Beneficial Arts Collaboration

A Bloomington Perspective

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Abstract

We collaborate with others every day. It is a common way to get by. Though, when it comes to organizational collaboration, things start to get a little more complicated. How does one define collaboration in an organizational context? What drives this collaboration, and what causes it to succeed or fail? How does collaboration function in the arts world? In the Bloomington, Indiana arts community specifically? And can collaboration be beneficial to everyone involved?

Collaboration, (in the arts and elsewhere), is a valuable topic in public affairs at the moment. Today's bulky societal problems call for organizations to band together in order to ease the weight of these problems. In the arts, limited resources encourage increasing organization capacity and avoiding duplication of services. This is all the more relevant in Bloomington where there are countless community and academic arts organizations that all share the same, small sphere.

In order to solve my questions, I set out to explore the literature on collaboration and collaboration in the arts. I also employed an IRB-approved study on collaboration in the Bloomington arts community. I conducted structured, in-person interviews with a sample of Bloomington and Indiana University arts organization leaders to gather qualitative data. I used iterative analysis to comb through the data, which involved coding for commonalities. Gazing through a local arts community lens, the results provide insight into my collaboration questions.

Introduction

I was an intern for the City of Bloomington, Indiana in the summer of 2013 working on a project related to its Bloomington Entertainment and Arts District (BEAD). The project included performing marketing research for a budding theatre alliance in the community tentatively named the Bloomington League of Theaters. It was a fresh endeavor that no one, to my knowledge, had tried yet at that scale. This was the beginning of a collaboration.

It was quite a unique experience. Multiple theatre organizations (along with facilitating and auxiliary organizations) came together to try to accomplish something as one. At first, the thought was to potentially market theatre as a whole. Then, the ideas began to flow about other possible joint opportunities like obtaining funding and creating a Bloomington theatre brand. Unfortunately, at the end of the summer I moved on from the project and was unable to see where they were going to take it. This experience was the origin of my thesis.

After I finished working on the project, I wanted to explore the world of collaboration to which I had been exposed. From a nonprofit perspective, I wanted to learn what collaboration really means in an organizational context, why organizations choose to collaborate, what makes collaborations succeed, and if organizations involved in collaboration can get equal benefits from it. I also wanted to discover if collaboration in the art world was unique and what the local Bloomington arts collaboration scene was like in regards to these questions. These were to become my research questions. Whatever I discovered, I wanted to share with organizations that create or join collaborative activity to use as a resource.

The following chapters will detail what I discovered in my research. First, I describe what the authors in the literature on collaboration discuss regarding the questions I have put forth. Then, I explain the methodology of my research that I conducted in Bloomington. Following the methodology, I divulge the findings from my research in the community. Finally, I will summarize and discuss the implications.

Literature Review

In recent years, authors have produced many different studies on the subject of collaboration. One can find scholarly books/articles along with more practical, guide-like books and articles on collaboration from numerous sources and perspectives. The authors prove why collaboration is an important topic. Then, many of these authors approach collaboration by defining collaboration, providing context for collaboration, explaining why organizations engage in collaborations, and describing how organizations can successfully collaborate.

The next few sections will discuss each of these aspects from the literature. After those sections, I will delve into arts collaboration, discussing collaboration from the arts world literature perspective.

Why Does Collaboration Matter?

Collaboration has been a hot topic in recent years. It is a strategy that organizations can turn to when the pressures of delivering services are too burdensome to tackle alone. Organizations are starting to collaborate in part because of government push and the need for efficiency and effectiveness.

The public sector has huge societal problems to deal with that are not going away and are too big to solve alone. Tirrell and Clay (2002) discuss the complexity of today's problems. They write about how government has shifted away from an approach of assigning specific, siloed agencies to solve problems. They state that "new governance is marked by a reliance on a dynamic collection of third parties and governmental units," (Tirrell & Clay, 2002). Fosler (2002) furthers this point by explaining how the boundaries between government, business, and nonprofits are starting to blur more and more. He writes that this is leading to the government rethinking its role in administering public services and conceding some of those duties to the private sector. Huxham and Vangen (2008) explore another side of this point when they state that collaborative efforts across public and nonprofit organizations allow for issues that would not otherwise get attention to receive much-needed focus. All of these new pressures on nonprofits call for organizations to be on the top of their game.

From the nonprofit sector perspective, collaboration may lead to solving the need for more efficiency and effectiveness in organizations today. Fosler (2002) states that as the government puts more responsibility on nonprofits, the demand for quality nonprofit services is going up. Donors or contributors are also putting pressure on nonprofits to be more accountable. Under all of this pressure, nonprofits have been changing how they view their relationship with the government; wanting to become more partners than contractors. Also, nonprofits are responding by thinking of new ways to build capacity in order to meet the demand for services and for accountability.

What is Collaboration?

Authors in the literature use many different terms when discussing the act of collaborating. Partnership, network, alliance, consortium, and inter-organizational relationship are just some of the terms that they use, seemingly interchangeably. For the purposes of this paper, I have chosen the term collaboration because I feel as though it encompasses all of the other terms.

