THE DYNAMICS OF INTERAGENCY COLLABORATIONS:

A THREE-PART FRAMEWORK

by

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ABSTRACT

Social problems are complex, increasingly so, yet resources allocated to deal with these problems have declined. Nonprofit and government agencies tasked with providing social services to individuals are joining forces to solve the most complicated problems faced by society. The Palmer Court Employment Pilot in Salt Lake City, Utah is an example of one such nonprofit/government collaboration. In a yearlong case study analysis, data from the Palmer Court Employment Pilot were collected and analyzed to reveal both strengths and weaknesses of the collaborative approach. The reported findings, in combination with a synthesis of previous literature, serve as a foundation for a ternary framework of interagency collaboration focusing on: (1) cultural dynamics, (2) relational dynamics, and (3) practical dynamics. The theory posited serves as a starting point for further research on the intersection of nonprofit/government collaboration.

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty, unemployment, and homelessness are three perennial issues facing social workers and other public service professionals. Historically, individual nonprofits and government organizations have attempted to address these issues independently. Dwindling resources and growing awareness of problem complexity, however, have led to increased interagency collaboration in social service provision.

Defining 'interagency collaboration' is the subject of intense debate within academic circles. Ascribed meanings vary depending upon context. A generic definition will suffice for the current purposes:

> A mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to a definition of mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and a sharing of resources and rewards. (Mattessich & Monsey, 1993)

Essentially, by coming together to share ideas, expertise, and resources in a structured manner, agencies in a variety of contexts have begun to define an entirely new way of delivering services and streamlining their processes; a method that is thought to be both effective and highly practical if developed and implemented successfully (Bamford, Gomes-Casseres, & Robinson, 2003; Buono, 2003; Linden, 2002).

Successful interagency collaboration instills within participating administrators a certain capacity to eliminate duplicated services, allocate limited funding more efficiently and effectively, and develop a more comprehensive and coordinated system that is easily

navigable by consumers. By working together across agencies, administrators are essentially creating the opportunity to fine-tune and tailor many of society's most awkward and cumbersome social service systems.

It has been argued, however, that the benefits of a successful collaborative strategy are outweighed by the difficulty of managing the development and implementation of such a project in the nonprofit and government sectors. As interagency collaborations emerge more frequently and on larger scales, it is increasingly evident that developing and implementing a successful collaborative project can be burdensome and highly complex. There are numerous obstacles to, and significant areas of conflict inherent in, the development and implementation processes (Gazley & Brudney, 2007; Golensky & Walker, 2003; Huxham, 1996; Packard, Patti, Daly, & Tucker, 2012). Furthermore, nonprofit and government collaborations often face unique challenges due to constraints embedded in organizational mission and method.

There exists a well-developed body of academic literature on the issue of collaborative policy making and implementation, yet it lacks unification. Praxis has been slow to respond to theoretical development which may be attributable to the lack of a coherent and practical framework by which the complexities of interagency collaborations can be understood. The scholarly effort to describe specific components of successful (and unsuccessful) collaborations has yielded a plethora of information on micro-level dynamics of collaboration; for example, variations in leadership style, the role of communication, and trust. What is lacking, however, is a unified approach to understanding the macro and micro-level complexities surrounding collaborative enterprises in social service provision.

It is widely recognized that the phenomenon of interagency collaboration poses significant methodological challenges (Bardach, 1999; Cross, Dickmann, Newmann-Gonchar, & Fagan, 2009; Jones, Crook, & Webb, 2007; Sanderson, 2002). What is sorely needed in the discipline is the ability to understand not only *if* these collaborative projects are working, but to know *how* they work and what factors produce successful and lasting outcomes and partnerships. Expectations are rising and even inchoate projects face demands for immediate feedback on outcomes and impact; yet, data collection and analysis require time and careful thought and consideration.

It is difficult to establish clear inferences between project components and outcomes using traditional quantitative methodology. Qualitative case studies serve as the primary method used to explore this phenomenon, but alone prove insufficient (Cross, Dickmann, Newmann-Gonchar, & Fagan, 2009). An additional obstacle to studying interagency collaborations specifically within the context of the nonprofit and government sectors is the subjective nature of "problem definitions." May (1992) highlights this issue succinctly:

> The objects of social construction are beliefs about cause and effect (whether correct in an objective sense or not), preferences concerning desired policy outcomes, perceptions of policy targets, and beliefs about the policy ideas that undergird policies. (p. 337)

Simply stated, each of the actors involved in collaborative efforts have their own ideas about the nature of a problem, its cause, and the most effective solution. For researchers, it is difficult to manage multiple, shifting, and even contradictory goals regularly emerging in collaborative development and implementation (Dixon & Dougherty, 2010; Eden & Huxham, 2001; Gazley & Brudney, 2007).

Given these complexities, it is necessary to view interagency collaboration as an evolutionary process; to understand its origins and lessons learned over time. A more holistic approach will highlight an increasingly sophisticated understanding of collaboration and its complexities in terms of both conceptualization as well as methodological advancements.

The particular example of interagency collaboration to be examined in this study and subsequently integrated with previous literature is the Palmer Court Employment Pilot in Salt Lake City, Utah. It is important to explore the impetus and background of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot to thoroughly understand its evolutionary process and its relation to the study of interagency collaboration as a whole.

The Palmer Court Employment Pilot

History and Context

Recognizing the growing problem of homelessness in 2003, the State of Utah contemplated a structured process to address it. By early 2005, the state had developed what is now referred to as the Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and obtained legislative affirmation for the initiative. The approved plan committed Utah to ending homelessness of all types by the year 2015 through an affordable housing policy approach.

To accomplish this ambitious goal, state government adopted the 'Housing First' model. Housing First involves placing individuals experiencing chronic homelessness into subsidized housing with case management and a variety of supportive, wrap-around services available onsite. The approach is grounded in the idea that safe and stable

housing is a primary component in the overall recovery process of an individual who has experienced chronic homelessness (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2006). In permanent supportive housing units operating within the Housing First framework, a resident's housing is not contingent upon anything other than the basics of good tenancy (e.g., maintaining the property and positive relationships with property management).

The Housing First theory stands in direct contrast to more traditional approaches of finding adequate housing for individuals. Traditional residency requirements often include regular payments (regardless of income) and independence from drug and alcohol use. As much as housing is needed by individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, it often proves too difficult to maintain sobriety and make regular payments to housing authorities. The long-term success of the traditional approaches, therefore, has been quite limited.

Recognizing these limitations and the ineffectiveness of traditional methods (as evidenced by stagnant levels of chronic homelessness and the inability to keep individuals housed long-term), the State of Utah enthusiastically promoted the Housing First model as one component of the Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and secured over 600 housing units for the estimated 1,900 chronically homeless individuals living in Utah in 2005.

Housing First was a major step for the State of Utah, but it proved to be only the beginning of a more extensive plan to deal with the causes of homelessness. Beginning in early 2010, plans to provide supported employment opportunities to the formerly chronically homeless living in permanent supportive housing began to emerge. In theory, encouraging employment within the permanent supportive housing facilities would help

support stable housing on a long-term basis. Over the course of one year, the most prominent of employment efforts evolved into the Palmer Court Employment Pilot.

Palmer Court

Palmer Court is a permanent supportive housing facility in Salt Lake City, Utah. It was selected to be the site of an experimental employment pilot beginning in March of 2011. With the mission of providing employment opportunities to the formerly chronically homeless, the pilot was a collaborative endeavor initiated voluntarily by a variety of agencies and represented a new way of addressing ongoing homelessness concerns in the State of Utah.

To fully understand the nature of this project, it is imperative to discuss the target population. For an individual to be determined "chronically homeless" as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (2009), they must have a documented disability and have been homeless for at least one year. It is common for chronically homeless individuals to have had multiple episodes of homelessness over the course of many years. The chronically homeless make up only a small portion of the overall homeless population (10% in Utah), yet require a much higher portion of the overall resources allocated to meet the needs of the homeless (Utah's Homeless Coordinating Committee, 2008). For this group, an array of mental and physical health factors can work together to make transitioning into employment or other societal institutions quite difficult.

Of the total population at Palmer Court, over 70% have been identified as having experienced chronic homelessness. Additionally, Palmer Court is the only permanent

supportive housing facility in Utah to house families. Parents with children under 18 (especially single parents) face additional challenges in attempting to secure and maintain employment. Scheduling conflicts and limited childcare options are only two of the many barriers facing parents with young children.

Collaboration Structure and Timeline

The Palmer Court Employment Pilot can be understood as a semi-formal group of nonprofit and government agencies in Salt Lake City, Utah working collaboratively to provide employment opportunities and associated services to the residents of Palmer Court. The term "semiformal" is an accurate description as the agencies themselves are not contractually obligated to participate. Frontline employees from the various partner agencies have been assigned to pilot activities and have little power to negotiate their participation. (See Figure 1.)

