

**Cross Sector Collaboration Champions:
How Collective Impact Network Directors Lead for Educational Equity**

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Abstract

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Collective impact, as a term and as a framework, has risen in popularity over the past six years as a set of guiding principles, processes, and measurement indicators aimed at addressing complex social issues. It has been employed perhaps the most by regional or city-wide efforts that aim to increase educational attainment, especially postsecondary attainment and education-to-workforce outcomes. Until very recently, little to no empirical evidence existed regarding the efficacy of the collective impact model nor the challenges or successes experienced by the practitioners attempting to implement the model with fidelity. A few recent empirical studies began to identify practical and theoretical gaps in the collective impact framework, including unrealistic preconditions and differences in practitioner experiences during implementation. The most common challenges to the collective impact framework identified by researchers have been its limitations for addressing systemic change (rather than more limited programmatic adjustments) and its failure to clearly identify and address basic causes of social inequality, such as racism and poverty. These limitations are an even bigger issue when considering the number of social issues to which the collective impact model has been applied, both within and outside of the field of education.

This dissertation first synthesizes the myriad conceptual and theoretical frameworks for understanding social issue based collaboration efforts generated by researchers before the recent popularity of the collective impact framework. I then locate education-focused efforts within the boundaries of cross-sector collaborations. I next synthesize the various empirical and prescriptive models for measuring the outcomes of collaborative efforts, especially those that attempt to explain the earliest years of those efforts. The earliest years of collaborative efforts can be the most difficult to study because of a lack of formalized accountability and hit-or-miss administrative processes. Such an ambiguous context can mean that early indicators of success are amorphous and are rarely clearly defined ahead of time. This makes the work of champions (network leaders in this case) extremely difficult and fraught with key decisions for which there is little guidance or research. Given the ambiguous nature of these early efforts as well as the

importance of network leaders in establishing collaborative norms during the first few years, this dissertation uses organizational learning theory and the integrative leadership framework to understand the practices and approaches network leaders apply to their work during those earliest years.

Using information gained from a pilot study that followed the implementation of 14 collective impact networks in field during their earliest years, this qualitative, multiple case study examines the strategies and behaviors of collective impact network champions. This study explores the extent to which those champions—specifically the network directors—of cross-sector, education-focused, collaboration efforts employed collective impact strategies with fidelity, the challenges they faced in implementing the framework in the earliest years of enactment, and to what extent and the conditions under which leaders adapted the collective impact model or used all new approaches and in what ways they did so. Using integrative leadership and organizational learning theory to conceptualize the work of network directors allowed the author to understand the early implementation of a collective impact collaboration as a process of learning, sense-making, and grappling with information and evidence within an ambiguous context.

This study provides detailed observations and findings from across nine different cases (among the original 14 in the pilot mentioned above) of collective impact network implementation, both confirming and deepening our understanding of the gaps and limitations of the collective impact framework and its guiding principles. By triangulating data from interviews, direct observations, and internal and external documents, I found that most collective impact network leaders experienced challenges regarding a shared sense of urgency among their networks' member organizations. I found that those that had successfully maintained their networks beyond a second year of implementation had approached the need for a collective sense of urgency as a process of collective learning among network members rather than, as much of the literature says, as a precondition for network implementation success. Furthermore, I found that, as they dug into the process of collective learning, some network leaders became more data and measurement literate, and that those who had begun to see network progress had in fact begun to approach their use of data and measurement through a new lens. Specifically, a few successful network leaders engaged in community conversations about measuring changes to major systems or institutional policies and had moved past using only programmatic data. Finally, I found that successful maintenance and growth of network implementation that led to some level of systemic change occurred when the network leaders were able to identify and name, get members to understand and buy into, and then address social and economic injustices that were root causes of disparate education outcomes, such as racism and poverty.

Evidence from the most successful networks indicated that the network leader had engaged other community leaders in conversations about how to increase representation of marginalized groups, about inequitable distribution of resources within the public education system, and about recognition of how dominant approaches to educational reform had, in fact, reinforced the inequitable status quo. These findings suggest that a modification of the collective impact framework is needed, given that it is very unlikely that the majority of social cause collaborations will completely reject use of that framework after a year or more into implementation of a network. Addressing the gaps in the collective impact framework by intentionally supplementing it with frameworks that address the underlying causes of inequity will be no easy task, but is a step that will more likely result in the kinds of social outcomes these efforts were designed to produce.

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CHAPTER 1 | INTRODUCTION

Collaboration, a form of engagement between distinct parties, such as those from private and public sectors, aimed at addressing either shared or individual objectives has been a documented phenomenon for more than a century within the fields of education and other social improvement causes like health, homelessness, social welfare, and environmental management (see, for example: Christens & Inzeo, 2015; Henig, Riehl, Rebell, & Wolff, 2015; Thomas & Koontz, 2011). The varied combinations of collaborative partners, reasons for partnerships, structures of governance for collaboration, and ebbs and flows of popular approaches to the work are also well documented and have provided the basis for some of the deepest-rooted contentions regarding educational reform in the history of the United States (for example, differences about the priority of school reform versus poverty/social reform led to many forced partnerships between schools and outside agencies, (Hedges, Laine, & Greenwald, 1994)). Indeed, improving educational outcomes may very well be the leading social cause for which a large number of cities and metropolitan regions have experienced a rising number of collaborative efforts, from community schools to wraparound cradle-to-college initiatives (Henig, Riehl, Houston, Rebell, & Wolff, March 2016).

Of late, one of the most popular terms used to capture one particular framework or approach to collaboration that is guiding many current efforts is “collective impact.” The term’s coiners define collective impact as a “structured approach to problem solving” in which “a group of actors from different sectors commit to a common agenda for solving a complex social or environmental problem” (Preskill, Parkhurst, & Juster, 2013a). Collective impact formally joined

the collaboration research and practice lexicon in 2011 when John Kania and Mark Kramer,¹ from the applied social research and consulting firm FSG, published a white paper with that term as its title; the term has gained increasing citations and references by scholars and practitioners alike over the past six years (see, for example: Christens & Inzeo, 2015; Easterling, 2013; Gallagher, 2014; Gillam, Counts, & Garstka, 2016; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Nee & Jolin, 2012). Kania and Kramer initially defined collective impact as “[t]he commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (2011, p. 36).

Most scholars who have investigated the rise in popularity of the collective impact approach have concluded that it is one framework or model, among many others, that could be (or has been) used, intentionally or otherwise, to develop and sustain collaborative efforts to address social issues (Christens & Inzeo, 2015). Of note, Jeffrey Henig and his colleagues recently published the most comprehensive literature review to date related to the collective impact framework in particular and to cross-sector collaborations generally in education, providing a foundational, empirical scan of 182 “place-based, multi-sector, collaborative leadership efforts focused on educational outcomes” (2016, p. iv) as of 2015 across the United States (Henig et al., March 2016; Henig et al., 2015). Their work and that of others since 2011 lays the groundwork for understanding the collective impact framework, its rise in popularity as

¹ Henig and his colleagues provide a summary on the incidence of the use of “collective impact” as a term of focus as such: “A web search of document titles containing ‘collective impact’ reveals only sporadic, idiosyncratic, or ordinary language uses of the term prior to 2011 (e.g., ‘the collective impact of service workers on...’); a search we conducted in Google Scholar yielded eight articles in 2011, 16 in 2012, 21 in 2013, and 40 in 2014” (2015, p. 2). Using the same Google Scholar search, the author of this paper found 49 articles with “collective impact” in the title and 1720 results with it anywhere in the body for 2015 and as of September 20, 2016, the counts are 34 and 1,130 respectively.

a symbol of renewed public and private interest in implementing collaboration with fidelity to the collective impact framework, and the particular interest among funders and backbone organizations—separate organizations that support the convening, framing, and accountability of a collective impact network—in measuring short-term and long-term outcomes and impact of such efforts.

In a parallel rise in popularity, or perhaps because of the enthusiasm garnered by the coining of the term collective impact itself, collaborative efforts that particularly attempt to address cradle-to-career education outcomes or those that aim to increase postsecondary attainment and workforce engagement have captured the attention and funds of many government agencies and foundations and have become the “next big move” by major cities and metropolitan regions (Barber, 2013; Holzer, 2013; Katz & Bradley, 2013; Perna, 2013). These efforts have been proposed and developed in response to national and statewide education and economic goals and often point to the number of US jobs over the next decade that will require a higher education degree or career credential alongside the apparently substantial shortfall in adults who hold those degrees or credentials (Giegerich, Summer 2010; Thompson, 2014; Vargas, 2013).

There are not always easily distinguishable boundaries between efforts that employ the collective impact framework versus others, or between those that focus solely on postsecondary outcomes versus educational outcomes more broadly.² Because of the usefulness that drawing such boundaries affords in making comparisons and measuring impact, this study explores the

² Such as cradle-to-college, “P-16” or “P-20”, and other efforts that certainly include but do not only aim to impact and measure postsecondary education and education-to-workforce outcomes.

literature and methods for, and carries out an empirical study of cross-sector collaborations that use the collective impact framework and that aim to impact place-based postsecondary and education-to-workforce outcomes. I employed the boundaries around these efforts using the set of parameters that Henig and his colleagues have developed for distinguishing “local cross-sector collaborations for education” (2016, p. 3) as distinct from other collaborations that may cover a larger geographical region or include fewer sectors in their work, further detailed in Chapter 3.

Regardless of the social or communal goals to which it has been applied (education, health, transportation, environment, etc.), rigorous and empirical research on collective impact efforts in particular and cross-sector collaborations in general is limited in both scope and depth, and often lacks theoretical grounding or apparent conceptual and/or methodological foundations for investigation. This is partly due to the fact that the vast majority of published works that have focused on collective impact specifically or cross-sector collaborations more broadly have been conducted or commissioned by vocal advocates for the work, such as foundations and philanthropies, that have taken up the mantle of collective impact in their most recent strategic giving plans (e.g. Education Gillam et al., 2016; Northwest, 2013; Summers & Honold, 2013). There are notable exceptions (see, for example: Choi, 2013; Dobbie & Roland G. Fryer, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013) and these exceptions point to common characteristics of and challenges to implementation of CI initiatives, a few promising practices regarding management structures, and insights on how recent trends in educational reform efforts provide a context for collaboration that is both promising and cautionary. The majority of the literature on collaborations for education improvement points to the need for empirical exploration of what has been hypothesized as the processes and outcomes of collective impact, but has not, with a

few rare exceptions, been clearly measured by applying conceptual frameworks built from similar phenomena.

Of particular note among the recent empirical research that has investigated the collective impact framework, scholars have voiced concern over the employment of the collective impact approach to issues that are grounded in problems of poverty, historical and systemic racism, and social inequality. A number of researchers have concluded that the collective impact model lacks any strategy for systems change, such as investigating causal relationships between disparities in access to resources as they relate to social, health, or educational outcomes (Boumgarden & Branch, 2013; Harwood, 2014; Wolff et al., 2017). Instead, they argue, collective impact may in fact reinforce status quo systems and institutional operations and practices by maintaining power structures between community members and leaders and by privileging traditional data collection foci and interpretation that places blame on the very individuals or groups the system already marginalizes (Raderstrong & Boyea-Robinson, 2016; Wolff et al., 2017; Danielle Wood, 2016). With these limitations, researchers and practitioners alike have begun to wonder whether the collective impact framework can be adjusted to better address issues of inequity and systemic oppression given that, practically speaking, so many efforts are well underway and are unlikely to divest from the collective impact approach completely (Weaver, 2016). Others have called for a complete overhaul, asking collaborative efforts that have relied on collective impact as a framework to dissociate themselves from it and to take up frameworks such as Collaborating for Equity and Justice or “CEJ” (Wolff et al., 2017).

Furthermore, many studies that have investigated collective impact efforts specifically or cross-sector collaborations generally, have found that network leadership in particular mattered a great deal to how and how well startup and implementation of collaborative efforts occurred

during the early years of the work (Baker, Kan, & Teo, 2011). Researchers have found that individual leaders adapted collective impact strategies, veering from fidelity to the model, in order to adjust to a rapidly changing landscape of data availability and use, growth and engagement of participating organizations, and political environment and resource changes (Edmondson & Zimpher, 2014). In a pilot study conducted before the primary study that is the focus of this dissertation, I drew similar tentative conclusions regarding the importance of individual network leaders as the drivers of early implementation of collaborative efforts and as those who set the tone for engagement, inclusion, and change in practice during the earliest years of the work. That pilot study pointed toward two conceptual models for understanding network leader implementation in the early years of collaboration efforts: 1) *integrative leadership theory* for framing leadership behaviors that are distinctly more common in network leadership roles, and 2) *organizational learning* as an appropriate conceptual framework for illuminating how network leaders go about making sense of the collective impact framework as a guiding model, how their efforts in the early years of implementation can be measured as a proxy for promising outcomes later on, and how their own learning and support for their work can dramatically impact the success of the collaboration given the limitations and shortcomings of the collective impact framework. Organizational learning is a particularly useful theoretical framework because it helps us understand the practices and sense-making efforts that individuals employ under both rigid and ambiguous contexts (Honig, 2008; Levitt & March, 1988; March & Olsen, 1975; Marsh, 2000; Rusch, 2005). Collective impact efforts can be highly ambiguous, with network leaders functioning under complete or near-complete autonomy, and with little to no direct guidance on how to deal with circumstances outside of the prescribed steps in the framework (S. Page, 2010, 2016; S. B. Page, Stone, Bryson, & Crosby, 2015).

Furthermore, leaders often must engage in a discovery process (learning that involves multiple individuals) with their network participants—other community and institutional leaders—regarding data interpretation and causal relationships among factors inherent to the issue, as a way to garner trust, span boundaries between sectors, and build a narrative about the collaborative effort that provides momentum for the work (Thomson, Perry, & Miller, 2009). These moves are inherent to the organizational learning framework and can point to ways of measuring and understanding early success among collective impact networks.

Research Questions & Study Overview

Given what we know to date about the rise in popularity of collective impact as one framework for guiding purposive collective action, where it sits among other frameworks for collaboration, and how it has been applied to education issues generally and higher education or workforce readiness specifically, this dissertation aims to answer the following research questions:

1. To what degree do early to middle year collaborations for education confirm or challenge the ability of practitioners to implement collective impact with fidelity to the collective impact framework?
2. Under what circumstances and in what contexts are the efforts of education-focused collective impact network leaders challenged or successful in implementing a collective impact collaboration during its earliest years?
3. In what ways can we assess early progress of education-focused collective impact collaboration efforts given the experiences, challenges, and successes of network leaders, regardless of their ability to implement with fidelity the collective impact model?

Overview of This Dissertation

To answer these questions with this dissertation project, I first review the literature on collaboration efforts broadly, paying attention to cause-based, social, and place based models of collaboration over the past century in Chapter 2. I then review collective impact as a particular collaboration framework in Chapter 3, chronicling its recent rise in popularity and synthesizing what empirical and theoretically-grounded research has been done to date regarding collective impact efforts, including critiques and challenges to the model. Chapter 4 provides contextual literature on a particular kind of collaborative effort that has seen perhaps the most prevalent employment of collective impact as a guiding framework, that is those efforts focused on postsecondary education and education to workforce gaps. My conceptual framework in Chapter 5 builds on our understanding of the role of network leadership within the context of collaboration and uses organizational learning theory as the theoretical grounding for understanding and measuring whether and how collective impact network leaders move from early efforts of network formation to aligning members' practices and policies. I then provide the methodology I used to investigate my research questions, outlining my qualitative multiple case study, sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures in Chapter 6.

My findings begin with Chapter 7, which provides the dimensions and context of the 14 networks that I have studied, starting with my pilot study, and detailing the nine networks that provided the case studies for this dissertation. Chapter 8 presents my findings regarding the process of discovery that network leaders engaged in to create a sense of urgency about the problem among community leaders using data and other sources of evidence. In Chapter 9, I discuss the approach that some of the network leaders took to challenge traditional shared systems of measurement by posing questions about institutional and systemic constraints and

inequities that could prevent more than surface level (or first order) changes. Finally, in Chapter 10, I conclude with my assessment of the limitations, contributions, and implications of this dissertation as well as suggestions for future research in this field.

CHAPTER 2 | SOCIAL, CAUSE-BASED, AND PLACE-BASED COLLABORATION APPROACHES AND THEORIES

This chapter synthesizes the literature on various types of collaboration frameworks and approaches that have been used for over a century in the US. It also outlines collaboration efforts that fall specifically within the bounds of those that have been focused on social issues, particular causes, and those that have set geographical boundaries around the places and populations for whom they are attempting to effect change. First I explain why understanding the literature on collaborations with these parameters matters to studying these kinds of collaborative efforts. Then, I provide a basis for definition of collaboration as well as the theoretical underpinnings of the term in the context of organizations in the public realm.

In the next section of the chapter, I synthesize several analyses from different fields regarding the history of collaborative efforts and how they have been studied through various theoretical lenses, including interorganizational relations, policy reform, civic responsibility, integrative leadership, and organizational behavior. From these theoretical lenses, many researchers have begun to apply parameters to different kinds of collaborative efforts in order to understand what factors, conditions, or approaches might be particularly necessary for certain kinds of collaborations to succeed. They also illuminate what might be missing from extant conceptual frameworks on collaboration when applied to different contexts. Finally, I summarize what we can take from this literature review on the history of collaboration, especially those that are social, cause-based, and place based, as a way of framing and contextualizing the rise of collective impact as a framework, which I review in depth in Chapter 3.

Why the History of Collaboration Matters

This dissertation attempts to add to our understanding of how network leaders' early years of implementation of a collective impact effort for improving educational outcomes is shaped by their own approach to leadership as well as the strategies they use to overcome challenges, especially when they are unable to implement the collective impact model with fidelity. In order to understand the collective impact model and how it garnered popularity in use after the coinage of the term in 2011, we must first situate collective impact among other collaboration frameworks, which have a long history in the US. Collaboration, by itself, is a ubiquitous strategy applied to innumerable situations and phenomena. Thus, for ease of grounding this literature review in more relevant terms, I have synthesized literature that has particularly addressed social, issue-based, and/or place-based collaboration approaches. These parameters are not mutually exclusive and they provide a rich harvest of sources from researchers in various fields that have attempted to tackle the history of collaborative frameworks, programs, and strategies.

Ultimately, the kinds of collaborative efforts I have undertaken to study—collective impact networks that attempt to address educational outcomes such as postsecondary enrollment and completion and education-to-workforce gaps—fit all three parameters as social, cause-based, place-based collaborations. They are focused on a social issue, that of educational attainment, and, in some cases, how education is associated with workforce gaps. They are cause-based in that they all, in some way, attempt to address inequities and/or disparities in outcomes between different population groups as they relate to educational outcomes and, potentially, their education-to-workforce transitions and results. And, they are place-based because they all address the outcomes of a given population within certain geographical bounds, usually smaller

than state boundaries (with some exceptions for very small states), and usually closer to a single or several counties, parishes, cities or towns. In the next chapter, I delve deeper into more recent, specific literature on what Henig (Henig et al., March 2016; Henig et al., 2015) and his colleagues call “cross-sector collaborations for education.” First, however, it is important to understand the broader history of social, cause-based, and/or place-based collaborations from various fields in order to catalogue what we already know about different leadership styles and theoretical frameworks regarding collaborative efforts in various situations and under various conditions.

What is Collaboration, Anyway?

Collaboration is not a new concept among those working in educational or other social and caused-based efforts, but the term itself has lacked coherence, until recently, as an emerging and distinct approach or set of practices across scholars and practitioners. Just before the collective impact era began, Thomson, Perry and Miller’s (2009) seminal work on *Conceptualizing and Measuring Collaboration* provided a theoretical framework for collaboration that was grounded in both a synthesis of literature on the subject as well as in the findings from an empirical study that collected data from 20 collaborative networks. They clarify and integrate the earlier work of several prominent researchers on collaboration, interorganizational cooperation, and organizational behavior, including Gray (1989, 1996, 2000), Huxham (1996, 2003), Huxham & Vangen (2000), Ring & Van de Ven (1994), and Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman (1986). From these works, Thomson and colleagues provide a framework for understanding the process of collaboration, conceptualizing the approaches to the work as having five variable dimensions:

1. *Governance*: Participants in any collaborative effort have to come up with a way to jointly decide on the rules, structures, actions, the types of information needed to make decisions, and how benefits will be distributed to all members of the collaboration. There is no one way that is best for deciding on a governance structure, but it will involve some level of shared responsibilities for both the approaches to and the outcomes of the work.
2. *Administration*: Structures for implementation and management must be put in place in order to seek to ensure that participants do what it takes to reach a collective goal. This is necessarily more complex than typical administrative duties within organizations because all of the collaborative's participants are autonomous or semiautonomous, which risks having ambiguity of roles, responsibilities, and mechanisms for accountability for whatever actions or changes are agreed upon by participants.
3. *Organizational Autonomy*: A signature feature of collaboration is that various autonomous organizations remain autonomous, but also do work toward a collective interest. This can create tension between the organization's self interest and the goals of the collaborative group. The key to striking balance between these two potentially contradictory interests is what these authors call "dynamism"—finding the "edges of chaos,"³ where there is enough room for mutual benefit because organizations are not completely comfortable with their own current outcomes but there is not so much chaos as to interrupt goodwill efforts.
4. *Mutuality*: This is described as interdependence that results in benefits to both or all participants based on either different interests (called complementarities) or shared

³ They borrow this phrase and concept from Judith Innes' work *Evaluating Consensus Building* (1999).

interests (such as moral obligations or commitment to similar outcomes, like shared interest in a particular target population).

5. *Norms*: Among the expectations among participants that are particular to collaboration are standards of *trust*, *reciprocity*, and what they call an “I-will-if-you-will” or *tit-for-tat* mentality. They argue that these norms or standard rules of engagement, even when outlined in writing as in memoranda of understanding between participants, are often fragile mores that must be coaxed into more formal reciprocal exchanges over time.

With these five dimensions in place, Thomson and colleagues set out to test the construct validity of the dimensions they proposed in their cohesive theoretical framework for understanding the essence of collaboration.

Their ultimate definition of collaboration is as follows:

Collaboration is a process in which autonomous or semi-autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions⁴ (p. 25).

⁴ Thomson and colleagues ensure that readers understand that: “It is important to acknowledge that this definition of collaboration is strongly influenced by Wood and Gray’s (1991) definition—an important definition because it is one of the only definitions in the literature that is derived from a synthesis of findings from nine studies on the subject. This definition expands on Wood and Gray’s in that it (1) incorporates key phrases and words from a much broader review of the literature, (2) is rooted in commonalities among multiple theoretical perspectives, (3) expands on the governance and administration aspects of collaboration, (4) incorporates a process framework into the definition, (5) contains identifiable key dimensions, and (6) provides the basis for a covariance structure model of collaboration whose fit has been empirically tested with sample data” (p. 25).

They found that the dimensions were supported by their structural equation model of collaboration, with one exception: items measuring reciprocity had weak statistical support compared to the overall importance that the literature they reviewed held for reciprocity as an important feature of collaboration. They hypothesized that building toward reciprocity can take time and it can be hard for smaller organizations or those with fewer resources to buy in or make changes necessary to see improved outcomes early on in a collaborative effort. While this may be true, further research is needed to understand if reciprocity can indeed be built over time and under what conditions reciprocity occurs.

Social and Cause-Based Collaboration

Collaborative practices, such as jointly identifying systems gaps at a local or regional level, pooling resources for interventions and advocacy, and building out efforts with common goals and values, have been long recognized as promising practices across civic, educational and social services, with rapidly increasing popularity since the late 1990s and early 2000s. The more recently coined framework *collective impact*, and related publications about it from the past five years, have caused a flurry of responses by researchers and scholars across various disciplines who have all urgently pointed out that both the phenomenon of collaboration around social issues and research-based frameworks for understanding, measuring, and defining cause-based collaboration have existed for decades. In the past 18 months, three groups of researchers independently published literature reviews attempting to connect *collective impact* to a larger body of work and against the backdrop of previous research on collaborative frameworks that go by other names, such as coalitions, networks, and community organizing (Christens & Inzeo, 2015; Henig et al., 2015; Danielle Wood, 2016). They came to similar conclusions regarding the caution with which future research should approach the recent hype created by the new term,

although they each situated their investigation of collective impact slightly differently within the literature.

