

Ties That Bind:
The role of shared affect in collective action

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on social-affective dynamics in the formation and cohesion of a team working in a complex collaboration crossing government, non-profit, and business sectors. Cross-sector collaborations are increasingly used in solving complex problems, necessitating a better understanding of what keeps actors committed to working together when relational and time commitments become strained. While cognitive reasons and mechanics of team formation are important, equally important are social and emotional reasons individuals find to stay committed to each other and the powerful impact they could have together.

Social and affective elements of group cohesion are interdependent with the rational-cognitive, yet they are under-represented in research on complex teams. To explore the mediating process of shared affect in building relational cohesion, micro-ethnographic research was deployed for a 7-month period in following a Collective Impact (CI) initiative to improve early childhood school readiness in a particular US community. This produced a rich cross-sector case study portraying what binds coalition actors to each other to achieve extraordinary commitment to collective action in addressing the community challenge. Extending previous research on person-to-group ties, the findings reveal type and frequency of social exchange are insufficient to understanding the emergence of shared commitment, as prior emotional history among participants and their perceived expectations play a role. The research also indicated that productive exchange may not be possible without first embedding negotiated exchange inside a reciprocal exchange relationship.

Finally, the findings were also considered through the lens of several prominent theories on group interaction as well as human intrinsic needs, yielding several opportunities for theoretical intersection and integration.

The thesis concludes the Theory of Social Commitments has merit in a real world case study and argues for more qualitative research to round out and deepen the existing body of knowledge on moving from person-to-person to person-to-group ties and the conditions whereby groups may chart their own course to collective action and impact.

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List of Abbreviations

- CAT** Collective Action Team, four of which were the working groups of the ELH. This case followed one of them in particular, the Early Learning and Literacy CAT.
- CC** Cultural Capital as defined by Randall Collins (1976), is an outcome of ritualistic interactions among people operating with a shared purpose. CC includes meaningful symbols and ‘sacred objects’ commonly referenced by a group.
- CI** Collective Impact – a model for collaborating across sectors to solve social problems. Originally articulated by Kania and Kramer in 2011, more information on the approach today found at: www.fsg.org/CollectiveImpact
- EE** Emotional Energy as defined by Randall Collins (1976), is an outcome for individuals when having positive interactions with others who share a common purpose and experience.
- ELH** Early Learning Hub – the field case studied, a collaborative coalition of non-profit service providers, government agencies, and businesses dedicated to improving school readiness of children 0-6 years of age.
- IRT** Interactional Ritual Theory developed by Randall Collins (2009, 2011)
- SDT** Self Determination Theory- A theory of motivation researched and practiced around the world. Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan (1995, 2000) initially developed SDT. The theory states all humans have natural and intrinsic needs to pursue autonomy, relatedness, and competence in their work and lives.

WTR Welfare Tradeoff Ratio – a human brain calculation based on a theory by Cosmides and Tooby (2013)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Context

Ever since Durkheim articulated a theory of ritual solidarity, social scientists have been fascinated with the process by which individuals become collectively connected – in their consciousness, in their affect, and in their actions. At the time, Durkheim proposed: “individual minds are not isolated, but enter into close relation with, and act upon, each other; from their synthesis arises a new kind of psychic life. It is clearly distinct from that led by the solitary individual because of its unusual intensity,” (quoted in Giddens 1972: 228). While the phenomenon of person-to-person ties is of interest, particularly in the realm of developmental and social psychology, far more mysterious is how humans form person-to-*group* ties. This is not as straightforward as one might expect as evidenced by today’s myriad of failed attempts inside governments, organizations and across sectors to achieve results that would deliver valuable benefits to customers, stakeholders and to society as a whole. Even when much is at stake, (e.g. the viability of the EU, resolution of the ‘debt crisis’ in the USA, the future of a major employer such as HP, the reduction of destructive greenhouse gases on the oceans), bringing people together to agree on a plan of action and then to act cohesively, often seems overly complex and ultimately illusive. It is as David Bohm (1996) suggested decades ago, the challenge of creating a “participatory consciousness” in pursuing collective interests. Several theoretical considerations are central to exploring this further.

