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Collaboration Among NGOs in Central Minnesota

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COLLABORATION AMONG NGOS IN CENTRAL MINNESOTA
The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University
Distinguished Thesis
By
Brigid Smith
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PROJECT TITLE: Collaboration Among NGOs in Central Minnesota
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Abstract

Collaboration is one strategy that organizations can use to confront various challenges and innovate their programming and services. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in particular face many obstacles, including the need to meet a variety of demands with a limited number of resources. Although these organizations are increasingly turning towards collaboration to resolve these issues, it is still unclear what exactly motivates NGOs to work together. In this project, I use semi-structured interviews and a survey to investigate why NGOs collaborate in Central Minnesota. Based on a network and qualitative analysis, I identify the most important factors discussed by NGO leaders. Based on the results, trust and resource complementarity appear to play an important role in explaining collaboration in these cases.

Introduction

Non-governmental organizations or NGOs differ from firms and the government because they operate in a unique sector, which serves the community with a limited number of resources. Human service organizations in particular offer a variety of services, such as education, housing, employment, and emergency relief, despite their small size and staff. These organizations then face several challenges in order to deliver diverse programming while attaining sufficient funding. Additionally, NGOs working in the same local area must decide whether to compete, collaborate, or remain indifferent with fellow organizations that benefit from the same resource pool. However, current research suggests that organizations within the NGO sector are increasingly entering into partnerships and collaborations to overcome environmental restraints (Guo and Acar 2005, 340; Snavely and Tracy 2002). Still, NGOs must decide if they are willing to undergo the risks that collaboration entails, such as ineffective programming and self-interested behavior, as well as decide which partnerships would be most successful. Past literature suggests that trust and resources could play a role in this decision-making process. Trust may allow NGOs to predict which organizations would be most reliable, while resource complementarity signifies that a collaboration could expand an organization's capabilities. Identifying the factors that incentivize collaboration is essential to effectively promote and form future partnerships within the sector.

In this project I investigate the role of trust and resource complementarity and their influence on an NGO's decision to collaborate. I begin by reviewing the literature on collaboration and previous research on NGOs' decision to collaborate. After defining collaboration more broadly, I examine trust and resource complementarity as factors that may explain collaboration. In the research design, I discuss the study's variables and methodology.

Based on the analysis, it appears that trust and resource complementarity play an important role in explaining collaboration among these cases. I conclude by discussing these findings and identifying the limitations of this study, as well as ideas for future research.

Defining Collaboration

Previous research on collaboration investigates shared decision-making, informational exchange, and joint service delivery. Broadly defined, collaboration is "a social exchange involving commitment of knowledge, skills, and emotions" (Snavely and Tracy 2002, 62). In the context of organizational collaboration, two or more organizations voluntarily choose to work together to solve a problem or accomplish a common goal, often giving up complete autonomy (Cooper and Shumate 2012, 624-625; Hu et al. 2010, 111). Many scholars have written about collaboration in organizational, nonprofit, and management literature. In Gulati and Garguilo's (1999) study of American, European, and Japanese businesses from three different industries, they describe collaboration as the voluntary combination of resources to cope with environmental uncertainty, organized through contractual agreements (1441). In addition, Moshtari (2016) examines logistics among international humanitarian NGOs in Africa, Asia, and South America to identify why organizations share information, expertise, and infrastructure or work closely together to design and implement projects (1548). In nonprofit literature, Guo and Acar (2005) conducted a study of ninety-five charitable organizations in the Los Angeles area, defining collaboration as when an organization chooses to exchange resources and information with another organization (342-343). Research on collaboration then examines how resources and decisions are shared between organizations to deliver projects and services.

Scholars have conceptualized NGO collaboration using both specific and broad definitions. Some authors narrowly define the term by distinct inter-organizational activities. Hu

et al. (2020) creates four separate categories: case management, volunteer recruitment, grant writing, joint housing service. Other scholars argue there is not a clear division between different forms, but that collaboration is on a continuum, with one-time interactions on one end and the full merging of two organizations on the other (Guo and Acar 2005; Jang et al. 2016). Similarly, in their study of rural nonprofit collaborations in southern Illinois and the Mississippi Delta, Snavely and Tracy (2002) broadly identify collaborating organizations as those that enter mutually beneficial relationships to work towards a common goal (64). This project uses a similarly broad definition of collaboration which does not restrict the concept to a specific set of activities. I define collaboration as the decision by an NGO to work with another organization to solve problems or achieve goals through joint efforts, combined resources, and shared decision-making.

There are several factors which may explain collaboration. Next, I examine two specific explanations that the literature emphasizes when analyzing NGO collaboration.

Incentives for Collaboration

Trust

Trust may explain why NGOs collaborate by ensuring that an organization will demonstrate goodwill, competence, and commitment. Past literature defines trust as the expectation that partners will communicate truthfully, act reliably, and will not take advantage of others (Awasthy 2019; Schneiker 2020; Snavely and Tracy 2002). As NGOs must decipher the motives of other organizations, partner selection can be a challenging task. Many NGOs have various criteria when evaluating partners, which can make the process long and complex especially in dynamic environments (Atouba and Shumate 2020). Trust may reduce this uncertainty as organizations can predict how their partners might act in order to manage the

relationship (López-Navarro, Callarisa-Fiol, and Moliner-Tena 2013, 109; Schneiker 2020, 33). In their study of Indian humanitarian relief organizations (HRO), Awasthy et al. (2019) defines trust as "the willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (2628). They divide trust into three dimensions, companion, competence, and commitment trust, to identify how trust is formed within disaster relief supply chains. The knowledge that another organization can commit to a long-term relationship, handle complex situations, or follow a code of conduct fosters trust (Awasthy et al. 2019). For this project, I build on their three-fold typology to define trust as a judgement based on past experience that a partner will display companionship, competence, and commitment.

Companion trust may promote trust, which may help explain collaboration. In her study of humanitarian NGOs, Schneiker (2020) found that time and experience with another organization enhances trust-building. Within the context of organizational networks, she found trust is built on a personal level when members regularly meet (33). When NGO members have personal relationships with one another they interact more often, and frequent exchanges allow organizations to become familiar and determine if their partner is capable and reliable. Hu et al. (2020) similarly found among housing service organizations in Florida that professional friendship networks led to informal ties that overtime fostered formal, long-term collaborations. These connections served as channels to share funding information, community concerns, and accomplish their collective mission. Snavely and Tracy's (2002) study of nonprofit leaders in rural areas of the southern Illinois and Mississippi Delta also found companion trust as important, as communication at the personal level allowed leaders to solve problems more efficiently (79). Furthermore, in Tsasis' (2009) study of Canadian NGO AIDS organizations, he found that interpersonal relationships were significant in building organizational trust. Personal

feelings of trust created through small-scale interactions translated into wider interorganizational trust (17). Tsasis et al. (2015) confirm the idea of organizational trust beginning at the personal level, stating that among HIV/AIDS NGOs personal relationships transformed into trust between organizations, often facilitating future collaboration (545-550). Feelings of companionship can then foster trust at the organizational level and promote collaboration.

An NGO's capabilities and reputation may serve as another avenue to build trust. Competence trust is "trust that is extended based on the perceived ability of the other to carry out needed tasks" (Stephenson Jr. 2005, 345). An organization's capabilities help form their reputation, but competence can also be measured based off past behavior or a recommendation from a reliable partner. Competence trust can then "reduce transaction costs and to curb the potential for exploitative opportunism in inter-organisational relationships" by showing if a fellow NGO is capable (Stephenson Jr. 2005, 343). Similarly, Schneiker (2020) explains that organizations are trustworthy if they are deemed reliable, and this "strategic trust" arises from frequent professional (as opposed to informal/personal) interactions as partners become familiar with each other's behavior. Having more information about a partner and their ability to carry out certain tasks made organizations more willing to collaborate by sharing information (Schneiker 2020). In their study, Tsasis et al. (2015) found that respondents identified "swift trust" as important in collaborations, or "a confidence that other parties will deliver on their promises based on professional standing, their reputation, or their track record" (549). Within the context of South Africa, they suggest trust is formed because of the NGO sector's small size as well as positive personal relationships, making it easy to access information about another organization before collaborating (Tsasis et al. 2015). Additional information on a partner's

previous behavior can then foster trust and may play an important role in explaining collaboration.