In their review, Henig and company (2015) call out three major waves of collaboration efforts (related to social and educational outcomes among a given population specifically) that both rose and fell in popularity of implementation and funding from the Progressive Era of the early 20th century up through the revitalized recent attempts at community coordination via collective impact and other frameworks. These include:

1) community-based poverty alleviation programs of the 1890s-1950s (such as urban settlement houses and school-based neighborhood centers);

2) government-funded coordination efforts of the 1960s-1980s (such as community action agencies and the Model Cities initiative); and

3) cross-sector collaborations of the 1990s to present (such as school-based external services coordination and comprehensive community initiatives [CCIs]).

In an important study on the collaborations formed within the context of the creation of charter schools in the 1990s and early 2000s, Wohlstetter and her colleagues (2004) explored what they called *cross-sectoral alliances* between public, for-profit and non-profit organizations. In this exploratory study, Wohlstetter, et al, concluded that while collaborations were indeed necessary for enhancing the capacity of the organizations involved as well as the outcomes that charter schools were attempting to facilitate, further research on the “types, ranges, content and impacts” of such collaborative efforts could unveil the conditions under which such work can be developed and sustained (p. 1094). In order to describe the types and approaches that different

collaborative efforts represent as they unfold, it is helpful to synthesize the conceptual field of social or cause-based collaboration frameworks already catalogued by researchers.

Henig and colleagues (Henig et al., March 2016) note that much of the same enthusiasm and evangelism that we see today about *collective impact* was seen with Empowerment Zones in the late 1990s and early 2000s—the most noteworthy example perhaps being the Harlem Children’s Zone founded by Geoffrey Canada and praised by numerous mayors, governors and US presidents. Finally, they review the landscape and context from the past two decades of collaborative efforts that have aimed at impacting educational outcomes specifically. They assert that the salient debate over school versus social factors—the juxtaposition as to whether either in-school time can most influence student outcomes or alleviating social ills like poverty and racism will better improve students’ futures—has been replaced by a both/and movement, one that promotes community programs *and* social policy changes as complements to formal schooling, all adding up to better futures for more children. They argue that this political climate, in turn, has called for holistic approaches to collaboration that include all sectors of life that can impact a person’s opportunities and lifelong outcomes, and has therefore shepherded in a revitalized interest in coordination across government, non-governmental and private organizations, institutions, and funders to work together to address issues that impact educational gains. This has led to some funding for *promise neighborhoods*, “full service community schools,” and scholarship incentive programs and statewide “promise” funds for low-income students to attend college, examples of which exist as thriving programs today.

Similarly, Christens and Inzeo (2015) also recount several decades of collaborative efforts in the US across the fields of health, social services, education and other social outcomes arenas. They focus on the aftermath of the *War on Poverty* and *The Great Society* in the 1980s

and beyond, arguing that, by then, Americans were skeptical of government investments and that deep cuts in government spending led to more frugal innovations such as inter-organizational partnerships—a side effect of the do-more-with-less era that we are, in many ways, still experiencing. They call out the difference between collaboration as a strategy (e.g., Labonte, Woodard, Chad, & Laverack, 2002; Lasker, Weiss, & Miller, 2001) and collaboration as an organizational structure (Hays, Hays, DeVille, & Mulhall, 2000), both of which have a correspondingly rich history of empirical research. Furthermore, they argue that *collective impact* simply builds on previous attempts to implement collaboration as an organizational structure in the same way that frameworks for *interorganizational networks* and *coalitions* have established understanding of collaboration in the past (see, for example: Feinberg, Riggs, & Greenberg, 2005; Zakocs & Edwards, 2006). Specifically, Christens & Inzeo point out that previous research suggests a number of strategies and conditions for success within collaborative structures that mirror what collective impact enthusiasts often tout as part of their innovative framework (without paying homage to decades of research that came before them). They summarize this mirroring as such:

[R]esearch findings on coalitions and community collaboration reviewed...suggest that successful collaborations can rarely be effectively initiated from the outside (Feinberg, Greenberg, & Osgood, 2004; Wolff, 2001), that positive internal relationships between participants are critical to success (Brown, Feinberg, & Greenberg, 2012; Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, et al., 2001), and that member diversity and formalization of rules and procedures are important in achieving goals (Zakocs & Edwards, 2006). (p. 431)

Indeed, as the features of collective impact are reviewed in the next section, one can find many parallels between the characteristics of the “new” collaboration model that is collective impact

and that of the summary of research on collaborative efforts of the past as offered in the quote above.

In Prange, Allen, and Reiter-Palmon's (2016) literature review comparing collective impact and collaboration, they frame collaboration in terms of its study within academic disciplines, most prominently in the realms of organizations, leadership, social work, education, and as a general practice. Interestingly, they do not call out health or labor force issues like previously mentioned authors do, though that may be because of the number of results produced from their key search terms of "collaboration" and "collective impact," (not including "coalitions," "networks," and similar phrases more common to those disciplines). However, they do propose that analyzing the level of participants on which collaboration is intended to have consequences and/or effect change—social, organizational/interorganizational, and/or personal/individual—as a useful way of delineating the terms used to describe the phenomenon. They argue that the majority of empirical studies of collaboration have studied the organization level, across all fields, and that far fewer studies have been produced at the inter-organizational level. This is confirmed by several researchers who specialize in within-organization versus between-organization dynamics within leadership, business, and education (e.g. Barringer, 2000; Brummel, Nelson, & Jakes, 2012; Hardy & Phillips, 1998; Hardy, Phillips, & Lawrence, 2003; K. G. Smith, Carroll, & Ashford, 1995). They suggest that it is perhaps partially because of this lack of empirical research at higher levels of engagement and interaction that collective impact, with its focus on both interorganizational and cross-sectoral alignment, has been trumpeted as new and innovative rather than as building on past research.

From Collaboration to Collective Impact

In recent decades, theories from organizational decision-making have highlighted and explored the phenomena of collaboration among various individuals, groups, institutions, and organizations (for example, see Williamson, 1983, for a review of theories like *transaction cost economics* and similar organizational literature over fifty years, beginning in the late 1930s). More recently, authors have focused on the particular challenges of collaborations between different social service sectors and within given fields (Austin, 2000). Furthermore, all three of the recently published literature reviews covered in this chapter that attempt to make sense of the rise in popularity of collective impact come to three similar conclusions about what the history of research around collaboration tells us about the current state of the field:

- 1) Collaboration is not new and researchers who intend to investigate collective impact or any other framework for understanding collaboration ought first to situate the efforts in light of longstanding empirical lines of research (such as interorganizational collaboration, cross-sector collaborations, and coalition building conceptualizations).
- 2) Much of what we know about what works in collaborative efforts has been established via empirical studies of the phenomena, revealing that most of the characteristics of collective impact as a framework are not innovative, but the totality of its framework may provide a fresh approach in a new context.
- 3) Some tools for understanding and evaluating collaborations have also already been established, although there is still much work to be done around understanding how collaborative efforts affect organizational and systems-level change as an indication of later impact on student-level outcomes in education.

The following section outlines the collective impact framework in particular and its presumed conditions for implementation and compares it to other frameworks for describing and studying collaboration more broadly.

CHAPTER 3 | THE “CREATION” AND ADOPTION OF COLLECTIVE IMPACT AS A COLLABORATION STRATEGY

The recognition of a persistent and pronounced gap in college-going rates despite an understanding of barriers and solutions points to a common conclusion that many social sectors have made: the need for *collaboration* among service providers. Collective impact, as it is known today as a framework for collaborative efforts, was first described in a paper by John Kania and Mark Kramer in the fall of 2011 in an article published by *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Since then they and their colleagues at FSG have written supplemental articles and white papers outlining the collective impact model, gleaned from their experiences with several education-, health-, and natural resources/environmentally-focused cross-sector collaboration projects. This framework is one in a lineage of frameworks for describing collaborative efforts and cross-sector partnerships. This section first describes collective impact’s characteristics, preconditions, and stages of development as outlined by FSG authors, followed by a brief outline of several other popular frameworks that were used by researchers before and after collective impact’s rise in use as an implementation framework.

Collective Impact as a Compact Framework

Although they did not collect empirical data on the efforts they describe, Kania and Kramer (2011) did distill their experiences, as well as descriptions from reports on specific efforts, into what they call the five conditions for successful collective impact coalitions. Their list of conditions may be better characterized as the most common strategies, activities, or characteristics of the organizations with which they were familiar and included in their distillation. Their five “conditions” are as follow:

1. *Common Agenda* They describe this as having many actors acting “in concert” toward a defined and agreed-upon single set of outcomes and indicators for a given population, region, or social issue (or all three). This is in contrast to having multiple individual organizations or activities with differing goals, and potentially, different ways of measuring progress.
2. *Shared Measurement System* This refers to the way that the agreed-upon indicators and outcomes will be measured, including defining terms and identifying measurement tools. Such common measurements are also intended to increase efficiency, decrease cost of data collection, and improve quality and credibility of the data itself.
3. *Mutually Reinforcing Activities* This refers to the independent activities that member organizations ought to conduct that are coordinated with others’ activities (not necessarily new activities or shared activities, though that could be an outcome of alignment as they note later in their article).
4. *Continuous Communication* They describe continuous communication as ideal when members have had several years of regular and consistent interaction that is also built along lines of trust and mutual respect. They note that member organizations need to know that individual efforts or organizations will not be prioritized over others, but that decisions will be based on objective evidence about how to best solve the core issue that the group is attempting to address.
5. *Backbone Support Organization* Because individual participating organizations often do not have the time or necessary skills to coordinate the collective meetings and to drive the agenda of the group forward, they assert that a separate, skilled organization must serve as the backbone of the entire initiative.

In this foundational article, Kania and Kramer (2011) do not outline how organizations and groups from across sectors can go about creating these conditions (or initiating these strategies, activities or characteristics), but they and their colleagues provide further prescriptive information on what they have concluded are other parts of successful collective impact initiatives in subsequent articles. In their next work, Fay Hanleybrown, along with Kania and Kramer (2012), identify three preconditions that they believe must be in place before launching a collective impact initiative in order for that initiative to have the best chances for success:

1. *Influential Champion*. This refers to the need to have a dynamic leader (or small group of leaders) who have the clout and recognition necessary to command the attention of other CEO-level leaders from across a wide range of organizations and multiple sectors. They also call this “dynamic leadership” with a focus on passion for problem solving yet also the skills necessary to let the group come to their own conclusions on strategies and solutions.
2. *Financial Resources*. Simply put, they state that there must be liquid, available, and willing funding for up to the first two or three years of the initiative to fund infrastructure and planning activities. This usually takes the form of a single funder that is actively involved and willing to bring other funders on board during those early years.
3. *Urgency for Change*. This is described as something compelling such as a highly publicized social crisis, a large pot of funding that could entice interest in collaborating, or a new approach/innovation in the work that could impact a large numbers of people. They suggest publishing a report documenting the problem and its importance and gaining media attention for that report so that it is widely read and gains momentum by word of mouth.

Finally, in that same article, these authors suggest that there are three distinct stages in the life of a collective impact initiative as described below:

Phase I, *Initiate Action*, requires an understanding of the landscape of key players and the existing work underway, baseline data on the social problem to develop the case for change, and an initial governance structure that includes strong and credible champions.

Phase II, *Organize for Impact*, requires that stakeholders work together to establish common goals and shared measures, create a supporting backbone infrastructure, and begin the process of aligning the many organizations involved to the shared goals and measures.

Phase III, *Sustain Action and Impact*, requires that stakeholders pursue prioritized areas for action in a coordinated way, systematically collect data, and put in place sustainable processes that enable active learning and course correcting as they track progress toward their common goals (Hanleybrown et al., 2012, p. np).

As mentioned above, the FSG researchers who wrote these articles provided no theoretical grounding nor empirical methodological overview for their basis of these descriptions of and prescriptive overviews for successful collective impact initiatives. Many of the details of their framework are, however, found in empirical examples of collaborations using research-based conceptual frameworks for understanding and describing similar efforts.

To date, Brian Christens and Paula Tran Inzeo (2015) provide the most comprehensive literature review of conceptual frameworks that can be used to describe and understand local, cross-sector, cause-based collaborative initiatives, particularly those that aim to affect social outcomes such as education, health, and socioeconomic advancement. Furthermore, they identify

four frameworks that are the most commonly applied and that also happen to include similar characteristics and conditions as those found in Hanleybrown, Kania, and Kramer's (2012) overview of the collective impact framework. They situate collective impact among those four frameworks, detailing their distinctions and similarities, and, ultimately, offer recommendations on the factors to which researchers should pay particular attention when studying collaborative practices and initiatives.

In particular, Christens and Inzeo (2015) call out *coalition building*, *social network analysis*, and *grassroots community organizing* as frameworks to which collective impact bears resemblance. They suggest the following similarities:

1. Research from coalition building frameworks suggests that successful collaborations can rarely gain or sustain any momentum without support from an outside organization (e.g., Feinberg et al., 2005), similar to what collective impact champions name by calling out the necessity of a backbone organization.
2. Research from social network analysis frameworks suggests that trust and positive relationships between member organizations matters (e.g., Nowell & Foster-Fishman, 2011) in the same way that continuous communication (mentioned specifically by Kania and Kramer, 2011) aims to build and maintain those trusting relationships.
3. Research from all three frameworks suggests that formalizations of rules and procedures related to how the group will measure and achieve goals is deeply correlated with successful collaboration outcomes (e.g., Zakocs & Edwards, 2006); this echos the conditions prescribed around a shared measurement system and common agenda, the first two conditions outlined by Hanleybrown, Kania and Kramer (2012).

Finally, Christens and Inzeo (2015) call out the distinct differences between the collective impact framework and community organizing frameworks, such as grassroots community organizing. They summarize that, while collective impact prioritizes leadership and trust building, community organizing centers power, especially as power dynamics play out in the formation, maintenance, and measurement processes of initiatives. They argue that not paying attention to imbalances of power, within the group of collaborators as well as in the broader public arena, may limit collective impact's potential for deep social change. Similarly, they argue that community organizing frameworks encourage and empower nonprofessional residents to play vital and central roles in the direction of the initiative, whereas, again, collective impact frameworks identify and emphasize professional leadership and its clout and connectedness to other powerful leaders. In response to this and similar criticisms, Richard Harwood (2014) encourages collective impact proponents and practitioners to address community civic cultural conditions, such as community ownership, localized strategies that fit community context, and other community-oriented practices. However, he does not go so far as to say that community members should participate in leadership and goal-setting, and he does not call out the implicit power dynamics that are assumed when one separates out the "community" from the "leaders" of an initiative—an implicit bias that underscores the lack of collective impact's centering of power in its framework.

Chapter Summary

Now that I have established a sense of where collective impact fits into both the larger narrative of research on cross-sector collaborative efforts as well as in relation to other, perhaps more established frameworks for describing and understanding collaboration as a phenomenon, I turn to a more particular type of cross-sector collaboration that, increasingly, is being coupled

with the collective impact framework: cross-sector collective impact collaborations for increasing postsecondary and workforce outcomes. In the next chapter, I review the specific boundaries that are helpful to place around these particular cases and what makes them both unique and useful in understanding collaboration work generally.

CHAPTER 4 | COLLABORATIONS AIMED AT IMPROVING POSTSECONDARY AND WORKFORCE OUTCOMES: A FIELD WITHIN A FIELD

As noted above, a number of researchers who are exploring the rise in usage of collective impact in particular have noted that the rise in cross-sector and inter-organizational collaboration in general has gained particular momentum within the field of education over the past two decades. Furthermore, in their empirical landscape scan of 182 cross-sector collaborations nationally, Henig and his colleagues (March 2016) found that the vast majority of collaborations included representatives from higher education (87%; second only to K-12 school/district leadership involvement) and the majority track indicators related to the transition from high school to college (postsecondary enrollment, postsecondary completion, postsecondary readiness, high school graduation, career track, and/or postsecondary advisement). This indicates that the transition between K-12 and higher education may be a particular field within the larger field of education that is ripe for collaborative efforts. In order to understand the rise of collaborative efforts aimed at impacting outcomes related to the K-12 to postsecondary transition point, we must first understand the history of attempts made to increase postsecondary education outcomes broadly and how that led to various forms of cross-sector and interorganizational collaboration in particular. This section describes the rise of individual interventions aimed at addressing postsecondary outcomes nationally, at the state level, and in particular regions or within particular populations. Then it outlines various permutations of collaborations that gave rise to the more commonly recognized efforts today, many of which lay claim to the use of the collective impact framework.

Postsecondary Opportunity Gap in the US: Programs and Interventions

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the US experienced a peak in public and private funding investment in individual education-focused program interventions aimed at increasing the rate of postsecondary completion, particularly among minority students. During that period, programs like TRiO, Gear Up, Posse Foundation, and others separately formed or vastly expanded services in order to try to interrupt cycles of poverty among underserved populations by increasing educational attainment (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Glennan, Bodilly, Galegher, & Kerr, 2004; Vaade, 2010). What followed our nation's period of deep investment in minority-focused programs was a period of assessment, landscape mapping, and reflection on the collective outcomes for the youth and young adults of America: Were they enrolling in postsecondary programs at higher rates, were they persisting, were more underrepresented populations completing degrees and landing living-wage and higher-wage jobs? Answers to these questions were mixed, at best, and often riddled with caveats and tones of deep criticism regarding the isolated efforts and impacts of individual programs (Bial & Gandara, 2001; Kirst, Venezia, & Antonio, 2004; Perna & Swail, 2002).

Finally, there has been a rise in and a renewed focus on collective impact efforts, with funders like Lumina, the Gates Foundation, and many other foundations restructuring their grant-making strategies in order to support “backbone organizations” and other partnership conveners (often while also reducing funding to direct-service programs) (Allen, Miles, & Steinberg, 2014 Fall; Siegel, 2010). These recent efforts are distinct from past efforts in one key way: they are no longer primarily K-12-oriented in nature and focus. Rather, they are focused on the secondary-to-postsecondary-to-career end of the developmental pipeline. Yet, even a shallow review of literature that uses “collective impact” and “collaboration” and their synonyms as keywords

reveals that empirical studies aimed at understanding these efforts more often focus on K-12 partnerships and less on the postsecondary engagement and workforce transition end of the so-called “cradle to career” trajectory.

Currently, scholars studying these particular efforts propose varying terms (from “College Access Networks” to “Employment Sector Partnerships”) and theoretical and geographic boundaries (from single school district-focused higher education outcomes to multi-county/metropolitan employment gaps) (Daun-Barnett & Lamm, 2012; Holzer, 2013; King, 2011; Network, 2012; Perna, 2013; Richburg-Hayes, Armijo, & Merrill, 2013; Wolf-Powers & Andreason, 2013). Therefore, it is helpful to have a brief description of these collaboration networks as a point of departure. In many cases, they include K-12 school district central office administrators; admissions counselors and diversity recruiters from community colleges and four-year public and private universities; high school principals and guidance counselors; leaders of community-based college access intervention programs; and representatives from bodies such as the College Board and the offices of chief state school officers (such as state superintendents).

In some cases, postsecondary-focused collaboration networks are more heavily representative of local business and industry, higher education institutions and training services, and municipal offices. Often, the representatives from each of the member organizations or institutions identify different short and long term goals and milestones; however, all of them purport to attempt to increase the number of students from a given geographic area (school district, multi-district region, municipality, or metropolitan geographic region) who are prepared for, who enroll in, and who complete a postsecondary degree or certificate programs and/or enter into middle-income or, in some cases, otherwise-defined competitive employment. Put another way, these groups are not the same as the statewide K-16 or P-20 councils, which are often

created and directed by a governor or chief state school officer (Kirst & Usdan, 2009; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2008); rather, the groups that are the focus of this paper are strategically concentrated locally or regionally (Daun-Barnett & Lamm, 2012). See Figure 1 for a visual representation of an example of what this kind of collaboration group often looks like.

Given their mission and work to date, cross-sector collaborations aimed at improving postsecondary attainment sit at the confluence of multiple, separate systems across the P-20 continuum.⁵ In this space, they are attempting to—either explicitly or implicitly—respond to and implement many of the recommendations of researchers from the field of higher education opportunity and success. Specifically, researchers have called for deeper and more meaningful *horizontal* collaboration of college access interventions and other preparation work that now occurs within schools and districts (Wohlstetter, Malloy, Hentschke, & Smith, 2004), as well as those who have called for *vertical* alignment of policies and practices across interventions, schools, districts, state governing bodies, higher education institutions and ultimately, state and federal policies (Kirst, 2008).

Therefore, such collaborations are promising given their grounding in the findings of some of the best research in higher education access and completion strategies to date. Collaboration to improve educational outcomes is by its very nature, however, both complicated and prone to the same challenges that have stalled state- and federal-level policy work, such as the need for appropriate leadership, capacity for changes in practice, and supportive contexts in which goals and outcomes can be aligned for those involved (Amey, Eddy, & Ozaki, 2007;

⁵ For states in which the state educational governing bodies are not organized under a single department of education structure, the state higher education institutions are not part of the same statewide university or college system—these separate entities are perhaps more disparate than those in most other states.

Bryson, Crosby, & Stone, 2006; Gillam et al., 2016; Siegel, 2010; Stone, Henig, Jones, & Pierannunzi, 2001; Wohlstetter et al., 2004).

As mentioned above, although some research has been conducted exploring the goals and outcomes of collaborations such as K-12 community-school partnerships as well as the conditions under which they thrive, little is known about the outcomes and conditions for success related to the work of cross-sector collaborations aimed at improving postsecondary attainment efforts. Furthermore, researchers who study the implementation of educational collaborations in general have called for a better understanding of the contexts under which educational leaders can engage in and respond to the work of these coalitions in a way that is different from typical top-down policy changes within school districts, and, rather, supports the enacting of new policies that build on the knowledge and work, and therefore ownership, of community partners on the ground (Honig, 2003; McLaughlin, 2006). Because these collaborative efforts were originally born out of a context of siloed interventions—individual efforts targeting a small subset of students or families—that attempted to work in or on schools, we must first understand the outcomes of those interventions and how those led to broader collaborations later on.

Interventions: Promising Strategies and (Limited) Results

The postsecondary educational attainment increases that have been documented over the past 50 or more years can more or less be attributed to the thousands of local, statewide and federal interventions that attempt to directly increase college-readiness and attainment among underrepresented groups. Patricia Gandara's work provides one of the most comprehensive summaries of these types of interventions, including why they are promising and how much they cost to implement relative to their outcomes (Bial & Gandara, 2001; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Gandara and Contreras organize these interventions into four types of intervention

organizations: *Private Nonprofits* such as I Have a Dream (IHAD) and Posse; *Community-Based* organizations such as Puente; *Government-Sponsored* programs such as Upward Bound; and *K-12 Sponsored* programs such as AVID (2009). For example, in their review of interventions, they found that one model element stood out above all others across contexts and populations as the most promising strategy for college-readiness interventions:

Nothing appears to be more important for helping underrepresented students navigate successfully through high school and into college than the formation of a strong relationship with a caring adult who truly knows the student. Mentoring, defined in this way, is the single most common characteristic of all of the successful intervention programs we assessed, and it seems crucial to each program's success (p. 292).