While activities associated with the Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness began in early 2005, employment-related planning did not emerge until more recently, and the official Palmer Court Employment Pilot did not fully materialize until March of 2011. Initially, the Pilot Administrative Team had developed several core objectives in addition to drafting a preliminary timeline for evaluation. While the official documents have been subject to frequent modification as the pilot has progressed, a simplified version of the timeline is useful here to clarify the core sequence of evaluative events (see Table 1).

Presenting Problem

       As the Palmer Court Employment Pilot evolved in its first few months of life, it became clear that all was not well with the collaboration. Discomfort and frustration were particularly apparent within the implementation group; the direct service providers and frontline managers seemed to be struggling to communicate with one another, and with the upper-level decision makers. This led to significant difficulty in implementing pilot initiatives and, thus, unrest within the collaboration as a whole.
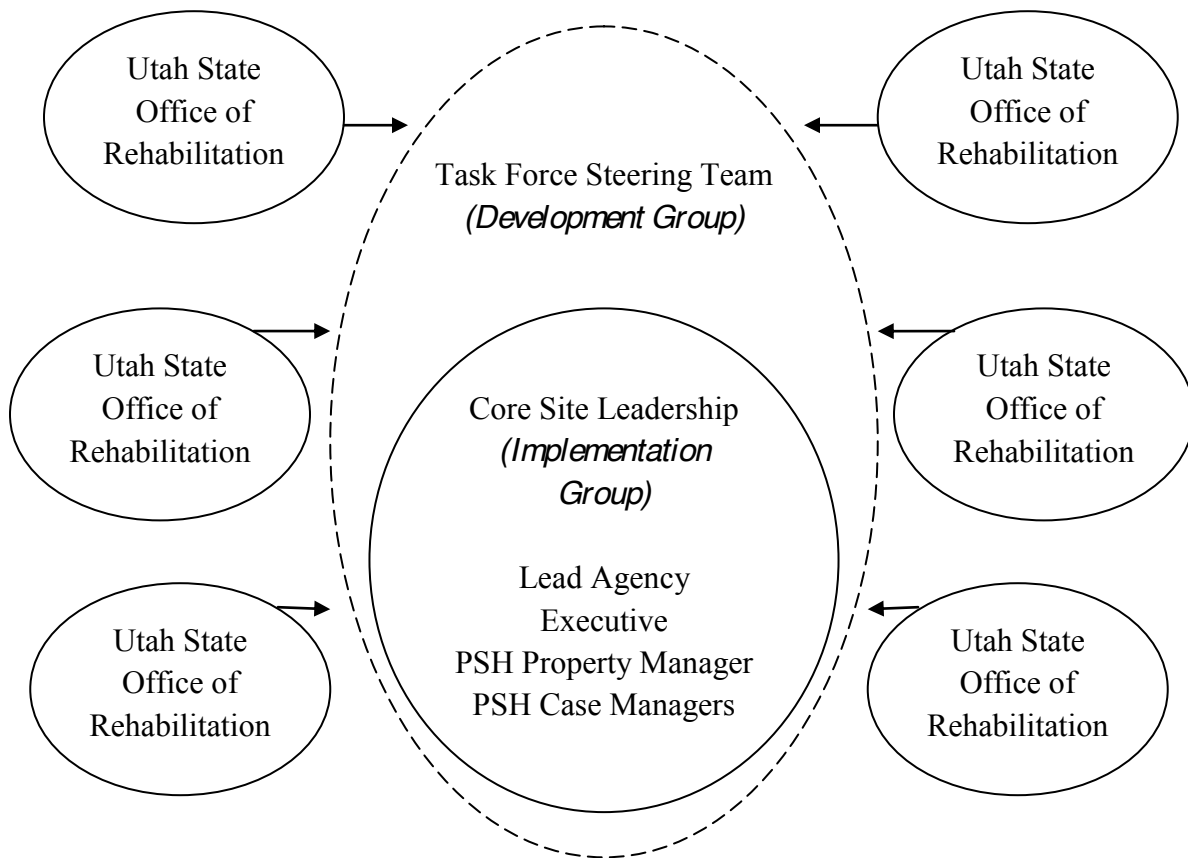

Figure 1. Palmer Court Employment Pilot Structure

Table 1. Palmer Court Employment Pilot Evaluative Timeline and Data Sources

Mar 2011	Apr 2011	Aug 2011	Mar 2012	Apr 2012	Dec 2012
* Pilot Start * Baseline Data Collection	* Resident Focus Groups (Set 1)	*Stakeholder Interviews	* 1-Year Analysis	* Resident Focus Groups (Set 2)	* End of Pilot Analysis

A critical turning point for the Palmer Court Employment Pilot occurred when two members of the implementation group (both frontline managers) made a significant breakthrough in their workplace relationship. Through lengthy conversation and a blossoming sense of trust, the two began to identify and name some of the issues that were arising in the pilot, many of which, from their perspective, were a product of cultural differences between agencies. This was revolutionary because, prior to their discussions, issues had been addressed primarily on a practical level. Awareness of deeper philosophical and cultural issues had been absent.

Additionally, because these two members of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot were highly influential in the implementation process, their discoveries ultimately led to a reevaluation of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot by the development group and provided the initial impetus for the present study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last 30 years, interagency collaborations have become more common and have been broadly studied in academic settings. Business, education, medicine, the social and behavioral sciences, and public administrative fields (to name only a few) have contributed to the body of knowledge surrounding interagency collaborations. Due to methodological constraints and issues of measurement, the qualitative case study approach is commonly used in these analyses.

Landmark studies in the area of interagency collaboration describe in detail many of the factors that impact collaborative projects and offer insight into some of the typical obstacles associated with interagency collaboration in the nonprofit and government sectors. The most commonly discussed topics can be grouped into two primary categories: (1) leadership and collaborative structure, and (2) collaborative communicative dynamics.

Leadership and Collaborative Structure

Leadership is a key concept focused upon in organizational studies of all types, and interagency collaboration studies are no exception. Numerous scholars have extensively explored the impact of leadership on collaborative projects and posit that 'good collaborative leadership' is a crucial element for any successful endeavor (Clark, 2009; Nowell & Harrison, 2011; Ospina & Foldy, 2010; Vangen & Huxham, 2003;

Weiner, Alexander, & Shortell, 2002); yet unified conceptual definition and operationalization proves elusive.

While some authors have identified personal characteristics embodied by successful leaders (Alexander, Comfort, Weiner, & Bogue, 2011; Roussous & Fawcett, 2000), others have taken a slightly different approach by focusing on specific *actions* associated with successful leadership rather than the leaders themselves. Huxham and Vangen (2003), for instance, discuss at length the importance of a leader including and mobilizing group members, while Nowell and Harrison (2011) identify three specific leader responsibilities including "(1) providing operational support, (2) managing relationships with internal and external stakeholders, and (3) developing and promoting a sense of vision for the partnership" (p. 25).

Defining "collaborative leadership," however, is only one aspect of a broader organizational focus. Kania and Kramer (2011) argue that formalized structure is crucial to achieving success in interagency collaborations. Because many nonprofit and government groups come together on a voluntary basis, a project can quickly lose direction and momentum without solidifying some kind of internal structure.

Kania and Kramer (2011) find there is a need for "backbone support agencies" charged with three primary responsibilities including (1) providing project management, (2) collecting and monitoring data, and (3) facilitating group progress. Successful backbone agencies demonstrate neutral involvement in the collaboration process, reducing potential for political influence.

Huxham and Vangen (2000) also suggest that formalizing group structure is a key component of collaboration, however, they empathize with administrators acknowledging that designing an effective collaborative structure can seem an impossible task:

> How to achieve the 'right' mix of individuals and organizations; how to involve members in different capacities, or with different status, without alienating them; how to ensure that the desired interests are represented; and how to maintain a stability of membership are among the many challenges facing them. Deciding *who* should make these decisions is another! (p. 796)

Focusing on the implications of leadership, Lawrence, Phillips, and Hardy (1999) highlight the ways in which discourse and social construction influence organizational structure and leadership when official hierarchies are naturally absent (or diminished), as in the case of some nonprofit and government collaborations. According to these scholars, organizational roles and responsibilities within the context of collaborative projects are actually *negotiated* in a highly social, discursive process, rather than dictated in the traditional hierarchical sense.

In addition to maintaining organized momentum, it has been suggested that creating a formalized collaborative structure ultimately impacts the funding and resources available for collaborative initiatives. Persuading voluntary collaboration members to provide additional funding and resources for a project often proves difficult when agency budgets are constrained. A formalized organizational structure can help clarify the role of each participating organization and outline expectations.

Moreover, it is important to consider that most nonprofit and government organizations are subject to strict bureaucratic regulations related to program funding and the allocation of limited resources. When budgets are restricted in this way, any appeal for special funding will likely be met with high levels of scrutiny; offering an official

organizational structure in addition to a thorough overview of collaborative goals may offer credibility to new proposals.

<div align="center">Communication and Interactional Dynamics</div>

Communication plays a crucial role in any collaborative effort as numerous individuals and agencies attempt to coordinate functions and responsibilities (Cheever, 2006; Lawrence, Phillips, & Hardy, 1999; Pietroburgo & Bush, 2007).