Lastly, commitment trust can arise from contracts and agreements of mutual benefit, which may facilitate collaboration. Although collaborations often occur at an informal level, Tsasis et al. (2015) suggest formality is vital through the institutionalization of collaborative processes. They state that "hierarchy and structure may also have positive effects on social capital by fostering new ties that come with formal positions or by introducing incentives and norms that encourage communication and collaboration" (548). The knowledge that one's partner must follow the same procedures, established through formal contracts, limits self-interested behavior and assures reliability (Awasthy et al. 2019). Likewise, Stephenson Jr. (2005) explains that humanitarian relief organizations create a sense of commitment by relying on formal contracts that outline expected tasks and regulations that must be met for the collaboration to continue. In their study, Snavely and Tracy (2002) found that contractual obligations and routines served as opportunities for members to meet, talk, and plan resource exchanges (79-80). I identify that commitment trust, created through verbal and written contracts, may play a role in explaining collaboration. Therefore, based on previous literature it appears that NGOs use trust to assess the competence and reliability of other organizations to decide with whom to collaborate. I expect trust to arise between organizations due to long-term relationships, assessments of another's abilities, and formal contracts, which could positively influence collaboration.

Resource Complementarity

An NGO may decide to collaborate due to the resources that another organization offers. Scholars agree that NGOs often face resource constraints due to environmental uncertainty and a

lack of funding (Gulati and Gargiulo 1999; Jang et al. 2016; Tsasis 2009). Organizations may then collaborate to access capabilities and resources that are essential to pursue their goals but are controlled by other organizations (Gulati and Gargiulo 1999, 1443). Atouba and Shumate (2020), in their study of human service organizations, determine resource complementarity as influential for partner selection, occurring when one organization collaborates because another organization has unique and beneficial resources (306). Likewise, in his study Moshtari (2016) highlights an example of collaboration between the United Methodist Committee on Relief and Muslim Aid in Sri Lanka in 2006. The ability to gain new staff, supplies, and logistical support motivated partners to jointly act (1552). In nonprofit literature, Pazirandeh and Maghsoudi (2017) suggest that complementarity is significant when deciding to collaborate. In their study of nonprofit relationships in short-term disaster relief operations in Southeast Asia, they highlight that complementarity between nonprofits increased their willingness to share resources. Therefore, an organization is more likely to pursue collaboration if they are able to gain goods or services that are possessed by another organization (Gulati 1995, 3). NGO's may then collaborate to access different resources and capabilities.

Discussions about resource complementarity include a range of definitions of resources. Snavely and Tracy (2002) focus on money, finding that the financial resources of an organization's collaborators will influence the relationship (72). Respondents in a study analyzing human service organizations in Albany, New York noted the term "resources" as corresponding to people, money, and time (Lee et al. 2021, 322). Gulati and Garguilo (1999) explain that organizations collaborate to develop large-scale projects, enter new markets, or pursue resource specialization (1143). Resources may then include gaining access to another organization's ideas or undergoing innovation. Similarly, Hu et al. (2020) found that housing

service organizations in Florida chose to collaborate to access new information and improve their status in the housing service sector (121). The ability to access more finances, knowledge, or ideas may then incentive collaboration.

One way that NGOs may be motivated to collaborate due to complementary resources is by working with an organization that differs in size. Much of the literature on resource complementarity based on organizational size focuses on business or firm relations. King (2003) argues that organizations that differ in size offer complementary resources and opportunities for innovation. Within technology-based industries King describes that smaller companies have resource advantages in technological flexibility and entrepreneurship, while larger companies have more financial resources and sales strength. Therefore, firms could benefit from collaborating with an organization of a different size (592). In his study of interfirm alliances between 1970 and 1989, Gulati (1995) compares the size of firms, examining how an organization's financial and managerial resources affected alliance formation. His study found that firms of dissimilar sizes were more likely to collaborate. Gulati and Gargiulo (1999) confirm these studies, observing that collaboration was more likely to occur between organizations of different sizes (1472). In addition, Fisher (1996) states that larger organizations may want to partner with smaller organizations to gain research resources, while smaller organizations will want to partner to access financial resources. Therefore, being able to collaborate with an NGO of a different size may motivate collaboration, as different sized organizations can offer complementary resources and capabilities. Based on the previous literature, it appears that organizations that differ in size may have complementary resources that could encourage collaboration.

My project contributes to the existing literature on human service organizations and the role of trust and resources in explaining collaboration. There is limited research on human service organizational collaboration, with the existing human services studies focusing on rural mental health services for farmers and human services for children (Lee et al. 2020, 316). I expand the literature on collaboration between NGOs by including data from several types of human service organizations. The project also contributes to research on the role of trust in explaining collaboration by building upon Awasthy et al.'s (2019) framework to investigate the influence of companion, competence, and commitment-based trust. There are also few studies that investigate the role of resource complementarity based on size difference, especially within nonprofit literature. This project enhances this research by examining NGOs of different sizes and analyzing how this may explain collaboration. Lastly, this study expands the current literature by investigating both trust and resource complementarity to identify whether both play an important role in explaining collaboration.

Research Design

While it is unclear which factors influence collaboration between NGOs the most, past research indicates that trust and resources can be important motivations. I investigate these factors and aim to identify which is most salient in explaining why organizations collaborate with one another. My research question is: why do NGOs choose to collaborate?

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of this study is an NGO's decision to collaborate. I use Guo and Acar's (2005) definition of when different NGOs "work together to address problems through joint effort, resources, and decision making and share ownership of the final product or service" (342-343). The measurement of *decision to collaborate* is the presence of this decision. I coded

interviews to identify instances when respondents discussed their NGOs' choosing to collaborate to show the different forms of collaboration that can take shape. My codes included "joint effort," "combined resources," and "shared decision-making."[1] The presence of these codes suggest that an NGO decided to collaborate with another organization.

Independent Variables

My first independent variable is trust. Trust is a judgement or expectation that a partner will display companionship, competence, and commitment. My measurement of trust is based on Awasthy et al.'s (2019) three-fold typology of companion-based trust, competence-based trust, and commitment-based trust. I use their word dictionary to code interviews and determine the presence of trust.

The first dimension, companion trust, refers to trust based on judgements of friendship or goodwill. An example from the research by Awasthy et al. (2019) exemplifies a passage coded for "companion trust:" "I think this is a very beautiful example of the *last 18 years how it has worked*. It is largely not because someone worked as a company but because people wanted to be associated with us for relief work" (2631). I expect to see a discussion of trust based on long-term relationships and friendship that motivates collaboration.

Competence trust is split into four subcategories codes including "role," "third party," "category," or "perceived ability." The code "role" refers to trust based on another organization's position, profession, or qualifications. Awasthy et al. (2019) coded the following passage as "role:" "And also because of the *Magsaysay award. People now are finding out about Goonj and about Anshu Gupta.* So, these kinds of things are happening . . . People are interested to know and also want to participate" (2630). The code "third party," refers to a prior reputation of an

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1. See full codebook in Appendix 3.

organization, from the news or advertisement: "The bridge suddenly connected 7–8 villages while hundreds of people, cycles and motorcycles crossed it . . . *Inspired by this experience, many other village communities* have since built 3 such bridges in the region" (2631). The code "category" refers to membership in a specific group, stereotypes, or culture: "We got *local volunteers, the local people* who were there. They were also the victims but we *used to ask the youngsters to help you*" (2630). Finally, the code "perceived ability" refers to an ability or expertise but not of a specialist role or category: "We asked them if they could build a bridge over the river. This was a first for us as well . . . But we were clear that the villagers had the *wisdom and the resources* to do this" (2630). I expect passages coded for these keywords of competence trust to express how another organization's abilities or qualifications creates a sense of trust, which encourages collaboration.

Lastly, commitment trust is divided into "mutual benefit based," "partnership/contracts," and "rule." "Mutual benefit based" is trust based on benefits from a mutual, bilateral agreement, as displayed in the passage: "Around 100 families reside in the village. People of the area decided to clean the local Pond, the only source of water for the village for the entire year. *Cleaning work was done and people got clothes as reward"* (Awasthy et al. 2019, 2631). The code "partnerships/contracts" is trust based on verbal or written contracts: "*GOONJ has officially tied up with Saharsa district administration* to look after the vast quantities of clothing received by it during the floods (estimated about 30 trucks load)" (2631). Lastly, the code "rule" refers to process, procedures, norms, and communication rules that can provide guard against maverick behavior: "I should also add here that he (Anshu) had sent one person . . . *He stayed in our organization for one week. He was continuously monitoring and managing the process.* I also went to the villages and stayed with the *local people so check if the process was in place*"

(2631). For the passages coded under commitment trust I expect to see instances of trust based on contracts and procedures, and its importance in the decision to collaborate.

