GROUP COLLABORATIVE CHALLENGES IN TODAY'S

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Abstract

This paper examines the collaborative challenges of organizational intergroup and intergroup dynamics. Research shows that collaborative networks are a strategic asset used by firms that form as alliances and partnerships to develop new products and services in sustaining a competitive advantage (Provan & Kenis, 2007). This paper argues that collaborative relationships are challenging. The challenge of leader-follower relationships, group members that represent organizational interests, transnational coordination, and intergroup conflict compounds the firm's collaboration outcomes. The author addresses negotiation strategies for problem solving, and conflict resolution to enhance collaborative efforts within the organization.

Group Collaborative Challenges in Today's Competitive Environment

The foundation of collaboration cross-organizational boundaries is interpersonal relationships. This paper examines the collaborative challenges of organizational intergroup and intragroup dynamics. Research shows that collaborative networks are a strategic asset used by firms who form as alliances and partnerships to develop new products and services in sustaining a competitive advantage (Provan & Kenis, 2007). This paper argues that collaborative relationships are challenging. The challenge of leader-follower relationships, group members that represent organizational interests, transnational coordination, and intergroup conflict compounds the firm's collaboration outcomes. The author addresses negotiation strategies for problem solving and conflict resolution to enhance collaborative efforts within the organization.

Intergroup and Intragroup Collaboration

The author believes that collaborative leadership is an anchor point as leaders address the complex and changing environment, which firms operate to sustain a competitive advantage. In an interconnected business environment, the firm's innovative capability, transfer knowledge-based competences, and dynamic capability are reflective of the leader's ability to form partnerships and collaborative relationships across boundaries (Barreto, 2010; Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2009; Van Velsor, McCauley, & Ruderman, 2010). Scholars contend that the leader's ability to collaborate internally and externally within an organization shifts the opportunity structures that shape the firm's strategic partnering and long-term economic sustainability (Gulati & Kletter, 2005; Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2009). Much of the literature suggests that collaboration is a critical leadership trait and strategic asset in today's business environment. Riggio, Chaleff, and Lipman-Blumen (2008) suggest collaborative leadership is a new paradigm in today's public and private sector. They argue for a paradigm shift to "change from followers

to collaborators [whereby] collaborative leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and collaborators who intend significant changes that reflect mutual interests" (Riggio, et al., 2008, p. 57). Throughout this paper, the author equates group members with collaborators. According to Ribeiro-Soriano and Urbano (2009), the challenge for today's leaders is to recognize that the "ability to innovate comes from a skill that is underdeveloped in most companies: collaboration" (p. 421). The *Center for Creative Leadership* indicates ninety-nine percent of senior leaders viewed the ability of a leader to lead groups and work collaboratively across boundaries as extremely important (Yip, Ernst, & Campbell, 2009). Alternatively, "only seven percent described themselves as being effective. This highlights a critical gap between the perceived importance and effectiveness of boundary spanning" (Yip, et al., 2009, p. 11) within group dynamics and organizational networks**.** In essence, firms are beginning to understand a leader's ability to form and sustain collaborative relationships that shape the firms' competitive advantage in today's changing business environment

In this section, the author will focus on collaborative group dynamics and organizational networks. Moreover, the discussion will focus on the formation and selection of collaborative groups, intergroup and intragroup collaboration challenges, and the implication on relational capability as the firm sustains a competitive advantage. The author contends that in today's security environment, for example, in the face of domestic fiscal constraints, political implications, and the challenging global economic climate, the US foreign policy shifted from "a go it alone" mindset to forming a collaborative relationship mindset. This paradigm shift led to an increased emphasis on creating collaborative systems that develop regional approaches and leverage cooperation across borders in advancing national security objectives. According to *Reflection on Leadership*, Secretary of Defense Dr. Robert Gates (2011) states

Just about every threat to our security in the years ahead will require working with or through other nations. Success in the war on terror will depend less on the fighting we do ourselves and more on how well we support our allies and partners in the moderate Muslim world and elsewhere. (p. 186)

Comparatively, in today's competitive business environment, leaders understand that joint venture and partnership shape the firm's capability to explore and exploit new markets, technologically innovate, and leverage resources to meet corporate objectives (Archer & Cameron, 2009; Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2009).   Archer and Cameron (2009) state "the business world has woken up to the possibilities that collaboration offers-things like efficiency, risk sharing, opening up new markets, launching new products, tackling massive problems and innovating in all sorts of ways" (p. 3).   In addition, leaders realize the emergence and maintenance of collaborative relationships is a strategic asset in the public and private sector. The implication is leaders understand that new competences are required as firms explore management relationships between collaborative group dynamics and organizational networks (Archer & Cameron, 2009).