Furthermore, empirical studies and evaluations of college-readiness intervention programs have found that programs that can boast success related to student postsecondary outcomes as well as showing scalability to various locations and under various conditions generally involve one or more of the following six model elements or strategies: 1) Individual student counseling about college is a key component for programs that want to increase postsecondary enrollment (Ascher & Maguire, 2007; Avery & Kane, 2007; Field, 2008; Gandara & Contreras, 2009); 2) Including academic enrichment in the form of tutoring or additional exposure to content is important for success across many indicators (ACT, 2006; Domina, 2009; Gandara & Contreras, 2009); 3) Personal and cultural support is key for programs; recognition that a healthy peer group is critical to success (Avery & Kane, 2007; Bial & Gandara, 2001; Colyar, 2011; DesJardins & McCall, 2009; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). 4) Mentoring—the monitoring of a student by a concerned and connected adult—provides the most return on

investment (Avery & Kane, 2007; Field, 2008; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Kezar, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c); 5) To some degree, the student's perceived ability to pay for college is correlated with his/her likelihood of both enrolling and completing higher education (DesJardins & McCall, 2009; Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2006; Gandara & Contreras, 2009; John, 2011); 6) Parental involvement is important for transition-focused programs (Ascher & Maguire, 2007; Chambers & Deller, 2011; Colyar, 2011; Domina, 2009; Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

At the same time, many researchers have called for both better research around and a better understanding of the causal effects of college access interventions and their specific components. One promising program, the I Have a Dream (IHAD) program in Chicago, received much press and praise for its outcomes, which doubled high school graduation and nearly tripled college enrollment rates compared to participants' peers in the region. Yet the studies conducted on IHAD were unable to control for the fact that more than half of their participants were removed from public school and placed in private Catholic schools, on scholarship (Kahne, 2001). In other cases, researchers raise issues of self-selection bias (or "creaming interventions" that select participants most likely to succeed) as well as scalability of the programs, especially when empirical and evaluation studies of these programs fail to list these as limiting factors for their findings.

For example, psychologists Larzelere, Kuhn, and Johnson (2004) call into question numerous studies on educational interventions that fail, methodologically, to take into consideration how participants were selected for or opted into programming. They coin this practice "intervention creaming," a metaphor related to skimming the cream off of the top of milk; Domina (2009) calls the intervention efforts "superfluous activity" when it involves students who are already more likely than their peers to enroll in and complete postsecondary

education. The IHAD program, Indiana's Twenty-first Century Scholars Program, the Oklahoma Higher Education Access Program, the State Promise Scholarships, and a number of other similar programs, have each faced this criticism. Researcher and public policy analyst Saul Schwartz (2008) specifically calls into question the registration processes of these early commitment scholarship and support programs, as well as the empirical and evaluation efforts that have been conducted on them in general:

Since these are voluntary programs, it is likely to be the case that the self-selected volunteers either are much more motivated to succeed or have much stronger support from parents and other adults than nonvolunteers. If so, comparing them to the general population of nonparticipants may greatly overstate the benefits of the program... [t]he difficulty in correcting for self-selection bias means that few serious evaluations of these voluntary programs have been undertaken. (p. 126)

Researchers also often call into question the feasibility of programs to scale up to serve more students and families so as to make a real systemic difference, depending on their costs per participant. For example, an evaluation of the Posse Foundation program in New York found that 90 percent of their students (mostly urban African-American or Latino youth) graduated from college, but that the costs of the program were between \$3,585 (for students who did not receive one of the foundation's tuition scholarships) and \$21,310 (for students who did receive scholarships) (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). This adds up to a budget of more than \$4.6 million per year to serve little more than 200 students. Compounding this challenging budget, many of the students involved already showed aptitude for leadership and academic achievement before being served by the Posse Foundation programming.

Because of the limitations researchers face in determining causal links between programming and outcomes, as well as for assessing whether the cost for programming would be a viable model for scaling to more than a handful of students, Gandara and Contreras argue that we can point to best practices but no concrete conclusions: "We do not argue in favor of an ongoing, ad hoc set of interventions that simply append themselves to schools in nonintegrated ways." Rather, "we must move forward now with the best research and cost estimates that we have at hand to implement the most effective strategies available" (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Others argue that there is a way to assess quality without conducting complicated or expensive evaluation studies. An example is the Center for Youth Program Quality, which promotes the assessment of program qualities that researchers have found to be associated with positive youth outcomes [rather than waiting for years to assess outcomes themselves?] (C. Smith et al., 2012). Still others push for more rigorous studies, especially quasi-experimental designs, that can tell us more about "what works" in a causal way among various postsecondary preparation and transition intervention programs.⁶

The Challenges of Siloed Programming, Despite Best Efforts

Outside of evaluation and scalability challenges, many postsecondary readiness and transition intervention programs also face more basic challenges, perhaps because of their relatively siloed approach. First, some programs report not being able to access the students they are most trying to reach because of the significant number of steps required to work with a given school or school district. For example, researchers estimate that only five percent of Latinos who could benefit from them are actually served by postsecondary readiness and transition programs

⁶ See, for example, Thurston Domina's study, 2009 and her implications for research using longitudinal data and quasi-experimental design regarding three different programs.

across the US (Bial & Gandara, 2001; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). At the same time, many promising programs, especially those in urban areas, face drastic competition for funding, even if their outcomes are highly promising. This is especially true for programs that rely on government funding; given the recession's lingering effects over the last eight years, government-backed programs like TRiO are only able to serve, again, five percent of the 11 million students across the US who are eligible for program services because of cutbacks in funding (Hanleybrown et al., 2012).

At the same time, many private and family foundations are also cutting back on funding or changing their approach to grant-making for a variety of reasons. Foundations may be attempting to use their philanthropic influence to encourage collaborative grant proposals and/or to focus their giving on "collective impact" organizations such as those that the Stanford Social Innovation Review have called "backbone organizations" (Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Turner, Merchant, Kania, & Martin, 2012). Backbone organizations are those that coordinate, formally or informally, the direct service of other organizations, rather than implementing the direct service. Some researchers have found that direct service organizations feel "squeezed" out of grants that they would have otherwise received because of the entre of these collective impact efforts in which they felt pressured to participate without any actual resource benefits, at least early on in their partnership (Turner et al., 2012).

Relatedly, postsecondary readiness and transition intervention programs often face competition for students (similar to the issue of access to students) in schools where students need the most support. Sometimes this creates "Christmas tree schools" and other experiences of "turf wars" within certain schools, districts and communities/regions, while other schools/regions are left begging for support services (Amey et al., 2007; Bragg & Russman, 2007). The latter is

especially true for suburban poverty regions just outside of urban centers, where they are too far away geographically to be reached by a group of intervention programs, but are still within the economic regions of concentrated low-income population (Kneebone & Berube, 2013). At the same time, many programs report not being able to access appropriate data to measure their effectiveness. This may be due to the necessity that they work directly with schools and/or districts to ensure that student-level data is handled with care and that it remains FERPA protected (Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007; Domina, 2009).

From Problems to Postsecondary Collective Impact Efforts

In the past decade, national non-profits that are supported by the Lumina Foundation, such as National College Access Network (NCAN) and National Partnership for Educational Access (NPEA), have created or revised their mission statements to include goals of fostering local and regional collaborations focused on increasing the number of underrepresented students who are prepared for, enroll in, and complete a postsecondary degree or credential ("National College Access Network," 2012; "National Partnership for Educational Access," 2012). With the support of these statewide and national networks, in community centers, libraries, and classrooms within urban and rural areas across the country there exist diverse groups of education practitioners, leaders and policymakers meeting regularly throughout the year to discuss topics such as "College Readiness," "Postsecondary Data Alignment," and "Access for College Bound Students." These groups usually include K-12 school district central office administrators; admissions counselors and diversity recruiters from community colleges and four-year public and private universities; high school principals and guidance counselors; leaders of community-based college access intervention programs; and representatives from bodies such as the College Board and the offices of chief state school officers (King, 2011).

Aligning the P-20 education work of separate systems and various policymakers and policy implementers can be a complicated process; it requires leaders and practitioners from semi-autonomous bodies to change policies and practices such that their work is beneficial to all of those involved in the education pipeline (Davis & Hoffman, 2008; Kirst & Usdan, 2009; Kirst et al., 2004). Yet before committing to these changes to policy and practice, those involved must come to an agreed-upon understanding of the issues as well as of possible solutions. An agreed upon understanding of the issues, in this case, usually involves some iteration of the persistent and pronounced gap in postsecondary opportunities between underrepresented students and their dominant culture peers (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009; Venezia & Kirst, 2005). Identifying possible solutions, meanwhile, usually involves coordinating the efforts of promising academic preparation and college access intervention and support programs (Domina, 2009; Gandara & Contreras, 2009) and supporting state and federal policies and recommendations through local efforts (Kirst, 2008; Rodriguez & Cruz, 2009).

Indeed, national groups that are funded by Lumina, Gates Foundation and others, as well as state governmental councils, have offered resources and support to burgeoning collaborative efforts that both utilize the collective impact framework and attempt to address pervasive postsecondary opportunity gaps among underrepresented students. They have also sponsored conferences and webinars to share best practices from early adopters of network strategies that may be backed by P-16/P-20 councils at the state level as well as creators of college access networks at the school district level (Giegerich, Summer 2010; Kirst & Usdan, 2009). This trend reflects in equal measure the fervor we have seen with the rise in popularity of the use of the collective impact framework generally and calls on researchers to frame these particular efforts

within the research around what we already know about collaboration generally and particularly what makes it effective.

Postsecondary Collective Impact Efforts: What We Can Expect Given Knowledge About Similar Efforts

Based on the literature reviewed above on the research conducted on collaborative efforts across many fields, we can say that collaborative efforts that employ collective impact as an organizing framework and that aim to increase postsecondary completion rates represent what policy researchers might call “cause-based, cross-sector partnerships” because of their focus and their approach (Barringer, 2000; Parker & Selsky, 2004; J. W. Selsky, 2005; John W. Selsky & Parker, 2010) Henig and his colleagues define similar collaborative efforts as local cross-sector collaborations for education (Henig et al., 2015). They also represent examples of “community-school partnerships” (Epstein, 2001; Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Sanders, 2009) as well as “collective impact coalitions” (Hanleybrown et al., 2012; Kania & Kramer, 2011; Nee & Jolin, 2012; Turner et al., 2012). While each of these bodies of literature lauds the work of collaborative groups as sites for innovation and broad leverage in the approach to social issues, there is a distinct lack of empirical research on how these particular types of collaborative efforts work and how they should measure success.

As noted, some of the early policy responses to the frustration with siloed interventions came in the form of P-20 and K-16 councils in a handful of states, although these have had generally disappointing results. At the same time, inter-organizational collaborations in education are not new and their work has been well documented (see, for example, National Association of Partners in Education, 2001). Education-related collaborative efforts, generally focused at the K-12 level, represent a growing trend in education in the United States; schools,

districts, cities and states recognize the value in both supporting specialized youth-serving programs beyond the schools that target students along a range of demographics, strengths, and risk factors and in supporting a more seamless continuum of partner organizations for the “hand-off” of kids at every stage in their educational trajectory. Such alliances can improve the capacity and depth of responsiveness of schools, districts and reforms in a way that individual educational institutions cannot do alone.

However, leaders in these types of educational collaborations also grapple with a number of challenges, such as capturing effective assessment of the outcomes of these efforts for all students in a given community, especially in the face of either uncoordinated data collection and analysis or a lack of data provided by individual nonprofits, schools, districts, (Wohlstetter et al., 2004). Given the promising outcomes and challenges found in some K-12 collaborations, collaborations focused on increasing postsecondary attainment may hold the same potential for systemic educational change and may also face the same, if not greater, obstacles to fulfilling their mission.

CHAPTER 5 | THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: COLLECTIVE IMPACT NETWORK CHAMPIONS AS LEADERS, LEARNERS AND AGENTS OF CHANGE

In this chapter, I unpack and synthesize two theories that, combined, helped me develop my guiding conceptual framework for conducting this study. I have already established that network directors, oftentimes referred to as “champions” in prescriptive collective impact literature, are the ones that drive the earliest years of a collaborative network’s efforts. The decisions they make and the practices and approaches they use to navigate early network turbulence can often lead to a network’s future success or demise. Whether they can or do employ the prescriptive collective impact framework with fidelity, and what they do if that framework is not appropriate for their contexts, can tell us something about the gaps or limitations in the collective impact framework itself.

In order to first understand the approaches and tactics that leaders like collective impact network champions often employ, I turned to Stephen Page’s integrative leadership theory. Page’s theory outlines the behaviors of leaders in civic spaces, and specifically in roles as collaboration conveners or those who are charged (formally or less formally) with enacting and empowering new work among many actors from across different sectors. Next, I turned to organizational learning theory to understand the particular practices that network leaders might employ as they engage with others in their collaborative efforts, while drawing on evidence and assistance to guide their collective work. Like integrative leadership theory, organizational learning theory is also ideal for use in understanding the behaviors of individuals under ambiguous conditions. Herbert Simon, James G. Marsh, and their colleagues have advanced a particular strand of organizational learning theory, often called “organizational learning from experience,” “trial-and-error learning,” and “learning under conditions of ambiguity.” This

strand of organizational learning theory has been, more recently, applied to the study of individual leaders and groups of leaders in other education-focused spaces. A recent and notable application of organizational learning theory to the practices and behaviors of educational leaders has been done by Meredith Honig and colleagues in the study of K-12 school district leaders as they implemented deep changes in district goals for teaching and learning (see, for example: Honig, Venkateswaran, McNeil, & Myers Twitchell, 2014). In her efforts to apply organizational learning theory to the work of educational leaders, Honig offers a synthesized version of organizational learning theory, on which my conceptual framework for this study is based.

Therefore, in this chapter, I provide an overview of an integrative leadership framework as synthesized by Stephen Page, alongside organizational learning theory as conceptualized by Meredith Honig. I explain how each framework lends dimensions of approach, practice, and conditions that are particularly applicable to collective impact networks that are in early stages of implementation and how concepts from each framework can be used to examine the experiences of network leaders. Finally, I summarize the dimensions of the frameworks as well as the limitations of employing this theoretical model.

Integrative Leadership

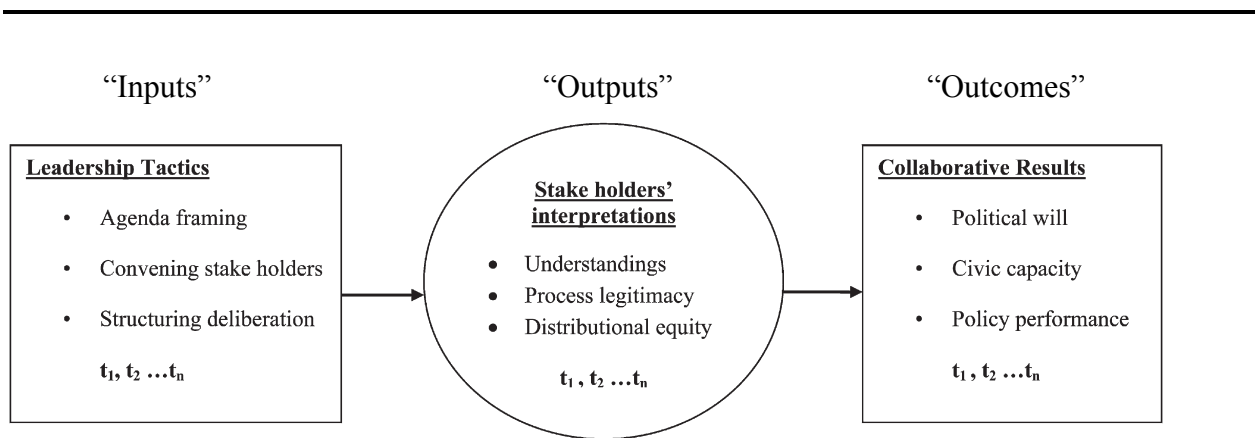
In the past decade, there has been growing interest in what some researchers have called “collaborative governance” (Ansell & Gash, 2007), “participatory governance” (Agranoff, 2008) and “collaborative government management” (O’Leary, Gerard, & Bingham, 2006). These are all labels for research that attempts to identify and describe the processes, approaches, and behaviors of various organizational participants working in conjunction who aim to address social issues that individual sectors, institutions, or organizations cannot address alone. In his work to synthesize commonalities between these strands of work, Stephen Page (2010) argues

that collaborative and participatory governance as well as collaborative government management, as theories, all tend to “blur traditional boundaries between organizations, sectors, and policy design and implementation” (p. 246). By this, he means that collaborative management theories that attempt to describe leadership processes end up conflating the actors and institutions that participate in a collaborative process with the processes by which they come together to work, which muddles the discrete actions and responsibilities of the participants with their civic or private roles as individual organizations. To address this confusion, Page offers a “parsimonious framework of tactics and constructs” with his cohesive framework of integrative leadership for collaborative governance.

While Page chose to apply his integrative leadership framework to issues mostly civic and public in nature, and those that heavily involved municipal government agencies, its concepts are useful for collaborations that involve participants from many sectors and with social issues that are not only civic in nature. Specifically, the theory of integrative leadership for collaborative governance outlines the tools and tactics to which leaders turn to address collaboration dilemmas and challenges. It identifies the concepts and empirical validity of the points at which multiple collaborative leadership theories intersect, providing a clearer conceptual grounding for measuring and comparing leadership tactics that are most common in cross-sectoral collaboration efforts. Page identifies what I am calling three “inputs” of leadership tactics (agenda framing, convening stake holders, and structuring deliberation), that, combined or separately, impact three stake holder interpretation “outputs” (understandings, process legitimacy, and distributional equity), that, in turn, lead to three types of collaborative result “outcomes.” It is important to note here that the use of “inputs,” “outputs,” and “outcomes” are my own terms, and not Page’s. I am choosing to use these conceptual boundary labels for his

framework as I think it helps researchers and practitioners get a better sense of the interactions (cause and effect) of each part of the framework. His illustration of the integrative leadership framework is below, with my boundary labels added, and I further describe each of his concepts in the next section.

Figure 1: Integrative Leadership Framework



Illustration, adapted from Steven Page (2010)

Inputs: Leadership Tactics In his review of myriad collaborative leadership theories, Page found that most theories include three leadership tactics or practices for leading networks and collaborative initiatives: agenda framing, convening stake holders, and structuring deliberation. I review his description of each below.

Agenda framing Perhaps the most important early moves a network leader can make, framing the agenda for collaborative work consists of making choices about one or more parts of a complex problem and making participants aware of the saliences of that part or those parts of the issue (Crosby & Bryson, 2005a). This can come about through debate and discussion, and through the formal or informal establishment of the purpose(s), structure(s), norms, and values of a network (Bryson et al., 2006). For the purposes of collaboration, shedding light on parts of the problem

for which it is believed that most or all participants have a stake or interest can be most important to ensuring buy-in from multiple stakeholders and across multiple sectors (Stone et al., 2001).

Convening stake holders While convening stake holders simply consists of bringing all potential collaborative participants together, formally, into a single venue or forum, Page argues that collaborative leadership frameworks have honed in on four aspects of the act of convening that offer leverage for leaders to impact stake holders' sense making of their participation: the scope of participation; the exclusivity of the venue; the collective decision-making authority that participants enjoy; and the fit among their capabilities, collaborative agenda, and decision authority. These aspects are critical, he argues, because decisions and changes that are made out of collaborative efforts can be contested and have little overarching authority or leverage for enactment without the deepest levels of agreement and belief in the cause from relevant participants.

While the scope of participation can be broad or narrow depending on the issue and the envisioned outcomes, just who is included in the earliest of convening meetings and how those choices are made can impact such things as the purpose, structure, and administration of the collaboration itself (Crosby & Bryson, 2005b). Thus, exclusivity of the members who are asked to participate as well the number of efforts that include invitations to the same stake holders to address the same or similar issues, can impact participants' beliefs in the legitimacy and power of the collaborative effort (Ansell & Gash, 2007). Furthermore, the amount of power that each stake holder wields relative to others in the ecosystem in which the issue at hand is occurring can deeply impact conversation trajectories, especially if some participants carry formal authority over certain arenas of influence that matter to the problem they are attempting to collectively address (Bryson et al., 2006). Finally, the interplay between problem, the authority for decision

making, and the capacities and capabilities of each stake holder can yield opportunities for addressing acute disputes with a smaller group and leave room for the more “wicked” problems for the larger convening of participants (Susskind & Cruikshank, 1987). Identifying which concerns are acute and which are wicked and how to alleviate them can be the toughest part of stake holder participation.

Structuring deliberation This refers to the format and approach to supporting stake holders in expressing their views and their proposed solutions, understanding and considering others views of the issue(s) at hand, and then having stake holders make decisions in some joint fashion. The format for deliberation matters to ensuring that participants feel heard and understood, and ensuring that differences and new information can be incorporated into the conversation (Innes, 1999) . Perhaps more importantly, however, the structure of the deliberation being perceived as fair and transparent is more likely to lead to stake holders’ acceptance and support for the outcomes and decisions made—otherwise known as legitimacy of the conclusions or process legitimacy (Fisher & Ury, 1981).

Outputs: Stake Holders’ Interpretations While Page’s main argument throughout his article on integrative leadership theory is that collaborative network leaders can impact the focus, participants, and processes of collaborative governance, he contends that context and stake holder interpretation are factors that can mediate both the processes and outcomes of collaboration efforts (Axelrod, 1984). The three categories of interpretations he argues are the most important are stake holders’ understandings, their interpretation of the process’s legitimacy, and their sense of the benefits and costs to partaking in the collaboration, known as distributional equity. This section of his theory is the least developed and intersects the most with the other theoretical framework I am applied to my study, that of organizational learning. Interpretation

and sense making as joint work and through collaboration with others are key facets of organizational learning theory that I believe complement Page's theory for this section in meaningful ways. I discuss the synthesis of integrative leadership and organizational learning theory further in the summary section of this chapter.

Understandings Page argues that stake holders' perceptions of the problems, goals, and values of the issue under deliberation can result in a shared sense of urgency and a coalescence around the formality of collective goals and identification of some values (Bryson et al., 2006). How this actually comes to be—how network leaders and network stake holders grapple with differences in approach, interpretation of an issue, and a sense of shared values is not addressed with Page's framework. Page offers that “[a]genda framing affects, but does not determine, understandings” (2010, pg. 250), but does not say beyond that how collective sense making and grappling with ideas might occur.

Process legitimacy As mentioned in the section above on the structure of deliberation, stake holders' perception of the process as one that is fair and transparent will be more likely to lead to their acceptance and support for the decisions made. Page does not offer much explanation beyond this regarding process legitimacy (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Fisher & Ury, 1981). Again, how leaders might influence or support a shared sense of process legitimacy may be better informed through the organizational learning theoretical framework later in this chapter.

Distributional equity The degree to which stake holders perceive the costs and benefits to their participation in the collective effort to address one or more issues can be highly subjective to individual interpretations, but matters deeply to the joint decision making process. How much influence someone has perceived that they have had on a decision can influence their acceptance of the outcomes as much or more than any other part of the deliberation processes (Okun, 1975).

Outcomes: Collaborative Results It is important to point out here that Page argues that, while other outcomes from collaboration are important, the public value of a collaborative network is what he is emphasizing in his framework. Page’s work mostly centers on the act of collaboration and collaborative initiatives to improve civic capacity—that is, the type of collaborative networks that involve or, more likely, are led by a civic leader and involve a highly public issue. Indeed, in his seminal article unveiling his integrative leadership framework, he applied it to the Mayor of Seattle’s Education Summit, a series of collaborative meetings and conversations over a year (1990) aimed at school improvement plans generally and toward creating a comprehensive plan for addressing the educational problems of the city of Seattle specifically. In this case, city money was used for the convening meetings and resulting plan, which led practitioners and researchers like Page to understand what the “public value” was in implementing a multi-sector collaboration. In other words, the actual changes in student educational outcomes or things like family engagement, for example, were of less importance in Page’s case example. Rather, he argues with his integrative leadership framework that there are three types of results of public value that should be considered when studying collaborative networks: political will, civic capacity, and policy performance.

Political will When policies, plans, and proposals have sufficient public and leadership support to enact legislation, new administrative procedures, or new collaborative processes, it is deemed that political will has resulted from the collaborative efforts (Innes, 1999). One important related, but missing, outcome here is that the individual agencies, organizations, or institutions may enact new practices as a result of the collaboration. While this does not necessarily take political will, per se, it does take institutional or organizational will—a feature covered better by organizational learning theory, below. This may also be akin to the collective impact framework’s “alignment”

of organizational policies and procedures to the goals of the collaboration, though what that alignment looks like and how it comes about are also underdeveloped parts of the collective impact framework.