Moving past the terms, how does one actually define collaboration? A diverse amount of definitions are out there, but one can find the similarities in them and establish a clear picture. Huxham and Vangen (2008, p. 4) define collaboration as "…any situation in which people are working across organizational boundaries towards some positive end." It's the idea of people in an organization reaching out to another in order to bring about joint activity of any kind. Vandeventer and Mandell (2007, p. 9) point out that it is "… many different organizations working in concert as equal partners." This way of looking at collaboration stresses the equity in the exchange. Gazley and Brudney (2007, p. 390) go further in stating that "collaborations require voluntary, autonomous membership… and they have some transformational purpose or desire to increase systematic capacity by tapping shared resources." Collaboration is often not

dictated, it has no hierarchy, and it is working toward some kind of end. Some argue that it always involves temporary situations, but it can involve permanent activities.

Defining collaboration is important, but one must also understand the context in which it occurs. Collaboration exists between all of the sectors. Focusing from a nonprofit perspective, it can exist in a public-private partnership such as when local government teams up with local nonprofits. A great example of this is what BEAD does with groups like the theatre alliance in Bloomington. They serve as a facilitator to convene and support the organizations in their collaborative effort. Collaboration can occur between businesses and nonprofits. For example, Weinstein (2011) describes a partnership between the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and Electronic Data Systems (EDS) where EDS became the orchestra's information technology department and the orchestra gave exposure to EDS's products and services through vehicles like mailings and their venue. Collaboration can also happen from one nonprofit to another nonprofit. An example of this type of collaboration is the Dayton Performing Arts Alliance (Dayton, 2012). This collaboration actually was merger where three nonprofits, the Dayton Ballet, the Dayton Opera, and the Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra became one operating entity in order to provide better quality and more innovative programming to the Dayton community. It is just as likely that a nonprofit could collaborate with government and businesses at the same time. Cross-sector collaboration presents its own unique rewards and challenges.

One can further categorize collaboration into varying degrees of connectivity. Vandeventer and Mandell (2007) provide three categories of connectivity for networks: cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. Starting out from the lowest level of connectivity, there is cooperation. At this level, the relationship is loose and low-risk consisting of information sharing and environment enhancement. The next level is coordination where there is more moderate risk. This level consists of more broken boundary lines and more engaging activities/commitments. The highest level of connectivity is collaboration where there is high risk. This level consists of fundamental, long-term system creation and fundamental resource reallocation. Worth (2012) references a scale of varying complexities of relationships between nonprofits. On a scale of less to more integration, the categories include collaborations, strategic alliances, and corporate integrations. Collaborations (in this scale) are the simplest form of relationship. These informal collaborations, however can lead to strategic alliances which can include joint programming for example. These strategic alliances can then lead to the most complex form of relationships which is corporate integrations. Corporate integrations can include parent-subsidiary partnerships and even mergers. Figure 1 is a representation of the discussed degrees of complexities in the relationships between organizations.
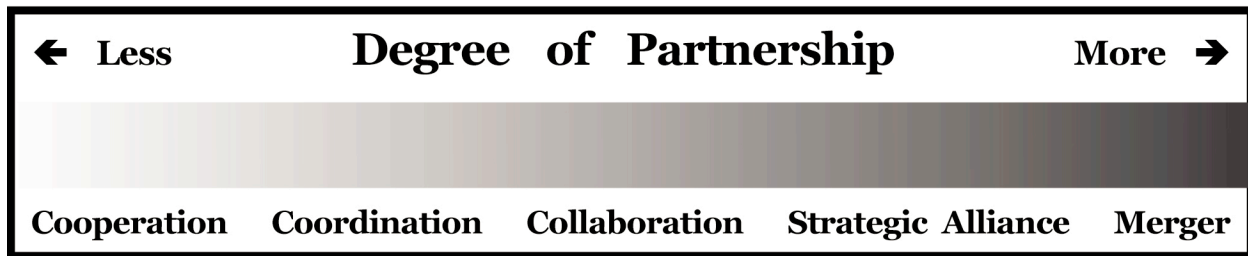
Nonprofit Partnership Continuum

← Less	**Degree of Partnership**	More →
Cooperation	Coordination Collaboration	Strategic Alliance Merger

Much like a single organization, collaboration has a life cycle. Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010) add to the understanding of collaboration by describing the stages of the life cycle as including: 1. Exploration 2. Formation 3. Growth 4. Maturity 5.(a) Ending 5.(b) Decline 6.(c) Renewal. The exploration stage involves the beginning where interested parties set up meetings together and assess whether they can work together to solve a problem. The formation stage is where the collaboration is actually set in stone and operational structure, shared values, and goals are hammered out. In the growth stage, the collaborating group goes through reassessments of their original operation structure, shared values, and goals in order to achieve the highest form of efficiency. The maturity stage is where the collaboration is stable and balanced in funding, participation, and access along with having strategies in place to stay on top of things. The fifth and final stage can manifest in three different ways. The collaboration can decline where focus and energy diminishes. This is an intermediary stage which either leads to the end or renewal. The end is where the group's work ceases. Renewal is where the collaboration reverts back to the formation stage and reinvents itself.

Why Do Organizations Choose to Collaborate?

When an organization chooses to join or help create collaboration, it can be investing a great deal of time and resources into the relationship. So why do it? Organizations can cite many different reasons for making the choice to collaborate. These driving motivators can be seen in similar fashion all across the literature on collaboration. Though, organizations may not always stand to benefit from collaboration.