Studies suggest that increased communication among collaborative partners often faces several critical challenges: (1) the acknowledgement of cultural differences, (2) the development of a common language, and (3) the establishment of trust amongst group members (Dixon, Dougherty, 2010; Morrison, 1996; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Cramerer, 1998).

At the outset of any interagency collaborative project, it is not uncommon for participating members to make assumptions about the functioning and underlying motivations of their partner agencies. Nearly all agencies possess unique workplace cultures and interagency collaboration may produce a clashing of cultures. Culture clashing is typically one of the more difficult obstacles to adequately address (Dixon & Dougherty, 2010; Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Identifying and overcoming cultural differences can involve an assessment ranging from differences in workplace environment and documentation style, to mission statements and foundational philosophies.

Additionally, organizational culture often proves highly resistant to change (Meyerson & Martin, 2007; Schein, 1990). Meyerson and Martin (2007), for instance,

suggest that significant cultural shifts for the purposes of interagency collaboration may be nearly impossible if the divergences between agencies are too great. Any changes that do occur may take an extensive period of time and enormous amounts of effort to fully materialize.

One essential and oft-mentioned component of culture is language. The difficulties of developing a common language within the context of collaborative partnerships have been outlined extensively by Dixon and Dougherty (2010). Initially, collaborative partners may feel as though communication has increased simply because they meet on a more regular basis; however, without common context and understanding, group members may 'talk past' one another.

> In our meetings and presentations, it is not uncommon for us to use terms and concepts that we believe (despite our training to the contrary) have 'universal' meaning. Consequently, rather than dealing with one meaning, we often find ourselves at a crossroad of multiple meanings; which, left undetected, can have a significant impact on organizational discourse and process. (Dixon & Dougherty, 2010, p. 4)

This type of communicative confusion not only sparks minor misunderstandings that hinder the completion of mundane collaborative tasks; in the absence of a common language and cultural understanding, the purpose and direction of the collaboration itself can become confused. Indeed, Eden and Huxham (2001) define the crucial collaborative task of goal-setting as "the process of negotiating joint purpose" (p. 374).

Interagency trust is a third concept highlighted in the collaboration literature. Huxham and Vangen (2004) posit that trusting relationships amongst group members are an important component of both successful communication and functional collaboration. Generally speaking, members of a collaborative group do not choose their partners based on mutual trust, which may complicate matters.

Bureaucratic restrictions represent an additional barrier to establishing trust in collaborative projects. This is especially true of government and nonprofit human services agencies as all entities are charged with protecting the privacy of clientele. For this reason, agencies are often unable to communicate openly with their partners about all aspects of implementation problems. The "red tape" can further complicate the development of adequate communication and trust within collaborative groups.

Rousseau, et al. (1998) highlight the complexity of trust-building within a collaborative setting as a result of individual psychological processes interacting with both group and institutional-level dynamics. Unfortunately for eager administrators, the process of developing interagency trust can be quite time-consuming and tedious. Kania and Kramer (2011) even suggest that "participants need several years of regular meetings to build up enough experience with each other to recognize and appreciate the common motivation behind their different efforts" (p. 6).

Overall, the literature on collaboration is detailed and of great depth, but lacks theoretical coherency due to fragmentation of effort. Of the few authors that make attempts to synthesize the data and shift toward the development of overarching theories about interagency collaborations, results typically prove to be surface treatments that are of little practical use in the development and implementation of interagency collaborations.

One exception to this trend is the work of Chris Huxham and colleagues from Strathclyde Graduate Business School in Glasgow, Scotland. Based on more than twenty years of specialized action research (Dick, Stringer, & Huxham, 2009), Huxham and colleagues have outlined a complex theory of interagency collaborations. Specifically,

these authors have sought to identify the specific components that are likely to facilitate collaborative success and those that more often lead to malfunction. Central to this theory are the concepts of *collaborative advantage* (success) and *collaborative inertia* (malfunction) (Huxham & MacDonald, 1992).

A synthesis of Huxham's work suggests that collaborative success highlights six primary components: (1) the process of defining purpose and aims, (2) membership structures and dynamics, (3) coping with trust, (4) using power, (5) dealing with issues of identity, and (6) defining and implementing leadership structures (Huxham & Vangen, 2005). While this framework is a solid attempt at theoretical unification, it remains inaccessible to practitioners due in part to its sheer complexity.

In light of the gaps in previous research, the two purposes of the current study are to contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding interagency collaborations by exploring and highlighting the general developmental process of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot in Salt Lake City, Utah, and to integrate a synthesis of collaboration literature with this study's findings to develop a parsimonious, unified theory of interagency collaboration.

METHODS

Methodological limitations pose significant challenges to researchers working at the crossroads of interagency collaboration theory and praxis. In an attempt to overcome this weakness, the present study will combine the traditional qualitative case study methodology with a meta-analytic approach to generate synthesized, practical implications for both academics and administrators involved in the development and implementation of interagency collaborations.

Apart from a thorough literature review, the primary method of data collection for this study consisted of a series of Palmer Court Employment Pilot stakeholder interviews, in addition to a compilation of meeting minutes, document drafts, and personal researcher notes/observations collected over a period of 1 year.

This hybrid methodological approach has both strengths and weaknesses. As mentioned in the previous section, qualitative case study results are by nature highly detailed, but have little generalizability. By comparing the findings from the Palmer Court Employment Pilot case study with the findings from previous research in a wide variety of contexts, generalizable results are more easily obtained. Additionally, by collecting and synthesizing the results of previous studies, a unified set of principles can be generated for practical use in developing and implementing future interagency collaborations.

Recruitment

Purposive sampling (Berg, 1995) was used to select participants for the stakeholder interviews based on the following criteria: length of time working with the Palmer Court Employment Pilot, role in the pilot, and association with a partner agency. To obtain balanced feedback and complete representation, interviewees were selected from two distinct levels of stakeholders involved in the creation and initial introduction of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot, as well as from each major participating agency.

The structure of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot embodies two primary levels of participants: upper level agency representatives and managers with decision making capacity, and frontline agency employees who are obligated to fulfill responsibilities associated with the pilot as part of their official job description. For the purposes of the stakeholder interviews, these two groups were differentiated from one another and labeled the 'development group' and the 'implementation group.' This is an important distinction to make when evaluating the overall process of the pilot as the experiences of decision-makers differ drastically from those of the direct service providers simply as a result of their position within the Pilot structure.

The development group included 15 members of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot team who had direct involvement and authority in developing the pilot itself, such as administrators, funders, consultants, and top-level managers. The implementation group consisted of 16 case managers, direct service providers, and frontline managers.

With the exception of two or three key participants who had overlapping roles in the pilot, all of the major players in the Palmer Court Employment Pilot were categorized into either the development group or the implementation group (see Figure 1).

Interviewing

A total of 31 individual interviews were conducted with stakeholders associated with the Palmer Court Employment Pilot. These interviews took place during the implementation phase of the Pilot and interview questions focused primarily on the development and initial implementation processes (see Appendix A for a full list of stakeholder interview questions). Because the Palmer Court Employment Pilot has continued since the completion of these interviews, it should be noted that more recent information and developments will be the topic of future study.

No compensation was offered to interviewees and participation was completely voluntary. Each participant was fully informed about the purpose of the study before conducting the interview and each signed an informed consent document. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and all were tape recorded for the purpose of transcription. All identifying information has been kept strictly confidential and recordings were immediately deleted following transcription. All interviews were conducted by the author of this study with University of Utah Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

In addition to the stakeholder interviews, the present study has also utilized information from archival data sources, such as meeting minutes, unpublished internal reports, resident focus group transcripts, and researcher notebooks compiled over the course of 1 year. The information gleaned from these data sources serves to supplement feedback and perspectives expressed in the stakeholder interviews, as well as to provide a structured means of triangulation.

<u>Data Coding and Analysis</u>

After verbatim transcription and immersion reading, stakeholder interviews were analyzed for themes related to the development and initial implementation processes of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot. Using the software program QSR NVivo 8, narratives were initially organized into segments of text that formed a foundation for further analysis. From the codes that were developed in this process, thematic and analytic coding were used to generate broader themes. These themes are presented in the following sections as this study's primary findings.

As mentioned previously, the stakeholder interviews were conducted using a list of semi-structured questions regarding the development and initial implementation processes of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot. The initial approach to analyzing the information, then, began with a thorough, exploratory assessment of these questions. Using the interview questions as a guide for the initial analysis process and coding of the individual interviewee responses provided a general sense of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot experience in addition to identifying some deeper, more philosophical themes that prompt further analysis and explanation.

<u>Reflexivity</u>

Reflexivity has been defined as the practice of the researcher's relationship to the study and, in qualitative research, to the participants as well (Pascale, 2010; Watt, 2007). Because this type of qualitative research involves some interpretation and it would be impossible for the researcher to fully disengage from her own personal history, background, and prior understandings, it is crucial to acknowledge and thoroughly

discuss the role of the researcher in any qualitative study. Typically, the process includes an explicit exploration of researcher biases, values, personal background, and any other factors that may influence interpretations that are formed in the study process (Creswell, 2009).