I use these three subcategories of trust as my codes to identify trust. If these subcategories emerge, it will suggest trust is an important factor in the decision to collaborate. In order to compare the influence of the different forms of trust, to understand which is most influential, I will compare the frequency of the codes across the total number of interviewees and total number of codes. A higher frequency of the codes will suggest the greater importance of each form of trust, while a lower frequency of these codes will suggest that the forms of trust are less important. My first hypothesis is:

H1: NGOs that share higher levels of trust will be more likely to decide to collaborate.

My second independent variable is resource complementarity. Resource complementarity is an NGO's ability to gain new or different goods, services, and capital possessed by another organization to pool resources and achieve a common goal. In their study, Gulati and Gargiulo (1999) used a similar variable of "interdependence" and concluded that organizations form ties with those who have complementary resources. Furthermore, they find that firms of dissimilar sizes are more likely to have complementary capabilities, leading to collaboration (1476). My project builds on this study by also examining the influence of differences in organizational size and resources to determine if resource complementarity is present or not between NGOs. I developed my own codes based on the findings of past literature. I coded interviews for passages in which respondents talked about "interdependence," "new/different resources" or working with an organization of a "different size." I use these three subcategories to identify resource

complementarity. If these subcategories emerge, it will suggest resource complementarity is an important factor in the decision to collaborate. In order to compare the influence of the different subcategories of resource complementarity to understand which is most influential, I will compare the frequency of the codes across the total number of interviewees and the total number of codes. A higher frequency of the codes will suggest the greater importance of each form of resource complementarity, while a lower frequency of these codes will suggest that the forms of resource complementarity are less important. Therefore, my second hypothesis is:

H2: NGOs with complementary resources will be more likely to decide to collaborate.

Based on my hypotheses, I expect an NGO to decide to collaborate with another organization because they trust the organization and/or have complementary resources. I expect an NGO to decide to collaborate because they trust another organization even if resource complementarity is not present. Additionally, I expect an NGO to collaborate if another organization has resource complementarity even if trust is not present. A difference in the frequencies of the subcategories of each variable will demonstrate the complexity of *trust* and *resource complementarity,* and the modes in which each could explain the decision to collaborate.

Methods

I use a mixed-methods approach by gathering data through interviews and a survey in order to explore why NGOs choose to collaborate in Central Minnesota. I conducted 13 semi-structured interviews through convenience and snowball sampling. Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes in-person or over Zoom depending on the availability of the participant. I

asked interviewees to talk about their own organization, which NGOs they collaborate with, what kinds of resources and qualities that promote collaboration, and what successful collaboration means to them.[2] I additionally asked interviewees to name the organizations they collaborate with in order to create a network map.[3]

After each interview, I sent a follow-up survey to the leaders who could disperse the survey to other members of their NGO. The survey could have been completed by anyone working in an NGO in Central Minnesota, and included 18 questions, 12 short answer, and six multiple choices.[4] The survey asked respondents to reflect on their own organization's pattern of collaboration, the characteristics of the organization(s) they collaborate with, and their own connections with members of other organizations.

As I am investigating connections between NGOs within the region of Central Minnesota, analyzing the network as a whole is important to understand how the relationships between individual NGOs may be shaped by the wider network. Therefore, I utilize a combination of network and qualitative analysis for this project. Network analysis focuses on a set of actors and the ties among them (Löblich and Pfaff-Rüdiger 2011, 635). An important aspect of network analysis is the visualization of networks through network maps (Ahrens 2018, 2). These maps highlight any organizational links as well as descriptive statistics (such as core and periphery, connections within the network, direction of relationship, density of connections, influence of different nodes) (Dean 2020, 100). To construct the network map, I asked my interviewees to name the organizations that they collaborate with. If they discussed collaboration with a specific organization, I represent this as an edge. My use of network analysis allows me to

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2. See full interview guide in Appendix 1.
3. See Figure 1.
4. See survey instrument in Appendix 2.

visualize where connections form between NGOs in Central Minnesota and where gaps exist in the network. Since the interviews in this project are anonymous, I cannot analyze the network map using quotations about the relationships between given NGOs. Instead, I discuss the map and highlight its key elements, while in the qualitative analysis section I identify the impact of trust and resource complementarity based on my interviews and survey. I use the map to identify where collaborations form, which organizations have the greatest or fewest connections, the reciprocity of the collaborations, and any gaps in the network.

I support the network findings using qualitative analysis, which seeks to identify the factors that motivate the network ties. Utilizing qualitative methods, "unfolds the subjective orientations of the network actors, who have their own perceptions of whom in the network they can trust or not and why" (Baycheva-Merger 2019, 4). I explore the perceptions of NGOs through the viewpoint of their leaders in interviews and a survey in order to investigate the NGO network in Central Minnesota and connections between individual NGOs. As I rely on interview data to explore subjective attitudes towards collaboration and any shared knowledge or norms within the network, qualitative analysis is an appropriate method (Ahrens 2018). Examining the network maps in the context of my interviews allow for "thick description" of the Central Minnesota NGO network.

I recorded, transcribed, and then coded my interviews. After transcribing the interviews through Otter.ai, I coded my interviews with the MAXDA 20 software. I conducted two cycles of coding, first looking for predetermined codes and second to validate my coding and add any codes that had emerged during the first round. While coding, I tried to not only code for passages that contained specific keywords, but also for passages that conveyed the meaning implicitly. I began the first cycle of coding with a predetermined codebook, developed from my literature

review. I wanted to investigate how resource complementarity and trust influence an NGO's

decision to collaborate, and also how NGO's undergo collaboration. I added additional codes

through the coding process if any themes emerged that were not included in the original

codebook. These added codes include "informational exchange" as a form of collaboration and

"open and honest communication" under the theme of trust. During the second cycle of coding, I

standardized these new codes and checked my initial codes to ensure reliability.

Once I finished coding, I compared the frequency of each code to identify the

significance of my two variables *trust* and *resource complementarity* in explaining collaboration.

Based on my raw data, I examine the distribution of the variables across the 13 interviewees as

well as the total number of codes (Awasthy et al. 2019; Curnin and O'Hara 2019). Awasthy et al.

(2019) used frequency counts and statistical techniques to make inferences in their study. They

calculated the occurrences of their sub-categories of trust and then used the frequency of these

counts to examine their hypotheses of trust. Additionally, Curnin and O'Hara (2019) analyzed

the distribution of specific codes across the number of participants and total number of codes in

order to identify which dimensions appear to be most significant in explaining

interorganizational collaboration. Following these procedures, I use both the interviewees and

coding segments as separate units of measure to calculate the frequency of each of my codes.

Firstly, for each code I identified how many interviewees mentioned the code and divided this

number by the total number of interviewees. I converted these numbers into percentages, as

displayed in Table 1.2.[5] By calculating the frequency of each code among the total interview

participants, I could compare the codes to identify which appeared most often across the

different NGO leaders. I followed a similar procedure and utilized the coding passages as a unit

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5. See Appendix 4.

of measure. I calculated the number of times each code appeared out of the total 316 codes and converted these numbers into percentages, as displayed in Table 1.3.[6] As my interview questions all centered around the concept of collaboration, it was appropriate to examine the number of times each code appeared throughout the entire interviews. The percentages allowed me to identify which codes were mentioned most often among the cases. Calculating the frequency of each code across both the interviewees and total number of codes allows me to calculate and compare the occurrences of each variable across NGOs in Central Minnesota and identify which appear to be most significant in explaining collaboration.

Case Selection

I chose to examine NGOs in Central Minnesota as it is an appropriate region to understand collaboration among NGOs. It is a small to medium sized metropolitan area with changing demographics, which has created a growing need for human service organizations. Central Minnesota is a region that encompasses the middle portion of the state of Minnesota and has a population of 758, 101. The population is smaller compared to the state-wide population of 5.7 million and the 55% of the population that lives in the Twin Cities seven-county region. To understand the need for human service NGOs, it is important to note around 9.2% of the population have an income that falls below the poverty status ("Central Region Data" 2021). Additionally, according to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, "The number of immigrants in the region increased by 43.4 percent from 2010 to 2017, outpacing the statewide growth rate of 22.2 percent." Near 30% of the immigrants came from Latin America, which was a 18.4 % increase between 2010 and 2017. Between 2010 and 2017, there was a 214% increase of African immigrants, becoming the fastest growing group of immigrants to the

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6. See Appendix 4.

region (Greiner 2019). The presence of poverty and increase in immigrants has led to the growing need for human services NGOs in the area.