Much like any other exchange, in collaboration, organizations need to receive some kind of benefit from the experience or the experience will not be worth its time and resources. Huxham and Vangen (2008) echo much of the literature in explaining six different motivations that might drive organizations to collaborate and gain those benefits: access to resource, shared risk, efficiency, coordination and seamlessness, learning, and the moral imperative. Some organizations will come to a point in time where they no longer have the necessary resources to continue providing programs at the same level as they used to. In this case, the organization needs access to more resources and collaborating can land it resources that it otherwise would not be able to afford. When the risk for a specific project or program is just too high for an organization to brave it alone, sharing risk in a collaborative effort may be the answer. Collaborating in order to achieve efficiency comes in multiple ways such as an organization outsourcing support services like cleaning or avoiding duplication of services. Organizations that

collaborate for coordination and seamlessness want to achieve an all-in-one service for example, a special education service that provides health, social services, and education services made up of various organizations in one building. Collaborating for learning is all about gaining information, whether it is in the form of training for employees or for observing best practices from each organization in the collaboration. Some organizations choose to collaborate just because they feel a moral obligation to and that the social problems facing the country are too big to tackle them alone.

Sowa (2009) discusses how hard it would be to pinpoint a single theory as to why organizations collaborate. When discussing motivations to collaborate, Sowa (2009, p. 1005) cites "such factors as a willingness to cooperate with others, previous history of collaboration, the need to share expertise, and the need to develop the organization's ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Gray (1989) adds that an organization can come up with better quality solutions to problems if they partner with other organizations to be able to employ a broader, more comprehensive analysis of the problems. Gazley and Brudney (2007) agree with the literature on motivation theories such as resource theory, but they point out that the motivation to collaborate is unique in each sector.

Sometimes it may be in an organization's best interest to steer clear of collaboration in the first place. Huxham and Vangen (2008) describe the concept of "collaborative inertia" where people see the act of collaborating as a slow and frustrating process that may die off without ever achieving anything. Miltenberger (2013, p. 54) writes that collaboration is challenging due to "a lack of structured hierarchy to formally organize the process." Gazley and Brudney (2007) assert that a lack of capacity, including staff resources and time, is a major deterrent for public-private partnerships. As Gray (1989, p. 255) states, "In some cases, the wisest course is not to collaborate." She presents situations when organizations should not collaborate such as when large power disparities exist, when past collaborations have frequently been ineffective, and/or when the problems that the collaboration seeks to alleviate are grounded in ideological differences.

How Do Organizations Collaborate Successfully?

Once organizations have made the choice to delve head first into collaboration, they have started investing a lot in hopes that it will be successful. Collaboration is no walk in the park due to the time and resources that must be invested in it. Though, the literature tells us that there are factors that contribute to the success of the endeavor.

Collaborators must come to a consensus on the goals and expectations of the collaboration. Miltenberger (2013) writes that the crucial element of an effective collaboration is the participating organizations recognizing that they are interdependent. Huxham and Vangen (2008) discuss the necessity of coming to agreement on aims. They write that it is often difficult to develop common aims, so in those situations, they recommend to "get started on some action without fully agreeing on the aims," (Huxham and Vangen, 2008). They also discuss gaining trust as an important factor of success. Norris-Tirrell and Clay (2010) write about leadership/management's role in the success of a collaboration. They note that the collaboration leader (different than a hierarchical leader) has the task of facilitating the shared agenda of the collaborators. They also cite three necessary skills that a collaboration manager must have:

people skills, analytic skills, and boundary –spanning skills. These relate to the manager's ability to lead people, develop systems for assessing different facets of the collaboration, and scan the environment. Vandeventer and Mandell (2007) add that equal partnership and embracing conflict and adding systems to deal with it are essential to a successful collaboration.

What about Collaboration in the Arts World?

When it comes to collaboration in the arts sector, the literature describes some similar elements to collaboration in general. However, there are some unique elements to arts collaboration including why it's important, types of collaboration and reasons for pursuing collaboration. Also, most of the literature on collaboration in the arts is made up of case studies and practical articles with a scattering of scholarly articles.

Why Does Arts Collaboration Matter?

Collaboration is especially important in the arts world nowadays. According to Grønbjerg and Toledo (2014), employment in the nonprofit arts industry declined during the recent recession in 2008-2009. This is having a direct effect on arts organizations' ability to produce quality programming. Grønbjerg and Toledo (2014) state that "economic downturns and growing for-profit presence is weakening the ability of nonprofit institutions to provide high quality arts and cultural services for in their communities." Arts organizations can look to collaborate as an option to handle these problems and bolster their capacity to provide quality services.

What are the Types of Arts Collaboration?

Ostrower (2003) describes different types of arts and culture partnerships that participated in her study of the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds' initiative, Community Partnerships for Cultural Participation. She describes the main types of collaborations as being between organizations in different arts fields, between large and small organizations, cross-ethnic, and venue-related partnerships. The partnerships in this initiative were usually convened to create an activity, product, program, or event of some kind. Ultimately, the leading reason for organizations to collaborate in this initiative was to expand and diversify their audience.