As both a graduate student studying interagency collaborations and a contracted employee working on the evaluation of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot, my overlapping roles are important to note as author reflexivity is considered. These differing responsibilities presented conflicts of interest at times which were addressed thoughtfully as they emerged.

Additionally, my personal work history as a social worker and case manager has significantly impacted my understanding of homelessness, mental illness, and policy/government interventions geared toward ameliorating these issues. Coming from a feminist-multicultural foundation, I value both political analysis and social deconstruction as avenues for understanding our world and the problems we face as a society. Viewed through this lens, my interpretation and experience of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot may differ from those with an alternative perspective.

One example of how my perspective may differ from others, for instance, is related to my understanding of the underlying value of employment. Some advocates of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot identify participation in gainful employment as a fundamental component of health, stability, and societal contribution. Having been trained as a feminist-multicultural therapist, however, my inclination is to deconstruct the concept a little further. Employment can be positive and beneficial for many individuals, but there are some for whom the experience may actually be damaging. For some, other

activities (such as education, social interaction, substance abuse/mental health treatment, etc.) may be more appropriate and beneficial for their personal well-being.

Further, I am aware that the political atmosphere plays a large role in the development and implementation of projects such as this. For the Palmer Court Employment Pilot, conservative political tendencies in Utah, among other factors, undoubtedly impacted the decision to focus primarily on employment activities as recipients of public aid are generally expected to 'give back' in some way. In light of my experiences with oppressed and disadvantaged populations, I disagree with this sentiment as a universal rule which has impacted my perception of the Employment Pilot as a whole.

FINDINGS

Findings from the Palmer Court Employment Pilot stakeholder interviews can be understood within the context of three broad categories that capture the overall development and implementation process of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot. These three categories include: (1) the stakeholders understanding of the pilot goals and purpose, (2) the major concerns and challenges that were encountered, and (3) the perceived successes of the Pilot. Each of these categories will be discussed independently in relation to the specific responses expressed by stakeholders throughout the interview process.

Pilot Goals and Purpose

The first category of findings from the Palmer Court Employment Pilot stakeholder interviews highlighted the importance of collaborative goals and purpose. As mentioned in the literature review, these are fundamental components of any interagency collaboration. Indeed, the very definition of 'interagency collaboration' explicitly refers to the unified pursuit of common goals. Many scholars have pointed out that establishing a clear and shared understanding of what those goals are can be difficult; cultural differences, communication dynamics, and many other factors all impact a collaboration's ability to develop a universally accepted and understood purpose.

Interviews with stakeholders made it clear that the Palmer Court Employment Pilot experienced this difficulty on an almost continual basis since the onset of development processes in the Spring of 2010.

Goal Development Process and Perceptions

The official goals of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot were initially developed by the Pilot Administrative Team (what has been called the development group for the purposes of this study) in an effort to build on the housing interventions involved in the Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. As previously discussed, the concept of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot was reflective of a shift toward an 'Housing First, Employment Next' model that posited employment as a method of facilitating long-term stability for the formerly chronically homeless.

Two development group members mentioned that the residents themselves had expressed desire for employment opportunities, but the majority of stakeholders agreed that the primary impetus for the heavily employment-focused objectives (and even the Palmer Court Employment Pilot itself) seemed to have stemmed more from higher-level policy questions:

> What's the endgame [of permanent supportive housing]? What does permanent supportive housing really mean? Ad infinitum we say, but can we afford that? Is there a limit to how many people you can afford to permanently house? And second, is that the best condition for somebody who's permanently housed? Is 'not working' a good condition? If not, then what next?

To answer these questions, a large group of administrators from a variety of agencies came together to discuss the Palmer Court Employment Pilot. When describing the process of goal development, one development group stakeholder commented that

"the steering committee came up with the mission, came up with the objectives. And they had big brainstorming sessions where they wrote down millions of things on white paper and kind of boiled them down. It was hard."

Over time, it became clear that the Palmer Court Employment Pilot was to function under several key assumptions. These assumptions included (1) the assurance that housing would not be jeopardized or made contingent upon the employment status of a resident, (2) the acknowledgement that employment is a beneficial activity that contributes to the quality of life of individuals as well as the sustainability of permanent supportive housing facilities, and (3) the belief that *everyone* is capable of employment. With these assumptions in mind, the development group went on to create more concrete goals and targets for the Palmer Court Employment Pilot, the result of which manifested in a lengthy document detailing the primary objectives (see Appendix B).

The development of the goals themselves was often described by stakeholders as a 'top-down' process. Several development stakeholders who played an integral role in initial planning efforts praised the group for being inclusive and promoting ingenuity in terms of designing specific interventions to be implemented, but a review of the initial development materials reveals that most of the inclusion was of a horizontal nature rather than vertical.

A wide variety of upper-level administrators were invited to participate in the development of pilot goals, but not necessarily upper-level administrators *and* frontline service providers, case managers, and residents. One development group stakeholder commented on the inclusion of many key high-level players:

> I was really impressed at how broadly they reached out. They could have
> said, here's the framework of the pilot based on this other thing, and this is

what we're going to do- what do you think? It was much more of an open-ended process. We've got everybody at the table, this is our general direction, we want to get people employed, we need general input and ideas and thoughts- and starting from that area with a big group of people I think was helpful.

In talking with upper-level development group members, many were under the impression that case managers had been informally involved in the discussion since the beginning by having a representative in the development group. Only later was it discovered that lines of communication were less open than anticipated. By the time this lapse had been identified, however, the direction and goals of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot were already being pursued and proved difficult to adjust.

Members of the implementation group expressed that the lack of earlier involvement made the Pilot itself feel abrupt and imposed. Many of the implementation group stakeholders spoke of heightened and drastically different expectations placed upon them and feeling that their already heavy workloads increased "out of the blue." One implementation group member shared her perception of the Pilot's goals: "What we were told was to be expected was that they wanted everybody employed. They wanted some kind of work- if it's volunteering or working or anything. They wanted everybody to be doing something."

In addition to the shift from a Housing First focus to a Housing First, Employment Next focus, many implementation group members also described feeling the stress of an increased workload: "Yeah, I mean it seemed time consuming. It seemed like, okay, this is more paperwork. I'm already busy, I've already got 50 clients and in the initial meetings people were like, this is designed for, you know half that- or even less!"

When asked about their initial perception of, and reaction to, the Palmer Court Employment Pilot goals, nearly all of the stakeholders were able to identify 'employment' as a central component. Most explanations were similar to this comment from an implementation group member: "When I first got started, it was just about getting people jobs. That was the goal, the bottom line. Getting people employed."

That said, some stakeholders (particularly members of the implementation group who were somewhat removed from the development of the Pilot's goals) qualified their statements and expressed personal and/or group confusion as to what the true purpose of the Pilot really was: "It was kind of unclear to be honest. I don't think there was really a clear goal." This could be the result of poor communication, fundamentally unclear goals, or a combination of both.

While the development of the purpose and goals of the Pilot was difficult, the identification of associated targets by which to measure success seemed even more challenging. Many stakeholders ultimately balked at the proposed targets thinking them unrealistic. Even some of the development group members expressed skepticism of the objectives: "...and I think administratively we set high goals in terms of 60% of our residents for employment; the case managers are like, how are we going to do that?" One development group member succinctly sums up this sentiment:

> We were in a room at Palmer Court and I remember lots of folks were there that are still around the table, and we were talking about all of these goals and expectations and I just remember sitting there cringing on the inside thinking, I cannot believe this is the direction we're going. Because it was so grand, so big, and to me seemed so unrealistic.

<u>Underlying Values</u>

Part of the confusion and hesitancy involved with the pilot seemed to revolve around the various underlying values that can be associated with the goals and purpose of an employment-focused project. To fully understand the impact of the purpose and goals it is important to consider not only the manifest content of any given objective, but also the latent values and underlying philosophies that guide the ultimate purpose of the endeavor.

Simply outlining the fact that the primary aim of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot was to provide job opportunities to the formerly chronically homeless provided no indication as to the fundamental values and motives associated with that objective. Some implementation group stakeholders wondered why employment was the focus of the pilot at all. What was it about employment specifically that made it more important than education or recreation? It was clear from the stakeholder interviews that each participant had a slightly different interpretation of the true value of an employment-focused pilot.

Four primary values associated with employment were revealed through the Palmer Court Employment Pilot stakeholder interviews: (1) opportunities for agency networking and advancement, (2) increased financial support and self-sustainability of permanent supportive housing, (3) heightened political support for permanent supportive housing, and (4) micro-level increases in quality of life.

The first value, opportunities for agency networking and advancement, was clearly seen as a benefit to many upper-level administrators involved in the development group. Some mentioned the benefits of networking and strategic partnerships that naturally accompany a collaborative project such as this. One stakeholder commented

that, "... our community is really small and where there is a community project like this, with all the key players involved, and some of the key funders involved, you'd be crazy not to be involved- just strategically."