Civic capacity This occurs when a large number of stakeholders and sectors develop a common understanding of an issue and a willingness to work together to solve the issue's root problems (Stone et al., 2001). This can come in the form of reduced conflict between organizations or institutions, enabling of future collaboration, and empowerment of citizens and other groups to take on leadership roles to solve the underlying problems surrounding the issue (Chrislip & Larson, 1994; Innes, 1999). This all occurs through "various processes that evolve over time" (Provan & Milward, 2001), though Page's theory does not address the specific processes that occur that lead to civic capacity—another area for which organizational learning theory can be a helpful complementary framework.

Policy performance Page argues that the most important results from collaborative networks are its "outputs" and "outcomes" (2010, p. 251). He uses these terms differently than I have used them in this section, arguing that outputs include joint programs and projects (Innes, 1999) and the increase in incidence of desired behaviors along with the decline in incidence of public problems (Provan & Milward, 2001). By this, we can assume he means the behaviors and public problems created by the target population around which the collaborative network has convened. However, changes in the policies that support or impact these populations can be and often are more important factors in long term changes in social outcomes than direct influence on individuals could ever be. This is a critique of top-down, collaboration-focused theories that I have already outlined, as offered by Wolff and colleagues (2017) in their proposed framework for Collaborating for Equity and Justice.

Summary: The Integrative Leadership of Collective Impact Champions

Stephen Page's theory of integrative leadership provides a useful roadmap for understanding and studying the tactics and approaches that leaders of collaborative networks might use, and how each stage of that process is related to earlier efforts on the part of the network leaders and the perceptions of the stake holders who are invited to participate. It provides, as Page puts it, a more appropriate and parsimonious framework for a particular kind of leadership, one that resides in a space of ambiguity regarding accountability (if any) of participants' actions and changes in practice. Most importantly, it provides a construct for how different collaborative actions, namely inputs, outputs, and outcomes, interact with one another. As mentioned, however, Page's theory has limitations when it comes to analysis of the processes by which a group of stake holders might grapple, either individually or jointly, about the causes or problems that are endemic to the issue at hand, for example. He does not provide a framework for how to understand the sense making process these participants might go through and how, if at all, a network leader can or should guide that sense making process. Fortunately, organizational learning theory, especially more recent iterations and applications of it, provides a conceptual framework for understanding the processes through which these stake holders, alongside a network leader, might go to deliberate, take up new knowledge, use tools to support their understanding, and rely on assistance to negotiate their conceptualization of problems and the solutions that can best address them.

Organizational Learning Theory

Organizational learning theory provides important concepts that can help us understand how the work of collaborative efforts can be understood, given the goals of the efforts, and provides a framework for exploring supportive conditions. Implementation researchers posit that

organizational learning happens when: “[S]uccess in certain arenas is inherently ambiguous...because feedback on performance tends to lag behind practice” (Honig, 2006, p. 130). Honig (2006) also argues that there are two strands of organizational learning that have been applied to educational phenomena—one more often than the other. One strand posits that organizational learning leads to demonstrable and measurable improvements—that change in practice leads to outcomes that are different as evidenced by data that can be collected and compared to past data (Bryk, 2010). This view has been applied countless times to schools, districts, and teacher improvement practices.

Another view of organizational learning can be applied when outcomes, data, and feedback about change in general is a bit more ambiguous or lags change in practice such that alterations cannot be directly attributed to improvements. Under such ambiguous conditions, theorists suggest that organizational leaders enact appropriate practices according to experts or other sources of reliable information on desirable changes to how they do their work (Levitt & March, 1988; March, 1994; March & Olsen, 1975), despite the fact that practices cannot be directly linked to immediate data feedback or outcomes (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

This second view of organizational learning under ambiguous conditions is particularly appropriate for understanding the work of collective impact efforts for three reasons. First, the work of coordinating numerous organizations that serve hundreds or thousands of students takes time, and improvement in student outcomes at just the K-12 level (e.g. improvements in rigorous course-taking patterns in preparation for eligibility to attend four-year colleges) can take many years to see, let alone distal outcomes at the postsecondary level (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Knapp, 1995). Second, collective impact efforts that are interested in improving rates of college-going and college completion—both efforts within school districts and community-based

intervention programs—rely on feedback from expensive and difficult-to-access data from sources like the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC), a third-party data provider that can create reports about student higher education enrollment and completion wherever it occurs. The NSC and state-based data systems like it often provide complicated reports, with numerous data errors and missing information whose significance must be expertly assessed. Such systems can only usefully do so between four and six years after a particular cohort of students has graduated from high school, which is very delayed relative to leaders' needs for timely feedback (Goldrick-Rab, Carter, & Wagner, 2007; Goldrick-Rab & Harris, 2010 (October 2)).

Finally, this complexity and delay with respect to key information is also complicated by the lack of policy incentives around higher education attainment as an outcome of K-12 education. K-12 leaders are often pressured to improve “college-readiness” and postsecondary enrollment and attainment rates of students from their districts, but are not given specific targets or reward for measuring and increasing the number of high school students they send off to postsecondary institutions, much less how many are successful there (Louie, 2007; Mathis, 2010; Venezia & Kirst, 2005).

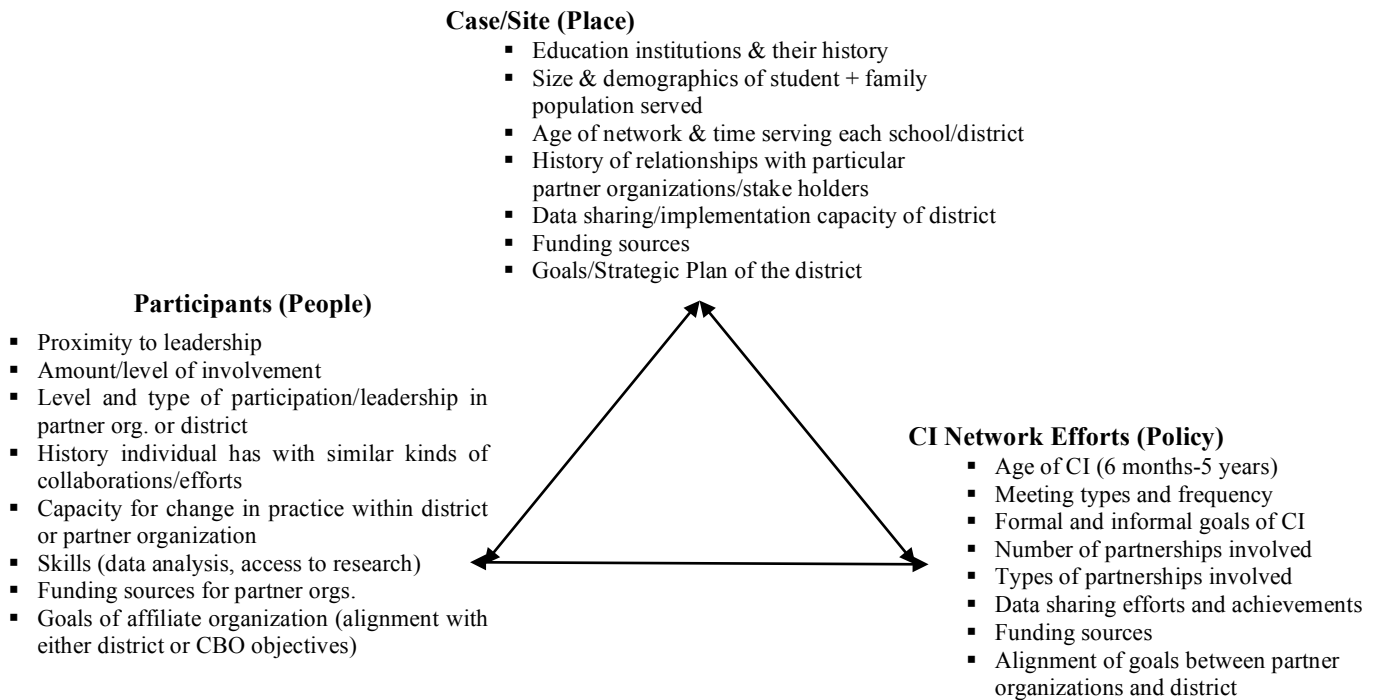
This final condition of ambiguity for the work of collective impact efforts aimed at increasing postsecondary attainment sets them apart from other kinds of educational collaborations that have been studied using organizational learning theory. District central office administrators who engage in the work of these kinds of collaborations may have to rely more heavily on the expertise and knowledge of community-based organizations and other practitioners at the table other than on their own staff to ensure that higher education outcomes of the students in their district are improved. At the same time, district leaders may be held most accountable by those very collaborators—community organizational leaders and local higher

education institutions—rather than by state or federal policymakers. In her work on K-12 educational collaborations, Honig (2006) posits that that the work of district leaders may have to change dramatically under conditions of ambiguity in coalition-based work:

[C]entral office administrators' demands in collaborative education policy implementation relate to new processes for central office policy development: Central office administrators build central office policy from the practice of school-community partnerships—that is, they learn about partnerships' decisions and experiences and use that information to guide central office policy with the explicit goal of enabling partnerships' decisions.

In this way, “building policy from practice” on the part of school district leaders and as a part of organizational learning becomes a key finding for the study of collective impact efforts aimed at postsecondary outcomes. Therefore, given 1) the current advances in higher education access and success research, and 2) our understanding of the promise of well-conceived collaborations among education service organizations, I will next outline my dissertation's empirical study. This study seeks to explore and gain a better understanding of the settings in which educational leaders in these collaborations learn about their work in a way that changes their practices as a result of participation in it. See Figure 2 for a visual representation of this conceptual framework, which highlights educational leaders (people), the conditions under which they work (places), and the nature of the goals and desired outcomes of the collaboration (policy), using Meredith Honig's (2006) educational implementation framework as a structure for understanding.

Figure 2: Organizational Implementation Factors for Collective Impact Efforts



Meredith Honig and Milbrey McLaughlin (2006), who focus on the implementation of educational collaborations, have called for a better conceptualization of the complexities of the work by calling attention to the people, places and policies involved in the process. Here, “policy” refers to the work of the collective impact efforts that aim to increase postsecondary success as an endogenous policy process rather than the typical exogenous policy one might imagine, such as the federal No Child Left Behind or a state or district-level mandate. The list under each category of contextual factor above are the most salient features relevant to the study of collective impact efforts that aim to improve postsecondary outcomes as policy implementation research.

Applying Organizational Learning to Collective Impact: How and What to Measure

In order to appreciate the usefulness of the organizational learning framework for understanding and evaluating prospects for collective impact, it is important to first explore other approaches, including those suggested by empirical research and those prescribed by collective impact researchers. This section reviews three frameworks for evaluating the effectiveness of collaborative efforts that focus, in particular, on early indicators of success related to implementation rather than on lagging indicators related to community outcomes (such as increased education attainment metrics or decreased health problems where that is the target outcome). Reviewing frameworks that focus on leading rather than lagging indicators matters, as mentioned above, because often the long-term outcomes that are attempting to be addressed are truly long term—we may have to wait a decade or more to know if collaboration efforts now will be successful in their aim and that is too long for decision-makers to wait. Therefore, the three evaluation frameworks reviewed here include: coalition functioning surveys, independent theoretical constructs of collaboration, and network analysis. Finally, this section ends with a review of collective impact experts' suggestions for evaluating collective impact efforts and compares those to the empirical frameworks as a way of situating what can and ought to be measured in early implementation of collective impact initiatives.

Measurements of coalition functioning most closely resemble what collective impact proponents have described in their guides for evaluating collective impact efforts, but they are based on conceptual and theoretical underpinnings. Valerie Shapiro and her colleagues (2013) propose psychometrically tested and validated participant surveys based on four dimensions of previously-observed coalition functioning: goal-directedness, efficiency, opportunities for

participation, and cohesion. They confirm the stability of these variables using factor analysis that shows that those dimensions were invariant over time. Coalition members took the survey and rated various sub-dimensions that amounted to personal satisfaction with the work that the coalition was completing as well as their belief that certain indicators and ultimate outcome targets were changing or would change due to causal efforts linked with the coalition's efforts. This methodology developed an innovative survey that may be able to be applied to any collaboration, but it only measured individual members' interpretations of the work and the links between changes in practice and participation in the coalition. While this is a promising approach for evaluating member buy-in, it does not empirically measure changes in stake holders' practices as a causal outcome of coalition efforts.

In a potentially complementary but distinct evaluation framework, Ann Marie Thomson and her colleagues (2009) also propose a survey using a multidimensional model of collaboration validated through factor analysis. However, they construct this survey with an aim at defining and measuring characteristics of collaboration, rather than on the effectiveness of the collaboration itself. Their measurement of participant activities and conditions, at the very least, builds a stronger understanding of what distinguishes collaboration from other forms of multi-player engagement or partnership. For the purposes of growing our understanding of evaluating effectiveness of such collaborative efforts, however, measuring the actions and changes in practice of the participants requires a different approach to data collection.

Perhaps the most applicable framework from which to draw for understanding of the effectiveness of collective impact collaborative efforts in early, ambiguous conditions, as suggested by organizational learning theory, is the evaluation framework proposed by Keith Provan and H. Brinton Milward (2001) for interorganizational networks, or network analysis.

They argue that networks must be evaluated at three levels of analysis: the community, the network, and the organization/participant levels. For the purposes of this paper, their proposal for evaluation at the network level suggests that measuring changes in organizational service delivery, deletion of redundancy in service delivery, and changes in other activities or practices among participant organizations as a result of participation in the network are the main measurement indicators for early success of a collaboration. This framework, combined with particular indicators borrowed from FSG's collective impact evaluation guide outlined below, could perhaps be the analytical framework that best investigates depth of productive change in practice as a result of collective impact participation.

Finally, among the many publications that have been produced by the Stanford Social Innovation Review since the coining of the term "collective impact," Preskill, Parkhurst, and Juster have produced a three-part evaluation guide for assessing the effectiveness of collective impact efforts (2013a; 2013b, 2013c). This guide offers prescriptive steps such as: "partners should agree on a set of early performance indicators," "use data from their initiative's shared measurement system," and perform a "summative evaluation to assess its impact, merit, value, or significance" (Preskill et al., 2013a, pp. 5-6). It concludes with a list of suggested outcomes and indicators for consideration in the evaluation, but does not provide an actual strategy for assessing those outcomes and indicators (such as a partner survey, for example). The table below displays a few examples out of their suggested 52 possible outcomes and 158 possible corresponding indicators.

Table 1: FSG/Preskill, et al. Collective Impact Evaluation Outcomes & Indicators

Outcome	Indicators
Structures and processes are in place to engage CI partners, keeping them informed and inspired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working groups (or other collaborative structures) hold regular meetings • Members of working groups or other collaborative structures attend and participate actively in meetings • Partners communicate and coordinate efforts regularly (with and independently of backbone staff)
The CI initiative has established a culture of openness, transparency and inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision making processes are open and transparent • Partners feel included in major decision-making processes • The CI initiative actively solicits and acts on feedback from community members and other external partners

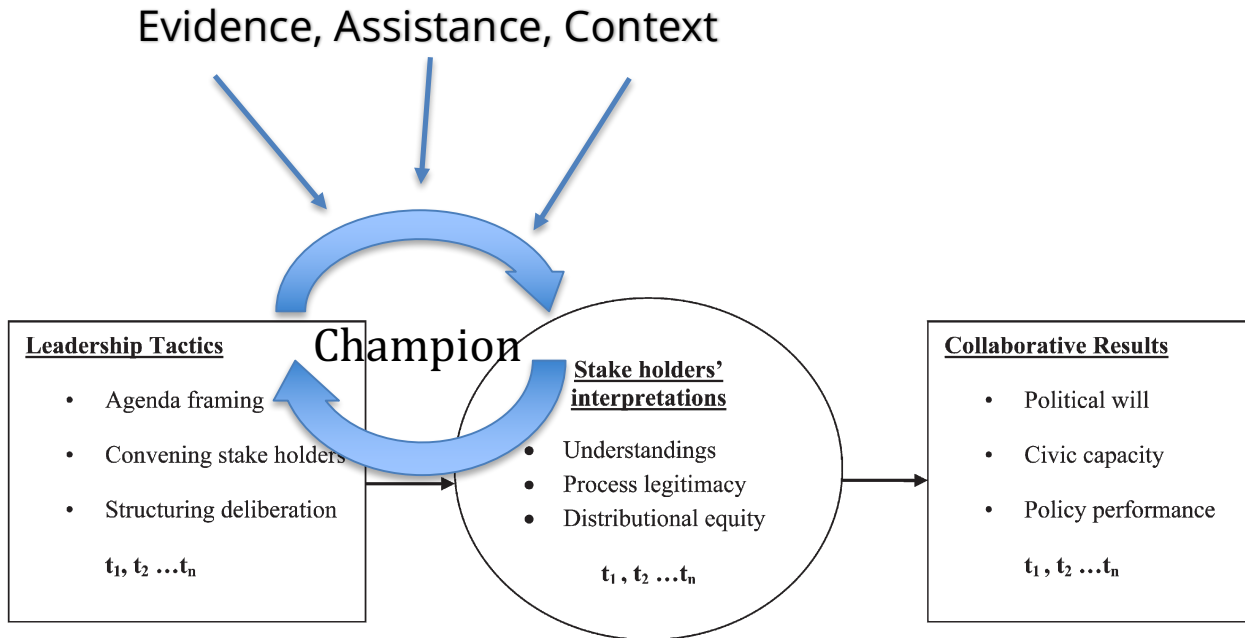
Interestingly, they include several categories of outcomes and related indicators that outline the ways that participants and member organizations could learn and make changes in their practice via their participation in the collective impact group. These sections include changes in professional practice and changes in individual behavior. They suggest several outcomes and related indicators that could be evaluated as measures of collective impact effectiveness to represent a depth of productive change as a result of participation in the collective impact initiative.

Conceptual Framework Summary

In summary, integrative leadership and organizational learning theory can help frame the work of network directors to allow us to understand the implementation of a collective impact collaboration as a process of learning, sense-making, and grappling within an ambiguous context. Interactions between the frameworks are summarized in the following figure, which integrates the experiences of network directors, along with their participant members, as an

organizational learning process with dimensions of integrative leadership allows us to uncover potentially complex engagement among individuals over time under conditions of ambiguity.

Figure 3: Organizational Learning Theory Applied to Integrative Leadership



I have already established that there are numerous limitations and gaps in the collective impact framework, but little is known about if and how leaders experience those gaps in their experiences and how, if at all, they navigate challenges in the early years of implementing their networks. Conceptualizing collective impact directors as integrative leaders and organizational learners also allows me to use research-based frameworks as a source of measures of accountability relative to potential early indicators of success. If we can understand the potential leadership tactics and learning tools a leader can use to instigate early forms of reciprocity among network members, we may be able to create a framework for predicting potential success

of a network earlier on in its existence and provide support and assistance for networks and their leaders who are not implementing integrative leadership tactics and learning tools with their network members.

CHAPTER 6 | RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Cross-sector collaborations that purport to employ collective impact as their strategy for addressing and reducing inequity in regional education outcomes are relatively new as a collaboration genre. They seem to be bounded differently from one context to the next with relatively little known about the efforts of their leaders. Thus, little precedent has been set for what researchers should expect to discover regarding how leaders of collective impact networks make decisions about their approach to leading a network, what influences their appropriation of certain practices, and how they influence others with respect to what might be identified in collective impact literature specifically or cross-sector collaboration research generally. Therefore, employing qualitative methods is particularly useful in studying the emergent practice of leaders of collective impact-oriented collaborations because so little is known about their experiences as leaders under certain contexts and conditions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Robert Yin (2011, 2014) contends that case studies allow us to examine individuals' lives and experiences within certain specific conditions, understand the views and perspectives of those being studied, understand how context matters to individuals' experiences, contribute knowledge to an emerging theory about a phenomenon, and use multiple sources of data to understand the phenomenon

Multiple Case Study Design

In order to study the emerging practices of collective impact network leaders, I employed a multiple case study (or “cross-case”) design (Miles & Huberman, 1994; R. K. Yin, 2011, 2014). By investigating the experiences, approaches, and choices made by multiple collective impact network leaders across different sites and within different contexts, I was able to uncover to what degree the leaders enacted the practices and approaches outlined by prescriptive

collective impact literature and under what conditions they made key decisions or appropriated important practices outside of what has been outlined in collective impact literature. Comparing different collective impact network cases that were situated in different geographical and political contexts at different stages of implementation allowed me to understand which conditions support leader appropriation of practices that can lead to changes among others in the networks.

Gathering evidence from multiple cases that sit within different contexts provides more compelling conclusions when findings are repeated across cases as well as a richer understanding of connections between conditions, contexts, and individuals' experiences and actions (R. K. Yin, 2014). Furthermore, data gathered from multiple case studies can inform what is missing or what is unique about some of the cases versus others, which allows for deeper analysis of conditions for "success" or the antecedents of unexpected outcomes and experiences of the individuals in the study (R. K. Yin, 2011). Therefore, for this research study, I investigated multiple cases of collective impact collaboration networks that aimed to improve educational and workforce outcomes to provide rich descriptive data about the conditions under which some of the network leaders have, for example, been able to maintain their networks over time or instigate change in practices among network members/organizations.

Because of the number of possible cases as well as the numerous possible approaches to data collection, I employed a two-phase approach to case selection and conducted a pilot study to refine my data collection plan. These two steps are outlined below, followed by detailed data collection and analysis processes I used to conduct the study.

Two-Phase Approach

In multiple-case study research, if the selection of cases is obvious because of rarity or uniqueness of the phenomenon, then a one-phase approach to screening candidate cases is appropriate and straightforward. In situations where there could be a larger number of eligible candidates, such as more than 12 possible case candidates, a two-phase approach to screening cases is appropriate (R. K. Yin, 2014). I used a pilot study (see below) to gain access to archival information and to uncover publicly available documentary data sources. This basic information provided enough information about possible cases to determine my selection criteria, detailed in the section on case selection below.

Pilot Case Study

Over a five-year period (2011 to 2016) I conducted a pilot study of 14 collaborative efforts to obtain initial information about emerging collaborative networks. During this pilot, I collected both internal and external documents related to network implementation, I observed public meetings as both a researcher and participant observer, I attended convening events, and I conducted exploratory interviews of education-focused collaboration initiatives within a single state. I obtained institutional human subjects approval for that pilot study, documents for which can be found in Appendix G. Overall, I collected data from and information about 14 collaboration efforts, all of which could be classified as cross-sector, education-focused collaboration initiatives, and specifically those that aim to increase postsecondary enrollment, completion, and to close workforce gaps. They were located in different regions around a single state and aimed to serve different individual districts and clusters of school districts ranging in geographic scope from a single county with one school district to multiple counties and a dozen school districts. This allowed me to learn about the various collaboration efforts as they unfolded

and as I developed my conceptual framework and criteria for inclusion in this dissertation’s study, as well as my approach to data collection and data sources.

Data Collection and Sources

After conducting my pilot study, I was better able to refine my line of inquiry, to identify the criteria for case selection, and to determine the sources from which I would collect data. The table below summarizes my data collection, methodology and analysis approaches with details about each in the following sections.

Table 2: Data collection, approach, and analysis strategy

<u>Areas of Inquiry</u>	<u>Data Sources</u>	<u>Research Methods</u>	<u>Analysis</u>
-Fidelity to the collective impact framework	-Network leaders	-Semi-structured interviews	-Grounded theory memos
-Network leader approaches to implementing networks	-Lead agency staff members -Meeting observations	-Direct observations with verbatim notetaking	-Deductive coding matrix (1 st round)
-Early changes in policy or practice among network members	-Lead agency documents -Network documents -Network backbone documents -Other documents	-Document analysis	-Inductive coding (2 nd round and beyond)

Case Selection

Using what I learned from my pilot study, I used purposeful site selection (R. K. Yin, 2014) and “criterion sampling,” under which all of the cases that I included for this study met the

criterion of claiming to be a particular kind of organization that is the focus of the study overall (Patton, 2002). Using my conceptual framework and research questions, I used the following criteria to select my sites:

1. All cases had to meet the criteria outlined by Henig and colleagues (Henig et al., March 2016) for cross-sector collaborations in education, including being place-based, multi-sector, and focused on educational outcomes.
2. All cases had to be located in the same state; recent research that catalogues cross-sector collaborations in education has found that such efforts are concentrated in certain states and suggests that this is because of a confluence of state educational policy contexts, economic and labor market trends, and state-bounded K-12 and higher education institutional organization and governance (Henig et al., 2015).
3. All cases had to be less than five years old, which is the approximate number of years associated with the early implementation phase of collective impact networks (Kania & Kramer, 2013).
4. All cases had to state publicly, on websites or public documents, that they were implementing a collaborative network based on the collective impact framework.