Scheff and Kotler (1996) echo Ostrower when they explain the type of collaboration where an arts organization partners with another arts organization. They characterize this type of collaboration as one that can create joint audiences and therefore expand the audience base for each collaborating organization. Collaborations between arts organizations can also manifest themselves in a sharing of administrative functions. For example, the American Symphony Orchestra and Concordia Orchestra in New York City started sharing the same management and staff, while each keeping their own board of trustees and artistic vision, in order to make up for the deficiency in performing administrative functions that Concordia was experiencing. Dabkowski (2007) provides another example of arts organizations of different disciplines collaborating in western New York. The organizations, CEPA Gallery, Just Buffalo Literary Center, and Big Orbit Gallery, have had success in both their individual and collaborative programming by pooling resources, sharing administrative expenses, and sponsoring educational programs. Grossman (2012) gives yet another example from New York where 12 arts organizations collaborate together while inhabiting New York City's cultural landmark, Lincoln

Center. These organizations include the Chamber Music Society, The Film Society of Lincoln Center, Jazz at Lincoln Center, The Julliard School, Lincoln Center Theater, The Metropolitan Opera, New York City Ballet, New York City Opera, New York Philharmonic, The New York Library for Performing Arts, The School of American Ballet, and Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. Even though these organizations have had challenges cooperating in the past, they recently succeeded in cooperating to redevelop Lincoln Center while at the same time bringing in more collaborative programming, establishing administrative networking meetings, and boosting joint fundraising.

Scheff and Kotler (1996) expand on Ostrower's discussion of types of arts collaborations when they discuss arts organizations collaborating outside of the arts. This situation can materialize in collaborations with nonprofits that are not arts-related. For example, Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra established a partnership with its neighborhood African American churches that resulted in the symphony expanding its audience and the churches receiving discounted tickets to cultural concerts and music education opportunities for its children.

Another way arts organizations can collaborate outside of the arts is with businesses. In this type of collaboration, arts organizations can receive funding and administrative function support and businesses can improve their public image along with retaining an educated and talented workforce which desires a strong cultural and artistic community. Weinstein (2011) extensively discusses collaboration between arts organizations and businesses. He takes a business perspective and focuses on how businesses can provide evidence of corporate social responsibility, foster creativity in its employees and gain tax benefits.

What are the benefits of Arts Collaboration?

The literature on arts collaboration alludes to capacity-building and more effective programs as potential benefits of collaboration. Ostrower (2003) writes that partnerships can lead to the development of new programs and the strengthening of existing programs through financial, administrative, physical, and artistic resources that participating organizations did not previously own. Scheff and Kotler (1996) agree with Ostrower on how collaborations can improve programs by bolstering administrative functions, "By combining various administrative functions and overhead expenses, arts organizations can realize economies of scale." Partners in a collaboration can potentially acquire new audiences through gaining knowledge of how to find and appeal to the target audience and extending their network in the community. Their new, larger networks can open the door for collaboration with other organizations that they did not have access to before. Arts organization collaborations can help with fundraising by generating visibility, legitimacy, and success. These collaborations also can create more opportunities for exposure for artists (Ostrower, 2003).

How Do Arts Organizations Collaborate Successfully?

Arts collaboration is not necessarily easy, and the authors in the literature offer many different potential routes to success which parallel the literature on general collaboration. Ostrower (2003) cites the effectiveness of having clear and realistic goals from the outset as a major driver of successful collaboration. She also explains that there must be commitment from collaborators to those goals, and they must agree that the partnership is necessary in order to

achieve those goals. Making sure that individual organizations' missions correlate to the partnership's goals is important too. "This is not to say that organizations should never enter partnerships outside their central mission… but rather they should have a clear rational for doing so…" (Ostrower, 2003). Scheff and Kotler (1996) also recognize the importance of setting goals in a collaboration, "Goals should be set not only for each participating organization but also for the collaboration as a whole." They also point out that reaching consensus on key collaboration decisions and establishing trust between partners through effective communication leads to success. In regards to communication, they state, "Convening regular meetings keeps partners informed and able to respond quickly to problems." Another important factor of success that Scheff and Kotler (1996) describe is clearly defining a leadership structure from the outset.

Because arts collaboration is not a simple task (much like collaboration in general), sometimes it does not end up being a positive undertaking and the literature gives reasons for this type of outcome. Weinstein (2011) explains that collaboration may fail if the individual organizations are not committed at the same level, have unattainable goals for the collaboration, or do not share equal benefits in proportion to their investment. In Ostrower's (2003) study, she cites reasons that the partnerships had difficulty continuing. She writes that if the partnership was not getting enough funding or if the partners did not see the collaboration supporting their core mission, then they had trouble keeping it afloat.

Methodology

My study was based on qualitative research over a two month time frame involving multiple structured, in-person interviews with local arts organization officials. I asked each official the same set of questions (which is included later in the chapter). I completed my research under IRB supervision at Indiana University. My protocol number for the study was 1401374297. My thesis faculty advisor, Beth Gazley, was the Principal Investigator on the study, and I was the Co-Principal Investigator.

The following sections include an explanation of my selection and recruitment process, description of the interviews and analysis process, and a discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of structured interviews and my process. I followed structured, in-person interview protocols and analysis protocols recommended respectively by O'Sullivan and Rassel (1999), and Tracy (2013).