In addition to the impressive networking advantages associated with the collaboration, many of the agencies involved in the Palmer Court Employment Pilot highlighted the fact that they are mandated to report on employment outcomes; any effort to increase those statistics would naturally prove beneficial in ensuring ongoing funding and agency support.

Secondly, increased income on the part of permanent supportive housing residents increases the long-term financial stability of these types of facilities. Although it was made clear that housing would not be contingent upon employment, many of the development partners viewed employment as an ultimate gateway to resident independence and, thus, sustainability for the permanent supportive housing facilities themselves.

One member of the development group, for instance, stated that, "We can help them [Palmer Court residents] so they can be more independent and eventually move out and maybe create those openings for other individuals who would need that." Another development group member echoed a similar sentiment:

> It [resident employment] helps to positively cash flow the housing, help some people maybe transition out of permanent supportive housing leaving room for other people that need to get in. So it helps create more movement.

The third value, heightened political support for permanent supportive housing facilities, seems to stem from what some have labeled 'Utah culture.' Essentially, encouraging permanent supportive housing residents to 'give back' creates a more

palatable political platform for the system as a whole within the State of Utah (and, some

would argue, on a national level as well). One stakeholder described the issue succinctly:

> I think we have in this state a culture that folks want to see people do more. So, for example, housing people is okay, but there is always the issue of whether or not you should keep- you know, you're paying for these people to live in these places, you're subsidizing their stuff, and you give them all of this... I think the culture of our state is that people should give back and do more, and it does seem like employment is something that people can get involved in.

Regardless of other values espoused, the majority of stakeholders from both

groups made some reference to the fourth value of employment: increased quality of life

for the residents. Whether the positive boost was thought to stem from increased social

interaction, income, or independence, it was clear that members of the Palmer Court

Employment Pilot believed that employment was a beneficial activity on an individual

level.

This final value was summed up nicely by a development group member: "My

goal in all of this was to help people find work- whether it was an hour a week, or two

hours a week, or twenty hours a week- because I think work is a meaningful part of life."

In sum, even those who may not have agreed with the initial underlying values

espoused by some of the most influential development group members (political

palatability, financial sustainability, etc.) seemed to identify some other positive

characteristics associated with employment over time.

Major Challenges

In addition to the struggle to establish a common purpose and project goals,

stakeholders involved in the Palmer Court Employment Pilot reported experiencing

several other significant challenges as the project evolved over time. These challenges can be understood as falling into one of three broad categories: (1) consequences of the culture clash, (2) unique population considerations, and (3) struggles with technical development and implementation components.

<u>Culture Clash</u>

The first and most prominent challenge that the Palmer Court Employment Pilot encountered had to do with differences in working styles, language, and underlying philosophies of the various agencies involved in the collaboration. It was expressed, for instance, that while some of the agencies involved in the Pilot were solely focused on employment and quantitative results, others valued different types of activities such as mental health/substance abuse treatment and education. Additionally, workplace norms differed from agency to agency. Stakeholders reflected that some agencies were more deliberate with paperwork and formal hierarchy than others.

These kinds of differences resulted in a significant culture clash which was not anticipated and for a long time not addressed by the development group; only as a result of implementation group members 'muddling through' did the issue truly come to light. One member of the implementation group describes the culture clash:

> It's miscommunications, but the reason I want to say it differently- it's not a *simple* miscommunication. It's like the language and the assumptions; all the unspoken stuff. everyone assumes what each other is thinking. It's completely different, so you have to talk about every little thing to really get on the same page. As soon as you leave one thing untouched, everyone grabs onto that and goes their own direction with it; not on purpose of course, but because they make an assumption about what they thought that one word meant.

As discussed in the literature review, interagency culture clash is often one of the least expected and most disruptive obstacles faced in collaborative projects. Especially in light of the top-down development of Pilot goals and purpose, it is no surprise that the Palmer Court Employment Pilot experienced this dilemma in full force as agency differences and service provider feedback were not taken into consideration during the initial planning stages.

Indeed, one development stakeholder remembers of the initial meetings that, "there wasn't a lot of thought put into the end product or how that would affect the people actually doing the work." In hindsight, another reflected that, "I don't think I put together that the little indications in some of those higher meetings that people were fighting for culture and that it would be sort of an embroiled battle down here on the ground."

Unfortunately, the differences between the various agencies in terms of language and philosophy were indeed significant and direct service providers, case managers, and Palmer Court residents seemed to experience the brunt of the resulting culture clash. One stakeholder, an expert in the development of these types of projects, commented on this dynamic:

> It's common for there to be a host of 'rubs,' if you will, because we're trying to span the housing and employment world- and those worlds are fraught with different languages, different principles, different practices, different rules, different ways of behaving. And when they come together, one should always expect there to be friction and tension.

Further, implementation group stakeholders expressed that without an explicit acknowledgement and exploration of these 'rubs,' any hesitancy on their part related to program goals seemed to be perceived as malicious resistance. One implementation

group member commented that, "... the government agencies were the ones that had this expectation of what was going to be accomplished, and any dissent from that expectation was perceived as not being on board, not being cooperative, not being supportive of our clients."

Ultimately, it was through the development of trust and personal relationships that the Palmer Court Employment Pilot group members reported being able to work through many of their cultural differences. One member mentioned that, "The relationships matter a tremendous amount. I think the whole project took a remarkable turn when we finally got to be friends."

Population Considerations

Some of the cultural discord may also have been the result of an important development issue: a poor program-population match. There had been some hesitancy expressed within the development group in the early phases of goal development that the established objectives seemed unrealistic for this population, but the Pilot moved forward optimistically under the assumption that *everyone* was employable.

By the time the implementation group became actively involved in the Pilot, significant concerns began to arise: "The Pilot seemed very administrative. And being the expectation that everybody could work, I was concerned that there was a disconnect between who our clients really are and what they're capable of, and what was expected of them."

A critical challenge for this (and any) developing social service program is ensuring that the project is well matched to the population it is meant to serve. For the

Palmer Court Employment Pilot, this has meant reevaluating the approach and taking into account a whole range of demographic considerations that, in combination, are largely unique to the chronically homeless population.

In choosing Palmer Court as the site of an employment pilot, the development group was essentially targeting a highly concentrated group of underserved individuals who have traditionally fallen through the gaps of accessible service provision. Several development group stakeholders mentioned that this was an intentional move: "I think we were going to take the toughest of the tough that are housed and get them employed to show that we can really do that."

While this seemed to be a worthy goal for many individuals in the development group, the implementation group members were not as easily convinced. With a direct connection to the day-to-day functioning of their clients, the onsite service providers and case managers understood that the reality was actually much more complex than the idealistic notion that *'everyone is employable.'*

As the realities became clearer to the development group over time, some stakeholders reflected that they really did not have an adequate grasp of the many barriers that this population faces. One interviewee reflected on this: "I had no idea what kind of barriers we would be facing. I mean, I work for DWS [the Department of Workforce Services]- we've got people with some pretty substantial barriers, but I don't know. I didn't know."

Technical Difficulties

In light of the apparent population-program mismatch and culture clashes within the pilot, initial implementation of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot activities did not play out as anticipated and the group began experiencing technical difficulties including the failure of 'business as usual,' the lack of appropriate job opportunities, and the ultimate struggle of how to effectively evaluate/report on the Pilot's outcomes and impact.

One of the first realizations of stakeholders associated with providing services to Palmer Court residents was that 'business as usual' approach was not going to be effective with this population. Even though partner agencies had relocated employees and authorized them to provide services onsite, without increased flexibility within the system itself, the services remained largely inaccessible to the population.

> In hindsight, we were trying something different, but really it's just business as usual. I mean, it's DWS [the Department of Workforce Services], and our clients have been working with DWS for years unsuccessfully, so it's just kind of like trying to make something new out of what was already there.

While the Palmer Court Employment Pilot was able to increase provider flexibility over time, thus successfully addressing the 'business as usual' dilemma, the development of appropriate jobs was identified by stakeholders as an ongoing struggle. In talking with the implementation group, one of the top challenges reported was the lack of opportunities for their clients. Rhetoric and encouragement surrounding employment had increased dramatically, but appropriate placements for clients expressing interest in employment were continually lacking. This problem was very frustrating to both residents and case managers who were losing credibility with their clients.

In the same vein, one implementation group member suggested that, "I think the lack of jobs in the less stressful, 'tier one' [lower level, highly supported employment] sort of jobs has been the most frustrating thing for clients, case managers, and probably service providers as well- not having something they can offer to people that will work for them." This has been a consistent struggle since the Pilot kick off in 2011.

Over time, the Palmer Court Employment Pilot's goals and objectives shifted significantly to reflect the Pilot's ongoing learning, however, this process created yet another technical difficulty: how to measure the impact and outcome of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot. Has the effort been successful? What are the measurable indicators of success and/or failure? One prominent development stakeholder lamented that, "I don't know how to tell the story; I have no idea how to tell the story right now." Another posed the question: "How do we document or capture a culture shift?"