From my initial pilot study, I determined that five of the 14 collaborative efforts that I had initially explored did not fit my selection criteria for this dissertation: one had aged out of the early implementation phase of its work; one had not yet formally launched implementation; two did not explicitly employ the collective impact framework but rather named other frameworks to which they attempted to adhere; and one did not match Henig's criteria for cross-sector collaborations in education regarding geographic range and scope.

The remaining nine sites met all selection criteria outlined above. All nine of these sites were individual networks that were a part of a large “hub and spoke” statewide model (outlined in further detail in Chapter 7). While data was actually collected from 10 sites originally, I dropped one site after an initial round of data collection upon learning that it was still in very pre-planning stages and would not be in the early years of implementation during the rest of my study’s data collection period. I sought permission from the statewide hub’s leadership, from the individual network leaders, and from K-12 school districts (as needed and as required by district rules for district staff to participate in research, such as by consenting to being interviewed). All of this study’s consent and data collection materials can be found in Appendices A through F.

Data Sources & Collection

Qualitative research generally and case study methodology in particular can benefit from analyses of multiple data sources from which triangulation can surface and reinforce findings (R. K. Yin, 2011). Data sources for this study included meeting and event observations (also called field observations or direct observations), individual interviews, and a variety of internal and external documents. Throughout the exploratory study conducted before implementing the study for this dissertation, I learned about the various collaborative networks’ meetings, began to understand development and implementation of new networks, became familiar with each network’s various types of documents, and identified which individuals had copies of or access to documents and materials. This proved critical in developing processes for consent for the dissertation study as well as understanding how I might access sensitive materials and meetings.

In many cases during the exploratory study, individuals who participated in the networks’ efforts represented/worked for a number of separate organizations and institutions from which I had to receive general consent for approaching to ask about observing or interviewing, before

actually requesting permission from the focal individuals themselves. This was especially the case for individuals who were employed by school districts. Overall, I conducted 25 individual interviews and 8 direct field observations and collected, transcribed (when necessary) and reviewed 429 documents across the nine networks. The table below outlines all of the data I collected and the sections following provide details about each kind of data source as well as approaches to analysis of the data.

Table 3: Summary of data sources and counts

Interviews			
<u>Types of Participants</u>	<u>Number of This Type</u>	<u>Number of Hours</u>	
Network Leader	14 ⁷	16.75 hrs	
Network Member/Org Representative	11	12.25 hrs	
<i>Total</i>	<i>2 types</i>	<i>25 interviews</i>	<i>29 hrs</i>

Observations			
<u>Type</u>	<u>Number of This Type</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>	<u>Hours</u>
Network Member Meeting	4	21 unique (not all 21 were present for every convening)	6.25 hrs
Network Event	2	104 unique (not all 104 were present for both events)	11.5 hrs
Network Leader Convening	2 (1 full day; 1 multi-day)	24 unique (not all 24 were present for both events)	23.5 hrs
<i>Total</i>	<i>3 types</i>	<i>28 unique participants (does not total above numbers because of overlap of participants at different events)</i>	<i>41.25 hrs</i>

⁷ As is noted later in this chapter and others, three of the nine networks had co-directors. I did interview one director of a network but then did not end up including that director nor that network's data in the final data analysis because that network had not begun network implementation and therefore did not yield enough information to include in this dissertation's study. I've included the little data collection I did do on that network in this chart, but I only conducted initial review of that data and did not include it in my rounds of coding nor in my findings.

Documents		
<u>Type</u>	<u>Number of Documents</u>	
Network Planning Documents	112	
Network Implementation Agreement	25	
Network Website Pages	93	
Network Meeting Materials	133	
Network Leader Convening Materials	32	
Network Event Support Materials	17	
Backbone or Hub Agency Documents	17	
<i>Total</i>	<i>7 Types</i>	<i>429 (approximately 1,750 pages)</i>

Interviews This study aimed to investigate the experiences of the leaders and implementers of collaborative networks, those that explicitly attempted to employ collective impact as a guiding framework, during their early years of implementation. Therefore, a primary source of data for this study included semi-structured individual interviews with network leaders and representative members of networks who participated during the early implementation process.

Network Leaders. Yin (2014) argues that applying some sort of sampling logic to selection of cases is misplaced because case study should not be used to assess the prevalence of a phenomenon, because different samples would yield an unruly number of potential variables at the intersection of phenomenon and context, because applying sampling could eliminate potentially important topics that have yet to be empirically investigated. This same argument applies to selection of the first round of interview participants in this particular study because

each network that met my criteria via purposive site selection, by design, was led by between one and three network leaders (also referred to as directors, in some cases). Therefore, I aimed to include all network leaders as interviewees. After identifying which sites to include as case studies for this research, I first identified each network's leader, co-leaders, or small groups of leaders (which varied by individual network) by reviewing my field notes from my exploratory study. I reached out to and was given permission by all nine network study sites' leaders to interview them (or to interview at least one of the co-leaders), totaling 14 network leader or co-leader interviews.

Network Member/Organization Leaders. In order to identify and select network members to participate in interviews, I requested and received all internal network documents that were collected by the statewide hub staff that included some details about network membership across the state. Then, using interviews with the network directors, I identified organization leaders mentioned by the directors who might be able to confirm or provide other information about the practices network leaders as they implemented their networks. In each case, one to two organization leaders were mentioned by network leaders during their interviews. Using that information, along with the documents I received from statewide hub staff, I reached out to 20 organization leaders and was able to conduct interviews with 11 of them. All nine network sites yielded at least one organization leader interview, with three sites yielding two.

Semi-Structured Interviews Semi-structured interviewing allows for exploration of themes and concepts as they emerged from the conversation about goals, intentions, outcomes and conditions of a phenomenon and how any of those things might have changed over time from the perspective of the interviewee (Patton, 2002). Overall, I conducted 25 semi-structured interviews using two sets of protocol, one for network leaders and one for members/organization

leaders. I created interview protocols consisting of roughly 15 questions with roughly four probing or sub questions for each main question. Per semi-structured interview norms, I sometimes did not have to ask all of the protocol questions because participants naturally segued to them in their responses and I sometimes reworded probing questions in order to better understand a participants' meaning or experience (Neuman, 2011). The interviews lasted between 60 and 82 minutes and included questions along the following lines of inquiry: interviewees' professional experience prior to current role, their perception of their current leadership or network participation roles and responsibilities, their understanding of the goals and work of the collaboration effort, their conceptualizations of changes in their practice and that of others in the network (including network leaders and/or network member participants), challenges and successes they experienced, and their explicit or implicit understanding of the collective impact framework as a tool for guiding early network implementation and practices.

Direct Observations The conceptual framework for this study suggests that processes of both group and individual learning, appropriation, and decision-making are at the center of the phenomena that this study investigated. Therefore, direct observations of network leaders as they grappled with early stages of network implementation and learning about how to do their work served as another primary source of data for this study. Over a period of nearly 12 months, I collected verbatim and observational notes (also called "field notes"), supplemented with meeting materials and numerous other documents (see below). I observed four network member meetings, which ranged in number of participants from 12 to 21 attendees and ranged in type of participants, such as K-12 school district leaders, nonprofit organization directors, business and philanthropic representatives, and higher education leaders. I attended and observed two network-initiated events, one that included 68 network-related participants, and one that included

52 network-related participants. Finally, I attended and observed two network leader meetings, one single-day meeting and one-multi day retreat. Overall, I collected 41.25 hours of direct observations from eight separate observation events.

Observation Protocol. During direct observations, I captured verbatim notes from all individuals who spoke, noting which individuals were speaking and interacting and I also made notes of nonverbal communication. These initial verbatim notes contained minimal lexical items to maximize capture of content; I cleaned the verbatim notes within 24 hours of capture in order to fill in any necessary contextual words that allowed for full sentences for transcription analysis purposes. These approaches are borrowed from transcription experts (Ochs, 1979) as well as the author's own experience working on a qualitative research team that formulated a verbatim observational protocol (Rainey, Venkateswaran, & Honig, 2010). The full description of the author's adaptation of that protocol can be found in Appendix B.

Documents Both archival documents and documents that were written or created during the time of this study's data collection period were collected from individual networks as well as from the statewide hub. Most of the documents were internal to the set of networks, but some were publically available through websites. The documents span approximately five years with regard to the dates that they were created and/or updated. Overall, I collected 429 documents totaling approximately 1,750 pages.

Procedures

Data collection took place between July 2016 and June 2017, with three intensive collection periods surrounding statewide-hub sponsored events. Interviews were conducted in two rounds, first with network leaders and then with member organization leaders/representatives. All data collected was cleaned or transcribed within 24 hours of

collection and then input to Dedoose, a research software that can be used to organize and code both qualitative and quantitative data (further details in analysis section below). All protocol and data collection documentation is provided in Appendices A through F.

Permissions & Informed Consent. Consent was attained for both the pilot study and for the dissertation study, with the pilot study providing more detailed information about network participants and their associated institutions and organizations, which further informed the consent process for the dissertation study itself. Prior to any data collection for the dissertation study, I obtained permission from statewide hub leadership to include them and their associated networks in my research. With that permission, I reached out to school district leadership, when appropriate, to gain consent for specific individuals who were employed by the district (but who were member representatives or leaders in an individual network) to participate in data I collected during direct observations, to participate in interviews, or both. From there, I first introduced myself to many of the individual participants at a leadership meeting. I provided study information and informed consent forms before all interviews and/or observations, as appropriate and directed by institutional review board approval conditions. Informed consent forms and protocol can be found in Appendices A through D.

Confidentiality and Pseudonyms. As a condition for permission to study each case and as part of the consent process for participation in direct observational data collection as well as interviews, I have maintained that identities of individual participants, names and locations of events and meetings, and names and specific locations/geographies of networks and collaboration efforts and their hubs be kept confidential. This means that I use no names of participants, and, moreover, I have created pseudonyms for names of networks. I mask geographic location by using generalized context of location rather than naming the specific

states or counties in which the networks are located. Furthermore, I have chosen to use the gender neutral terms “they,” “them,” and “their” to refer to individual network directors and other study participants when talking about particular examples or when explaining individual quotes I use to illustrate my findings. These terms are now widely accepted by the American Psychological Association, and are in fact encouraged as an alternative to the former usage of the universal “he” when referring to hypothetically or specifically to an individual, to a reader, or other general or specific, but non-disclosed individual.

Data Analysis

Wolcott (2009) asserts that case studies allow for open coding and triangulation of data in order to further explore themes in findings as they develop. Open coding is important for identifying new or previously unreported patterns and associations between contexts, practices, and experiences of those being studied. After all data were transcribed, cleaned, and input into Dedoose as text-only documents, I applied two levels of preliminary coding using concepts from my conceptual framework to all of the text, noting when one type of document or one context reinforced concepts from another type of document or context in order to triangulate inferences (R. K. Yin, 2011, 2014). It is particularly important to gather evidence from multiple sources of data when investigating a phenomenon such as learning—whether that be individual or organizational learning—because findings cannot rely on individuals’ self-reports of whether they or a group in which they are a part have participated in learning (Honig, 2008). Self-reports alone (such as interviews) present a challenge to construct validity for determining the accuracy of individuals’ thoughts or beliefs, especially within a larger group of engaged individuals, as well as for phenomena that are related to internalized thoughts, such as processes of decision-making, learning, and framing of ideas (R. K. Yin, 2011, 2014).

Coding Constructs

For the first round of coding, I deductively applied concepts from systems and civic leadership studies to uncover both descriptive and interpretive statements and patterns of behavior among 11 network leaders from nine collective impact networks. Simultaneously, during this first round of coding, I applied concepts from organizational learning theory to understand how leaders navigated situations of ambiguity or challenge and to uncover how they grappled (both individually and with network stakeholders) with concepts and issues that lacked clear data or approaches to measurement. This first round of coding involved several general readings of all meeting, event, and interview transcripts, employing a modified and directed form of “open coding,” guided by general concepts from the conceptual framework and research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This coding process included statements and documents produced by other community participants and from the network hub staff. The table below summarizes the first round of coding concepts applied to the data:

Table 4: Round One Coding Concepts

Integrative Leadership	Organizational Learning
<u>Leadership Tactics</u>	<u>Evidence Use for Framing or Identifying Issues</u>
Agenda framing	Use of experience to guide practices
Convening stakeholders	Use of research to guide practices
Structuring deliberation	Use of data to guide practices
	Use of peer experiences to guide practices
<u>Stakeholder's Interpretations</u>	<u>Support Through Assistance Relationship</u>
Understandings	<i>Level 1:</i> Assistance from hub; network leader assisting community leaders; or other/outside assistance
Process legitimacy	
Distributional equity	<i>Level 2:</i> Modeling; valuing peripheral participation; social engagement; developing tools; brokering/boundary spanning; joint work/discovery; information search; incorporation of evidence; retrieval; or negotiation & sense-making
<u>Collaborative Results</u>	<u>Context for Interactions</u>
Political will	Individual's history or experience
Civic capacity	Cognitive limits
Policy performance	Cultural dimensions
	Normative dimensions
	Political and/or power dimensions

Using the above concepts, I reviewed all transcribed documents, coding each instance of integrative leadership tactics, stakeholder's interpretations, and collaborative results, as well as each instance of evidence use, support through an assistance relationship, and the context for interactions. In many cases, passages were coded with more than one code (of passages coded, over half were coded with two concepts in the first round, and about twenty percent were coded with three or more concepts in the third round). This round of coding alone was not used for

findings; rather, I used a second, and in some cases a third round of coding to triangulate concepts and assertions between different participants and or between different sources of data. This second and third round of coding is outlined in the following section.

Triangulation and Inductive Rounds of Coding

After the initial round of coding, I isolated all of the topics, issues, challenges, experiences and implementation phases (largely coded as “salient phenomenon”) that provided at least three sources of data coded for a concept, at least three participant respondents that corroborated on a given concept, or a combination of sources and respondents that triangulated a phenomenon. This allowed me to do a second round of coding on just those instances that were salient for the coding concepts of my conceptual framework in order to investigate the depth and extent of any changes in practice or beliefs on the part of any network participant as a result of network activities sponsored by the network leaders. This coding revealed the number and type of phenomena that led to surface level changes in practice, policy, or belief, for individuals or groups of network members, as well as the contexts and conditions under which that change occurred and the leadership tactics used by the network leader, if any, correlated with those changes.

In summary, identifying 1) which leadership tactics and learning processes under 2) which overall conditions led to 3) which changes in practice, policy, or belief, as triangulated by multiple sources of data and/or respondents, allowed me to construct a theoretically-grounded understanding of 4) early measurements of progress we can apply to collaborations that employ the collective impact framework and allowed me to 5) not only uncover limitations in the collective impact framework, but also 6) how network leaders improvised tactics and approaches in order to move past the framework’s limitations.

Methodological Limitations

Multiple case study designs, however strategic, are not statistically generalizable to the work of other populations or sites even when they are analytically generalizable using carefully applied conceptual frameworks and theoretical groundings. Therefore, data from these individual sites should be understood as contextualized by the people and environment of the locality and the involved organizations. By design, case studies provide conceptual depth that allows for an understanding of how conditions, phenomena, and experiences interacted in order to add to previous confirmations, supplementation or, in some cases, exceptions to previously held assertions and frameworks. They can add, dimensionally, to a theory and can point out limitations of the application of a particular framework to particular cases or fields not previously investigated through a given conceptual lens. However, case study methodology also sacrifices breadth of data that can allow for more sweeping generalizations about the strength of any relationship between factors or contexts as they apply to any or all other like phenomena. By triangulating data from multiple sources, I have attempted to mitigate, to the extent possible, potential problems with construct validity (R. K. Yin, 1989). The conclusions I have come to from the nine cases investigated in this study offer the opportunity to examine the implementation of the collective impact framework and what happens when that framework does not meet the needs of those charged with implementing it.

Methods Summary

This chapter reviewed the original pilot study I conducted, how it shaped my inclusion criteria and conceptual framework for this dissertation, and details of data collection for the nine network cases that I analyzed for the research for this dissertation. The nine cases of this dissertation yielded interesting descriptions of their implementation and the leaders' tactics and

approaches in overcoming challenges during the early years of the networks. The following chapter describes the case contexts for all 14 original cases and the specific dimensions of the nine cases that were included in analyses for this dissertation. Then, chapters 8 and 9 detail the findings from data analysis of the nine cases analyzed for this dissertation, followed by my conclusions and implications chapter.

CHAPTER 7 | 14 EDUCATION COLLABORATION EFFORTS IN SEVEN YEARS: CONTEXT & CASE DIMENSIONS

Over a span of seven years, I observed and gathered evidence on the early to middle implementation years of 14 different collective impact efforts located in/in service of different regions across a single western state. I collected data on three cases during the pilot study and then I collected data on 11 other cases for the study for this dissertation. The findings from this dissertation come from data on nine of the 11 cases for which I collected data most recently. However, this chapter provides general descriptions of all 14 of the networks because the findings from the pilot study informed my inclusion criteria for the dissertation study and pointed to the ways in which I ought to pay attention to the practices of network leaders. Given that data collection for the pilot study began in 2009, two of the networks I included in my pilot study data collection predate the official coining of the term “collective impact.” This chapter then provides specific descriptions of the contexts and case dimensions for the nine networks that met the criteria for inclusion for the dissertation in particular. It concludes with a summary of the most salient concepts, issues, approaches, and conditions experienced by each of the nine networks’ leaders and their network members. That summary is the basis for the ensuing three findings chapters that aim to answer my original research questions.

Setting the Stage

Descriptive insight into case studies can help to unravel and shed light on the complexities and important features inherent to the places, times, and contexts that interplay and ultimately impact the phenomena that a case study is designed to understand (R. K. Yin, 2014). While this study relied on theoretical propositions about the collective impact model and used a conceptual framework for how and under what conditions network leaders implement

collaborative efforts to guide data collection and analytic priorities, having an understanding of the general context and dimensions of the cases prior to delving into particular findings can help inform other researchers investigating cases with similar features (R. K. Yin, 1989). Notable case studies that have included an initial descriptive approach prior to enumerating the analytical findings are also often the case studies that investigate the implementation of public and civic programs, much like the networks investigated for this dissertation (see, for example: Knapp, 1995; Marsh, 2000; Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Rehberg & Hotchkiss, 1972; Swanstrom, Winter, Sherraden, & Lake, 2013). Therefore, in the following section, I provide the geographic, demographic, and other illustrative context features for all 14 of the original networks I investigated, followed by more specific descriptions of the nine networks included as cases for this dissertation in particular. I summarize these descriptions in Table 5 before introducing the summary findings that are detailed Chapters 8 and 9.

As noted in Chapter 6, I am masking some specific features and descriptors in order to preserve anonymity and privacy for the participants and the organizations as a whole. I will be referring to individual networks with a basic geographic descriptor and a random number, such as Urban 1, Suburban 2, or Rural 5. While it is possible that readers may be able to distinguish among the networks if they have prior knowledge or experience in western state collaborative education efforts, my aim is that typical readers will not be able to attach descriptive findings in later chapters to individuals or specific organizations.

Geography As mentioned earlier, all 14 of the original networks that I considered for this study and/or that were a part of the pilot phase of the research were located within and aimed to serve different regions throughout one western state in the U.S. Among the 14 cases, five of them were located in and served urban-suburban mixed areas, meaning that their geographical boundaries

included an urban center/city (for these purposes, I put the minimum population of the urban center at 200,000 people) as well as a greater metropolitan or suburban region that included multiple other cities and towns. For ease of description, I'm simply calling these networks "urban" even though all of them also serve suburban areas around an urban center as well.

Another five networks served suburban regions, for which I applied the population minimum of a city or a few adjacent city centers to be 35,000 up to a 200,000 maximum population (i.e., mid-sized cities). In some of these suburban cases, the region included several mid-sized cities, in others they included just one mid-sized city, and all of the cities or towns within the region might be classified as suburban for the purposes of this study. Finally, the remaining four networks I investigated served rural areas, meaning that they served towns no larger than approximately 35,000 people and included in their area of service a majority of towns or unincorporated county regions of between 50 and 10,000 in population.

Planning and Implementation Years As mentioned in the literature review in Chapter 3, before collective impact became a recognized and coined term and framework by researchers from Stanford's Center for Social Innovation (Kania & Kramer, 2011), a number of education-focused, cross-sector collaborations had cropped up across the nation based on the Cincinnati Strive Network (Strive Partnership, 2016). Among the 14 networks for which I have collected data over the past seven years for my pilot and dissertation studies, two of them began their work as Strive partners before the coining of the term "collective impact," between 2009 and early 2011. The state in which these networks are located has since seen other Strive-based networks crop up, and not all networks that were modeled on the Strive framework are included in the 14 for which I collected data. Five networks began right after the collective impact wave hit the

nation, in 2012 or 2013, five were implemented in 2014 or 2015, and the final two were implemented between early 2016 and early 2017.

From my inclusion criteria for this dissertation, I deemed the two earliest networks that began before the coining of collective impact (although they both purportedly use collective impact as a guiding framework) too far along in implementation, past the middle years of their work and into their years of course correction and ability to look at lagging indicators and longer-term student outcomes. At the same time, one of the two most recently developed networks was not yet far enough into implementation to garner any useful data for this study, after a single round of interviews and document analysis confirmed that that network was still in planning stages of its efforts. One of the networks for which I collected some data did not exist past the first year of implementation and one, while purporting to use collective impact as a framework during its first few months of implementation, formally abandoned that framework for a different model.

Network Student Demographics As with many western US states, the state in which my original 14 network cases reside is a predominantly ethnically white state with a significant population of Latino/Hispanic, Mexican-American, and Central American immigrants, including second generation and multi-generation Hispanic-American families. Some of the state's urban centers have significant racial and ethnic diversity, including some of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse zip codes in the country, while a few of the other urban centers report a mostly white and Latino/Hispanic split along with a few smaller immigrant and ethnic minority populations. Some of the suburban and rural areas of the state are predominantly white, while most are either predominantly Latino/Hispanic and/or have large migrant Central American populations. Others are split between white and Latino/Hispanic with neither pan-ethnic category

being more than 60 percent of the population. The most commonly spoken language after English in nearly every county in the state is Spanish, with the third, fourth, and fifth languages including Vietnamese, Somali, and Russian.

Overarching Organizational Structure There were two prevailing organizational structures used by the 14 networks for which I collected data across my pilot and dissertation studies: independent and hub-and-spoke. The three networks that I studied for my pilot research were all independent networks, two of which that were based on the Strive Partnership (Strive Partnership, 2016) model and one that began by using the general collective impact framework the same year it was first published but then switched to what appears to be a version of collaboration for equity and justice. In the individually-driven models, an individual or a small group of individuals formed a new backbone organization, pulled together early stake holders, and implemented a network across a given geographic region. The smallest individual model network served one large urban school district, while the largest served 51 small rural school districts, and one served seven urban to and suburban districts.

Meanwhile, the 11 networks from which I collected data for this dissertation study were all a part of a hub-and-spoke model that started in 2012. The hub of this model is Western STEM⁸ (pseudonym), a nonprofit organization that functions as a backbone organization across a single state, supporting state-level legislative advocacy, regional STEM networks (the cases for this dissertation), and educational professional development and programming for K-12 schools. The original 11 network cases for this dissertation were supported by and given seed funding by Western STEM, although they were all independent networks. This means that the network

⁸ STEM is an acronym for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

directors and any administrative support they hired were not staff of Western STEM, but of the individual network and/or of a local backbone that assumed responsibility for the individual network. In most cases, the individual network directors were, administratively, staff of a local education-focused nonprofit or of a civic agency such as a city or county economic development or workforce board. This meant that seed funding secured by the network to begin implementation was routed through the nonprofit or civic agency to fund the salary of the network director, any other relevant network staff, and any network activities.