Selection & Recruitment Process

The selection process I used for interview subjects involved picking people in leadership positions within Bloomington arts organizations who would have a more comprehensive view of collaboration. I selected them from contact lists given to me by other Bloomington arts leaders with knowledge of my research questions. In order to capture the diverse art community in Bloomington, I chose individuals from organizations related to a variety of disciplines including visual and performing arts organizations located in the community or a part of an educational institution. Also, some individuals were from alliances made up of multiple organizations. I recruited these individuals by email, asking them for their participation and if interested, to contact me for scheduling an in-person interview and choosing a location. Allowing them to

choose the location made the interview as comfortable as possible for them, so that they could provide quality answers in a familiar environment (O'Sullivan & Rassel, 1999). In the recruitment email, I attached a study information sheet with a detailed description of the study (including the individual's rights as a research subject) and the set of questions I would be asking them. This strategy helps the participants understand the context of the study (O'Sullivan & Rassel, 1999). My overall sample size ended up reaching 17 individuals out of 20 contacted.

Interview & Analysis Process

Each participant was asked the same set of eleven questions that generally set out to discover their experiences with arts collaboration, incentives and disincentives to collaborate, examples of successes and failures, and their perspective on Bloomington arts collaboration (see Appendix). The questions were sent to the subjects beforehand in the recruitment email (except for the last question). I took this step in order to give them some time to think about the questions and therefore, provide me with better answers (O'Sullivan & Rassel, 1999). With the last question, I was looking for a gut reaction. I also asked some follow-up questions depending on the subjects' unique responses.

Each interview, on average, lasted approximately between 30-45 minutes. I recorded each interview with a digital recorder and took notes of responses that stood out along with my general thoughts. I analyzed the recordings and notes after I completed all of the interviews.

I applied an iterative analysis process to make sense of the data (Tracy, 2013). This process is composed of recognizing emerging data and at the same time, reflecting on the literature and previous concepts relevant to the subject. For recognizing emerging data, I coded my qualitative data for words and phrases that associate to larger phenomena like concepts or themes. I consulted my literature review to inform the larger phenomena I coded for. I used a qualitative data analysis software tool called Nvivo in order to assist me in organizing and coding my data.

Advantages & Disadvantages

This method of interviewing has advantages over other methods. In-person interviews give the researcher the opportunity to solicit in-depth responses that one cannot obtain through more impersonal methods like surveys (O'Sullivan & Rassel, 1999). Because I am studying a local aspect of collaboration, it is beneficial to actually go out into the community and speak with individuals to pick up on the general sense of the environment. Also, some of the questions I asked in the interviews were slightly difficult to understand. In order to achieve more accurate responses, it was useful for me to be there in person to explain some of the questions. In these ways, in-person interviews are more advantageous than phone interviews in receiving more comprehensive answers. In-person interviews also bring forth more detailed answers than mailed questionnaires/surveys, and the interview questions are less likely to be misunderstood (O'Sullivan & Rassel, 1999).

However, in-person interviews do have some disadvantages. During an in-person interview, researchers can sometimes damage the reliability and validity of results when they vary how they ask questions and probe the subject for desired answers. With the researcher

bringing their personality and motivation to produce useable answers into the face-to-face interview format, the opportunity for the researcher to bias subjects' answers increases (O'Sullivan & Rassel, 1999).

Some potential flaws in my personal research process may exist. Some individuals chosen for the study had previous working experience with me, which may have led to some biased answers. Also, the individuals who responded to my interview request may have already had a positive view on collaborating. The individuals who did not respond may have had another perspective that is not represented as well.

Findings

The results of my research exist in a local context due to the nature of my study. Generally, the findings from my research parallel what I found in my review of the literature. My findings align with answers from the literature to questions of why organizations collaborate and what makes collaboration successful. They also agree with the literature on arts collaboration regarding these questions. Though, my research findings do shed light on the uniqueness of arts collaboration and the local aspect of arts collaboration in the Bloomington community.

Experiences with Arts Collaboration

When asked whether their organization collaborates regularly, the majority of participants said that their organization collaborates frequently. Figure 2 shows the breakdown of the responses to this question.

Does your organziation collaborate regularly? (N=17)
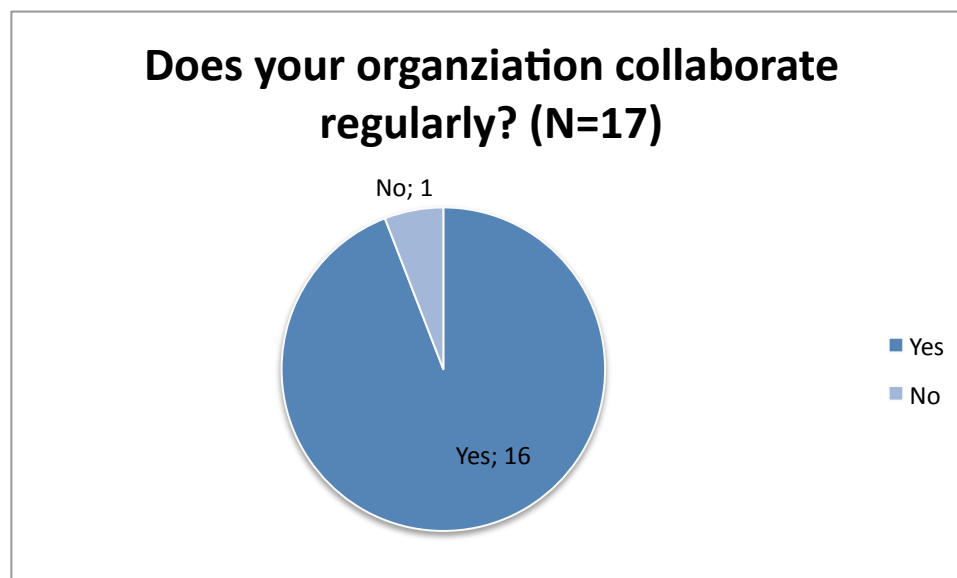
No; 1