Formation and Selection

Archer and Cameron (2009) state "everyone has to collaborate at some point in their working life. Whether it is across function, organization, or borders, face-to-face or virtual, working in partnerships has become unavoidable. And we believe it will continue to rise, transforming the face of organizations in the future" (p. 4). The author believes the outcome of effective collaborative activity reflects the collaborator members' interaction and organizational network structures. The formation of collaborative relationships across internal and external boundaries requires new competences such as cultivating personal networks, conflict

management, and negotiation skills (Archer & Cameron, 2009; Provan & Kenis, 2007). Archer and Cameron (2009) suggest that understanding and negotiation "across organizational boundaries is a skill collaborative leaders need to cultivate. Being able to talk about what you feel is a key feature of people who are good at collaboration" (p. 168). The literature points out that collaboration among individuals, teams, and organizations is about understanding the interaction between intergroup and intragroup collaborators and a mindset of sharing information across organizational boundaries (Robinson & Rose, 2007; Van Velsor, et al., 2010). The implication to collaborate across boundaries is reflective of the group leader's capacity to effectively manage the self-awareness of collaborator members' interactions and competing interests within the group.

The literature on forming intergroups and organizational networks suggested leaders bring collaborators together based on personal attributes, knowledge-transfer expertise, and internal and external common interests. Archer and Cameron (2009) clearly note that personal attributes of individual group members is key to complex collaborative group dynamics. Archer and Cameron (2009) point out that key attributes of effective group leaders who are empathetic to others' perspectives, patient in developing intragroup buy-in, persistent in resolving intergroup conflicts to meet organizational outcomes, and build networks across boundaries contribute to making effective collaborators. The author's posit is that knowledge, skills, and abilities are critical learning attributes for emerging leaders. Archer and Cameron (2009) state "you don't need to be natural to collaborate well" (p. 123). Scholars argue "personal attributes such as the ability to work collaboratively, as sense of personal empowerment and ability to affect outcomes, and a willingness to stay open to new information and adapt to a dynamic environment positively relate to team performance" (Lamb & Munsing, 2011, p. 49). That said, the ability of leaders to

understand challenges of forming intergroup collaborators or organizational networks influences the outcome and decision making of senior managers. The author's contention is that the complexity of integrating different personalities, aligning group expectations, and disseminating information across organizational networks requires developing relationships vertical and horizontal across organizational boundaries. However, researchers acknowledge that the social complexity within groups potentially fragments the relationship process (Conklin, 2005). Therefore, the transparent communication from all intergroup and intragroup participants is critical in sustaining group integrity and organizational networks (Robinson & Rose, 2007). Moreover, the communication outcome of intergroup or network dynamics is contingent on four structures: "trust, size, goal consensus, and the nature of the task" (Provan & Kenis, 2007, p. 237). Scholars posit enduring collaborative relationships are centric to freedom of individual inputs and trust among internal and external stakeholders (Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2009; Gulati & Kletter, 2005; Archer & Cameron, 2009). Ribeiro-Soriano and Urbano (2009) state

> In collaborative and collective relationships, the parties each accept responsibility for their own inputs as well as for the equitable sharing of returns on outputs. Trust acts as the bonding agent that allows for networks to realize and achieve their full potential. Trust can eliminate the barriers that hinder long-term relationships, knowledge-sharing and continuous feedback that can enable creativity, innovation and competitiveness. (p. 424)