The table below summarizes each of the 14 networks for which I have collected data across both my pilot study and the research for this dissertation. Those that are italicized were not included in the data analysis for the dissertation because they did not meet my inclusion criteria. I provide more detailed information about Western STEM's hub-and-spoke model as well as more detailed information about the nine cases for which data was included in the analysis for this dissertation later in this chapter.

Table 5: All Network Characteristics

Network + Geog.	Starting Years	Educational Area Served	Organizational Structure
<i>Urban 1</i>	<i>2009 planning 2010 implementation</i>	<i>7 school districts</i>	<i>Single backbone, one network</i>
<i>Urban 2</i>	<i>2010 planning 2011 implementation</i>	<i>1 school district</i>	<i>Single backbone, one network</i>
<i>Suburban 3</i>	<i>2012 planning 2013 implementation</i>	<i>13 school districts</i>	<i>Part of hub and spoke, single backbone</i>
<i>Suburban 4</i>	<i>2012 planning 2013 implementation</i>	<i>11 school districts</i>	<i>Hub and spoke, spoke network, single backbone</i>
<i>Rural 5</i>	<i>2012 planning 2013 implementation</i>	<i>6 school districts</i>	<i>Hub and spoke, spoke network, single backbone</i>
<i>Urban 6</i>	<i>2012 planning 2013 implementation</i>	<i>10 school districts</i>	<i>Hub and spoke, spoke network, single backbone</i>
<i>Suburban 7</i>	<i>2014 planning 2015 implementation</i>	<i>18 school districts</i>	<i>Hub and spoke, spoke network, single backbone</i>
<i>Rural 8</i>	<i>2014 planning 2015 implementation</i>	<i>51 school districts</i>	<i>Single backbone, one network</i>
<i>Urban 9</i>	<i>2014 planning 2015 implementation</i>	<i>8 school districts</i>	<i>Defunct</i>
<i>Urban 10</i>	<i>2016 planning 2017 implementation</i>	<i>4 school districts</i>	<i>Hub and spoke, spoke network, single backbone</i>
<i>Suburban 11</i>	<i>2016 planning 2017 implementation</i>	<i>7 school districts</i>	<i>Hub and spoke, spoke network, single backbone</i>
<i>Rural 12</i>	<i>2016 planning 2017 implementation</i>	<i>5 school districts</i>	<i>Hub and spoke, spoke network, single backbone</i>
<i>Rural 13</i>	<i>2016 planning 2017 implementation</i>	<i>3 school districts</i>	<i>Hub and spoke, spoke network, single backbone</i>
<i>Suburban 14</i>	<i>2016 planning 2017 implementation</i>	<i>5 school districts</i>	<i>Hub and spoke, spoke network, single backbone</i>

Nine Cases from a Hub-and-Spoke Model

As mentioned above, the nine cases that fit my inclusion criteria for complete data collection and analysis for this dissertation were all part of a single hub-and-spoke model that I am calling Western STEM. Two of the nine cases served urban areas of the state, four served suburban areas, and three served rural areas of the state. The networks were incorporated and began implementation at different times over a four-year period, as outlined in the table above. In this section, I provide an overview of Western STEM as a backbone hub organization, including its plans and goals for individual network development, implementation, and support as well as its overall mission and goals as a statewide nonprofit organization. I then provide more specific information about the nine networks included as cases for this dissertation, including examples of their network work plans, goals, and governance structures.

The Western STEM Model

Western STEM is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 2011 and could be considered, according to collaboration and management literature, a backbone organization as well as serving as a nonprofit policy and advocacy group. While it is not a Strive Network partner, its goals and activities span the “cradle to career” continuum—from early learning goals through workforce development indicators—and target primarily traditional public education spaces, institutions, programs, and outcomes. Its mission and vision revolve around increasing access to, engagement in, and workforce outcomes in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) in relation to education, jobs, and industries/employers. Western STEM’s 2025 vision includes the following specific statewide goals:

- All K-12 students have access to computer science learning opportunities

- All high school graduates have an inspiring career goal and are prepared to succeed in related education and training pathways
- All children enter kindergarten and reach third grade on track in math
- All K-12 students demonstrate proficiency in basic science and engineering skills
- 70% of [the state's] students earn a postsecondary degree or credential

Western STEM names three priority areas—I would call them strategies—that they employ to reach their aspirational goals: incubation of STEM innovations in teaching and learning, state-level policy and advocacy for funding and support for STEM education and programming, and community-based STEM networks. These networks are the case subjects for this dissertation as well as their testbed for their other two strategy areas; that is, they utilize their networks to garner support (such as individuals willing to testify or write letters to legislators) for state policy and advocacy and to roll out teaching and learning innovations among teachers and schools that are participants in various STEM networks. Western STEM has, since its founding, aimed to support the implementation of a total of 10 STEM networks across the state and has recently fluctuated between eight and 10 fully functioning networks. At the time of data collection, nine networks were fully operational and had existed long enough to provide enough insight into networks' early implementation success and challenges. The vision for the Western STEM networks is as follows:

Our STEM Networks are creating unified systems of STEM education in their own communities – fostering partnerships, eliminating the duplication of work, and increasing impact. [Western] STEM's role in this process is to create a network of networks that spreads best practices among communities and drives the scaling of effective practices across the state.

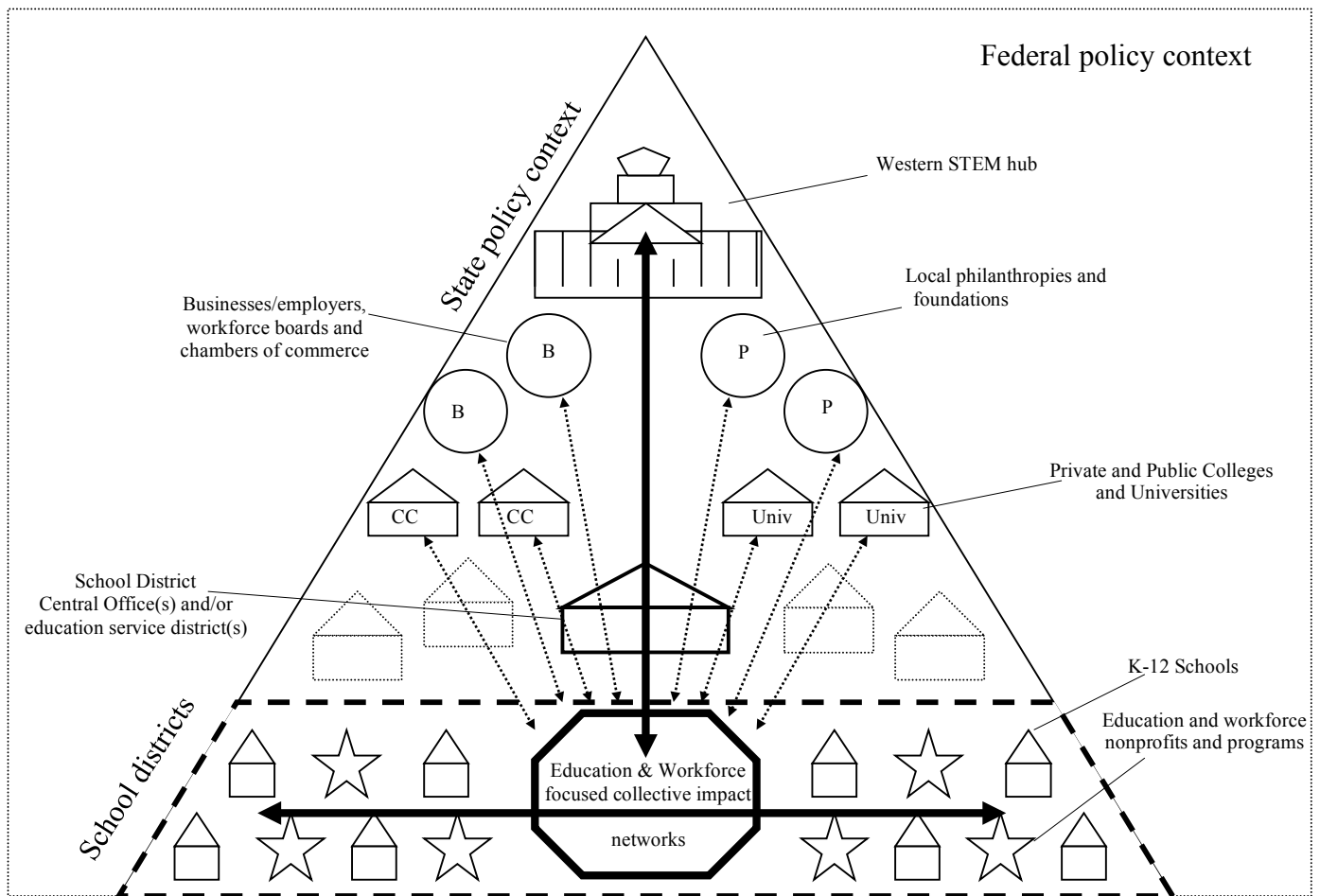
Operationally, Western STEM provides seed grants, through a competitive request for funding process, for which any region in the state is eligible. These seed grants, if awarded, allow a (usually) small group of leaders to hire a network director and provide the resources necessary for network planning and initial implementation. As part of the agreement to receive seed funding, applicants must agree to secure other sources of funding for network operations, including, eventually the salary of the network director and any other staff supported by the network. Applicant organizations have typically included workforce development boards, local colleges, industry associations, or regional education-focused nonprofits. In the following section I provide more specific information on each of the nine network cases for which I collected and analyzed data for this dissertation.

Nine Network Cases: Director & Stake Holder Characteristics

At the time of data collection, three of the nine STEM networks had two network leaders; in some cases they were called co-directors, in others they were referred to as directors and assistant directors. There were discrepancies in leaders' titles across documents and even across their email signatures and so, for sake of clarity, I will simply refer to these three pairs of leaders as co-directors when appropriate. All of the network directors appeared to me to be white and 9 of the 12 directors or co-directors referred to themselves as "white" or "Caucasian" at one point during data collection (either during an interview or during my observation of their conversations during one of the network director retreats). Six of the 12 directors or co-directors had professional backgrounds in K-12 or higher education, while the other six had had prior careers in the private business or nonprofit sectors. Most of them were indigenous to the regions served by their STEM networks and had held professional positions in that region prior to taking on the role as network director.

The 11 stakeholders that participated in interviews hailed from seven of the STEM networks, with with four of the networks yielding two stakeholder interviews. All but one of the stake holders appeared to be or identified themselves as white, while one stake holder self-identified as Hispanic. Six of the stake holders were staff members of a school or school district, one was a staff member at a local community college, and four held leadership positions in businesses or nonprofits in the networks’ regions.

Figure 4: Collective Impact Network Conceptualization



This is a conceptualization of the work of the nine postsecondary education and workforce development-focused collective impact efforts under study here and acts as an organizational

chart for the kinds of cross-sectoral collaborations these efforts attempt to navigate and sustain generally. The thick arrows represent the vertical and horizontal alignments they negotiate, while each level of the triangle represents politically and, usually, economically separate institutions or across sectors.

Overview of Common Challenges & Successes

In the following chapters, I review the key findings from my data analysis for this dissertation, focused on the nine STEM networks supported by Western STEM that were operational during my data collection period. I found that the work of the directors, during their early years of network implementation, centered on framing the agenda for their network stakeholders, and specifically required them to engage in organizational learning practices, such as engaging in discovery of information as joint work with participants and using evidence to understand root causes of issues. Overall, the literature-prescribed precondition of a shared sense of urgency was not present for any of the networks before they began implementation; rather, network leaders and their stakeholders built a sense of urgency through shared understandings of the information and data together over time. Furthermore, I found that some network leaders recognized that some minority communities already felt a sense of urgency and the network leaders found it hard to reconcile different approaches and experiences of the issues because of both perceived and actual power imbalances across different stakeholder groups.

I also found that many network directors and stakeholders shared similar perceptions regarding early successes of the networks, such as the case of recruitment efforts for a statewide STEM scholarship. At the same time, however, leaders and stakeholders had questions and concerns about how to assess the overall effectiveness of these scholarship-related efforts as well as other systemic and institutional structures and capacities that they believed were linked to the kinds of student outcomes they hoped to impact. Furthermore, network directors and their

stakeholders reported needing access to forms of evidence as well as assistance in summarizing the evidence, to inform their early implementation efforts. They most commonly cited the need for access to data regarding systemic student supports and institutional capacities such as K-12 coursework availability, teacher coursework capacity, and details on tracking of students from K-12 into higher education and the workforce. Finally, the network directors exhibited a range in levels of comfort with race and empowerment of minority communities in their regions. This manifested in a number of ways, including directors naming their own whiteness, indicating that they were unsure of how to include or work with minority communities, and general unease regarding their capabilities as leaders to navigate issues and situations that highlighted power imbalances among stake holders. In the following chapters, I provide details on these findings, followed by my conclusions and the implications of these findings as well as the limitations of this dissertation project.

CHAPTER 8 | DISCOVERING A SENSE OF URGENCY TOGETHER: A PROCESS RATHER THAN A PRECONDITION

In this chapter and the following chapter I am able to answer the first two research questions that have guided this investigation: “1) To what degree do early to middle year collaborations for education confirm or challenge the ability of practitioners to implement collective impact with fidelity given known limitations of the collective impact framework?” and “2) Under what circumstances and in what contexts are the efforts of education-focused collective impact network leaders challenged or successful in implementing a collective impact collaboration during its earliest years?” In this chapter, I answer those first two research questions by uncovering the processes of discovery that each of the collective impact network leaders went through to determine how to frame the issues that their network was intended to address to various community stakeholders. I argue that this process of discovery was fundamentally one of organizational learning—particularly one of engaging in joint work, using various forms of evidence to frame issues, and employing individual discussions of norms and values—that supplanted the precondition prescribed by collective impact authors of “a sense of urgency.” Similar to the findings of Wood (2016), I found that while two of the three preconditions for early sustaining of a collective impact network were necessary according to all study participants—the pre-conditions of significant resources and a committed champion and/or backbone organization (Hanleybrown et al., 2012)—the most common and salient challenge among network leaders and their colleagues during the early to middle years of implementation of the networks was in finding, generating, or coalescing around a sense of urgency.

Furthermore, this chapter describes the integrative leadership tactics and approaches network directors used to frame collaboration agendas and to structure the deliberation processes

and the interpretations that their stakeholders had regarding the postsecondary attainment and workforce supply-demand gaps in their region. I found that this process happened over time in order to build a sense of urgency as the network leaders began to uncover the beliefs and biases of their stakeholders as well as the stakeholders' understandings of their organizations' relative costs and benefits of participating in the network. Then, I enumerate the ways in which five of the nine network leaders specifically engaged in a discovery process with various stakeholders to identify and understand educational outcomes and discrepancies in their communities, including how the leaders' professional backgrounds informed their work with network members and how both presumed and actual political differences and power distribution between stakeholders mattered to decision making on the part of the network leaders. I argue that these tactics, approaches, and the process of joint discovery are evidence of organizational learning that must take place during the first one to two years of education-focused collective impact organizations and that expecting a precondition of urgency is neither realistic nor beneficial to the goals of the collective impact effort in the first place.

Therefore, to answer my first research question, I found that generating a sense of urgency for each stakeholder or group of stakeholders among the networks' member organizations was not at all a precondition for launching a collaborative network, as prescribed by collective impact literature. Rather, creating a sense of urgency, by toggling between agenda framing and stakeholder understandings of the issues through a process of organizational learning, was the most challenging but also most meaningful work of the collective impact network directors during their first few years of implementing the networks. Generating an understanding of the issues among various participants, framing them in a way that spurred dominant community leaders to engage, and engaging in joint work of uncovering causal links

between systems, policies, and people—the act of seeding a sense of urgency over time—is the necessary and foundational work of a collective impact effort’s champion or leader. It cannot be assumed that such urgency always exists prior to launching the network.

Agenda Framing to Understanding: A Learning Process

After two rounds of coding all of the data using my concepts from integrative leadership and organizational learning theories, I found that the most common integrative leadership tactic network leaders participated in during their early to mid-years of network implementation, as reported by themselves, other participants, and through document analysis, was agenda framing. This is not necessarily a surprising finding, as coalescing around a common agenda has been found to be the most common task for most collaborative efforts during their first few years in most of the recent studies on collaborations (Bryson et al., 2006; Crosby & Bryson, 2005b). Interestingly, however, these instances of agenda framing were nearly always also coded in my study for network directors’ use of various kinds of evidence to guide the deliberation of their stakeholders, their conversations and presentations with other network participants, and in formulating communications about the goals of their network.

Furthermore, I found that use of data or research as evidence was more commonly used by individuals who had high-level leadership positions in their former professions; use of one’s own experience or relying on the practices of peers as forms of evidence were more commonly used by individuals who had mid-level or non-leadership positions in their former professions. Network leaders reported a range of comfort with use of educational and workforce data as well as a range of comfort with using and interpreting research. Finally, all of the network directors reported that they had at least a general sense of what the collective impact framework was, with

three network leaders able to name specific elements of the framework and others having a vague understanding of the framework.

From data collected during one of the director retreats, I gathered evidence that only one of the network leaders believed that they were stepping into a network or into a space in which a “shared sense of urgency” was already established. All of the other network leaders, throughout the director retreat and corroborated in various interviews and with meeting documents, believed that they found a lack of interest in the work of the network, let alone urgency, from a majority of their stakeholders when their network was in its first year of implementation. Seven of the network’s leaders identified businesses and at least one of their school districts as a major source of challenge; they reported that leaders of those organizations (CEOs, superintendents, etc.) did not acknowledge, let alone have any cause for concern, regarding various educational outcomes for all students or among particular underrepresented minorities.

One leader reported that they assumed that all of the individuals who had agreed to be a part of the network on behalf of their organizations or institutions would understand the issue and already have enough information know why they needed to participate in collaboration. The network leader assumed that it was their responsibility to simply provide next steps on how to fix problems and hold people accountable for those changes. They described their challenge as such:

I thought they would all just get it! I don’t know why I thought that—I guess because I already knew what was going on with our schools and our kids not going to college equally, and I had worked in the schools. I thought, ‘Okay, so the first task is to make sure we are all on the same page,’ and during the first few meetings I had with them, I realized we aren’t even reading the same book. And I don’t know how to get the

businesses to understand what we're doing because they have their own agendas and I think they just show up because it looks good for them to be a part of this.

This leader was in the beginning of their second year of network implementation and said that they “actually believed in the collective impact” model and thought that that meant that people already knew something about the problems. Other leaders as well as network participants reported that they were surprised at how few leaders from other organizations understood that there was a discrepancy between different populations regarding educational outcomes. Three participants reported that they believe that some other network participants don't understand that systemic inequities or institutional policies can prevent students from being able to meet certain outcome indicators, and instead “blamed the students” or “think it was the family's fault or culture's fault.”

Five of the nine networks' leaders engaged in joint learning and/or discovery processes, in some cases at more than one time within a given network, using some form of data or research or both to discuss and come to shared conclusions regarding disparities in students' educational or workforce outcomes. In three cases, this took place during formal network meetings, with the network leaders bringing data or bringing a third party to present data or research regarding outcomes of the population served in the given network's region of influence. In two cases, joint learning or discovery occurred in one-on-one or in small group meetings between the network leaders and individual network members or small groups of like members (business leaders, for example). In all five cases of joint discovery, network leaders reported having to think about what each participant's intuitional or organizational goals were and how the data or research they presented would need to connect in some way to each participant's intuitional or organizational goals. In all five of these cases, network leaders reported having to question or set aside their

own assumptions about what conclusions they would draw regarding what the data or research said about educational or workforce outcomes. In this way, they all attempted to approach these framing conversations in a neutral way, implying use of a learning or joint process for use of evidence to frame (or, more accurately, identify) the collaboration efforts' key issues.

These findings suggest that issue framing from integrative leadership is perhaps not the most accurate name for the process that most network leaders went through. Issue discovery or joint identification may be a more accurate description of the processes that these leaders undertook. Furthermore, the process that many of the networks went through to understand and use evidence to guide their work underscores the findings from Wood (2016): “The sense of urgency was provided by the trend analysis of the community indicators—thus not a precondition, but rather the outcome of an institutional design for addressing community challenge” (p. 205). Discovery of information over time, use of evidence to inform perceptions, and engaging in joint work are all acts of organizational learning in which these network directors and stake holders reported partaking, as a way of understanding the issues they were tasked with investigating. If the directors had stated up front what they believed issues were, it's likely that they would not have gained interest or engagement from many of the stakeholders. In order to have a “shared” sense of urgency, the work of uncovering the issues, their causes, and their possible solutions was one that had to be truly shared, which took time during the first year or two of each of the nine networks that I studied.

Building Urgency Toward Organizational Engagement

As noted in the earliest parts of the literature review in Chapter 2, Thomson and colleagues (2009) found that mutuality was not a strong correlate of collaboration in the

empirical part of their work. They hypothesized many reasons why, but summarize their conclusion as such:

Mutuality has its roots in interdependence. Organizations that collaborate must experience mutually beneficial interdependencies based either on differing interests (what Powell [1990] calls complementarities) or on shared interests—usually based on homogeneity or an appreciation and passion for an issue that goes beyond an individual organization’s mission (such as the moral imperative of environmental degradation or a humanitarian crisis) (p. 28).

By this, they mean that mutuality—when each of two or more parties that are working together receive benefit from the work—must either happen in the form of benefiting the individual goals of each organization or must benefit a goal that is shared above and beyond each of the partners’ individual goals. All of the network directors I interviewed reported facing challenges with engaging (or even gaining interest from) some stake holders due to what many of the directors believed was the stake holders not knowing or not understanding how their organization might benefit by participating in the network. In most cases, network directors stated that their biggest challenge for stake holder engagement was with the business community (seven of 12 network directors identified this), while some directors identified individual school districts as the toughest stake holder group to engage (six of 12 directors identified this).

Directors stated that they believed that these “challenging stake holders” did not see any discernable complementarities (Powell, 1990) coming out of their relationship with their network. In two cases, network directors believed that prominent businesses that had declined to partake in network activities or to show interest in network meetings were unable to see how

what was asked of them as a network member would ever eventually result in a positive gain for their business. In both cases, the network directors were attempting to get the businesses to agree to host internships for middle or high schoolers at their business. They believed that the businesses wanted to have access to locally-trained potential employees, but, according to one director, “did not believe that hosting a 15-year old would get them a trained employee down the line.”

There were, however, other examples where mutuality had been built up and stake holders reported understanding how their engagement and efforts as a stake holder in the network would eventually benefit their organizations. One stake holder, a business, reported that the initial reason that they joined the network was to gain from the positive impression that the community would have about participation as an early member partner in the organization. However, as they participated in two conversations and one network leadership group meeting, the business began to realize that they would be able to diversify their employee base and source hard-to-fill jobs from local applicants if they participated in discussions with the network director and two of the local colleges that were also network stake holders. Furthermore, the business reported that they wouldn’t have understood how important the issue was if they hadn’t taken the time to look through some of the data and information regarding local workforce supply and demand gaps that the network director provided at one of the discussions they had with the director. The business member commented as such:

I knew that we were changing [as an industry] and I just thought that that, you know, would mean good competition for our openings. I didn’t think about the issue of the “skill gaps,” that’s what [network director] calls it—the fact that kids leave this region and don’t come back. They don’t want to stay in farm country. ‘Cause, you know, that’s what

we are here. But some do if they go through some local programs at [local community college]. So, we really have to capitalize on that. We'd be dumb not to.