There are many NGOs in the St. Cloud area, which provides organizations with the opportunity to collaborate. St. Cloud is the largest city in the Central Region of Minnesota, with a population of 68,001 ("St. Cloud Data" 2021). According to the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, "in the center of the fastest-growing metropolitan area St. Cloud serves as a commercial hub for more than 250,000 people. In addition to the strong economic environment, St. Cloud offers abundant opportunities in education, recreation, and the arts." However, despite these employment opportunities, 22.5% of the population has an income that falls below the poverty line ("St Cloud Data" 2021). St. Cloud has also recently experienced changing demographics and an influx of immigrants. According to the 2020 census, St. Cloud is becoming increasingly diverse, as the city saw a growth in every racial group except white. Also, every community in the St. Cloud area saw an increase by more than 100% of the population of Black citizens (Kocher 2021). As St. Cloud is the largest city within the area and is undergoing demographic changes, Central Minnesota is an important region study to understand how human services collaborate to confront new challenges and meet different needs.

It is worth mentioning that Central Minnesota is a fitting selection due to my connections with the region's NGO community. Beginning in the summer of 2021, I interned for UniteCloud, an organization that works in Central Minnesota to provide education and actionable steps to resolve tension and provide dignity to all people. From my connection with UniteCloud's founder, I gained access to a network of local NGOs. Likewise, as a student at the College of Saint Benedict in St. Joseph, MN I have spent more than three years in the area and continue to live in the region in order to sustain contacts for the project.

I recruited interview participants within Central Minnesota through a mixture of convenience and snowball sampling. First, I sent recruitment emails to NGO leaders, primarily executive directors and CEOs, or people in other leadership positions. I emailed potential contacts acquired through convenience sampling, while also using the *Searchable Nonprofit Directory* on the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits' website to achieve contact information for NGOs in the Central Minnesota region. The respondents must work for an NGO within the 14 counties of Benton, Cass, Chisago, Crow Wing, Isanti, Kanabec, Mille Lacs, Morrison, Pine, Sherburne, Stearns, Todd, Wadena, or Wright. After completing interviews, I asked participants for the contact information of any other executive directors or CEOs that would be interested in participating in my study. Additionally, following the interview I sent my participants a brief survey, which they were encouraged to share with other members of their NGO. By receiving responses from several members of an organization, I hoped to gain a wider sample and understand patterns across NGOs in Central Minnesota.
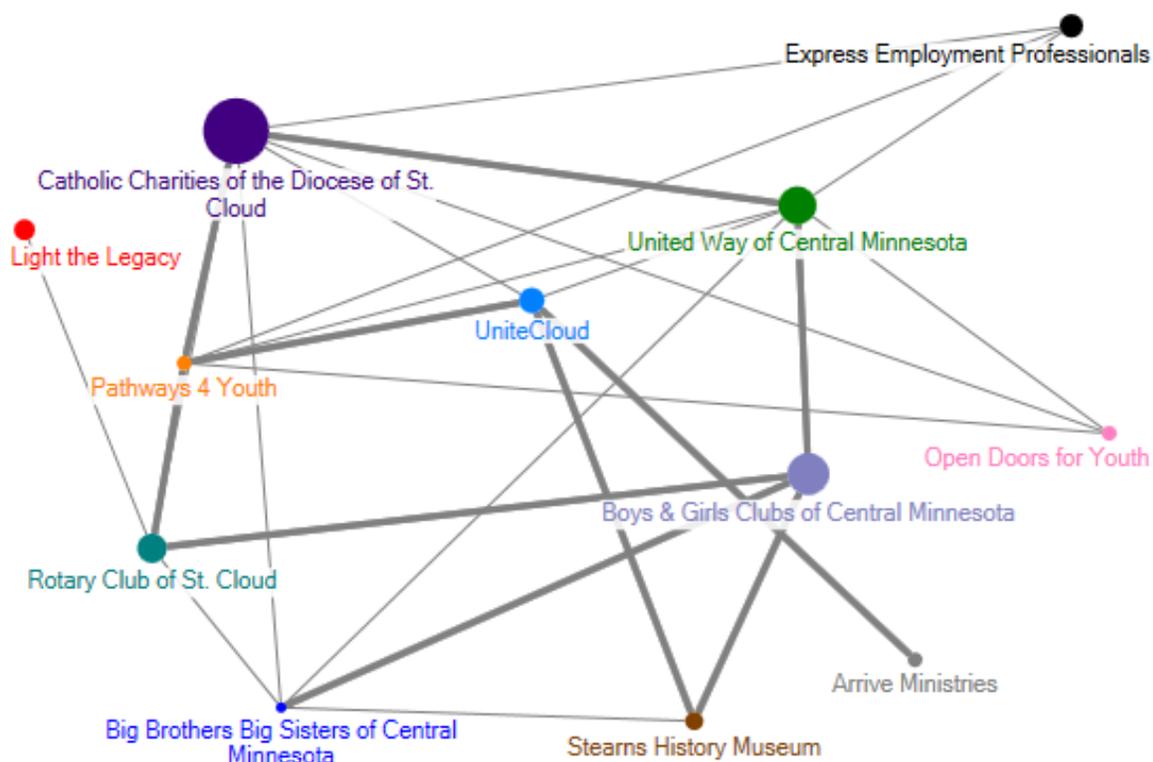
Network Analysis

Figure 1. Network map of collaboration among NGOs in Central Minnesota, created using NodeXL and a Fruchterman-Reingold force-based layout algorithm.

I used NodeXL to create a network map, as displayed in Figure 1. The network consists of nodes and edges, where the nodes are different NGOs in Central Minnesota. The edges indicate collaboration between NGOs, with the width representing relationship strength. I use a rating of either 0, 1, or 2, where 0 indicates neither organization mentioned collaboration in the interviews, 1 indicates that one organization in the collaboration mentioned working together, and 2 indicates that both sides mentioned each other. The size of the disk shape represents the budget of each NGO, calculated by taking the difference between revenue and expenses of an NGO's most recent available budget. I estimated any budgets that were not available.

The Central Minnesotan network analysis of NGO collaboration has 12 nodes and 15 unique edges. There are 20 duplicate edges, making 35 total edges. Key elements include the

edges, the strength of these connections, the size of the nodes, and any gaps in the network. According to Figure 1, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of St. Cloud and the United Way of Central Minnesota have the most connections with a total of seven edges. Next, Pathways 4 Youth has six edges. UniteCloud, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Minnesota, and the Rotary Club of St. Cloud each have five edges. As discussed in the qualitative analysis section, it appears that trust and resources could play a role in explaining these connections.

In terms of edge strength, several NGOs demonstrate strong partnerships. All the edges linked to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Minnesota are rated 2, or strong. Therefore, every NGO that the Boys & Girls Clubs of Central Minnesota listed as a collaborator also listed the Boys and Girls Clubs of Central Minnesota a collaborator. The reciprocal nature of these connections indicates well-established collaborations with every NGO they work with in this network. The Stearns History Museum also displays strong partner strength, with two of their three connections as being rated 2. In contrast, Express Employment Professionals and Open Doors for Youth have edges that are all rated with a strength of 1. Based on this map, the NGOs that Express Employment Professionals and Open Doors for Youth mentioned as collaborators did not reciprocate their partnership. The connections could suggest their collaborators do not value the relationship equally, as Express Employment Professionals and Open Doors for Youth were not listed as primary collaborators. As discussed in the qualitative analysis section below, interdependence is important when deciding to collaborate. Therefore, NGOs with lower edge strengths can strive to develop their relationships to create stronger connections.

The size of the NGOs in this network are varied, with both large and small organizations pursuing collaboration. The NGOs with the greatest number of connections are also the larger organizations, such as Catholic Charities and the United Way. However, smaller organizations

such as Pathways 4 Youth and UniteCloud have several connections as well. In addition, organizations of different sizes seem to collaborate with one another. For example, Catholic Charities shares an edge with Big Brothers Big Sisters, Open Door for Youth, and Express Employment Professionals. However, these links are rated 1, suggesting unidirectional collaborations. It also appears that organizations of similar sizes collaborate with one another. For example, UniteCloud has strong connections with Pathway 4 Youth, Stearns History Museum, and Arrive Ministries, all of which are a similar size. These findings could suggest, as discussed below, that a difference in size does not appear to play an important role in explaining collaboration.