Yes; 16

- Yes
- No

Figure 2

The types of collaborations and degrees of connectivity that the participants described varied quite a bit. They spoke of collaborations with other nonprofit arts organizations,

nonprofits in other sub sectors, businesses, and the City of Bloomington. Organizations had or were collaborating with anywhere from one to multiple organizations. They described collaborations that existed at different points on the partnership continuum. Some described simple, one-to-one collaborations such as a sponsorship of an event, while others described more complex collaborations that have multiple players with joint programming, policies, and administrative functions.

When asked whether their collaborative experiences had been generally positive or negative, a majority of the participants said generally positive. Figure 3 presents a breakdown of the answers to this question.
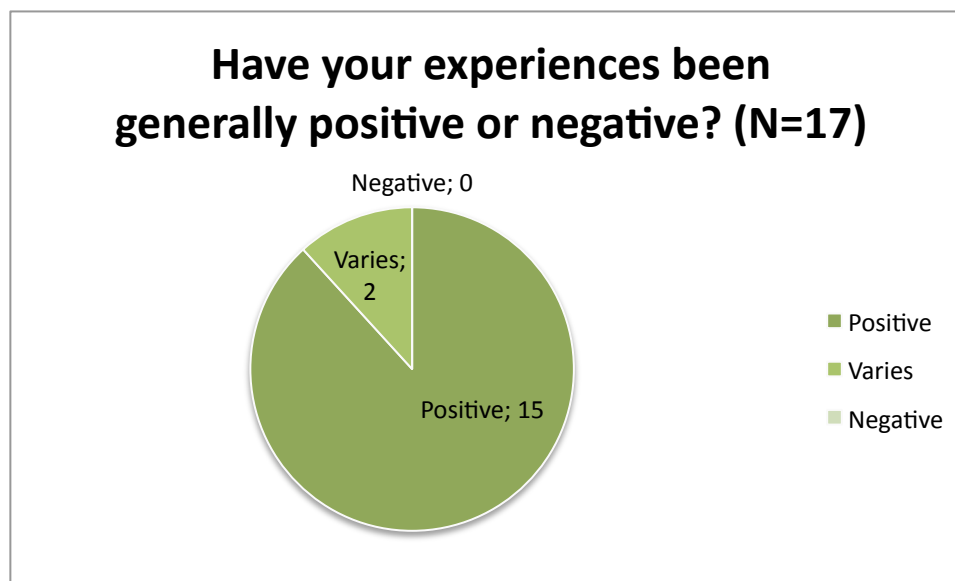

Have your experiences been generally positive or negative? (N=17)

Negative; 0

Varies; 2

Positive; 15

- Positive
- Varies
- Negative

The organizations that said it varied cited reasons for the variation including personal relationships and the capacity to take on collaboration.

Motivations & Deterrents for Arts Collaboration

Represented organizations had differing motivations to collaborate, but some key, common motivations began to emerge. Table 1 displays the motivation concepts that participants alluded to in order of highest to lowest frequency response:

Motivations to Collaborate (N=17)
"What were/would be your motivation(s) to join/create a collaborative effort?"
1. In mission/moral imperative
2. Access to resources
3. Improving capacity
4. Learning/networking
5. Expanding audience
5. Strengthening programs

Table 1

On the flipside, participants cited various deterrents to collaboration. Table 2 shows the deterrent concepts that participants alluded to in order of highest to lowest frequency response:

Deterrents to Collaboration (N=17)
"If no experience, what discouraged/s you from joining/creating a collaborative effort?"
1. Time and resource commitment
1. No/not good mission fit
2. Personal relationships (bad personalities and values not matching)
3. Bad reputation or ineffectiveness of potential partners
4. Competition
4. One-sidedness
5. Potential to lose identity

Table 2

When asked whether they liked or disliked working with certain sectors such as nonprofit, business, or government, participants' answers varied. Many participants said that they saw no difference in working with different sectors and they did not think in terms of sectors when collaborating. Some of those participants said that the sectors do not come in to mind because other factors, such as personal relationships and values, outweigh the characteristics of sectors. Other participants said that each sector has their joys and challenges.

