unit of analysis for this study. ATL is an example of public and private agencies working together to impact positive change in communities. Following is a discussion of the study's relevance, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice.

### **Study's Relevance**

There are three primary reasons that organizations choose collaborative partnerships that are relevant to this study. First, public (i.e., federal, state, and/or local), nonprofit, and private organizations are being called upon to attend to national and local needs such as improving health care, reforming education, and creating jobs (Billett et al., 2007). As a result, these organizations are increasingly adopting collaborative partnerships to enhance their capacity to implement solutions that address social, political,

economic, and educational issues (Honig, 2009; Lewis, Baeza & Alexander, 2008; Billett et al., 2007; Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2007; Seddon, Billet & Clemans, 2004; Agranoff, 1998; Powell, 1990).

Second, collaborative partnerships operate with the understanding that each partner makes a unique contribution and has equal but different “complementary strengths” (Davies & Hentschke, 2006, p. 211). For example, the foundation’s strength is its fiscal assets, while the leadership consultants possess the knowledge and skills to design a program curriculum for community leaders, and the university’s forte is research and teaching. Collaborative partnerships operate in a distinct manner from single hierarchical organizations. At the core of a single hierarchical organization is central steering, which refers to a single figure with administrative control and authorization to make decisions that determine the direction and goal(s) of the particular entity, whereas collaborating partners are jointly accountable for the direction and goal(s) of the partnership (Kickert, Klijn, & Koppenjan, 1997; Lewis, Baeza, & Alexander, 2008). Therefore, to effectively collaborate, partner members must recognize one another’s contributions and determine how best to leverage these strengths in the interest of the partnership.

Third, collaborative partnerships operate under the assumption that leadership and decision making are shared among partner members (Agranoff, 2006; Gold, Doreian, & Taylor, 2008). Therefore, leaders choose these partnerships believing that all members are held accountable to the success or failure of the collaborative endeavor as well as share the associated risks and rewards. Regardless of shared authority among partners, however, leadership remains necessary in order for collaboration to be effective.

Otherwise, if any single member has “unchallenged power,” true collaboration cannot occur (Gray, 1989, p. 24).

As public and private organizations increasingly adopt collaboration as a way to address public matters, it is necessary for scholars and practitioners familiar with the practice to create awareness and provide education about what it takes to be effective (Agranoff, & McGuire, 2001; Agranoff, 2006). As previously mentioned, collaboration is more than managing “the deal” partners make, but also about building relationships among stakeholders and maintaining fidelity to the collaboration model (Kanter, 1994, p. 96). The agreement between ATL’s senior leaders was to employ collaboration as their way of partnering. Collaborating is especially significant since the actual ATL program curriculum is grounded in collaborative principles. Specifically, collaborative leadership is one of the core competencies that participants work to develop during the program.

## **Discussion**

While collaboration is a viable means for independent organizations to join their efforts, it presents challenges for organizational leaders. In this particular study, leaders from a foundation, consulting firm, and a university chose to employ a collaborative approach in their efforts to positively impact children, families, and communities.

However, the results of this study indicate that they were not in true collaboration; total stakeholder buy-in did not exist; and relationships played a significant role in decision making. These results are consistent with the literature in that stakeholders readily accepted the idea of the partnership, but its implementation brought about challenges (Walters & Pritchard, 1999).

Upon conducting the data analysis, I chose five adaptive challenges encountered by the ATLB members because they illustrated key indicators of Thomson's (2001) dimensions of collaboration that were either present or absent. Moreover, their handling of the challenges exemplified their ability to adapt and survive, in that they worked through the processes of change and conflict (Heifetz, 1994). However, the partnership ended due to their inability to evolve into what was necessary for the partnership to thrive (i.e., appropriate venue, alignment of the organizations' missions, clarity of process, shared authority, and authentic relationships).

### **Dimensions of collaboration.**

Findings reveal inconsistencies in determining whether the partnership was collaborative. While there was stronger consensus in the survey data, the participants answered using their own definition for collaboration, and 68.4% added a caveat to their answer noting that it was partly collaborative. Two factors influence the variation in the data. First, participants in this study loosely defined collaboration, which is consistent with the theoretical propositions in the literature. For instance, a basic definition of collaboration is organizations working together to accomplish a common or shared goal. More complex definitions of collaboration suggest that jointly established structures, rules, and norms are also necessary. These aspects are represented in the governance dimension of collaboration, which consists of the agreements partner organizations establish to confirm their commitment to collaborating and details the requirements for the process. While ATLB members understand the basic concept of collaboration, they fall short in the actual practice and process of collaborating.