Much of the literature points out that while organizational intergroup dynamics is a long-term investment in time and resources, most leaders believe collaborative relationships initiate at the individual and migrate to the organizational level within the firm (Archer & Cameron, 2009). Archer and Cameron (2009) argue leaders "need to understand what the real value is in the

relationship and how it is created in ways that no one part could achieve on their own" (p. 34). For example, Shaw and Chayes (2011) argue effective group leaders will "determine if your leadership team has the talent and drive to develop strategies effectively and execute on both a strategic and operational level" (p. 51). Researchers argue that firms select collaborators based on relational capital with key stakeholders internal and external (Gulati & Kletter, 2005; Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2009) "to resolve a particular problem" (Archer & Cameron, 2009, p. 21) within the firm. The author notes that organizations form groups to leverage technical expertise, coordinate resources, and solve organizational problems. However, the challenge for group leaders is aligning an appropriate number of collaborators with diverse viewpoints to the group outcomes (Archer & Cameron, 2005; Robinson & Rose, 2007). An argument can be made that firms exploit an individual's relational capital to manage information flow as groups are formed and selected (Network Roundtable, 2011, para 3). The literature shows that relational capital increases the organizational outcome as collaborators transition from transactional interaction across the full spectrum of building and maintaining strategic alliances, to organizational networks that connect groups together to enhance learning and technological innovation (Archer & Cameron, 2009; Gulati & Kletter, 2005; Network Roundtable, 2011).

Additionally, not only does the literature agree that organizational group dynamics and networks span across the full spectrum from individual relationships to organizational activities (Lamb & Munsing, 2011), some literature suggests potential intergroup polarity arises when forming and selecting individual and team collaborators (Robinson & Rose, 2007). Interestingly, the literature notes that understanding interdependent relationships of individual and team building sustains the group and organizational networks' capacity to collaborate with internal and external partners (Archer & Cameron, 2009; Hansen, 2010; Robinson & Rose, 2007). On

the one hand, Robinson and Rose (2007) state that "focusing on the team to the exclusion of the individual results in groupthink, mediocrity, and loss of accountability. Focusing on the individual to the exclusion of the teams results in chaos, anarchy and dissent" (p. 7). On the other hand, Shaw and Chayes (2011) note effective team leaders believe maintaining "existing relationships and building new coalitions among internal and external stakeholders" (p. 51) are more important than personal power within the group. The author's position is that dealing with intragroup competition between organizational interests, maintaining intergroup focus with competing organizational priorities, and maintaining participation with constant collaborator turnover fragments the ability to create team cohesiveness. Scholars suggest "individuals who make up the team must become aware of the assumptions they make, the choices they enact and the behavior they exhibit" (Robinson & Rose, 2007, p. 7). In essence, the implication is that the group leader must balance the risk of collaborative fragmentation with attempt at forming intergroup cohesiveness.

Collaboration and Negotiation

The literature showed that effective collaborative leadership manages competing interests and conflict (Van Velsor et al., 2010) between the "interaction of its members" (Joseph & Payne, 2003, p. 368). Joseph and Payne (2003) clearly notes "a group consists of the activities, interactions, and sentiments of its members and the mutual relationships existing among these elements" (p. 368). The research reflected an increased understanding of intergroup and interpersonal collaboration and negotiation roles and responsibility of leaders. An "important characteristic of intergroup negotiation is that it is typically not feasible for all those concerned to be present at the bargaining table. Therefore, intergroup negotiations are usually conducted by representatives" (Van Kleef, Steinel, van Knippenberg, Hogg, & Svensson, 2007, p. 130).

Research suggests that intergroup members select leaders based on the representative prototypicality, the relationship among other group members, and intergroup support of the leaders' ability to negotiate tangible interests (Teixeira, Demoulin and Yzerbyt, 2011; Van Kleef, et al., 2007). Van Kleef, et al., (2007) state with respect to "the representative position in the group. A prototypical in-group status may be derived from a number of factors such as, acceptance by the other group members, how long one has been a member of the group, or how well one exemplifies the group" (p. 133) interests. The author suggests an effective leader negotiates conflicting individual and organizational interests, group hidden agendas, and addresses the relational needs of collaborative members within the group. Moreover, after reviewing the literature, the author is convinced that collaborators depend on group leaders to negotiate positive intergroup and intragroup relations across organizational boundaries. Furthermore, that author contends this will to facilitate knowledge-sharing activities among networks, and coordinate the collective action and resources that strengthens organizational networks (Pittinsky & Simon, 2007; Provan & Kenis, 2007; Ribeiro-Soriano & Urbano, 2009). This implies that high performance collaborators identify a group representative with the political savvy to constructively handle conflict, be accountable to represent group interests, and manage internal and external cooperation across boundaries to create change within the organization.