As discussed in the introduction, evidence-based practice is becoming ever more popular in the world of policymaking and implementation. For a program such as the Palmer Court Employment Pilot to successfully function on a long-term basis, administrators have acknowledged that they will need to find some consistent and valid way of measuring and reporting on the Pilot's successes and possible areas of improvement.

<u>Major Successes</u>

Despite many of the challenges faced by Palmer Court Employment Pilot stakeholders, several notable successes were reported. It is especially interesting that the vast majority of stakeholders, even those who expressed the most criticism of the Palmer

Court Employment Pilot, did not report questioning their involvement over time and even reasserted their positive view of the project as a whole.

While the successes may not be exactly what the partners initially aimed for (namely, increased income through employment), the stakeholders have taken pride in other associated achievements. The major successes as perceived by the various stakeholders range from macro, agency-level achievements to the individual progress of the residents themselves.

Partnerships and Community Awareness

One of the most notable successes identified by Palmer Court Employment Pilot stakeholders (particularly those involved in the development group) had to do with the networking that has occurred between various organizations and the subsequent increase in community awareness. One stakeholder commented on this achievement: "I've been incredibly impressed with the partnerships, and the variety of people in the community coming together, and putting together things that have started to yield something."

Highlighting the relationship development between agencies, another development group member mentioned that, "I think the success of having so many decision makers in big organizations that have been traditionally ignorant of each other, or in conflict with each other, working together to put resources in- I think that's a huge accomplishment."

The resolution of many cultural conflicts between agencies and individuals has also been identified as a significant accomplishment for the Palmer Court Employment

Pilot stakeholders. One development group member noted the progress that has been made:

> We kind of had our fights back and forth, and our deep conversations- and I'm sure there's still more of that. But these last several meetings it's been okay, you know, next step; next step; next step; let's go. Everybody is kind of getting comfortable with where everybody's at, so that's encouraging.

Micro-Level Successes and Culture of Employment

While the quantitative employment outcomes were disappointing to some stakeholders after months of intensive program implementation and experimentation, other micro-level successes surfaced in the interviews as reflective of major program achievements. This was particularly true for those involved in the implementation group whose initial appreciation of an employment focused pilot had more to do with possible increases in quality of life for Palmer Court residents rather than employment itself. When asked about the major successes, for instance, one case manager reported that:

> I was really impressed by what this was doing for some of my clients. It felt really positive. For one guy in particular- he's done a lot of general time, you know, prison time- and kind of struggles with depression and has a really rocky, volatile relationship with the woman he lives with here. And so for him, it was really exciting. He shows up and does the paperwork!

These small increases and micro-level successes in resident quality of life have been interpreted by the Palmer Court Employment Pilot (and, in fact, by the residents themselves) as 'baby steps' in a long process that can ultimately lead to employment.

<u>Onsite Resources and Accessibility</u>

      With these 'baby steps' has come the recognition that ongoing employment

support is a crucial component of success. One development group member commented:

> We've actually shifted our resources from, hey, go find traditional jobs. It's
> not going to happen with employment unless you have *supportive*
> employment. You have to find the right opportunities, and then you still
> need to support the employment environment.

      One example of this type of supportive employment is the availability of ongoing

job coaching. Many of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot stakeholders mentioned the

success of partnering a working resident with a long-term job coach to help guide and

teach the resident individually, as well as assist in resolving any conflicts that may arise

between the employer and the resident.

      Another related success of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot expressed by the

stakeholders was the sizable increase in onsite services and accessibility to helpful

resources: "The onsite jobs have been a really great success," said one implementation

group member. Stakeholders also identified the increased access to services via onsite

representatives from prominent government agencies (i.e., Vocational Rehabilitation, the

Department of Workforce Services, and the Veteran's Administration) as highly

beneficial, as well as the special groups and workshops that have been offered onsite (for

example, budgeting groups and life skills classes).

      The benefits of these types of systematic improvements are not only visible within

Palmer Court itself, but have, according to stakeholders, spread to other permanent

supportive housing facilities. The process of other facilities learning from the Palmer

Court Employment Pilot and adopting similar (albeit less expensive) practices has been

referred to within the pilot as "the bleed-over effect." Efforts are now being geared

toward measuring the indirect benefits being received by other formerly chronically homeless individuals residing at other permanent supportive housing locations.

Summary of Findings and Lessons Learned

It is often said that hindsight is 20/20. Interviewed stakeholders had many suggestions for future pilot activities and offered insightful advice for other collaborative endeavors with members wishing to facilitate successful outcomes. Looking back over the development and initial implementation processes, the stakeholders of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot had much advice to pass along to future collaborations.

While an exhaustive review of the many project-specific recommendations is beyond the scope of this study, a useful synthesis can be boiled down to five overarching suggestions that may be applicable in other collaborative situations: (1) know and understand your target population before developing interventions, (2) pay careful attention to the cultural differences between agencies and make this an explicit/ongoing group discussion, (3) be thoughtful and inclusive in approaching the development process, (4) be aware that 'business as usual' will likely be unsuccessful; explore new ways to be flexible and innovative, and (5) ensure that appropriate resources and funding are secured for long-term success.

Taken as a whole, the feedback and shared experiences of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot stakeholders contribute greatly to the knowledge that currently surrounds interagency collaboration as a whole. In combination with a synthesis of previous research, these findings prompt a broader exploration of the implications for the study and development of interagency collaborations.

IMPLICATIONS

A Ternary Framework of Interagency Collaboration

The information provided by stakeholders in this process has shed significant light on the development and implementation processes of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot specifically, but these findings also illustrate some broader implications about interagency collaboration as a whole. By synthesizing the current findings with concepts developed and discussed in previous literature, a new three-part framework of interagency collaboration can be proposed (Figure 2).

Cultural Dynamics

Agency Values & Philosophies
Agency Language & Culture
Agency Priorities

Successful Collaboration

Relational Dynamics

Individual Communication
Individual Personalities
Trust & Familiarization

Practical Dynamics

Group Funding & Resources
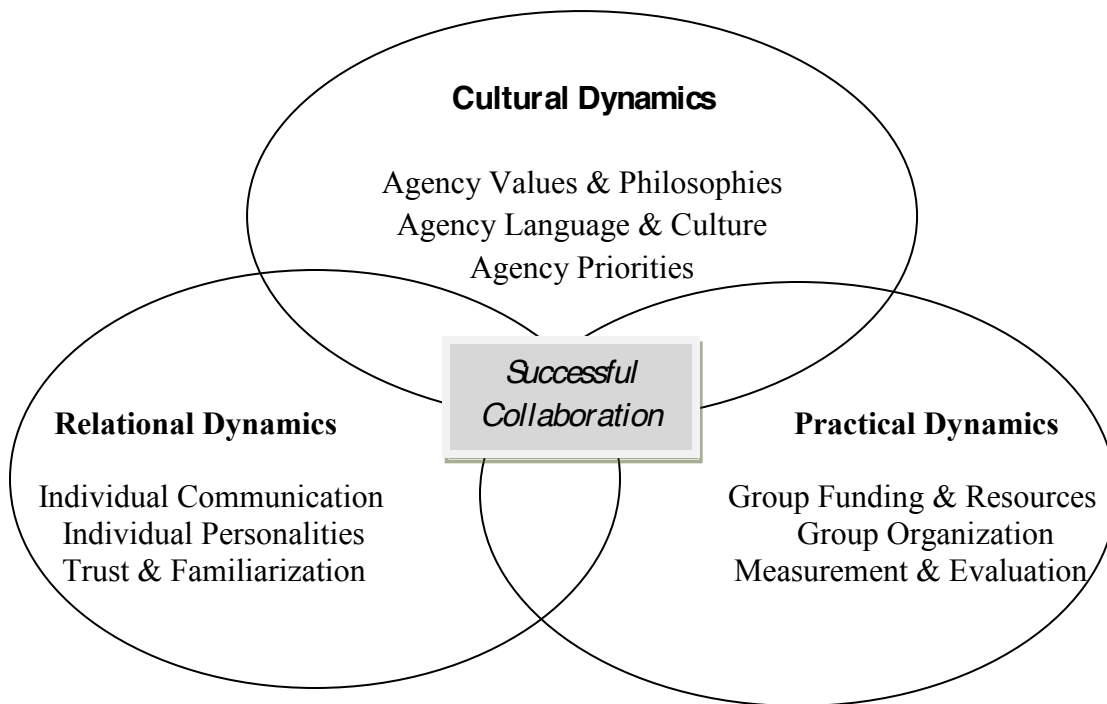Group Organization
Measurement & Evaluation

Figure 2. Ternary Framework of Interagency Collaboration

I. Cultural Dynamics

The first and most prominent component highlighted in both the Palmer Court Employment Pilot stakeholder interviews and in the previous collaboration literature encompasses the many dynamics that naturally occur when a variety of agencies attempt to work together. *Cultural dynamics*, the interactional patterns between agencies, play a large role in shaping the development and implementation processes of collaborative initiatives and should be taken into serious consideration at the onset of any collaborative project.