Secondly, without the institution of governance, true collaboration could not occur, since organizational leaders did not spend enough time establishing, in collaboration with one another, the leadership structure for managing the partnership, sharing authority and sharing accountability. There were tools and processes that the senior leaders used to support their leadership, such as being able to communicate, work through conflict, and make decisions, but they were not the result of their joint efforts. Instead, the tools were brought in by one of the senior leadership consultants and adopted by the group. Although this may not appear to be a significant problem, the lack of ownership in creating the process for shared leadership prevents true collaboration and limits stakeholder buy-in.

A key indicator that a misstep occurred in demonstrating governance was their partnership agreement. It was not comprehensive, and the official agreements that did exist were in the form of one organization acquiring the services of another. The agreement was contractual and there was no mission or vision to outline the purpose of the partnership or reinforce their commitment to collaborate. The absence of the partnership's mission and vision prevented stakeholder buy-in, which was another major obstacle in the partnership.

### **Recognition of adaptive challenges.**

Early on, the lack of stakeholder buy-in was evident in the ATL partnership. ATL's founding members had reservations about partnering with a university, as it was clear that a large bureaucratic institution was not best suited to manage and implement the ATL program. Yet, they allowed the program to be located at two universities for more than three years. These leaders went against what they knew best when deciding on

an implementation partner and institutional home. Three years and several million dollars later, they acquiesced to the understanding they held from the beginning and contracted the program out to a consulting firm.

Stakeholder buy-in was negatively affected because the university was placed in a precarious position, which was one that prevented them from maximizing their strengths. The university's strengths lie in their ability to teach and conduct research. They are also adept at managing programs, but within the structural protocols of a university. Regardless of the university members' efforts, there was a gap between what they were able to do and what the founding members wanted them to do. Thus, the findings suggest that more value was given to the partner members with certain resources, which ultimately led to the imbalance of power in the collaboration process. Since the private foundation provided the fiscal resources for the program, they had the power to exert influence over how and where the money was spent, even though the university held and managed the funds. The senior leadership consultant who designed the program was able to exercise authority and make changes to the program or process as she saw fit. The type of power exercised by the foundation leaders and senior leadership consultant can be understood using French and Raven's (1958) definition of coercive and legitimate power. Both forms of power involve the ability to influence others. The difference between the two is that coercive power influences people to act out of fear of penalty. On the other hand, people perceive those with legitimate power as having the right to exert influence. Ultimately, coercive and legitimate power showed up in this partnership through the foundation's ability to leverage its fiscal resources and the senior leadership consultant's ability to flex her intellectual property. The university had little to no authority or

influence, and upon realization of this decided to simply comply in an effort “to keep people employed” rather than pulling out of the partnership. Therefore, the foundation and the senior leadership consultant appeared to influence many of the partnership’s decisions.

In some partnerships this may not be a problem, but the ATLB members claimed to employ collaboration in their partnering. As such, they were in violation of collaboration principles since certain members of the partnership were allowed to exert influence without real consideration of all members involved. As Gray (1989) contends, true collaboration cannot occur if there is unchallenged power. According to the data, the foundation had the fiscal power and if challenged could pull funding and end the partnership and program. Likewise, the consultant who designed the program held intellectual property rights and could make changes or decisions at will.

Some senior leaders expressed concern with the approach by other senior leaders in their various interactions with partner members. This also contributed to the lack of stakeholder buy-in, as there was some disagreement about the practices some leaders adopted in regards to transparency, civility, and conflict. Although transparency was touted as a key practice in their collaboration process, this study’s findings revealed that decisions were not always made in front of or with the entire senior leadership group. Moreover, one interviewee noted how some matters could not be resolved with, or in front of, the entire leadership team “because frustrations might have been too hot” to do so. Nonetheless, it was not a secret that conflict existed. Members clearly expressed their disdain for the way some partner members, such as project managers, project assistants, were being treated if they did not strictly adhere to the steps outlined by the

program's framework for completing tasks. While senior leaders addressed this particular issue, conflict still surfaced throughout the tenure of their partnership. To manage conflict, there were tools and processes in place, nonetheless, there remained disagreement among the leadership team about their success in dealing with it. A faction of the interviewees believed that the senior leadership team handled conflict "better than most." Another faction of the interviewees thought the "whole system was riddled with conflict" that never really got resolved because it was intentionally built into the system.