The network map illustrates gaps in the network due to a lack of connections. The NGOs with the fewest connections are Light the Legacy and Arrive Ministries, which both have one edge. Light the Legacy has an edge rated 1 and Arrive Ministries has an edge rated 2. Yet, these organizations are linked to well-connected nodes. For example, Arrive Ministries is connected to UniteCloud and Light the Legacy is connected to Rotary. As both UniteCloud and Rotary have various connections, they could serve as third parties to connect and refer the smaller organizations. The organizations with fewer connections could then aim to build trust and offer new or different resources with other NGOs to enter more fully into the network.

The network analysis displays which NGOs in Central Minnesota collaborate and with what other organizations. In the section below, I use interviews with leaders and a follow-up survey to investigate why NGOs decide to collaborate, and how trust and/or resource complementarity impacts this decision. The significance of these factors can help explain why NGOs decide to collaborate, in order contextual the connections represented in Figure 1.

Qualitative Analysis

Trust as an Incentive for Collaboration

I expected that NGOs sharing higher levels of trust would be more likely to decide to collaborate. To calculate how often the *trust* occurred, I combine its nine subcategories, as indicated in Table 1.3. The variable *trust* consisted of 34.5% of the total number of interview codes, and each form of trust appeared in the interviews. Discussion on companion trust among Central Minnesotan NGOs emphasized goodwill, friendship, and long-term relationships. The passages coded under competence trust talked about the assessment of an NGOs reputation and abilities. Commitment trust appeared in passages about mutual agreements and recurrent meetings. In these cases, trust appears to play an important role in explaining collaboration.

Companion Trust

Among NGO leaders in Central Minnesota, creating goodwill, friendship, and long-term relationships is vital to build trust to collaborate. Among the subcategories of *trust*, "companion trust" emerged most often. "Companion trust" appeared in 92.3% of the interviews and was the second most popular code, making up 14.2% of the total number of codes. Companion trust may then be an important type of trust that appears to explain collaboration in these cases. According to the interviewees, viewing another NGO as a companion increases their willingness to work together by fostering goodwill. One leader observed: "And it's easier to collaborate with someone that you like and you enjoy being with. And trusting as well. You have to trust them. But it's easier to think of ways to work together when you really enjoy being with that person. You want, we want each other to succeed" (Interview 2: 79). Being able to have fun while working together creates a shared sense of friendship and a desire for the other organization to succeed. Others explained how being friends with another NGO member motivates collaboration

by making it easier to communicate and exchange information: "you get to know people. I mean, I know a lot of executive directors that I've gotten to know personally, and we bounce ideas off each other. We share resources, you know, especially in the nonprofit world, they may have a certain policy that they can share with you, or vice versa" (Interview 9: 58). As indicated in this passage, when nonprofit members interact at a personal level they can informally talk and brainstorm. The familiarity of working together and viewing each other as friends fosters trust, leading to collaboration.

The interviewees and survey respondents also discussed how long-term relationships build trust and positively influence collaboration. Previous experience with another organization incentivizes working together. One leader explained, "I worked with her for three and a half years. And so I know that there's going to be follow through there" (Interview 1: 64). Being familiar with another organization's behavior, such as their ability to follow-through and be reliable, builds trust through repeated interactions. Also, it is simpler for longstanding partners to work together on a new project since their relationship is well-established. One NGO leader expressed a similar sentiment:

> the relationships are super critical, and you need to develop them and maintain them long term, there may not be anything, you know, right on the immediate horizon that you're able to do, you know, together. But as time goes by, you know, these things crop up, and you say, Okay, I'm glad I have that relationship, you know, just in time relationship building, you know, never is real effective. (Interview 7: 24)

Building long-term and personal connections help NGOs establish inter-organizational relationships for future programming. The responses to the follow-up survey support the idea that relationships are important when explaining collaboration. When asked to describe how they are connected to members of other organizations, most respondents expressed having strong links in both professional and personal settings. This finding could suggest that networking with

fellow members is valued in the Central Minnesotan NGO sector, and relationships are established in both formal and informal settings. Interactions between NGO members builds relationships that then leads to collaboration. The interview and survey then suggest that trust developed through long-term relationships and friendships may play a role in explaining collaboration in these cases.

Competence Trust

There was evidence of competence-based trust in the interviews, but it was not as present as other measures. The form of competence trust was the least frequently mentioned type of trust across interviewees and made up 6.3% of the total number of codes. For the subcategories of competence trust, "role" appeared in 46.2% of the interviews and made up 1.9% of the codes; "third party" appeared in 38.5% of the interviews and made up 1.6% of the codes; "perceived ability" appeared in 46.2% of the interviews and comprised 2.8% of the codes; and "category" did not appear. Although the codes for competence trust comprised a smaller proportion of the total codes, they still appeared in over a third of the interviews. In addition, nearly half of the interviewees mentioned "role" and "perceived ability." Therefore, competence trust could be significant in the decision to collaborate among NGOs in Central Minnesota.

The passages coded for "role" emphasized how NGOs pursue collaboration because other organizations are experts in certain fields. These statements included references to a relevant qualification or profession of a fellow organization. According to one leader:

> We're kind of a hub, and we can provide basic needs and basic case management, but then we partner with all these other organizations that are really experts in those specific areas of housing, employment, the partner with the school district around education. So in that way, we're very much a community based organization. So we provide the basic, basic services, but then we collaborate with these other organizations that are kind of the experts in those areas. (Interview 6: 76)

Since individual organizations cannot provide every service needed by their beneficiaries, they choose work with experts in these sectors. Trust is built because a collaborator's expertise ensures that they can provide appropriate services in which one's own organization lacks.

Another way leaders assess the capabilities of another organization is through their standing in the NGO sector. The code "third party" appeared in passages where leaders talked about the reputation of another organization, based on community knowledge or what fellow leaders had observed. One interviewee stated:

> So it causes us to have to really know who we're working with, and what they're all about. And so a lot of the times, folks will be suggested to us or will be suggested to folks, and then I'm able to know from the person who's suggesting it, this is why I'm thinking you guys should work together. And so it's, you know, knowing what other people are saying about the organization as well. (Interview 1: 60)

The passage above emphasizes how another NGO's reputation may help decide whether collaboration is worth pursuing. Trust is then fostered through the recommendations or referrals from fellow NGO members. The predictability and reliability of another NGO's behavior makes collaboration worth pursuing.

Lastly, the code "perceived ability" discussed instances of trust based on an NGO's track record or what they have done in the community. An NGO's abilities are assessed by the quality of staff, number of resources, and evidence that they have followed through with past projects. One leader commented on the importance of a potential collaborator's track record: "I also want to know about sustainability… I might look at, you know, longevity, I might, I might research, some of the things that they've done, the community, you know, to see that it might be good partnership for us" (Interview 3: 32). As this passage indicates, an aspect of competence trust is knowing that a potential collaborator has proven their capabilities and taken action in the community. Being able to assess another organizations capabilities then builds trust, which leads

to collaboration. The interviews suggest that trust developed through the assessment of another organization's competence may play a role in explaining collaboration in these cases.

Commitment Trust

Similar to competence, commitment-based trust did not emerge as frequently as companion trust, but it still appears to be relevant. Overall, the category of commitment trust comprised 6.9% of all codes. The subcategory "mutual benefit based" appeared in 76.9% of the interviews and made up 4.1% of the codes; the code "partnership/contract" did not appear; and the code "rule" appeared in 38.5% of the interviews and totaled 2.8% of the codes. The occurrence of "mutual benefit based" and "rule" as forms of commitment trust indicate that this is a significant form of trust that my explain collaboration among Central Minnesotan NGOs.

The code "mutual benefit-based" emerged in passages that talked about mutual or bilateral agreements. Interviewees stressed that collaborators should not be self-serving but that there should be an equal distribution of effort and resources, as well as mutual support. One leader stated: "And I think there, there's that element of like, I don't know, like, I help you out in this circumstance, you help me out in this circumstance, and we just we kind of go back and forth, we work together. And, and those, I guess that would be more for like, long-term standing partnerships. We, there has to be like a mutual value there" (Interview 11: 35). As stated in this passage, it is important to know that all those involved in a collaboration will equally benefit. There is a greater sense of obligation and trust knowing that all organizations find similar value in working together.