In this way, some network directors were able to find ways of meeting stake holders where they were—listening to their interests and desires as an organization, and explaining the issues that they could solve together by referencing data and information. In these cases—which occurred in six of the nine networks—there were examples of initial hesitation from stake holders, which were met with communications with the network director assisted by the use of data and/or information as evidence to frame the issue. This built a shared sense of urgency between stake holders and network directors initially, which in some cases grew to a shared sense of urgency among a large group of stake holders across the networks.

CHAPTER 9 | MOVING THE FOCUS FROM STUDENTS TO SYSTEMS: LEADERSHIP IMPERATIVES FOR SUCCESSFUL NETWORKS

With this chapter, I continue to answer the first two research questions that guided this dissertation, but I also offer some answers to the third research question: In what ways can we measure early progress of education-focused collective impact collaboration efforts given the experiences, challenges, and successes of network leaders, regardless of their ability to implement to fidelity the collective impact model? The findings in this chapter center on some of the most interesting questions and challenges that network directors posed and identified regarding what Wood (2016) and colleagues might view as moving beyond traditional shared metrics to indicators of deeper systems changes. While every network director identified common education outcomes indicators as necessary for measuring the success of their collective impact networks, nearly all of them (seven out of nine) brought up concerns that either they held or that were voiced by stake holders regarding institutional or systemic barriers that they believed could prevent their network from being successful in reaching its goals. Some of them pointed out structures or policies that they or their stake holders believed warranted further investigation, and some of them simply asked open-ended questions related to capacity, scale, or breadth of programming or educational opportunities, without quite knowing yet if the issue was one that could be feasibly solved through structural or policy changes.

The most salient example of a policy or program that led network directors and/or their stake holders to raise concerns about systemic or institutional structures came out of the networks' involvement in a statewide college scholarship campaign. Questions that arose from the widely-accepted success of the campaign were reminiscent of findings from my pilot study, which included outcomes regarding a different statewide scholarship campaign. The findings

from the pilot study and from this dissertation's study echo each other, leading one to wonder about the promising value of these scholarships, both in their original intent to motivate students/families, as well as how they might, given particular leadership tactics from network directors, motivate collective impact stake holders to examine institutional policies and systemic structures.

Relatedly, another salient finding was that all of the networks reported wanting better access to (or access at all to) and support in explaining and summarizing data and information regarding institutional and systemic structures and policies. Access to student outcomes, such as test scores, was widely acknowledged to be accessible to network directors and to their stake holders, but several directors stated that they either did not have any access to or didn't have easy access to, nor have the capacity or ability to incorporate, data or information regarding systems capacities, policies and structures. This included data and information such as the number of and types of STEM courses available in regional high schools, a list of and enrollment criteria for all out-of-school activities that could support STEM enrichment for local students, and the number of students from the region who went on to enroll in and/or complete STEM degrees at higher education institutions. Furthermore, some network directors and stakeholders voiced concerns regarding moving into their networks' second or third year of implementation without having a firm grasp on the kinds of systems-level accountability indicators they might use to measure progress. They indicated that they didn't believe that they could rely solely on student-level indicators to measure their network's progress both because the network was too early in implementation to be connected to student-level outcomes and because their networks' goals were tied to systemic and institutional changes.

In the following sections, I provide details about each of my findings regarding director and stakeholder interest in, and challenges around, measuring their networks' outcomes by paying attention to systemic and institutional indicators rather than just student level data.

Catching the Scholarship Bug

The single most common concept or topic that was discussed or named across every single interview, many meeting notes and minutes, most of the network reports, and other documentation that was part of my analysis, was an existing statewide scholarship aimed at increasing the number of students who completed STEM bachelor's degrees at higher education institutions in the state. I will refer to this scholarship simply as "the STEM scholarship" throughout this chapter. While data analysis revealed excitement and engagement at many levels around this scholarship from many stakeholders and leaders, nearly every network had at least one participant or piece of documentation evidence reporting that they had systems-level questions about capacity and institutional readiness related to the scholarship. This indicated that networks and their leaders were moving from "early wins" in issue framing to managing stakeholder interpretations through efforts at joint learning and building of interest in evidence regarding potential systemic changes needed to address a core issue.

The STEM scholarship was partially funded through state financial aid (state grants) and partially through significant funding from private donors, businesses, and foundations. The scholarship aimed to fill jobs in high-demand sectors in the state, most of which were in technology, engineering, health, and other STEM-related industries, by providing increasing levels of scholarship support for students as they completed a relevant bachelor's degree. Eligibility was limited to state residents who graduated from a state high school and who were attending a state college (including all public colleges and most private colleges), and limited to

students from moderate- to low-income households. While students could receive up to \$22,500 from the STEM scholarship, they also could access personalized advising, mentorship, internship connections, and job search support throughout their time as scholars. The scholarship and related support services could be received for up to five years, with the first one to three years' awarded at \$2,500, increasing to \$5,000 when a student was accepted to an approved high-demand major, and increased to \$7,500 for the student's final year. These increasing award amounts, alongside targeted support programming, aimed to incentivize satisfactory progress toward a bachelor's degree that was associated with jobs in industries in the state that had verified supply-demand gaps.

For the first few years that the scholarship was available, the administrators of it did not recruit the maximum number of scholarship recipients, in part because recruiting was complicated by a large infusion of support from a single donor during the second year of the scholarship's availability. The scholarship administrator increased statewide recruitment, including working closely with the Western STEM hub and its relatively new regional networks to create regional goals for numbers of scholarship applicants and recipients. Western STEM hub staff, network directors, and network stake holders all mentioned the STEM scholarship ramp up in goals, communication activities, and recruitment support as an easily identifiable "success" for the organization and its networks. Directors and stake holders reported that the STEM scholarship gave them a "clear direction" for their work including how to use media outlets, an activity around which they could "rally support," and a way of "measuring a clear indication of good things happening." One director spoke of the engagement and excitement around the STEM scholarship in the following way when asked to describe a network success:

Oh, of course the [STEM] scholarship was a huge deal here this year and last year. We doubled—more than doubled—our applicants last year and then increased it some more again this year. It’s great that so many students are applying and that schools are getting involved in it and making it a fun competition. And it was picked up in two newspapers, which was so great for the network.

This director and two others spoke of their networks’ efforts around the scholarship as a concept that had reliable data and readily understood accountability indicators. They reported receiving direct support from the Western STEM hub with updates about their progress in numbers of scholarship applications completed and increases from year to the next. They also reported being provided media-ready information and press releases that they used to promote and generate excitement about the scholarship and to have an opportunity to widely broadcast their networks’ goals and spread awareness about their region’s worker supply-demand gaps affecting local STEM-based industries.

However, directors and stake holders also posed questions about the overall goal of increasing the number of students who are prepared for, enroll in, and complete postsecondary STEM degrees. Five interviewees from four different regions of the state asked similar questions or posed similar concerns about institutional or systemic capacity for supporting student readiness or entry into STEM majors and degrees. Three of the five cited media articles that had drawn attention to one of the state universities’ lack of capacity in computer science and engineering majors and the institution’s efforts to increase the number of spots in STEM degree programs. One network director posed their question regarding system capacity as they talked through the value of the STEM scholarship as such:

I kind of wonder if we are just giving [the STEM] scholarships to students who would have already been doing the college thing and then patting ourselves on the back for it and calling it good. Are we doing anything about spots in STEM for them? That's what I want to tackle next...Like for the spots in computer science at [state public baccalaureate institution]. I've been working with [the local community college] to figure out how many of our students are going through them [attending the local community college] to get to either [state public baccalaureate institution] or [other state public baccalaureate institution]. You know, I just really, well, I want to know if the numbers are ticking up [in STEM degrees] and I kind of don't know where to begin.

This network director's concerns highlight a number of potential underlying institutional and systemic capacity constraints that could prevent students in their region from pursuing STEM degrees. This director as well as one of the stake holders from this individual's network expressed that they would like to have a better understanding of how many students—specifically high school seniors—were prepared or eligible to go to a four-year college in the state (discussed in the following section) as well as a sense of whether the STEM scholarship was increasing the overall number of students in their region who were getting STEM degrees. Indeed, a number of interviewees expressed both an excitement for the STEM scholarship, followed by critical questions about how to determine if the goal of the scholarship (alongside the goal of their networks) to increase the overall number of students pursuing STEM degrees was being achieved. When asked if they expected to be able to find or receive information on the indicator of increasing the overall number of students in their region or in the state who are pursuing STEM bachelor degrees, three reported that they would not know how to find that kind

of information and three reported that they hoped that the Western STEM hub would provide that information.

When recoding passages from interviews regarding the STEM scholarship, interestingly, I found that all interviewees began by talking about the scholarship as a positive point of engagement with others in their network and as a vehicle for communication about the goals and agenda of the STEM network. This points to the scholarship as a useful tool for network directors to frame one of their networks' core issues—that of a supply-demand gap in the number of eligible local residents who have the credentials and training necessary for relatively high paying STEM-related jobs in their region. At the same time, talking about the STEM scholarship also seemed to prompt all of the interviewees to ask critical questions related to, but not necessarily directly impacted by, the STEM scholarship, such as about higher education institutional capacity in STEM majors as well as overall student preparation and eligibility to attend four-year colleges. Some named the type of evidence (data, information) that they would like to have in order to be able to discuss those concerns with relevant stake holders, such as local higher education institution leaders or local district superintendents and school principals. Finally, all of them expressed that they didn't have enough data or information to have those discussions, another common thread from my data analysis overall.

Indeed, stake holders and network directors reported that they had identified a number of sources of evidence as necessary for them to uncover both causes and potential solutions for systemic and institutional barriers faced by their region's students and families. One director summed up their needs this way:

I've got all of the data I can possibly get from all of the public sources and I've been working with it for a while. But now I need to work with the schools to get some data that

the state just doesn't have because it's a mess. I need to know how many seats there are in AP [advanced placement] math and science courses and some of our districts just don't want to work on that with me. I've got to figure out a way to know how much room there is in the system. I can't pretend that students will be prepared for college if they can't get the right classes in high school. That's a joke.

This director had held a professional position in a school district with which they were tasked with working and summarizing student outcome data. Therefore, the network director had considerable skill in understanding and accessing data sources that stake holders requested. However, in this situation, even for perhaps the most data-savvy network leader out of all of the cases, this director required and requested different data—the kind that could reveal systemic gaps that could make it impossible for students to access STEM high school courses because of capacity constraints. This focus on needing systems-level indicators pointed to an overall readiness among network stake holders to understand institutional barriers that could be a root cause of a particular poor student indicator rather than just the student indicator itself.

Empowering Minority Voices and Experiences

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, race and racial power imbalance were salient codes during my inductive round of coding the data. Network directors' acknowledgment of their own race, statements about racial populations that made up their networks' regions, and the degree to which race was a factor in directors' and stake holders' understanding of their networks' goals varied widely. Four directors named empowering minority voices and working with communities who have been traditionally underserved in public education, higher education, and in workforce outcomes as challenges in their network that they and their stake holders were working to overcome. Interestingly, all of the network directors named their race or

stated how their race was different from that of others in their networks' regions, although the reasons for them naming their own race differed widely. Three of the network directors expressed deep emotions regarding how race—their own, that of their stakeholders, and their regions' students and families—was a factor in systemic barriers they believed local individuals faced in accessing educational and workforce opportunities.

The range of comfort that the network directors expressed in wanting to and feeling capable of approaching minority communities regarding their engagement in network activities was vastly different from network to network. One director expressed confidence in knowing that they needed to engage one particular minority population and described going about it in this way:

Well, this region has a lot of Hispanic families. That population has grown a lot recently. I've learned that from looking at the data with the superintendent's group and I know how to use the census data. And so I went to this program, it's a Latino program for families in [this area], and I asked if there could be a representative from their organization who could be a part of the network and then, well, and I asked if she could come and speak to the network about what she knows, like what she's heard from families about how they interact with the schools and the teachers. She has a lot to say; so much of this isn't new to her at all, it's not new, their program. I know I'm new in this kind of work—it's so different from my corporate job. But I know that if you want to find out what's going on with something, you have to go to the source. And in this case, it's the Hispanic people themselves.

Another network director expressed regret that they hadn't realized until after they had been in the network directorship role that they might have contributed to maintenance of systemic status quos as such:

I used to work in the nonprofit world and I did fundraising for a while for nonprofits. Then I went to a training here locally about social justice and advocacy or whatever in networks like mine and I realized, holy crap, I was part of the problem! Me! I was working for nonprofits that had access to a lot of the foundations [in my area]. Sometimes we didn't even really need the money for what it was out there for. It would have been better if a community or ethnic program used the money; they had a, you know, a better relationship with the people that it was meant for. But we gobbled it up.

Later on in the same interview with that director, the person expressed deep sadness and concern for how to navigate their work in the particular region they served, given that they felt that their change in understanding about the problem and their views of racism and systemic barriers were a rarity among their family and friends:

Sometimes I realize that my views and my values are really different from everyone else around here. I don't talk about political stuff with anyone—they don't know any different, they think I'm like them. But I've really changed over the past few years. And I'm working to make things change now that I know that I have people's trust. I'll just keep working away at it.

I couldn't help but reflect on these particular parts of my interviews with network leaders and wonder if these are examples of white leaders take ownership of their position of privilege in an attempt to become allies for minority groups.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

This dissertation aimed to understand the extent to which education-focused collective impact network leaders were able to follow and implement the collective impact framework with fidelity, to understand the challenges and successes they experienced in early years of network implementation, and to start to uncover ways that we might assess early collective impact efforts given their strategies and tactics for overcoming challenges. This dissertation provides further understanding of the relationships between collaboration efforts, cross-sector efforts in particular, and collective impact frameworks specifically while also contextualizing the placement of collective impact cross-sector collaborations for postsecondary outcomes within the larger narrative of collaborations generally. Below, I outline the various contributions this dissertation provides as well as provide a call for further research. I also summarize the overall limitations of this study.

Theoretical Contributions

This dissertation began by synthesizing collaboration literature generally, and then literature on social, cause-based, cross-sector, and place-based collaborations more specifically, and then offered suggestions on how we might learn from the collective impact framework's limitations that have been enumerated by researchers over the past few years. From Thomas and others, we already knew that collaboration efforts may be weak in reciprocal activities and perceptions of reciprocity among participants may be slow to develop in early years of a collaborative effort—we knew this well before the collective impact framework came on the scene. More recent researchers found that the precondition of a sense of urgency was simply not present in those collaborative efforts they investigated and that, in fact, discovering a sense of urgency over time was the work that many collaborative network leaders had to undertake in the

early years of implementation. With the findings from my study, it seems that reciprocity (both the actions and perceptions thereof) and a sense of urgency are or can be deeply linked by the process of working together to uncover evidence about the target populations and target indicators that a collaborative effort aims to affect.

Using organizational learning theory to understand the practices that network leaders can employ to develop a sense of urgency among participants and to move to a space of reciprocity could be a significant addition to post-collective impact frameworks, such as Collaborating for Equity & Justice. Understanding the efforts of these leaders alongside their network members as a learning process can help to frame evidence in a way that does not necessarily privilege dominant models of measurement and indicators, which have the potential to reinforce a status quo that is contrary to the vision of the collaboratives' efforts and goals.

I found that when some of the network directors in my study were attempting to use and discuss evidence regarding their target populations, they would discover that some of the “reinforcing activities” [that they utilized?], while promising for gaining interest in and media attention for the work of the network, may actually end up reinforcing status quo problems such as academic tracking or systemic bottlenecks rather than addressing the issue at its institutional or policy roots. This finding supports recent calls by researchers for an investigation of to what degree collaborative efforts that aim to address systemic issues of inequity are actually able to do so, especially if they are using a framework that privileges dominant forms of data and measurement. I argue that by supporting a learning-oriented approach to the discovery and use of evidence regarding educational outcomes among target populations, leaders and their network member participants may be able to more easily uncover together systemic structures and

institutional policies that are preventing the kind of change the collaborative effort is trying to make.

Methodological Contributions

By conducting a multiple case study that included network cases that developed over largely the same time period, in the same state, with the same hub-and-spoke backbone support, but in different geographical contexts and with network leaders who had different skills and backgrounds, I was able to understand the challenges that collective impact champions face when given the same resource supports and general framework for implementation. Case studies, in general, can help uncover information about phenomena that are new or relatively understudied and, as in this case, can provide detail about individuals' experiences and details about how they go about their work that other methodological approaches cannot capture. In this study, I was able to uncover the ways in which multiple individuals grappled with information and worked within a broadly similar framework with little to no oversight and a lot of autonomy. In short, I used the case study method to understand the practices of people in ambiguous circumstances and was able to determine some of the tactics they used to tackle issues for which they had no handbook.

Implications for Practice

Network directors are key champions and boundary spanners in the work of implementing collaborative networks and their approaches and supports can ensure that challenges are met with creative solutions. I found that network directors often engaged in joint discovery and processes of organizational learning in order to help develop a shared sense of urgency among stake holders. However, they were often frustrated at having a lack of sufficient evidence in the form of data or curated information that could support their discussions and

meetings with stake holders. This was especially true with regard to systemic and institutional capacity data and information about structural policies, as many directors indicated that they had a basic understanding of and access to student-level educational outcomes data. These findings suggest that Western STEM hub staff should support their network leaders by either providing systemic and institutional data or advocating for the curation of such data by the relevant systems actors, such as state educational data and research entities, e.g., state longitudinal data systems centers and system level boards in both K-12 and higher education.

Furthermore, network directors displayed a range of levels of comfort in being able to work or engage with minority groups in their network regions. Most of them recognized that these minority groups were disproportionately underserved by education institutions and nonprofit programs, but some directors reported not knowing where to begin when it came to reaching out to those groups while others had reached out but were unsure of how to navigate power imbalances between minority group representatives and other stake holders. These findings support the recommendation that Western STEM needs to provide training regarding anti-racist pedagogy as well as, perhaps, on methods for collaborating for justice and equity.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Coalition Participant Interview Protocol

1. I understand that _____ (coalition) is about XX years old [almost the same for all sites]; how long have you/your organization been involved with the coalition?

Probe: Has your participation or the participation of your organization as part of the coalition changed over the first year of its existence?

Probe: If yes, in what ways has it changed?

Probe: Why has your participation changed?

Probe: Why did you it experience those changes?

2. In your opinion, why do you think _____ (coalition) was created?

Probe: Do you think this coalition is serving a need in this region?

Probe: How would you or your organization characterize the need for this coalition?

Why is your organization participating? What does it hope to get out of it?

3. As you understand them, what are the goals of the coalition?

Probe: If you or your organization is a part of subcommittees or workgroups, what are their goals?

Probe: How do the subcommittee or workgroup goals differ from or support the overall mission if the coalition?

Probe: If the goals are different, what, in your opinion, is the overall mission of the coalition?

Probe: The coalition consists of different member organizations: what are their separate goals as best you understand them?

Probe: Where do they see common ground?

Probe: Where are they still perhaps in different places?

4. What is your role in the _____ (coalition name)?

Probe: What does your role consist of on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis?

Probe: What are some of the duties of your role?

Probe: How did you get involved? What motivated your participation?

Probe: In what ways would you say you or your organization participate in this coalition?

5. As _____(role), which meetings do you attend that are related to this coalition?

6. Outside of meetings, how would you characterize the work that you do as a coalition member?

Probe: Are members expected to do work between meetings?

Probe: If yes, what?

7. What does the coalition try to accomplish in [meeting type A/meeting type B]?

Probe: Can you walk me through an average meeting?

Probe: Who attends the meetings?

Probe: Who runs the meetings? And how do they?

8. In observing the meetings, it seems that the coalition has short-term goals for each month and each year as well as long-term goals that may span a year or up to three to five years or the life of the organization. Is that accurate?

Probe: Inside or outside of the meetings, how are the long-term goals determined?

Probe: Who, in your opinion, guides the decision-making around goal setting?

Probe: Have the goals changed during your participation in the coalition?

Probe: If yes, why and in what ways?

9. Inside or outside of the meetings, how are the short-terms goals determined?

Probe: Who, in your opinion, guides the decision-making around goal setting?

Probe: Have the goals changed during your participation in the coalition?

Probe: If yes, why and in what ways?

10. Have you participated in identifying goals?

Probe: If yes, what goals and how? Why those?

Probe: Can you walk me through what happened in that meeting or conversation?

Probe: What challenges, if any, did you experience any challenges during that process, and how did you respond to them?

11. In your opinion, has the coalition reached any short-term or long-term goals so far?

Probe: If yes, which ones?

Probe: Can you walk me through how you participated in or observed the reaching of that goal (those goals)? What evidence, if any, can you point to?

Probe: Who was involved in the setting and reaching of that goal (those goals)?

Probe: If no, what stage(s) are you at in reaching those goals?

12. What stands out to you as the kind of support needed to make this coalition work?

Probe: Do you think the coalition has received that support?

Probe: If yes, from whom/what?

13. Have you experienced or observed any unintended outcomes based on the work of the coalition?

Probe: If yes, what were they?

Probe: Would you say that these outcomes have been important in some way?

Probe: If yes, what makes those unintended outcomes important to you?

14. In a perfect situation, if the coalition kept running smoothly and stayed on track with its goals, what would the landscape of education in this region/district look like in 5 years?

Probe: In 10 years? Or 20?

APPENDIX B: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Guide, Coalition and Subcommittee/Workgroup Meetings

Field notes will be taken during observation of all meetings I am allowed to attend, including large-group coalition meetings, subcommittee or workgroup meetings, and potentially (if they exist) executive or leadership meetings and any others that fall outside of these definitions.

I plan to attend a total of nine (9) large group meetings (somewhat evenly distributed between the three coalitions I have identified) as well as approximately six (6) subcommittee or workgroup meetings (as is possible and appropriate with permission) during the data collection period for this study.

I will pay attention to the following items during each meeting.