While it was their intent to collaborate, the foundation and primary leadership consultant wanted a contracted organization to act as a partner member to a program that came pre-packaged. CU never had a real stake in the program since it did not have a role in its design or development. This is problematic given that collaboration is predicated on preconditions (Gray, 1989). In fact, the preconditions bring actors with an interest in a common problem together to determine their purpose and commitment for collaboration as well as establish structures and rules for working in partnership. The ATL partnership did not begin like this with the university. Instead, the ATL program and processes began with the foundation and the consulting firm leaders before being introduced to the university. Thus, the university had to fit in a pre-established framework rather than contributing to the conceptualization of the program and being able to adequately determine its best role. While each of the senior leaders bought into the concept of the program, there was considerable disagreement about the process, indicating the absence of true collaboration

Relationships, along with trust, characterize the norms dimension of collaboration. In the ATL partnership, survey and interview data suggest notable disagreement about

trust, relationships, and commitment to the partnership. Findings demonstrate that some relationships were authentic, while others were perceived as inauthentic. Those relationships presumed to be inauthentic prevented some leaders from fully participating as members of the partnership. Moreover, some relationships were stronger than others and the strength in these relationships wielded unchallenged power even when some partner members attempted to share authority. With strength in relationships, partners have flexibility in decision making and a high commitment level as they work towards a win-win solution. However, all of the relationships among members were not strong (Davies & Hentschke, 2006, p. 211; Powell, 1990; Powell, Koput, Smith-Doerr, 1996). Therefore, they lacked trust and confidence, ultimately putting the partnership at risk (Das & Teng, 1998b). This also influenced the ability of members to leverage relationships. While strong relationships are not inherently negative, collaborators must use prudence when leveraging these relationships to ensure that all members of the collaborative reap mutual benefit of being in a shared arrangement.

Overall, the findings illustrate that even if the foundation and the leadership consultant had the power, all of the senior leaders were complicit. Moreover, the violation of norms prevented strong relationships from being built amongst all members. This led to an imbalance in relationship structure whereby those people in weak relationships could not leverage them at the same level or in the same way as those with strong relationships. Finally, if the university was to be involved in the program, founding members should have taken the time to determine the best role, which they eventually understood to be research and teaching. Ultimately, these factors prevented the ATL partnership from thriving as a collaborative entity.

### **Surviving and a little thriving.**

The concept of thriving is used a number of times in the literature, but it is not well defined for the purposes of understanding collaboration. However, based on the research that does exist (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz et al., 2009), there are three criteria necessary to thrive. Thriving involves the ability to survive through challenges that often accompany change and loss while also:

1. Taking the tools, skills and lessons that proved useful throughout the process;
2. Getting rid of the practices, behaviors, or tools that did not work; and
3. Creating new ways to meet future challenges by adopting practices, behaviors, skills, and tools that prove beneficial.

It is important to note that this definition of thriving is applicable for both individuals and systems. For individuals, an example of thriving involves the adoption of new or modified behaviors, practices, skills, and tools after surviving through a challenge and getting rid of ways that proved inadequate. For systems, thriving connotes developing new structures, policies, and procedures.

Findings indicate that the partnership did not thrive because the leaders failed to adopt new practices or behaviors after being confronted with challenges. For example, in their quest for a venue, the leaders chose a university that did not meet the criteria for being a partner member in that they did not have a mission centered on results and accountability. Moreover, after one failed attempt with a similar university, to get closer to thriving, the leaders should have been more thoughtful about the best role a university partner could play in the partnership. To meet the challenges they faced, however,

leaders attempted to exercise their personal leadership skills and use leadership tools to work together. However, they remained unable to improve their collective leadership abilities in order to ensure they thrived together as a collaborative team. As previously mentioned, they survived throughout their process together, but had to end the partnership.

Given that this study was conducted after the partnership ended, the leaders were able to be reflective. Accordingly, the data reveal that each individual leader thrived as a result of her experience in the partnership. Unfortunately, thriving individually was not enough, and the consequence of their inability to thrive as a group was the dissolution of the partnership. Nonetheless, each member was able to salvage something from her experience through learning lessons, discarding the practices that proved ineffective, and intentionally transforming her personal leadership style.