In instances where "rule" appeared, interviewees talked about the procedures, structures, and norms that ensure commitment. Several leaders explained how regular meetings and check-

ins create a shared sense of commitment by fostering accountability and open communication.

One leader explained the progression of a collaboration:

> And then we can start drawing circles, you know, to see where there's, you know, potentially intersections, and if we see that, wow, there's really some nice intersections here and some complimentary things that we can or should be doing, you know, then we can start to say, All right, let's boil that down into, you know, more concrete sorts of action plans that may evolve into some meetings, you know, and then actually doing some joint work together. (Interview 7: 30)

The meetings, as emphasized in the passage, ensure that the collaboration is not simply an idea for the future, but an event or service that will take place. Although interviewees rarely talked about verbal or written contracts, it seems commitment trust can be built through other processes and norms. The presence of the subcategories "mutual benefit based" and "rule" indicate that among NGOs in Central Minnesota, commitment trust may play a role in explaining collaboration.

Open and Honest Communication

Although not included in Awasthy et al.'s (2019) framework, open and honest communication appears to be a form of trust that may help explain the decision to collaborate among NGOs in Central Minnesota. The code "open and honest communication" was added to the codebook because it continually appeared, emerging in 69.2% of the interviews and comprising 7% of the codes. These passages express how honest communication promotes trust by displaying vulnerability and follow-through. A sense of openness allows NGOs to talk about the resources they have to accomplish a common goal or finish a project. One leader observed how openness and honesty allows for NGOs to build trust and incentivizes collaboration: "Being open and honest, and just talking about that sharing. You know, is what makes it work, and then, you know, the next thing that comes along, you know, you trust that person, you know, that they've been honest with you, and you and you go on to the next one, you know. So, honesty and

trust is most important in my mind" (Interview 5: 114). The speaker explains how being open

and honest helps NGOs decide how to work together. Being honest also makes partners more

likely to collaborate in the future because a trustworthy relationship is already established.

Respondents in the survey additionally mentioned the significance of honesty and

communication. When asked to name important qualities that a collaborator should have,

respondents listed terms such as "transparency" and "honest." NGOs in Central Minnesota may

then value open and honest communication as a form of trust, which could explain collaboration

among these cases.

Different Resources and Interdependence as Incentives for Collaboration

I expected that NGOs that share higher levels of resource complementarity would be

more likely to decide to collaborate. After combining the three subcategories of *resource*

complementarity, I find that the variable consists of 27.6% of the total number of codes. In

addition, each subcategory, "different size," "new/different resources, and "interdependence"

emerged during the interviews. Based on the interview and survey data, resource

complementarity appears to play a role in explaining collaboration among NGOs in Central

Minnesota, but a difference in size between organizations may not be an important factor in these

cases.

There was evidence of a difference in size as being a factor when deciding to collaborate,

but it was not as relevant as other measures. The code "different size" was mentioned in 30.8%

of interviews and comprised 2.8% of the total number of codes. In these passages, leaders talked

about collaborating with either smaller or larger organizations, such as one interviewee: "Who

can fulfill the role and meet the outcome you want to have at the end the day, you know, if you're

trying to deal with a certain population, demographic, there might be smaller organizations that

have a much better ability to do that" (Interview 5: 52). The interview participant explains that smaller organizations may offer different resources that one's own NGO lacks, such as strong connections with the community. However, there were also instances where leaders decided not to collaborate with an organization of a different size. One NGO leader states: "But in terms of much smaller organizations, you know, probably not as much, again, because of lack of consistency, and then lack of resources to make sure that they have the training and the background checking on all of their volunteers" (Interview 13: 36). A medium or large organization may not want to collaborate with a smaller organization because they are not well-established and lack resources. These findings may suggest that a difference in size could incentivize but may also prevent collaboration. Overall, the relative infrequency of "different size" suggests this specific form of resource complementarity was not as significant among Central Minnesotan NGOs.

Accessing previously unattainable resources seems to play an important role in explaining collaboration in these cases. The subcategory "different/new resources" emerged in every interview and was the most popular code, making up 16.5% of the codes. These passages express the value of materials, spaces, or finances when deciding to work with another NGO. One interviewee expressed how the desire to gain different supplies or services led to a collaboration: "It's probably those collaborations have come out of a need, you know, to for services or resources for our youth that we can't or don't provide here" (Interview 6: 28). As stated, collaboration may result from one's own organization's lack of certain goods or services that are achievable through collaboration. Although leaders defined resources in various ways, including people, finances, facilities, and funding, most suggested that having some sort of resources was a motivation for collaboration:

> they have to have some resources, they have to have the staffing, they have to have the funding, you know, sometimes maybe it is funding, maybe it's some, we're going to give you $10,000 If you can do this, okay, I can maybe do that I'll hire a part time person, and I can, you know, pull that off. But what are they bringing? What resources coming with that? Whether it's money, whether that's time, whether that's creativity, you know, energy, whether that's some of the social, social presence. (Interview 8: 30)

The potential to gain access to funding, staffing, or even new ideas positively influences the decision to collaborate. The reoccurring discussion of accessing new resources indicates that the ability to gain different resources likely plays an important role in explaining collaboration among Central Minnesotan NGOs.

The final measure of resource complementarity, interdependence, similarly indicates that resources may help explain collaboration in these cases. The code "interdependence" was mentioned by 92.3% of the interviewees and comprised 8.2% of the total number of codes. NGO leaders described collaboration as a mechanism for organizations to unite their strengths. Some leaders offered specific examples, explaining that both their own organization and their collaborator brought unique capabilities to benefit the collaboration as a whole: "we have an expert on child safety. So maybe they're weak on that. So we could maybe help them with with that. And maybe they're really strong in fundraising. So we could help each other in those different ways" (Interview 2: 91). The leader expresses how joining together made all the NGOs in the collaboration stronger. Additionally, organizations rely on each other to succeed, and it is important that collaborators help and support one another. One leader observed: "If you're in it by yourself, you're not going to make it. And so hopefully, our relationships are really good. And we're connecting and making them work. They're, they're critical for us. They're really important" (Interview 8: 42 - 42). As in this example, individual organizations cannot achieve

everything alone. Instead, there is a benefit from joining forces with another NGO which may motivate organizations to collaborate.

Several responses from the survey confirm that an exchange of resources and mutual dependence is likely important to explain collaboration among NGOs in Central Minnesota. When asked why their organizations decide to collaborate, respondents noted a "win-win" situation or because each NGO can offer something new. When asked to define a successful collaboration, respondents once again stated a "win-win" situation and when organizations aim to help one another, or where everyone is part of the effort. It is interesting to note that a difference in size did not appear in these responses. The findings then suggest that resource complementarity, by having different resources and a sense of interdependence, could be important when explaining collaboration among NGOs in Central Minnesota.

Unexpected Findings

The Joint Effort as a Form of Collaboration

Joint effort appeared to be the most popular form of collaboration among NGOs in Central Minnesota. Among the four codes to measure *decision to collaborate,* "joint effort" appeared most often, as it was mentioned in every interview and comprised 11.1% of the total number of codes. These passages explain specific programming that was made possible because multiple organizations decided to work together. The programs and services took the form of fundraisers, after-school programs, and even a blanket-making activity. For example, one leader stated: "Yeah, we all could do a food drive, but it's going to make more sense for this to be a community food drive, which will be promoted as a joint effort" (Interview 12: 22). The passage offers an example of how multiple organizations collaborate by offering a joint event, such as a food drive. Another leader talks about an event they helped put on:

> And I mean, there was was so we collaborated with an organization who does that, who does food packing here in the community. And then with tons of organizations that brought their people to do the packing up the food. But we planned it for almost I'd say 9, 10 months....We're working towards something together. And we know, we'll know we're successful if we're able to pull this off (Interview 1: 80).

Similar to a food drive, a food packing event is an example of how NGOs in Central Minnesota may collaborate. Joint efforts then appear to be a popular way in which organizations collaborate in these cases.

The other measures for *decision to collaborate* emerged, but less frequently. "Combined resources" appeared in 38.5% of the interviews and "shared decision-making" appeared in 46.2%. Also, "combined resources" consisted of 2.2% of the total codes and "shared decision-making" comprised 3.2%. The smaller frequency of these codes could suggest they do not capture the concept of collaboration as well as joint effort. It may be less common for NGOs to collaborate by sharing decisions and combining resources in Central Minnesota. Based on the findings, joint efforts may be a common form of collaboration among these cases.