Factors of Successful & Unsuccessful Collaborations

Participants cited many different factors of successful collaborations. Table 3 presents the factors they alluded to in order of highest to lowest frequency response:

Factors of Successful Collaborations (N=17)
"What has caused collaborations you have been a part of to be successful?"
1. Effective communication
1. Effective leadership
2. Clear goals/aims
2. Having will to collaborate
3. Cultivating positive personal relationships
4. Shared benefits
5. Regular scheduled meetings
5. Documenting meetings and progress

Table 3

Participants also offered factors that contribute to unsuccessful collaborations. Table 4 displays the obstacles to success they cited in order of highest to lowest frequency response:

Factors of Unsuccessful Collaboration (N=17)
"What has caused collaborations you have been a part of to fail?"
1. Sour or lost personal relationships
2. No/not enough commitment
3. No/not enough shared benefits
4. Lack of time and resources to contribute
4. Lack of focus on goals and mission
4. Change in leadership or ineffective leadership
5. Competition

Table 4

Unique Elements of Arts Collaboration

The participants in my study provided ways in which arts collaboration is unique in comparison to other forms of collaboration. Table 5 provides the positive and negative unique elements of arts collaboration cited in order of highest to lowest frequency response:

Unique Elements of Arts Collaboration (N=17)
"What is unique with collaborations involving arts organizations?"
Positive Elements:
1. Creativity
2. Holistic view (everything is not about bottom line)
3. Passion/excitement
Negative Elements:
1. Lack of Money
2. Organizations' tendency to initiate by asking for money
3. Lack of time and organization

Table 5

Two out of the 17 participants actually said that collaboration is the same in any circumstance and that there is not anything unique with collaboration in the arts.

Arts Collaboration in Bloomington

When asked whether they thought Bloomington was a good environment for arts collaboration, all 17 participants said that they thought Bloomington was a good environment for collaboration. Table 6 shows the factors that participants thought encouraged collaboration in Bloomington in order of highest to lowest frequency response:

Factors that Encourage Arts Collaboration in Bloomington, IN (N=17)
"Do you feel like the Bloomington arts community is a good environment for collaboration? How?"
1. City support
2. Community spirit
3. Plethora of arts organizations and artists

Table 6

The entities that participants mentioned when they spoke of having support for collaboration from the city included the mayor, Bloomington Entertainment and Arts District, and Bloomington Arts Commission. Participants described Bloomington's community spirit as involving small town camaraderie and a lack of ego.

Even though all the participants thought Bloomington was an overall good environment for collaboration, participants did bring up some factors that discourage collaboration in Bloomington. Table 7 presents the factors that participants said discourage collaboration in Bloomington in order of highest to lowest frequency response:

Factors that Discourage Arts Collaboration in Bloomington, IN (N=17)
"Is there anything that discourages collaboration in the Bloomington arts community? (If so) What and how?"
1. Oversaturation
2. Lack of resources (time and money)
3. Red tape

Table 7

Participants said that the oversaturation of arts organizations in Bloomington can lead to competition, limited pools of money, and audience fatigue. Participants that spoke of red tape being a barrier to collaboration said that it came from their organizations and others.

Potential for Equal Benefits

When asked whether they thought each party in a collaboration could receive equal benefits from the experience, the majority of participants thought that equal benefits for each party in a collaboration was possible. Figure 4 displays the breakdown of responses to this question.
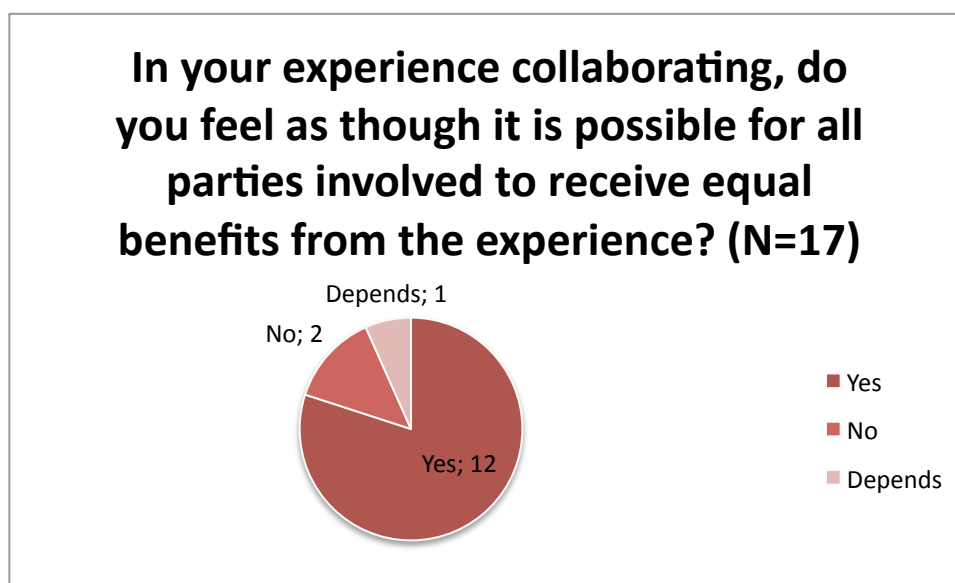

Figure 4

Participants that said they do not think it is possible explained that some organization will always get a little (or a lot) more out of a collaboration than others. They said their organization goes into collaboration hoping that at least they will get something out of it and that in later collaborations, things will come around and they may be the ones who see the real benefits.

Summary & Implications

A major takeaway from my study is that it echoes the literature on collaboration in many aspects. Although my study involved a small sample of representatives from local organizations, the similarities in the responses to the literature on the subject make my findings relevant. The participants mostly described having positive experiences with collaboration as a whole, and this aligns with the literature's positive normative tone toward collaboration. Though, participants did have some hesitancy with collaboration. The hesitancy stemmed from issues such as not having the capacity to collaborate and bad personal relationships.