### **Outside of the lines.**

While the major findings of this study fit within the theoretical models used to frame it, there were other themes or findings that emerged and are worth noting. First, while collaboration is often the preferred way to bring organizational leaders together to achieve common goals, it is not the only way. Notably, this preference is largely due to the exchange of resources, modification of organizational structures, shared authority, and joint accountability that collaborators can leverage. However, coordination and cooperation are other ways that organizations can partner to accomplish shared goals without having to commit to the process of collaboration, which requires a greater sacrifice. In coordination, an organization agrees to make adjustments to some of its structures, activities, programs, etc. in support of achieving the shared goal. In

cooperation, organizations coordinate as well as share resources. The difference is that organizations do not need to establish governance structures, share decision making, be jointly accountable for all involved, or rely on the resources of the collaborative to survive.

Second, relationships and collaboration are not one in the same, however they are not mutually exclusive either. Relationships are key to the success and effectiveness of collaborative endeavors because they drive how leaders interact with one another and act towards one another. Collaboration is partly characterized by relationships given that some of its key indicators include interdependence, trust, communication, and sharing. Had the relationship between Caroline and Angela not been so much stronger than the relationships with other leaders, the partners may have been able to be better collaborators. For Angela and Caroline, they considered themselves to be in ultimate collaboration with each other given the history and strength of their relationship. This did impact the ATL partnership and the ability of the entire senior leadership team to be more effective collaborators. Illustrating this was challenging given the frameworks used for this study, but it is worth noting the significance of Caroline and Angela's relationships.

Finally, another significant finding that did not fit neatly into the framework was the power that one of the senior leadership consultants wielded. Moreover, the data revealed some underlying tension among the leaders and the program administrators. However, I struggled to illuminate their voices when it came to sharing their perspectives on who owned and exploited her power. Given what was shared, I attempted to exercise an ethic of care for my survey and interview respondents. Sharing some of the

information related to this finding could risk breaching confidentiality, and I, therefore, chose to protect my research participants. Based on this study's results, what is important to articulate is that relationships and power wielding were two factors that prevented the partners from being in full collaboration.

Ultimately, this study builds upon existing research by framing the process of collaborating with the governance, administration, organizational autonomy, mutuality, and norms dimensions to better understand the complexities of the collaborative process (Gray, 1989; Gray & Wood, 1991a, b; Thomson, 2001; Thomson et al., 2009). Moreover, it confirms some key indicators in the literature that emerged as challenges to collaborative processes. These challenges include clarity of process (Klijn, Koppenjan, & Termeer, 1995; Via, 2008), trust (Das & Teng, 1998), power-sharing (Das & Teng, 1998; Gray, 1989; Gray, 2004; Kanter, 1994), and management and structure (Agranoff, 2006; Meier & O'Toole, 2001; Rethemeyer & Hatmaker, 2007). While there is some literature that references the importance of building relationships as an antecedent to the collaborative process (Ospina & Foldy, 2010), this study highlights the significant role that relationships can play in advancing or hindering the process. Furthermore, while organizational fit and capacity are important factors for collaborating, their level of significance in the collaborative process is not substantiated in the literature. As a result, this study provides a platform for researchers to focus and build on the combination of the aforementioned indicators and their impact on collaborative processes.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

This study demonstrates there are criteria that must be in place in order to be successful and effective when collaborating, as the absence of these criteria can lead to

problems. Success is defined by the quality of experience collaborators have during the process. Effectiveness is the measurable impact that results from a successful collaborative endeavor. Thus, prior to entering a collaborative arrangement, answers to the following set of questions are necessary.

1. What does collaboration mean to you?
2. What is it that you really want to get out of a collaborative arrangement?
3. What are you willing to contribute?
4. What sacrifices are you willing to make?
5. How committed can and will you be to the process?

If leaders decide to enter into a collaborative partnership upon answering the aforementioned questions, following is a list of five recommendations to support leaders' capacity to successfully collaborate. They include:

1. Agree on the mission;
2. Determine institutional fit and feasibility;
3. Share decision making;
4. Cultivate relationship building; and
5. Exercise adaptive leadership.

***Agree on the mission.*** To generate buy-in, leaders must facilitate a collaborative process whereby the stakeholders have input in creating the vision and outlining the mission of the partnership. Even if a program or idea has been created prior to the onset of a partnership, it is key to gain buy-in to both the concept and process of implementation. To begin, consider facilitating a dialogue among potential stakeholders to draw out their interests and apprehensions as well as their capacity to collaborate in

lieu of their commitment level and contribution of resources. Ultimately, potential stakeholders need to be aligned in their thinking and action when transitioning into a collaborative arrangement.