Informational Exchange as a Form of Collaboration

Although not included in my original codebook, I added "informational exchange" as a code under the *decision to collaborate* because it was repeatedly mentioned in the interviews. "Informational exchange" appeared in 76.9% of the interviews and totaled 11.1% of the codes. In these passages, leaders talked about collaborating with other organizations by sharing various kinds of information, such as COVID-19 policies, annual reports, or hiring methods. One leader observed the ability for nonprofits to share information on things they are seeing in the community:

> You know, if there's a particular issue, regarding, you know, the hiring or candidates or something, you know, we don't hesitate to reach to each other…we're nonprofit partners, and just say, you know, are you seeing this? Or

how's this working for you? Or gosh, I need, all of a sudden, I've got this, you know, population of folks, you know, I'd really like to tap into an entity that can help me help them, boom, you might try this out and the other. So, you know, it's like, it's like a big book of knowledge. In a sense, everyone's got it. Sometimes if you ask people will share (Interview 3: 46).

The idea that the NGO sector has "a big book of knowledge" may incentive organizations to collaborate, in order to gain knowledge they were previously unable to attain. Referrals also appear to be an aspect of informational exchange, by directing clients towards a collaborator if one's own organization does not provide certain services. For example, a leader stated: "So I think that is part of the collaboration is understanding what your partners do and what they're good at and a normal basis. So that if we have somebody that says, Hey, will you do this? We'll say, No, we don't do that. But actually, one of our partners does, and we will point them in that direction" (Interview 1: 40). The ability to refer a client to another organization demonstrates collaboration, as NGOs are willing to work together for the common good and benefit of their community.

The Significance of Similar Mission for Collaboration

Another concept I did not include in my original codebook but I found to be significant in my interviews and survey was "similar mission." It was the fourth most popular code, appearing in 92.3% of the interviews and making up 10.4% of the codes. The interviewees stressed the importance of sharing values and goals when deciding to collaborate. A shared mission helps organizations to know they can rely on one another since they are working towards a common goal. Several leaders expressed that they could rely on their fellow NGOs to fill service gaps and improve outreach capabilities, such as one leader:

I think what the main thing is, is that we are really open to collaborating with any, any organization or agency that whose mission aligns with ours, because I think in Central Minnesota, there's such a gap in services, in so many ways. Geographically, there's gaps. As far as specific services, there are gaps. And so I

>feel as though we're all just working together to try to fill those gaps to meet the needs of people in our community. So from our perspective, we're willing to collaborate with any organization whose mission is similar to ours, and whose values are aligned with ours, as you know, as we work to help people in our community. (Interview 6:16)

Having the same vision allows organizations to access goods and services that help promote their goals. The survey indicated a similar theme. When asked what types of NGOs their organization typically collaborates with, respondents stated those in which they share visions or missions. A similar mission may then help explain collaboration between NGOs in Central Minnesota.

Discussion

My findings highlight key aspects of the NGO network in Central Minnesota and may help explain why organizations decide to collaborate. The network analysis of collaboration among NGOs in Central Minnesota illustrates many well-connected organizations among these cases. The network map reveals that some organizations have reciprocal connections, suggesting that these NGOs have stronger relationships with their collaborators. However, some NGOs still lack connections in this specific network or have only weak ties. These organizations could aim to improve the strength of their connections, perhaps by building trust or offering new resources to collaborators. Additionally, it appears that a difference in size does not play an important role in explaining collaboration in these cases. Although organizations with large budgets collaborated with smaller organizations, and vice versa, many similar sized NGOs seemed to collaborate as well. Overall, it appears that many NGOs decide to collaborate in Central Minnesota despite having a difference in organizational size.

The qualitative analysis also reveals potential explanations for why collaboration occurs and the influence of trust and resource complementarity among NGOs in Central Minnesota. For the organizations that participated in this study, it appears that collaboration is common, as noted

in the network analysis, and that joint efforts and informational exchanges are the most popular forms. The prevalence of joint efforts is supported by Hu et al.'s (2020) research in their examination of collaboration as the joint work of housing service organizations in four areas, case management, volunteer recruitment, grant writing, and joint housing service. Their findings similarly emphasize joint efforts as a principal form of collaboration. Although not included in my initial codebook, the literature also supports the concept of informational exchange as a form of collaboration. Stephenson Jr. (2005) studied coordination between humanitarian relief institutions and how coordination can be conceptualized. One policy instrument to coordinate activities for humanitarian assistance included information gathering and sharing. Additionally, Guo and Acar (2005) identify collaborative activities based on their levels of formality. Formal efforts include joint programs and ventures, while informal efforts include informational sharing, referral of clients, and sharing office space (349). Building on their study, the findings of my research suggest that both formal and informal types of collaboration occur among NGOs in Central Minnesota. My project then contributes to the literature by identifying various forms of collaboration and suggesting that collaboration can occur in various ways (Cooper and Shumate 2012). Although collaboration can take many forms, among Central Minnesota NGOs it appears that joint programming and informational exchanges may be more common types of collaboration.

The findings on the role of trust in explaining collaboration are also supported by the literature. My findings on trust differ from Awasthy et al.'s (2019) study, in which the authors find competence trust to be the most popular form of trust, and companion trust as the least popular. In my study, companion trust appears to be the most significant form of trust in the decision to collaborate. More specifically, among Central Minnesotan NGOs, trust may

positively influence collaboration through long-term relationships and friendships, which is widely confirmed in other literature. Tsasis et al. (2013) find that interpersonal relationships build trust and lead to inter-organizational collaboration. Hu et al. (2020) identify how informal ties or professional friendships foster collaboration. In his study, Moshtari (2016) confirms this idea, explaining that regular communication and joint activities allow partners to bond, positively impacting their trust levels and attempts at future collaboration. The role of friendships, long-term relationships, and goodwill may build trust, which appears to be important in explaining collaboration among NGOs in Central Minnesota.

Based on the interviews and survey, companion trust may be more important for collaboration as compared to competence and commitment-based trust in these cases. These findings are supported by Moshtari's (2016) study, which found that formal safeguards, such as financial penalties or incentives, were less influential than informal structures, like mutual trust, for collaboration between international NGOs. Moshtari (2016) states, "the informal or relational safe-guards are more effective within complex working environments in which partners cannot foresee the future and they therefore develop comprehensive agreements to discourage opportunistic behaviors" (1544). In the dynamic environment in which NGOs operate, personal relationships may help build trust more effectively than formal contracts or procedures. Saab et al.'s (2013) research on coordination among humanitarian organizations finds that between task-oriented and relationship-oriented trust, the greatest value was placed in relational trust. The emphasis on relational trust is similar to the interviewees in this study who did not frequently discuss written or verbal agreements as being significant. Instead, the relational orientation towards a collaborator appeared to be more influential on trust-building in order to collaborate.

The relevance of open and honest communication as a form of trust may play an important role in explaining collaboration among NGOs in Central Minnesota. There is scant literature on open and honest communication as a form of trust that influences collaboration. However, Atouba and Shumate (2020) do discuss the role of communication in interorganizational partnerships among human service organizations. They find that communication effectiveness positively influences partnerships by reducing uncertainty and enhancing problem-solving abilities. Although they consider this a separate factor from trust, they note that communication helps to maintain trust. Participants in a study conducted by Snavely and Tracy (2002) also emphasized that partner organizations should be transparent in their actions (69). Therefore, the prevalence of open and honest communication in my study expands the literature on trust. In comparison to Awasthy et al.'s (2019) framework, it also suggests that NGOs in Central Minnesota may build trust differently than in other regions.

The findings indicate that resource complementarity may play an important role in explaining why NGOs choose to collaborate in Central Minnesota. The interviews and survey emphasize the significance of being able to access different resources as well as share a sense of interdependence. Atouba and Shumate (2010) confirm this idea, as they state that INGOs and NGOs choose to collaborate to obtain needed resources, and development agencies favor joint dependencies: "organizations forge ties based on their need to obtain informational or material resources from others and their ability to provide their own valuable material and informational resources in exchange" (296). Gulati (1995) supports this idea, finding that firms more likely collaborate with organizations with which they share greater interdependence. Based on the findings of this study and past literature, an interdependent relationship to gain new resources may be an important aspect of resource complementary that could play an important role in

explaining collaboration. This project helps expand the literature on resource complementarity, while also suggesting that a difference in size may not be as important when explaining collaboration in these cases.