As individuals associated with an interagency collaboration begin working together and designing various interventions, it often becomes clear to many that not only are there significant divisions among agencies in terms of values, beliefs, and underlying philosophies, but the purpose of the project itself can remain largely undefined. As an example, stakeholders involved in the Palmer Court Employment Pilot (most of whom were part of the development group) recalled many months of shifting goals, miscommunications, and a plethora of tense meetings. While almost all of these participants were able to identify 'employment' as the primary goal of the pilot, there were significant variations in the definition of this term, the purpose of focusing on employment as the primary objective, and the most appropriate activities to implement in attempting to achieve that goal.

Additionally, agency priorities may differ drastically due to varying agency missions, cultures, and their perceived role in collaboration. While some participating agencies associated with the Palmer Court Employment Pilot, for instance, focused solely on obtaining direct employment for residents (as outlined in their mission statements and

agency cultures), other agencies placed more value on the types of supportive services to which residents would now have increased access as a direct result of the Pilot. Such resources included assistance with ongoing medical concerns, transportation, and life skills coaching. Other interagency collaboration case studies have highlighted similar problems.

While individuals involved in the development of a project have the capacity to easily maneuver around shifting goals and theoretical frameworks, those tasked with the actual implementation activities of group projects cannot escape the culture clash. These members are often required to work together under significant amounts of pressure to carry out very complex tasks for the purposes of the project. Thus, the culmination of culture clashes and differing goals typically occurs at the ground level as the various operational teams attempt to make the best of complex and often shifting directives. For members of the development groups, however, cultural differences between agencies can more comfortably remain abstract.

Stereotypes and previous disagreements between collaborators (such as the perception of the Department of Workforce Services as being too bureaucratic and rigid to be effective) might be viewed by development stakeholders as something of a side note with the assumption that any problems associated with culture clash will be naturally worked out along the way. While this is the case in some situations, a thorough and honest exploration of the cultural components and possible problems associated with collaborative activities *prior* to the actual implementation may help prevent some of the most severe discontent and resistance to collaboration itself.

For example, throughout the first year of development and implementation, the Palmer Court Employment Pilot experienced many challenges due to culture clashes between agencies as a common philosophy and culture had not been established from the onset. Each agency spoke a different language, had different underlying values, and operated within different understandings of the ultimate purpose of the Pilot. The studies related to communication outlined in the literature review suggest that similar issues are faced within the context of many collaborative endeavors.

II. Relational Dynamics

Relational dynamics, or the interactional patterns between individuals, occur at all levels of collaboration. A synthesis of previous research findings and findings from the Palmer Court Employment Pilot study highlight three consistent themes can be associated with relational dynamics through the development and implementation processes including the enhancement of communication, the development of trust, and the interaction of individual personalities.

As team members begin negotiating their roles within a collaborative endeavor, it often becomes clear that increased communication is necessary to develop working relationships and to accomplish the goals of a project, especially at the implementation level. In order to complete assigned tasks in a collaborative manner, there is by necessity a heightened need to communicate on a more regular basis; both within individual agencies and with external partner agencies.

Increased communication among the various development partners seemed relatively straightforward for the Palmer Court Employment Pilot, and this contributed

greatly to the ongoing progress of the project as a whole. That said, communication between *implementation* group members surfaced as more of a challenge as partners were asked to share highly sensitive information (i.e. extremely confidential and potentially harmful information about residents) making trust an essential component of partner relationships.

While any interagency collaboration is likely to face obstacles associated with trust in their developmental process, the struggle seems to be amplified within the realm of social service provision specifically, as sharing confidential information about individual people is naturally very risky. Additionally, legal release of information restrictions must be addressed as client permission is often required.

The familiarization process took the Palmer Court implementation group many months and several personnel changes to fully realize; however, it is of note that the trust building and the development of working relationships have been identified as two major Pilot successes thus far. Other interagency collaborations report similar successes after a period of getting to know one another. Although this relational work is never complete, with diligence and a willing group, any interagency collaboration can develop the skills to create effective relationships with new partners over time.

As is true in any context in which human beings interact, personality differences and similarities play a significant role in relationship development within interagency collaborations. Unsurprisingly, many group members involved in the Palmer Court Employment Pilot experienced both personality matches and personality clashes with their new colleagues. These interactions can impact both communication and trust

between individuals and, thus, have a significant effect on the developmental process of an interagency collaboration as a whole.

III. Practical Dynamics

The final component of this three-part framework is the role of practical dynamics. In addition to the more abstract issues associated with cultural and relational dynamics, emerging interagency collaborations must also consider the practical components of such a complex project such as funding, resources, and the evaluative measurement of outcomes. Like other collaborations, the Palmer Court Employment Pilot exhibited several strengths in this area, as well as several weaknesses. These examples help shed light on some of the practical pitfalls associated with interagency collaboration in the provision of social services.

In terms of resources, many upper-level administrators are able to effectively repurpose resources from within their respective agencies to assist in collaborative activities. In addition, some limited financial assistance was generated through donations or other grants. This type of funding can be more or less flexible depending on the source, and can be highly beneficial to collaborative initiatives. Repurposed funds within the Palmer Court Employment Pilot, for instance, allowed agency staff to provide onsite services during designated periods throughout the week. By reallocating these resources, the Pilot received substantial benefit and the residents of Palmer Court gained access to employment services and other critical supportive resources.

Findings from the Palmer Court Employment Pilot and similar projects demonstrate that having more resources readily accessible can help solve many practical

problems in a timely manner. That said, it is important to note that there are often larger, more systemic issues at play that become difficult for collaborative groups to resolve. Transportation and expunging criminal records, for instance, stood out as ongoing challenges for the Palmer Court group. The systemic nature of institutional problems are often an obstacle for interagency collaborations, even with powerful government agencies at the table.

A final component of practical dynamics that warrants emphasis is the necessity of a neutral, organizational entity within an interagency collaboration. As mentioned in the literature review, Kania and Kramer (2011) call this entity a 'backbone agency.' Without a neutral agency whose sole responsibility is the organization and facilitation of project growth (as was the case in the Palmer Court Employment Pilot), a collaboration is more likely to lose momentum and fall into what Huxham (1996) terms 'collaborative inertia.'

The Ternary Framework of Interagency Collaborations

Taken together, the three components of the present theory (cultural dynamics, relational dynamics, and practical dynamics) highlight the most important aspects of interagency collaboration. As evidenced by previous research findings and duly illustrated within the Palmer Court Employment Pilot case study, interagency collaborations require adequate attention to all three of these core components to be successful in the long run. In the case of interagency collaboration, one group of dynamics is no less crucial than another.

It is important to note that these three components of interagency collaboration do not always function independently. There are overlapping and intertwined consequences that impact and complicate collaborative projects, as well. Relational and cultural dynamics, for example, often cross over, as when an individual becomes personally attached to an agency-level value or culture which may interfere with communication efforts with other group members. Similarly, practical stressors such as inadequate funding and resources can generate high levels of frustration within the group and significantly impact relational dynamics.

A final factor related to the proposed ternary framework of interagency collaboration is the decision of whether to engage in collaboration at all. While the benefits of collaborative work can be favorable for agencies when conducted successfully over a period of time, the decision to work collaboratively should be made with careful consideration. Not all social problems or organizational inefficiencies require interagency collaboration to adequately address. In fact, in addition to wasting limited resources, inappropriate collaborative work may actually cause more harm than good in some situations.

The role of the administrator, therefore, is a crucial one. Administrators with a thorough and realistic understanding of both collaborative benefits and pitfalls are more likely to choose the most appropriate route for their agencies. Easy access to unified and practical information (such as the present theory) about collaboration is one key to successful decision making.

That said, the information presented here represents the skeleton of a larger, more holistic framework from which to study and develop interagency collaborations in the

future. Additional research and elaboration will be necessary to fully flesh out this theory

and to create simple, accessible documents and tools to be utilized by project

administrators.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several key limitations related to the present study including (1) methodological complications, (2) the absence of a previously conducted systematic review of the literature, and (3) limitations associated with time constraints. Specific methodological considerations and limitations have been discussed at length in previous sections. The remaining two limitations warrant further explanation here, in addition to several suggestions for future research in this area.

The lack of a previously conducted systematic review is a limitation in that some information may have been missed in the current literature review. While beyond the scope of the present study, a thorough systematic review would be beneficial to provide a unified starting point for scholars and practitioners working in interagency collaborations. While previous reviews of the literature have considered select components of the available data, future research should be conducted to produce an exhaustive review of the vast body of literature surrounding interagency collaboration including studies conducted in unrelated fields and on an international level.

A final limitation concerns the timeframe of the Palmer Court Employment Pilot itself. The present study was conducted while the pilot implementation process was still underway, so final conclusions and implications cannot be fully addressed at this time. Future project-specific research will need to be conducted to draw further conclusions about the Palmer Court Employment Pilot implementation process.