Large Group Coalition Meetings:

- Who is present and what organization/institution s/he represent
- Who facilitates the meeting and who speaks at the meeting; how people interact at the meeting. Obvious dominance, silences....
- Meeting agenda (if any)
- Meeting objectives (if any)
- How meeting objectives are declared and known by participants.
- Any goals that are identified related to: the meeting at hand, future meetings and work of the participants, the mission of the coalition, the mission of the subcommittees or workgroups
- How goals are identified
 - by whom,
 - reasons/justification for identification,
 - discussion, if any, about the goals
- Revisions/changes to past goals (long or short term) over time/across meetings
- Participation and attendance over time/across meetings
- Continuity of discussion of topics over time/across meetings
- Changes in organizational direction over time/across meetings
- Discussion or references to research that may guide the work of the coalition
- Challenges to or discussions around identification of goals

- Discussion of perceived systemic gaps related to higher education attainment
- Discussion of perceived solutions related to higher education attainment
- Other issues that preoccupy the meeting participants
- Meeting conclusions:
 - task completion,
 - assignments made for the future,
 - celebrations
 - the absence of any of these

Subcommittee/Workgroup Meetings:

- Who is present and what organization/institution s/he represent
- Who facilitates the meeting and who speaks at the meeting
- Any goals that are identified related to: the meeting at hand, future meetings and work of the participants, the mission of the coalition, the mission of the subcommittees or workgroups
- How goals are identified
 - by whom,
 - reasons/justification for identification,
 - discussion, if any, about the goals
- Revisions/changes to past goals (long or short term) over time/across meetings
- Discussion or references to research that may guide the work of the coalition
- Challenges to or discussions around identification of goals
- Discussion of perceived systemic gaps related to higher education attainment
- Discussion of perceived solutions related to higher education attainment
- Revisions/changes to past goals (long or short term) over time/across meetings
- Participation and attendance over time/across meetings
- Continuity of discussion of topics over time/across meetings
- Changes in organizational direction over time/across meetings
- Discussion or references to research that may guide the work of the coalition
- Challenges to or discussions around identification of goals
- Discussion of perceived systemic gaps related to higher education attainment
- Discussion of perceived solutions related to higher education attainment
- Other issues that preoccupy the meeting participants

- Meeting conclusions:
 - task completion,
 - assignments made for the future,
 - celebrations
 - the absence of any of these

APPENDIX C: DATA-SOURCE-BY-RESEARCH-QUESTION MATRIX

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	DATA SOURCE
<p>1. What is the scope and nature of region-based postsecondary attainment and college readiness coalitions?</p> <p>1a. Which gaps between attainment outcomes, known barriers, and representative solutions do these coalitions identify as central to their organization’s mission and goals?</p> <p>1b. How do individuals in the organization identify those gaps?</p> <p>1c. What does that identification process look like as it happens?</p> <p>1d. What supports or challenges do the coalitions identify or encounter during that process?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Coalition Leaders</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviews ○ Observing during coalition meetings ○ (see below) ■ <i>Coalition Members</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviews ○ Observing during coalition meetings ○ (see below) ■ <i>Coalition Meetings (Both Leaders and Members Present)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Monthly, bimonthly or quarterly meetings, depending on each coalition’s schedule ■ <i>Coalition Meetings (Subgroups of only Leaders, or only leaders and some members)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Subcommittee meetings, executive or leadership meetings, workgroup meetings, others as they form and are scheduled ■ <i>Document analysis</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meeting agendas and notes, materials distributed at meetings or in emails, coalition-codified documents
<p>2. How do these coalitions determine their scope of work?</p> <p>2a. What is the theory of action in identifying the gaps between attainment outcomes, known barriers, and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Coalition Leaders</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviews ○ Observing during coalition meetings ○ (see below)

<p>representative solutions?</p> <p>2b. What models, if any, do the coalition leaders and mentors identify as useful and replicable?</p> <p>2c. What research, data, or guidelines do these coalitions use to inform their mission, goals, and perceived outcomes?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Coalition Meetings (Both Leaders and Members Present)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Monthly, bimonthly or quarterly meetings, depending on each coalition's schedule ■ <i>Document analysis</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Meeting agendas and notes, materials distributed at meetings or in emails, coalition-codified documents
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APPENDIX D: CONSENT TO INTERVIEW

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

CONSENT FORM

Consent to Interview

Researchers: Jenee Myers Twitchell, Doctoral Student
College of Education
Miller 322B, Box 352800, Seattle, WA 98195-2800
myersja@uw.edu, 206-409-8705
Faculty Adviser: Dr. Ed Taylor, edtaylor@uw.edu

Researchers' statement

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether to be in the study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what we would ask you to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a volunteer, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When we have answered all your questions, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” I will give you a copy of this form for your records.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Collaborative networks that use collective impact strategies hold promise for increasing education attainment and social equity but relatively little is known about how the activities of the collaborative organizations lead to incremental changes in a larger system. This study attempts to build on previous research about collaborations in education (usually in K-12 education), organizational learning theories, and higher education attainment among underrepresented groups (such as students from low-income families, students of color, and students whose first language is not English). The study will explore the scope and nature of these cross-sector networks and coalitions and how individual leaders/members participate in their activities and what their experiences are as a result.

STUDY PROCEDURES

This study is a comparative multi-site case study of four different cross-sector networks/coalitions in the state of Washington. For this study I will conduct interviews with up to 40 individuals who are leaders or members of a cross-sector network that aims to increase education outcomes and social equity.

This form asks for your consent to participate in an interview for the study and for your permission that I audio record the interview.

If you choose to participate, I would like to do a semi-structured interview with you of approximately 60-90 minutes about network/coalition activities, procedures and meetings; your role in the coalition; about the coalition's mission and goals and actions taken to achieve these goals; and your experiences as a result of participating in network activities. For example, I will ask you "As you understand them, what are the goals of the coalition?"

Interviews will last about 60 minutes and no longer than 90 minutes each. I will conduct these interviews in a quiet and secure location, preferably the interviewee's place of work or in a public office/meeting space. I will digitally record the interviews and transcribe them myself. Recordings will be saved on a password-protected laptop and original and saved recordings will be destroyed by six years after being recorded. I may follow up with you after interviewing you to ask for clarification on information you shared during the interview.

You have the right to not participate in the interviews. You also have the right to end the interview at any time during the interview.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

You may be uncomfortable sharing information about yourself or your experiences during interviews, especially if sensitive material is being discussed or referenced. If this is the case, you can, at any time, tell me that you would like me to leave or that you would like to end the interview. You can also contact me any time outside of meetings or interviews to ask questions or raise concerns. Breach of confidentiality may be a risk of the study if persons other than the research team obtain your responses.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

There are likely no direct benefits from this study for participants. A possible indirect benefit to participants is a better understanding of your coalition/network's work and how to improve your work as a participant in the network.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH INFORMATION

All data in this study will be confidential (names and identities will be linked to pseudonyms). Links between names and pseudonyms will be destroyed in six years.

I will collect and record the names and roles of individuals who participate in any way in your coalition/network. I will then assign pseudonyms to each participant and only use those pseudonyms to reference statements or actions. All data for this study, including the names, roles and pseudonyms of individuals will be kept on my password-protected laptop. There is never a guarantee that your identity or participation in the coalition can be completely protected, but I will do everything possible to keep your name and role confidential during and after the study.

I will use pseudonyms for any findings, published manuscripts, or other outcomes from this study.

Government or university staff sometimes review studies such as this one to make sure they are being done safely and legally. If a review of this study takes place, your records may be examined. The reviewers will protect your privacy. The study records will not be used to put you at legal risk of harm.

OTHER INFORMATION

You may refuse to participate and you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any questions about this research study, please contact Jenee Myers Twitchell at the telephone number or e-mail listed on the top of this form. If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact the University of Washington Human Subjects Division: 206-543-0098.

Subject's statement

This study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research, or if I have been harmed by participating in this study, I can contact one of the researchers listed on the first page of this consent form. If I have questions about my rights as a research subject, I can call the Human Subjects Division at (206) 543-0098 or call collect at (206) 221-5940. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed name of subject

Signature of subject

Date

Copies to: Researcher
 Subject

APPENDIX E: CONTACT TEXT FOR COALITION LEADER PERMISSION

Email/Phone/In-person Contact Script for Coalition Leader Permission to Conduct Study

Dear _____,

My name is Jenee Myers Twitchell and I am a student researcher at the University of Washington. I am hoping to conduct a study to investigate the work of college-readiness coalitions like (insert coalition name) . This study will allow me to better understand the activities, participants and conditions of these kinds of coalitions.

Please see the attached Interview Consent Form that further details the purpose, procedures and possible risks of this study.

[I would like to talk to you further about your interest having your coalition members be a part of this study.] OR [I would like to interview you about your experiences as a member of this coalition. The interview would take between 60 and 90 minutes and I would ask you questions about your participation in coalition activities and your experiences a member in this group overall.]

Please let me know if you are interested in participating in this study. Feel free to email me or call me below to talk through any questions you have or to schedule a time for me to interview you.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jenee Myers Twitchell, Doctoral Student
University of Washington College of Education
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
myersja@uw.edu, 206-409-8705

Attachment: Appendix G, Consent to Interview

APPENDIX F: CONTACT TEXT FOR PERMISSION FROM K-12 LEADERS

**Email/Phone/In-person Contact Script for
K-12 School District Leader**

Dear _____,

My name is Jenee Myers Twitchell and I am a student researcher at the University of Washington. I am hoping to conduct a study to investigate the work of college-readiness coalitions like (insert coalition name) . This study will allow me to better understand the activities, participants and conditions of these kinds of coalitions.

Please see the attached Interview Consent Form that further details the purpose, procedures and possible risks of this study.

As you may know, (School district staff member) is a representative member of (School/School District) for the (insert coalition name) . I am seeking your permission for (School district staff member) to participate as an interviewee in my study of (insert coalition name) . I understand that your district's protocol for employee participation in research studies requires permission from you/your office. Please let me know if you would like to discuss this further or if there are any other protocol you would like me to follow for permission for (School district staff member) to participate.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jenee Myers Twitchell, Doctoral Student
University of Washington College of Education
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
myersja@uw.edu, 206-409-8705

Attachment: Appendix G, Consent to Interview

APPENDIX G: CONTACT TEXT FOR POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES

Email/Phone/In-person Contact Script for Network Leader or Members

Dear _____,

My name is Jenee Myers Twitchell and I am a student researcher at the University of Washington. I am hoping to conduct a study to investigate the work of coalitions like ____ (insert coalition name) _____. This study will allow me to better understand the activities, participants and conditions of these kinds of coalitions as well as how participants partake in network activities. I would like to interview you about your participation in the network and your experiences as a member/representative of your organization.

Please see the attached Interview Consent Form that further details the purpose, procedures and possible risks of this study.

Please let me know if you are willing to or would like to further discuss being interviewed for this study.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jenee Myers Twitchell, Doctoral Student
University of Washington College of Education
myersja@uw.edu, 206-409-8705

Attachment: Consent to Interview

APPENDIX H: CONTACT TEXT FOR OBSERVING MEETING PARTICIPANTS

Email/Phone/In-person Contact Script and Notification of Meeting Observations for Coalition Meeting Participants

Dear _____,

My name is Jenee Myers Twitchell and I am a student researcher at the University of Washington. I am conducting a study to investigate the work of college-readiness coalitions like _____ (insert coalition name) _____. This study is a pilot study that will allow me to better understand the activities, participants and conditions of these kinds of coalition. I would like to notify you that I plan to observe _____'s regular and subcommittee meetings for the next four to six months.

I will attend three to six meetings with your coalition over the next six months. I will act as a participant observer, as my work with the University of Washington may be of interest or relevance during the meetings. I will be observing the dynamics of the organization, the kinds of questions raised, and the kinds of plans and goals that are generated during the meetings. This will not require any extra time or effort on your part.

I will only take field notes during meetings; no other recording methods will be used.

If you have questions about my observations or my methods of taking field notes, please notify me personally. If, during any meeting, you become uncomfortable with my presence or note taking, please let me know so that I can adjust my procedures or exclude your remarks from any of my notes.

If, at any time during or after the meeting, you feel uncomfortable or have questions, please notify me (contact information below) so that I can adjust my procedures or exclude your comments from any or all of my data.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jenee Myers Twitchell, Doctoral Student
University of Washington College of Education
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
myersja@uw.edu, 206-409-8705

APPENDIX G: PILOT STUDY FINDINGS, ONE NETWORK'S EARLY YEARS

The excerpt below comes from one of the cases I studied during the pilot phase of my research. I called the network the Columbia College Access Network (CCAN) to protect study participants' privacy and to ensure confidentiality of the network itself. The findings about this particular network highlight the work of a network that had formed two years before (2009) the coining of the term and creation of the framework of collective impact (2011), and data collection took place in 2010 and 2011 and the pilot study paper was written in 2012. Findings from this particular case from the pilot study pointed to the usefulness of an organizational learning framework because of the ambiguity in the nature of this work, because of the usefulness of understanding processes and practices over time, and because so much of the network meeting activities centered on information search and use (or evidence search and use). Both the methodology and the theoretical underpinnings of this case, as well as other cases from the pilot, informed the revised methodology as well as the revised conceptual framework for my dissertation. This particular excerpt from one case highlights an interesting parallel in interest in a statewide scholarship, the importance of joint work between participants, and the

Findings on One Network's Early Years

During data collection, I observed a range of participants come to the table at meetings and events to contribute to the ongoing implementation of the Columbia College Access Network. The co-leaders of the group, one assistant superintendent for the district and one high-level leader of a large non-profit community-based organization, were present at every meeting; both invited other representatives from their respective organizations and similar organizations, including principals and district administrators as well as community mentors and leaders of

smaller intervention programs, respectively. Typically, between twenty and thirty individuals attended the CCAN meetings and discussions centered on three general topics: progress on the enrollment of and support for College Bound Scholarship-eligible students in middle and high schools; updates and special information from both the district and the community-based organizations; and development of a mutual definition of “college-readiness” for all students in the district. Although CCAN employed well-established use of a meeting agenda and distribution of minutes, the co-leaders facilitated a fairly flexible schedule for the meetings to allow for fruitful discussions and important updates to run longer if they aligned with the goals of the meeting in general. Event observations and PCI materials supplemented meeting observations such that I was able to see activities and plans for changes in practice develop over time; in fact, outcomes around two issues in particular unfolded such that I was able to observe both initial concerns and ultimate changes in policies from start to finish.

Correspondingly, researchers of collaborative education implementation have called for empirical studies that uncover the nature of the work of community-school partnership organizations as it happens (Honig, 2006; McLaughlin, 2006; Wohlstetter et al., 2004). This case study revealed evidence of district policy changes as they happened, based on the work of Columbia College Access Network, and some of the conditions needed for these changes in practice to occur. Two kinds of outcomes, related to the goals of the effort, were particularly salient as empirical reinforcements of organizational learning: *information search and use* in spite of conditions of *ambiguity*. At the same time, two types of supportive conditions were particularly instrumental in the changes being attempted and made: *leadership capacity* and the building of trust through the replacement of detrimental *scripts with counter-scripts*. I have

organized the findings section around these four types of findings, first discussing outcomes of organizational learning and then exploring evidence of supportive conditions.

Organizational Learning in Action: Information Search and Use

Throughout the data collection period, I observed the ongoing discussion of how CCAN's support of a new statewide college scholarship might affect the population of undocumented junior high and high school students served by the district. Similarly, during interviews, three participants used this ongoing discussion as an example of their postsecondary collaboration initiative's goal of learning from each other or as an outcome that stemmed from learning. For example, one interviewee from the district identified the dialogue about undocumented students as a "tremendous learning experience" for both her and for the district. This process of inquiry regarding the needs and outcomes of a typically marginalized group reinforces the concepts of *information search* and *use* in organizational learning frameworks; specifically, it highlights a case in which educational leaders employed search and use in order to build meaningful district policy out of the knowledge of community partners (Levitt & March, 1988). Moreover, after the topic of supports and outcomes for undocumented students arose, the co-leaders of the postsecondary collaboration initiative (PCI) identified two *boundary spanners* to act as specialists at subsequent meetings to provide on-the-ground information about that student population (Kanter, 1988); this provides an empirical example of intentional learning in which the PCI engaged in order to change practices across participants in the district.

About five years ago, the state created the a statewide scholarship I will call State Promise Scholarship, a program that guarantees tuition and funding for books for low-income

students if they sign an agreement during junior high.⁹ During the year I collected data for this study, the first cohort of eligible students were juniors in high school, fast approaching graduation and the year that they needed to prove that they remained eligible to receive the scholarship. During meeting and event observations, it became obvious that getting low-income students signed up for the scholarship, supporting them after registration throughout high school, and ensuring that they enrolled in college with free tuition and books were formal goals of CCAN. During the first meeting I observed, two participants from community-based organizations briefly raised concerns about undocumented students who had been allowed to sign up for the scholarship in junior high but who had not gained U.S. citizenship since then. One of the women reminded the group, “If a student doesn’t have [citizenship] status in the country, they can’t complete the FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid].” Completion of the FAFSA is a requirement for eligibility for the scholarship.

In the minutes and email immediately following this brief statement, the topic of the issues and outcomes of undocumented students in the district was named as one of four agenda items for the next meeting. The email also identified two individuals who would present information on the topic: one data specialist hired by the district for special projects and a leader of a small community based organization that primarily served Latino/a youth. At the following meeting, the data specialist provided information about the approximate number of students who may have signed up for the scholarship but who remained ineligible. Next, the CBO leader spoke

⁹ Students must graduate from a high school located in the state with a 2.0 GPA, not commit a serious crime, and complete the FAFSA before February 1 of their senior year of high school. The scholarship supplements other forms of aid that students from low-income households are likely to receive, such as the Washington State Need Grant and the federal Pell Grant.

and answered questions for approximately 25 minutes about the regulations for FAFSA eligibility, the likelihood of students gaining citizenship, and the ways in which students who remained undocumented could be supported in finding alternative ways to attend and pay for higher education. These two “boundary spanners” provided for others at the meeting a closer look at specific information regarding a small group of students served by the district.

At the end of the discussion, the district’s Director of Secondary Guidance counseling suggested that ten minutes of the next counselor meeting be devoted to this topic. However, the high-level district leader who was present interrupted him and asked that an entire meeting be spent on this topic. When the district leader spoke of this interaction later during her interview, she indicated that she would be taking action to ensure that changes were made regarding the support of undocumented students:

So the next steps are with [the district’s Director of Secondary Guidance counselors], and saying, how many of our counselors know this stuff? You know? Who in our system knows this? And really, what I heard: nobody...[A]s a system, we don’t know it...So then [the district’s Director of Secondary Guidance counselors] says, “On the counselor’s agenda we only have ten minutes.” No. This issue is way bigger than ten minutes...I don’t care if there are only ten kids in Tacoma who are impacted because they are immigrant families...my own leadership tells me that, when you start to pay attention to people on the margin like that, the whole system gets stronger.

After this, she retrieved her calendar to determine when she would be meeting with the district’s Director of Secondary Guidance counselors. She continued, saying, “What I hope I can do is have the conversation with him so that he gets, at a deeper level...how important this is for our counselors to really spend some time on this issue.” With this, I was able to observe an idea suggested at one meeting lead to intentional search for information provided at another meeting, which led to use of the information to change the content of other district meetings.

In Spite of Ambiguity: Defining and Enacting “College Readiness”

A number of models for “college readiness” as enacted by school districts exist in literature (see, for example, (Conley, 2010). Most call for increased rigor in coursework and more offerings of core courses, as well as a better sense of “college-going culture” in K-12 schools. Some of these suggestions are more concrete than others; and none of them guarantees overnight changes in students’ access to and enrollment in college. This makes the task of enacting “college readiness” across a school district an ambiguous one. Implementation researchers posit that organizational learning happens when: “[S]uccess in certain arenas is inherently ambiguous...because feedback on performance tends to lag behind practice” (Honig, 2006, p. 130). Under ambiguous conditions, theorists suggest that organizational leaders enact appropriate practices according to experts rather than practices that can be directly linked to immediate data feedback or outcomes (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

Over the course of data collection for this study, participants of CCAN held discussions at meetings and events centered on defining and enacting “college readiness” across the district, using articles and papers written by researchers such as David Conley and policy groups such as Jobs for the Future. All of the interviewees indicated that creating a common definition of “college readiness” was a formal goal for the PCI but that divvying up the responsibilities for the practices of the definition would be a challenge. For example, one of the district staff explained, “[T]he goals of the group are to use all of our collective power to establish, to maintain and, support, a college going culture in this city... [W]e’re at the point now of, of defining, you know, concretely what does it mean to be “college-ready”” (see Data Tables 1 and 2 in the appendices for other excerpts from interviews and meetings). However, at the end of the four-month data

collection period, a definition was codified and the PCI was prepared to discuss changes each participant would make in the practices of his/her organization.

Academic preparation responsibilities that fell to the district included: “Align coursework and HS graduation requirements with college entrance” (taken from a document that was emailed to participants on April 25, 2011). Although this singular prescription for increasing college readiness is ambiguous and outcomes from changes in course offerings and scheduling may not be measurable for up to five years, district administrators such as the Director of Secondary Education immediately began “meeting on a regular basis with high school principals...and having more AP [Advanced Placement] courses available for kids.” In fact, at a special CCAN meeting held to discuss district policy changes for “college readiness” that occurred just before the end of my data collect period, high school and middle school principals each identified three strategies, including changes in course offerings and funding of teacher professional development to teach Advanced Placement coursework, that they planned to enact in the coming school year. Therefore, despite the ambiguity of determining whether CCAN could achieve success with regard to “college readiness” in the district, the phenomena outlined above illustrates an empirical case in which school district leaders supported school-level changes based on the ideas identified by experts in the field.

Building Policy from Practice: Leadership Capacity for Change

In each of the above descriptions of changes in school-level policies, one of the conditions under which the changes occurred was strong leadership capacity for *marshalling* rather than *mandating* change on the part of Columbia Public Schools. In her research on central office leadership, Meredith Honig calls for more empirical research on instances in which district

administrators choose to enable decisions that come out of school-community collaborative work—policy from practice (Honig, 2003, 2004a, 2004b, 2006). Traditionally, models for changing policy encourage the changing of practice from policy; when the opposite occurs, it is rare and usually goes unstudied.

At each of the meetings and PCI events, two or three mid- and high-level leaders of the district central office were present. In the case of the change in counseling support for undocumented students, the central office administrator and the Director of Guidance counselors learned of the implications of the College Bound Scholarship as well as other related issues that students face if they are not eligible citizens but are from low-income families living in the U.S. After learning that few if any counselors had that knowledge, the district administrator grappled with how to support learning about this topic among other district staff: “It’s classic *We Can’t Teach What We Don’t Know*...So how do I help [district staff] understand how damn important this is for the counselors to be spending time on this issue? That’s my leadership dilemma.” Later in the interview, she explained that being present at the meetings allowed her to “try and get as close to those kinds of details as possible” so that she could use her “position of power” to support the external partners in their efforts to “put pressure on the system.”

Similarly, in planning for the meeting with principals about the creating and enacting of “college-readiness” standards, she described the work in this way:

[I]f we ask that question of our high school principals, we’d end up with a really cool list... The district says, “Here’s what we think it is.” And then the district, in its own strength as an organization comes to the table with other organizations. And [various community based organizations] say, “And we think this.” And there’s give and take.

With this, we see that she envisions the process as informed by the work of the community based organizations. In fact, she goes on to say that because it is based on information from the community and school partners, school-level staff are more likely to implement changes in school-level policies than if the definition of college readiness had appeared as a district mandate:

We can say, “Okay, so here is our definition of ‘college readiness.’ And we did not do this all by ourselves... This is our community partners saying, “Here’s the community’s definition of ‘college readiness’”... I think our principals will look at that document with a different set of eyes or a different level of urgency, given there are people watching and there are other people who are going to be working on these different tangents of the definition... It’s a totally different conversation that if it were the superintendent saying “Here’s what defines college-ready.”

With these examples, the central office leader highlights the importance of policy stemming from the practice of community partners—both in terms of what central office leaders can learn from the work of the partners and in terms of being able to marshal appropriate support out of that learning for change in district and school-level policies.

Trust: Scripts & Counter-Scripts

Ironically, the central office leaders who regularly attend the CCAN meetings either resisted participation or had not heard of the effort during its first two years. All of the interviewees pointed to challenges with retaining the “right” leadership at the table from all participating organizations, but especially from the district, during those early years. McLaughlin (2006) acknowledges that trust and mutual understanding are key conditions under which collaboratives like CCAN can thrive; so how can that trust be established and maintained? This strategic case study revealed that open acknowledgement of detrimental scripts and the co-

creation of productive mutual understanding—between collaborative leaders and regularly at meetings and events—may be one promising way that trust can thrive.

When I asked interviewees about the goals and outcomes of CCAN, each one of them described the process of becoming “smarter about the districts”—in other words, learning about what the district was doing, what it was working on, and what struggles it was facing each month. The community partner leaders each said that they were trying to stop blaming the district for any and all poor outcomes, but instead use the meetings as a way of asking questions about certain issues in order to rally support for the district. Representatives from the district explicitly acknowledged that other partnerships in which they have participated between schools and the community followed what I am calling “district deficit scripts.” Here one of the administrators talks about how “partnerships” had worked in a different district:

So often, the partnerships are all about how, “The school district doesn’t have that much strength, so we sit on the outside of the district, we bring our expertise, and you guys would just be foolish not to use it.” You look at the press that urban districts get and the results; people are just sitting in their houses and...organizations assuming that everyone in the system must be so stupid.

Here, “the system must be so stupid” is a common script that I heard debunked and countered numerous times during meetings, events and interviews. That is not to say that community partners did not question or challenge the support or roles of the district. Rather, community partners often acknowledged the magnitude and complexity of the work the district faced in serving tens of thousands of diverse students. For example, one community partner leader offered:

You can’t turn on a dime a big ship like that. There are some who want that overnight. “By god, these kids are real life people who, you can’t wait five years for these kids.” But, I just know that unless there is a ton of money thrown into it and more resources, which there don’t appear to be, you can’t turn it that quickly.

Typically, research on central office leadership in community-school partnership implementation focuses solely on the changes in practice needed from district administrators. These statements, however, reflect how district leaders who want to be engaged in the work of supporting policy changes need to be able to trust that the community partners understand the complexity of the work. This adds new depth to previous studies of collaborative educational implementation.