Similar missions and values appear to be important when deciding to collaborate among NGOs in Central Minnesota, which is supported by previous studies. Tsasis (2009) notes that NGOs view complementary organizational goals and shared visions as important for maintaining resource exchange relationships, stating: "If all NGOs perceive the interests and goals of the other NGOs as helping them to meet their goals, they become oriented toward aiding one another in accomplishing each other's goals, and they do so by coordinating their actions so that they continue to exchange resources" (11). Similar missions, values, or goals may foster a sense of goodwill and promote greater effort in the collaboration. Tsasis et al. (2015) confirm this finding in their case study, where they found a shared passion to address HIV/AIDS as being important for collaboration to occur (546). Furthermore, a study on various types of Haitian NGOs dealing with disaster response and recovery found that organizations were more likely to work with organizations with similar missions, stressing the importance of mission compatibility (Sapat et al. 2019, 968). This research project contributes to the literature on the role of shared missions as a factor that may explain collaboration and illustrates how Central Minnesotan NGOs may value different factors when deciding to collaborate as compared to other regions.

Limitations and Future Research

There were several limitations in this study that future researchers can work to improve. The measure for resource complementarity is weaker than that of trust, as I created my own measure to code for keywords based on previous literature. Future research could enhance this measure by developing a coding framework for qualitative analysis that attempts to measure

resource complementarity. In addition, my use of network analysis identifies the presence of collaboration but does not analyze the impact of trust and resource complementarity on these connections. In the future, I aim to prepare interviews questions which prompt interviewees to discuss their views on trust and resource complementarity with specific organizations to develop a network analysis for these specific variables. In terms of analysis, my initial plan was to examine the frequency of each of my codes among the entire interviews. In the future I hope to be more precise about my methods, perhaps by examining the frequency of codes among specific questions related to collaboration. Also, the project would benefit from an expanded use of survey data. The survey received eight responses, and this small sample size made it difficult to generalize about patterns among NGO members. More responses would allow for an improved analysis and identification of patterns across Central Minnesota. Furthermore, I cannot generalize about collaboration and NGOs based on this project. As I conducted 13 interviews, no generalizations should be made about all NGOs in the Central Minnesotan region or NGOs in general. It is also important to note the data in this study is based on the perspectives of CEOs and executive directors. Their viewpoints may not reflect their organization at large and future research would benefit from interviewing more members from each organization.

For future research, I hope to gain a greater sample size for the survey as well as conduct more interviews to get a more representative sample of the Central Minnesotan NGO network. As stated above, more specific interview questions would allow me to conduct a network analysis for my two independent variables. Future projects could also focus on the role of open and honest communication as a form of trust that incentives collaboration among NGOs in Central Minnesota. As the role of shared missions and values was another unexpected finding,

this concept could be tested to identify if it is an important factor that explains collaboration in

this region.

APPENDIX 1
Semi-structured interview questions

Main questions
1. Can you tell me a little bit about the organization you work for?
2. Can you tell me about the organizations you collaborate with?
3. How do you collaborate with other organizations?
4. What is important information to know before deciding to collaborate with another organization?
5. When deciding, what would you say are some important qualities that a collaborator should have?
6. How would you describe your relationship with members of other organizations you collaborate with?
7. What goes into a successful collaboration?
8. Do you have any final thoughts, comments, or questions?

Follow-up questions
2a. How would you describe these relationships?
2b. Would you say these collaborations are usually short-term projects or long-term relationships?
2c. Are there some organizations that you would consider more collaborative than others? In what ways?
3a. What do typical interactions look like?
3b. Can you talk me through an example or two of collaborative programs/projects?
5a. What are some qualities that might prevent collaboration?
5b. What are some important resources that a collaborator should have?
6a. In a typical week, how often do you communicate with members of other organizations?
6b. How do you typically communicate with members of other organizations?
7a. Can you give an example or two of successful collaborations?
 I. In your opinion, what made the project work well?

APPENDIX 2
Survey questions

1. What are the key components of your organization's mission?
2. How does your organization work to implement its mission in the community?
3. How would you characterize the size of your organization?
 - Very large
 - Large
 - About average
 - Small
 - Very Small
4. Do you have any additional thoughts on the previous question regarding your organization's size?
5. Does your organization have the resources needed in order to accomplish its goals?

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- Unsure

6. What would you say is your organization's most valuable resource?
7. How often would you say your organization collaborates with other organizations?
    - Very frequently
    - Frequently
    - Sometimes
    - Not frequently at all
    - Never
8. Without naming these organizations, what types of organizations does your organization typically collaborate with?
9. Why does your organization typically collaborate with these other organizations?
10. How would you characterize the size of the organizations with which your organization typically collaborates?
    - Very large
    - Large
    - About average
    - Small
    - Very small
11. Do the other organizations your organization collaborates with have the same resources needed in order to accomplish your organization's goals?
    - Yes
    - Maybe
    - No
    - Unsure
12. Do you have any additional thoughts on the previous question regarding the resources of other organizations?
13. Which would you say are some of the most valuable resources of the organizations with which your organization collaborates?
14. To what extent are you connected to members involved in other organizations?
    - Very connected
    - Moderately connected
    - Somewhat connected
    - Not at all connected
15. Based on your answer to the previous question, please describe how you are connected to members of other organizations.
16. What are some important qualities that your organization looks for in a collaborator?
17. What are some important resources that your organization looks for in a collaborator?
18. What are the essential components of a "successful" collaboration?

APPENDIX 3

Table 1.1: Code book for qualitative analysis of interviews

Code	Description
Joint effort	Any discussion of joining together with another NGO to put on a program or deliver a service.
Combined resources	Any discussion of combining one's organizational resources with another NGO.
Shared decision-making	Any discussion of working with another NGO to make a shared decision.
Companion trust	Any discussion of trust built through a long-term relationship, friendship, goodwill, same group, or perceived similar identify or formation with another NGO.
Competence trust	
Role	Any discussion of competence trust based on the position, profession, or presence of relevant qualification and certification of an NGO.
Third party	Any discussion of competence trust based on prior reputation, advertisement, or news.
Category	Any discussion of competence trust based on membership in a specific group, stereotypes, or culture.
Perceived ability	Any discussion of competence trust based on ability or expertise but not of a specialist role or category.
Commitment trust	
Rule	Any discussion of commitment trust based on processes, procedures, norms, structures, practices, or communication rules/templates which can provide guard against maverick behavior.
Partnership/contracts	Any discussion of commitment trust based on a verbal or written contract.
Mutual benefit based	Any discussion of commitment trust based on benefit, mutual, bilateral, or agreement.
Different size	Any discussion of an organization collaborating with another NGO that is of a different size or capacity (due to its budget).
Different/new resources	Any discussion of an NGO gaining access to new or different resources that the organization would not have been able to access alone (including staff, money, materials, etc.).
Interdependence	Any discussion of NGOs relying on one another to access different resources.
Added codes	
Information Exchange	Any discussion of an NGO collaborating by sharing information.

Similar mission	Any discussion of an NGO collaborating due to shared or similar missions, values, or goals.
Open/honest communication	Any discussion of trust based on open communication and honesty.

APPENDIX 4

Table 1.2: Frequency of codes among interview participants

Code	Interviewees that mentioned code out of total number of interviewees (%)
Trust	
Companion trust	92.3%
Role	46.2%
Third party	38.5%
Category	0%
Perceived ability	46.2%
Rule	38.5%
Partnership/contract	0%
Mutual benefit based	76.9%
Open and honest communication	69.2%
Resource Complementarity	
Different size	30.8%
Different/new resources	100%
Interdependence	92.3%
Decision to Collaborate	
Joint effort	100%
Combined resources	38.5%
Shared decision-making	46.2%
Informational exchange	76.9%
Other	
Similar mission	92.3%

Table 1.3: Frequency of codes

Code	Number of times code appeared out of total number of codes (%)
Trust	34.5%
Companion trust	14.2%

Role	1.9%
Third party	1.6%
Category	0%
Perceived ability	2.8%
Rule	2.8%
Partnership/contract	0%
Mutual benefit based	4.1%
Open and honest communication	7.0%
Resource complementarity	27.5%
Different size	2.8%
Different/new resources	16.5%
Interdependence	8.2%
Decision to collaborate	27.6%
Joint effort	11.1%
Combined resources	2.2%
Shared decision-making	3.2%
Informational exchange	11.1%
Other	10.4%
Similar mission	10.4%

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