The above discussion suggests exploring the question of the expected negotiation outcomes and the implication on collaboration. Present research indicates negotiators represent the interests of the group; however, their roles and responsibilities are not well-defined (Van Kleef, et al., 2007). The literature states "not all group members are equal within a group, (Teixeira, et al., 2011, p. 229). Furthermore, Pittinsky and Simon (2007) state "negotiation is

more likely to succeed when each group believes that the other group is motivated and willing to cooperate" (p. 591). An argument can be made that collaborators usually support leaders who negotiate intergroup differences (Teixeira, et al, 2011), "resolve conflicts between social identity groups" (Van Velsor, et al., 2010, p. 381) and promote positive intergroup relations (Pittinsky & Simon, 2007). That said, the author posits that intergroup composition, differing opinions, and defensive behavior prevents the group leader from negotiating a win-win solution in order to preserve a long-term collaborative relationship (Archer& Cameron, 2009; Van Velsor, et al., 2010). Therefore, in line with the literature, the author agrees that group conflict redefines the negotiation boundaries that cross cuts group membership and recategorizes the group identity of "us versus them" to "we" in order to reach a positive outcome and maintain group cohesiveness (Pittinsky & Simon, 2007; Van Velsor, et al., 2010). Archer and Cameron (2009) state "a mutually acceptable win-win outcome is even more important in collaborations where you will have to operate together in the future" (p. 170).

Much of the literature agrees that collaborative barriers require leaders to negotiate win-win outcomes in the best interests of the group and organization. Hansen (2009) states that leaders "unintentionally erect barriers that block people form collaborating" (p. 49). According to Hansen (2009) and Archer and Cameron (2009), collaborators look for leaders with the ability to negotiate innovative relationship building and processes development with intergroup and intragroups across organizational boundaries. In line with Hansen (2009), this author agrees that

> … as a collaborative leader, you need to ask yourself what you are doing to foster a culture of innovation within your organization and that of your partners, and to think hard about how you will use the different skills and experience of your partners to challenge you to work in a new and more creative ways. (p. 181)

The author posits that innovative negotiation mechanisms develop increased transparent collaboration between parties. Moreover, Archer and Cameron (2009) notes "collaborative leaders need to build their own and their organizations awareness of sustainability" (p. 182). Archer and Cameron (2009) point out that building relationships and networking is vital to the long term success of the organization. In contrast, Hansen (2009) and Archer and Cameron (2009) agree that in a decentralized organization the risk of silos prevents effective collaborative and negotiation activity across organizational boundaries. That said, the author contends that collaborators either form or leverage existing relationships with external organizations to develop courses of action that negotiators present as common interests to sustain the long-term viability of the firm. Not only does the literature agree that leaders who negotiate must focus on innovation and sustainability to derive a positive collaborative outcome, some literature suggests that leaders who negotiate must be resilient when erected barriers form across organizational boundaries (Archer & Cameron, 2009; Hansen, 2009). For example, the literature indicates that hoarding of information, unwillingness to collaborate across boundaries, and collaborators inability to work across organizational boundaries produces touch times for the negotiator and collaborative leader (Archer & Cameron, 2009; Hansen, 2009). The author believes ingraining collaboration into the organizational climate, tailoring collaborative solutions, and mapping performance standards (Henson, 2009) to collaborate is instrumental "in creating a highly resilient organization that can collaborate effectively both internally and externally" (Archer and Cameron, 2009, p. 184). The author contends the importance of innovative approaches of building coalitions sustains and shapes collaborative long-term relationships. Therefore, it is important to empower the negotiator to be resilient in overcoming objections and impasses in an attempt to reach acceptable agreements.

To illustrate, Pittinsky and Simon (2007) stated "leaders are advised that one aspect of effective leadership is the development and maintenance of group cohesiveness" (p. 587). For example, on the international scene "national leaders will have to bring racial and ethnic groups together to lead effectively (Pittinsky & Simon, 2007, p. 587). Transnational theorists argue "states will cooperate through alliances in order to balance against external challengers [however] cooperation among states is difficult to achieve because of fears about cheating, dependency, and relative gains" (Doyle & Ikenberry, 1997, p. 176). Doyle and Ikenberry (1997) point out "cooperation is an important feature of world politics, harder to achieve and more difficult to maintain ... even when they share common interests" (p. 174). Similarly, the present paper argues collaboration is challenging and difficult to maintain in today's competitive business environment. The author believes a plausible argument can be made that in an interconnected world (Archer & Cameron, 2009) the full spectrum of identical negotiation and collaboration challenges, conflicts resolution measures, and group dynamics exists among local to international stakeholders. Moreover, the author contends intergroup fault lines of boundary suspending, reframing, nesting, and weaving are the same given the expectations of negotiating and collaboration across organizational or cultural lines (Van Velsor, et al., 2010). However, the implications of ineffective negotiation and collaboration are far reaching on an international scale. Archer and Cameron (2007) contend international negotiation and collaboration on the war on terror underscores the need to "understand the complexity of new forms of collaborative organizations. Al Qaeda's self-organizing structure is a harsh lesson in the effectiveness of collaborative methods" (p. 176). Therefore, the author posits that seeking a positive negotiation, collaboration, and maintaining group cohesiveness among international world leaders derives the