One can see from my findings that many different types of arts collaborations have shared elements. One participant speaks to why he/she might collaborate, "I think all decisions that you make are based on your mission." Arts organizations participating in collaboration usually have missions that promote collaboration. This fact points to the idea of collaborating organizations feeling as though they have a moral obligation to collaborate. Their missions also usually fit together so as to set the collaboration up for the development of shared goals. Arts organization collaborations have a shared characteristic of creativity generated from the participating organizations and people. When a joint programming opportunity between different arts disciplines arises, this creativity helps them mesh the different disciplines together. One participant explains, "What I can say is that with arts organizations, there is this element of creativity or finding common ground with vision for both. A lot of it is trying to find those places where each organization's mission, as it relates to the art that they're doing, meshes." Also, their shared creativity allows them to come up with inventive solutions to the common problem of a lack of money. The lack of resources is another shared element between arts collaborations. This shared element is a big reason why arts organizations choose to collaborate in the first place. Though, it can also be an obstacle to success once the collaboration has commenced.

If an arts collaboration wants to be successful, then supportive processes must be in place and the commitment to collaboration must be present. The participating organizations in a collaboration need to have supportive internal policies and procedures in order to facilitate collaboration. If these policies and procedures are not in place, then the collaboration will run into red tape which greatly hinders momentum. There has to be commitment from each side for a collaboration to be successful. As one participant says, "It's a commitment to finding a way to collaborate. If one side or the other is not committed, you're going to lose out."

An element of collaboration that cannot be forgotten is the personal element. Even though I have been discussing collaboration in an organizational context, people are what really drive collaboration. The key to a collaboration's success is to build good, strong personal relationships within the collaboration. One participant warns, "As soon as those personal relationships go, it's just a matter of time." Personalities can halt a collaboration from happening in the first place or derail it once it has already started. Also, when certain people leave a collaboration, personal relationships are lost and the collaboration can be hard to maintain after these losses. Strong leadership is also a part of the personal element. A leader of collaboration is in an untraditional position and must be adept at creating relationships and managing personalities. One would be unwise to underestimate the personal element of collaboration.

Conclusion

After my time was up with my BEAD internship, I went away with some questions. These questions included what is collaboration in an organizational context, why do organizations choose to collaborate, what makes collaborations succeed, what is unique about arts collaboration, and what is the local Bloomington arts collaboration scene like? I feel as though I gained a lot of insight to those questions through my review of the literature and my IRB-approved study in the Bloomington community with local arts organization leaders.

I do have remaining research questions that could facilitate further research. What explains the variation in collaborative levels within the arts community? Is the variation caused by different arts disciplines, different capacity levels, and/or different cultures? Also, what can we learn about college communities where arts collaboration is successful to help our community minimize the red tape?

What Explains the Variation in Collaborative Levels Within the Arts Community?

My research focused on experiences with collaboration from arts organizations in the community on a general level. I did not focus on the distinctive characteristics of each organization in relation to how they answered questions. For example, I saw this difference of organizational characteristics in my time with the theatre alliance. Since I was doing marketing research, I saw how each theatre was in a different marketing stage and therefore, approached the collaboration with slightly different motivations. My research was also limited in sample size for my interviews, which also hindered the amount of variation in the represented arts organizations. In future research, there should be a focus on how arts organizations with specific characteristics (such as art discipline, capacity level, and culture) answer questions dealing with positive experiences, motivations to collaborate, and how to be successful. There should also be a larger sample size with more variation in organizations.

What Can We Learn about College Communities Where Arts Collaboration is Successful to Help Our Community Minimize the Red Tape?

Though it was not the most frequent response to what discourages collaboration in Bloomington, the notion of red tape being a barrier to collaboration in the community did arise. Bloomington is a unique community because it is a college town. My research did not focus on the town and gown (or community and campus) relationship, and how that affects collaborative experiences. Future research should explore this relationship to see if red tape really is a significant barrier to collaboration, and how to deal with it if it is.

I hope that my research can be a practical tool for arts organizations, not just in Bloomington, but in other communities too, that are considering collaboration or are already engaging in it. Collaboration can have many benefits, but it is not an easy endeavor. Organizations must be ready to commit to putting in some real work in order to achieve success.

Collaboration is not always going to be fruitful. I will draw to a close with a matter-of-fact message to collaborators from Huxham and Vangen (2008, p. 257), "Our final message for practitioners of collaboration is go and do it—get your hands dirty, get the buzz, don't expect miracles, get cross if it helps but don't despair."

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Have you collaborated with other organizations regularly in the past/present? Why or why not?
   a. (If so) What degree of connection did the individual organizations have within the collaborations you were a part of?
   b. Have your experiences with collaborations generally been positive or negative? Please explain.
2. What were/would be your motivation to join/create a collaborative effort?
3. If no experience, what discouraged/s you from joining/creating a collaborative effort?
4. When collaborating, do you like/dislike working with certain sectors (e.g. business, government, nonprofits)? Why?
5. What has caused collaborations you have been a part of to be successful?
6. What has caused collaborations you have been a part of to fail?
7. In your experience collaborating with other organizations, were there any common collaborative management techniques that helped make the partnership succeed?
8. What is unique with collaborations involving arts organizations?
9. Do you feel like the Bloomington arts community is a good environment for collaboration? How?
10. Is there anything that discourages collaboration in the Bloomington arts community? (If so) What and how?
11. In your experience collaborating, do you feel as though it is possible for all parties involved to receive equal benefits from the experience?