***Determine institutional fit and feasibility.*** Collaborative partnerships involve multiple independent organizations that join together and create a new organizational structure, which is the actual collaborative endeavor. For some partnerships, this requires a virtual and/or physical location to serve as its institutional home. In determining a venue, partnership leaders must consider institutional fit and feasibility. Moreover, organizations should have the ability to integrate the program into its infrastructure from a mission and operational standpoint. Specifically, the objectives of the collaboration should reflect some aspects of its institutional home's mission so that there is an endorsement and natural integration of the partnership. From an operational perspective, a needs assessment must be conducted to determine the most effective and efficient way to leverage resources, such as fiscal, physical, human, and technological necessary for the partnership to function.

***Share decision making.*** Collaborative endeavors are filled with people eager to contribute to social change through collective action. Specifically, collaboration fosters opportunities to include multiple and diverse perspectives and talent, which can positively contribute to social change efforts. Nonetheless, those adopting this method as their way of working must be acutely aware of the sacrifices they will need to make in exchange for the benefits of collaborating. All members should share in decision making and be jointly accountable for the results of their work regardless of what they contribute. For example, a funder who participates as a collaborator must recognize that they cannot

shape or influence the partnership to meet their independent interests simply because they provide the funds. Additionally, members of a collaborative endeavor may not abuse any power they might wield or else they risk isolating partner members, changing the scope of the collective work, and/or ruining potential or current relationships. Ultimately, while some partners may have more resources than others, it does not mean they have more authority. Subsequently, leaders should not be complicit in allowing any member of the collaboration to exert such authority if collaborators' desires are to be successful and effective.

***Cultivate relationship building.*** Tenets for effective relationship building involve trust, communication, transparency, mutual respect, and the ability to work in concert with partner members. These quintessential components contribute to a successful collaboration. Accordingly, leaders must encourage and set the tone for relationship building among partner members. Following is a list of suggestions to support leaders in doing so:

- Provide a profile of all partner members as a way of ushering them into the partnership;
- Facilitate formal and informal leadership activities that foster relationship building;
- Design workgroups that allow a diversity of partner members to interact; and
- Keep open lines of communication.

***Exercise collaborative leadership.*** Leadership makes the difference in collaboration. However, collaborative leadership is particularly challenging given there is no central figure to set the tone for followers. Instead, collaborators must exercise leadership among their peers. Accordingly, Heifetz (1994) adaptive leadership framework provides some guidelines for ways leaders can approach their peers in a

manner that empowers and mobilizes them to move to action. Following are six key actions:

- Acknowledge the reality of problems;
- Clearly outline all of the issues, both large and small;
- Encourage, motivate and support peer leaders to sort out challenges and generate solutions;
- Facilitate dialogue among leadership members about what it might take to meet problematic challenges;
- Consider traditional and nontraditional solutions; and
- Be open to peer leaders perceptions, thoughts, ideas, and recommendations.

Leaders who seek to enter into a collaborative partnership may take these recommendations into consideration as a guide for setting up and facilitating a successful, and ultimately effective, process.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the limitations of this single case study and its findings, there are additional areas where further research would be theoretically and practically beneficial to the field. First, this study did not define collaboration for participants. Therefore, a replication of this study with collaboration defined in advance might have implications for the study's results. For example, there may have been less variation in responses regarding whether the ATL partnership were collaborative.

Second, conducting a prospective study may reduce recall bias and produce a different set of results. Additionally, this may foster the opportunity for mid-course correction because members are being reflective based on their participation in the research study. For example, in the ATL partnership members reflected upon the fact that they were not being collaborative, but could make no changes given that the partnership had ended. Therefore, a prospective study could support real-time changes that positively impact collaboration.

Third, a multiple case study analysis of several independent public-private partnerships should be conducted. The purpose of this large-scale analysis is to identify commonalities and best practices to serve as concrete and practically accessible guidelines for leaders seeking to join efforts in collaboration.

Fourth, the senior team members in this study were all women, and this may have some implications for the results of this study. A recommendation for further research is to study a similar partnership with team members who are all male or of mixed gender. Some areas to focus on for similarities or differences include the relationships among members, where coercive power might appear, and the ownership of resources and the ways in which they are leveraged.

Finally, researchers should consider using social network analysis (SNA) as a framework for specifically studying the impact of relationships and interactions among members on the collaborative process. Moreover, employing SNA offers an additional level of analysis since social network data “include measurements on the relationships between social entities” and the flows of information/knowledge between them (Wasserman & Faust, 1994, p. 28). Unlike the traditional research methods where measurements are “taken on a set of independent variables,” network methods focus on the interrelatedness of social units and the patterns of their relationships (p. 16). Ultimately, SNA maps and measures the relationships and the flows of information between people and groups.

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