same outcome as a small intergroup team. The outcome of negotiating and collaborating is to meet the organizational goals and objectives.

The literature suggests conflict is part of the interchange of collaborators and negotiation leaders with senior leadership. "Conflict is a process of expressing dissatisfaction, disagreement, unmet expectations with any organizational interchange; a dispute is one of the products of conflict" (Costantino & Merchant, 1996, p. 5). The author contends the negotiator's role is to assist the organizational and individual stakeholders to work together as a group, identifying common interests, and creating options for a more effective way of handling collaborating across boundaries. However, the research suggests conflict arises based on blaming others, struggle for intergroup power, conflicting interests, and rights-based issues (Costantino & Merchant, 1996). "Conflict that blames, suppresses ideas or has at its core the conversion of others, is usually unproductive" (Robinson & Rose, 2007, p. 69). In the previous section, the author presented innovation, sustainability, and resilience as negotiation frameworks to minimize collaborative barriers. Additionally, a considerable amount of research indicates two intergroup and negotiation constructs to resolve organizational conflict. First, much of the literature suggests that negotiators employ the alternative dispute resolution approach to resolve organizational conflict (Costantino & Merchant, 1996). Costantino and Merchant (1996) state "more and more corporations, business, individual, groups, organizations, and courts are embracing alternative dispute resolution as a better way to resolve disputes" (p. 34). The author's position is that the alternative dispute resolution approach provides the negotiator a win-win framework to mediate organizational disputes. "There has been a growing realization that all disputes do not require the same mechanisms for resolution" (Costantino & Merchant, 1996, p. 37).

In addition, not only does the literature suggest alternative dispute resolution frameworks to resolve organizational conflict, some literature suggests that collaborators who exhibit mutual trust in the negotiators' ability to mediate tensions is critical. Kouzes and Posner (2007) state

> Building trust is a process that begins who one party is willing to risk being the first to ante up, being the first to show vulnerability, and being the first to let go of control … that in order for your constituents to call you 'trustworthy' they must believe that you have their best interests at heart. (p. 244)

The author notes that, among collaborators, trust in the negotiators' ability to advocate in the group's best interests with decision makers is critical. That said, trust among all collaborators that players seek the organization's best interests minimizes intergroup disagreements and approaches to provide group leaders the intergroup support to negotiate contentious issues, with the goal of seeking a positive organizational outcome. Van Velsor, et al., (2010) state collaborators "would like nothing more than to discover that their leaders are competent (know what they are doing), acting with integrity (they are open and honest), and concerned for their employees (they have their best interests at heart)" (p. 205). The consensus of collaborators to trust that the negotiators' approach to mediate the group's best interests will align with the organization's direction and foster a commitment to its goals and objectives (Van Velsor, et al., 2010). The implication of fostering trust among intergroup players and negotiators reduces conflict and intergroup tension, and strengthens the high performance of the collaborative process.

Conclusion

This paper presented the leader's ability shapes the intergroup and intragroup collaborative relationships across organizational boundaries. Studies identified that a critical

capability gap within organizations for effective leaders to lead collaborative activities across organizational boundaries. Moreover, the author addressed new competences, challenges, and conflicts of forming, selecting, and managing collaborative intergroup and organizational network relationships. It is important for leaders' to understand the challenges of intergroup and intragroup collaborative relationships are similar in both private and public sectors. Finally, the author presented negotiation and conflict resolution strategies to minimize collaborative barriers, strengthen intergroup cohesiveness, and promote win-win collaborative agreements. Developing a culture of negotiation and collaboration within an organization will require a paradigm shift by leader's in today's competitive environment.

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