Another direction to pursue with future research should involve an exploration of new methodological tools and approaches to use in the study of interagency collaboration. The most adequate and appropriate methodology will likely include a mixed-method, interdisciplinary approach that encompasses both quantitative and qualitative findings. Historically, the complexity of this type of research has been largely unmanageable, but with newly developing technologies and communicative tools, researchers in a variety of settings now have increasing capacity to work together and interpret findings in entirely new ways.

Finally, beginning with a universal starting point (i.e. the systematic review of interagency collaboration research) and building on that information by implementing new and improved methodological tools, coherent and practical theories can be developed regarding the development, functioning, and impact of interagency collaboration

APPENDIX A

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

<u>In The Beginning</u>

1. Introductions (name, agency/role, length of time with the pilot, etc.)

2. How and why did you and/or your agency initially become involved with the pilot?

3. What was your agency's initial role in the pilot?

4. What do you see in this project that makes it a valuable effort in which to invest your agency's time and resources?

5. When you were first introduced to this project, what was your sense of the overall goals or purpose of this effort?

6. How were these goals developed?

   a. What was your/your agency's role in developing the goals/mission?

   b. Who else was involved in the process?

7. When you think back to how the goals/mission were developed, what were some of the major "sticking points" or areas that required the most discussion to gain consensus?

8. Did you have any initial concerns about the focus of the project that might have been reflected in the goals/mission of the project?

9. What (if any) groups/agencies/key partners were missing from the initial stages of the pilot development?

    a. What perspectives were missing or underrepresented because of this gap?

10.   Any other issues or dynamics that were critical to the startup and initial development of the project?

Over Time

1. As the pilot developed, what shifted (if anything) to change your/your agency's involvement?

2. How did you experience the primary goals/mission changing as the project developed?

3. What key events happened during the development process that you see as shifting the direction of the project?

4. Was there anything that happened to make you question your/your agency's involvement? Or that led to your dropping out of the project if that is the case?

5. What has kept you interested/motivated to stay involved?

Currently

1. In a broad sense, what do you see as the major successes of the pilot so far?

2. What do you see as the major struggles or challenges that still need to be addressed?

3. What experiences (if any) have been particularly challenging for you/your agency?

4. There has been a lot of discussion about shifting the "culture of employment." What do you think this means in the context of Palmer Court? What was the culture? What needed shifting?

Future Considerations

1. If you could share your advice with other agencies wishing to participate in this type of

   collaborative effort, what would you tell them?

2. What outcomes do you expect or hope to see in the future relative to the pilot?

3. In your mind, is there anything that could be changed to facilitate the pilot's success?

4. Overall, written or unwritten, what do you see as the greatest driving force (person,

   ideal, expectation) behind this project?

Anything else?

APPENDIX B

ORIGINAL PALMER COURT EMPLOYMENT

PILOT OBJECTIVES

Purpose: All PSH residents become employed and increase their income.

Objectives:

1. Determine the impact of Palmer Court Pilot on each resident's connection to employment

2. Determine how the focus on employment impacts social services costs and use of services

3. Assess how the culture of employment changes during the pilot

4. Identify the pilot elements/activities most likely to improve each resident's capacity to engage in employment and increase income

5. Determine if the Palmer Court model is considered replicable at other PSH facilities.

Objectives with outcome measures and targets:

1. **Determine the impact of the Palmer Court Pilot on each resident's connection to employment:**

    a. Number of Palmer Court residents who earned any wages in the pilot year.

Targets:

1. At 6 months = 20% of adult population

2. At 12 months = 40% of adult population

b. Changes in earned income over the time of the pilot.

Target:

1. For residents who are employed or gain employment, 30% will increase their average hourly wage or average number of hours working within 6 months; 50% will show increases within 12 months.

c. Retention of employment

1. Percentage of residents who gained and retained employment for at least 3 consecutive months.

Target:

1. 75% of residents who were employed at entry to Palmer Court retained employment for at least 3 consecutive months

2. 40% of residents who gained employment after arriving at Palmer Court retained it for at least 3 consecutive months.

2. Determine how the focus on employment impacts social services costs and use of services:

a. Number of residents who access each of the following social services during the pilot year:

1. State Child Care assistance

2. Family Employment Program (TANF)

3. Food Stamps/SNAP

4. General Assistance (GA)

5. Housing

6. Medicaid

7. SSI/SSDI

8. Vocational Rehabilitation

Target:

    a. 10% reduction in the number of residents eligible for each of

    the means tested programs due to earned income

b. The total dollars received by residents from the following social services:

    1. Family Employment Program (TANF)

    2. Food Stamps/SNAP

    3. General Assistance (GA)

Target:

    a. Cost neutral after year 1.

    b. 20% decrease in those program costs year 2.

3.   Assess how the culture of employment changes during the pilot.

a. Degree of implementation of the elements in the Corporation for

Supportive Housing assessment scorecard which states that <u>an</u>

<u>organization</u> has adopted a "culture of work" if:

1. Tenant employment written into mission statement.

2. Executive from The Road Home has authority and responsibility for implementing employment services at Palmer Court.

3. Key staff person for employment services has experience and/or training in job development, job training, vocational counseling and/or developing business enterprises.

4. Communication mechanisms in place among social services, housing management and vocational services that result in effective problem solving and integrated service delivery.

5. Case managers have regular contact with employment staff; case managers consider support to tenant employment to be a core element of their job responsibilities.

6. Palmer Court personnel policies, procedures manuals, services manual and job descriptions reflect a consistent approach to prioritizing tenant employment.

7. Employment outcomes are tracked and reported on, and staff are held accountable for employment outcomes.

8. Road Home, Palmer Court and appropriate partner budgets reflect that designated funds are allocated for vocational and employment services.

9. Property management and services support employment goals.

10. There is an identifiable physical space dedicated to employment services.

11. Tenants have input into the overall program design.

Target:

    1.   Within 3 months of pilot start, all elements of the Corporation for Supportive Housing assessment scorecard for an organization will be discussed and evaluated for application to this pilot.

    2.   Within 6 months of pilot start, all parts of the Corporation for Supportive Housing assessment scorecard for an organization deemed appropriate for this pilot will be fully initiated.

b. Degree of implementation of the elements of the Corporation for Supportive Housing assessment scorecard which states that a <u>supportive housing program</u> has adopted a "culture of work" if:

    1.   Tenants are asked about their job-related skills and employment goals at intake.

    2.   Tenants are informed, verbally and in writing, of employment resources and opportunities available to them within the organization.

    3.   Tenants use available resources within their building for developing a resume, sending letters, and getting and making phone calls.

    4.   Support groups and other employment-focused activities attended by tenants.

    5.   Tenants are recognized for their successes.

6. Staff work schedules include time to meet and support tenants who have diverse work schedules.

Target:

1. Within 3 months of pilot start, all elements of the Corporation for Supportive Housing assessment scorecard for a supportive housing program will be discussed and evaluated for application to this pilot.

2. Within 6 months of pilot start, all parts of the Corporation for Supportive Housing assessment scorecard for a supportive housing program deemed appropriate for this pilot will be fully initiated.

4. **Identify the pilot elements/activities most likely to improve each resident's capacity to engage in employment and increase income.**

a. Type of activities engaged in by residents related to reduction in support needed. Examples of activities to tracked include:

1. Work Readiness Activities such as:

1. Treatment (mental/physical)

2. Attend pilot kickoff event or overview.

3. Visit employment office within Palmer Court

4. Attend benefits education opportunity (housing, SSI/SSDI, GA, Food Stamps, etc.)

5. DWS workshops, resume, networking, use of job preparation technology

6. Involvement in tenant association

7. Involvement in decision-making, social groups

and community opportunities.

8.   Involvement with formal and informal recognition of tenant success.

9.   Volunteer opportunities within Palmer Court with staff and/or tenant leader supervision.

10.   Paid work within Palmer Court with staff and/or tenant leader supervision.

11.   Work group participation

12.   Apply for SSI/SSDI

2.   Pre-employment activities such as:

1.   Job readiness, interviewing skills, resume writing workshops

2.   Job shadowing/employment mentoring

3.   Paid group placement

4.   Volunteer/internship

5.   Opportunities sponsored by Palmer Court by occurring outside Palmer Court with tenant and/or staff

6.   Participate in job placement through partner s (VA, USOR, DWS, DI, Valley Services, etc.)

7.   Use UtahFutures

8.   WorkKeys

9.   Register in jobs.utah.gov

3.   Employment and income increase activities such as:

1. Retaining employment

2. Seeking out additional education or training

3. Pursuing higher levels of responsibility at employment

Targets:

1.   Within six months of beginning their participation with a partner agency, 30% will increase their ability to engage in employment and employment related activities.

2.   Within 12 months of beginning their participation with a partner agency, 50% will increase their ability to engage in employment and employment related activities

5.   **Determine if the Palmer Court model is considered replicable at other PSH facilities.**

Determine elements of the model that worked or did not work.

What is the resource and return on investment?

Are conditions at other PSH facilities similar/better/worse for success?

Are similar or appropriate resources available to support the model at other locations?

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