Person-to-group ties have been studied both as a cultural phenomenon (i.e. where one’s societal affiliations lie) and to a much lesser extent as an everyday phenomenon where actors form collective attachments, defining themselves as members of groups, intentionally working together on shared problems and challenges (i.e. who one counts on to get things done). Ironically, Durkheim believed that it was only through humankind’s ability to become interdependent

and integrated in consciousness and action that the “cult of the individual” could even emerge as something to be venerated in society, the individual glorified as something special. Over the decades, an unintended consequence of that view has been an evolution of a kind of either/or thinking, where philosophers, economists, and politicians among others, have framed public choices as either optimizing individual rights and freedoms or optimizing what is best for groups or the common good. Today, this framing carries into the everyday choices people make in their communities and in their organizations, often with results that are increasingly polarizing and unsatisfying. The dilemma seems always to be whether to pursue *my* individual self-interest or to commit to something with others, something only *we* can do together. This particular dichotomy will be an examined theme throughout this thesis beginning in Chapter Two with a potential resolution put forth in Chapters Eight and Nine.

People working together across boundaries for shared impact as opposed to pursuing interests with a more personally focused impact has a temporal component as well. Shared commitment requires time, which adds to the complexity. Time to develop, time to practice and overcome doubts, and time to actually see the collective impact. Groups that have been successful often report feelings, a *sense* of being on the right track long before seeing the actual results of their shared work (Sandow and Allen 2005; Senge 2006; Scharmer and Kaufer 2013). Especially in the short run, the pull to return to personal agendas, one’s history of success in a smaller sphere, can be compelling. But the gratification of short-term reactive problem solving can hinder the important pursuit of long-term value creation. Unless individual self-interest becomes re-contextualized to include the realization that ultimately, success depends on creating shared well-being within a larger social system, some of the most vexing social, economic, and environmental realities may continue to degenerate. (Senge, Hamilton, and Kania 2015)

In is within this context of complexity and interdependence, individual vs. collective

interests, that this thesis was conceived and designed. This original research explores through a real-world, real time case study, how a specific group of individuals, intellectually aligned on a purpose to work together differently, actually interacted on the journey to create shared commitment and a new identity as a social system. The main research question became: ***Under what conditions will a person subordinate an individual impact agenda on behalf of a collective impact agenda?*** The Early Learning Hub, (ELH) is the case discussed in this thesis and the research focuses primarily on the social-affective dynamics for creating relational cohesion among the actors participating in this Hub. As argued in the early chapters, there are clear reasons for this focus on social-affective as well as the adopted micro-sociological frame for the field study. While the context of a growing need for complex, cross-boundary collaborations fuels many innovative approaches to working cross-organizations and cross-sector, the specific ELH operating framework referenced in this case is the Collective Impact (CI) model originally outlined by Kania and Kramer (2011). This framework was chosen solely because the ELH was created according to a CI design and was following those specific guidelines in its operation. This research would be just as relevant in following a different organizing model used in conducting cross-boundary collaboration.

As presented, there are many reasons to better understand the phenomenon of social solidarity, of seemingly ordinary people bonding together to achieve extraordinary results. There is a growing realization that people working across boundaries – communities, businesses, professional disciplines – will be required in tackling complex social issues (Senge, Smith, Kruschewitz, Laur, and Schley 2008; Scharmer and Kaufer 2013; Senge et al. 2015). And to better understand this phenomenon may require a look across disciplines in order to find the answers to age old questions concerning how to work better together, how to find and maintain cohesion as teams of people who can see a larger picture bringing greater resources to bear in solving complex challenges; staying the course in finding breakthrough innovations that are important to the world. Just as no one

organization can solve global issues, no one academic discipline will likely reveal the how and why of person-to-group ties. For this reason, this thesis draws on contributions in several different fields. While relying most heavily on recent sociological research, literature from the domains of philosophy, developmental and social psychology, biology, and organizational studies have also been investigated and referenced as part of this project. As will be discussed in Chapter Nine, there are encouraging opportunities for intersection.

The following chapters begin with an examination of the paradigms of essential human nature leading to assumptions and research on how people form ties not only as individual to individual, but also to a group, on behalf of doing something they believe to be collectively significant. Chapters Two through Five set the stage for decisions on research questions, design and methods as reviewed in Chapters Six and Seven, where a qualitative approach with a social constructivist perspective is explained. Chapter Eight covers a deep dive into the research findings as interpreted by ELH participants, and according to various theories, the backbone of which is the Theory of Social Commitments (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2009). In conclusion, Chapter Nine comes back to the larger picture this introduction has framed and puts forth future directions for consideration in research and application for practitioners.

CHAPTER TWO

Human Beings

This chapter presents several historical views of being human, exposing some age old debates on what the essential nature of humans may be, and particularly salient processes of individuals coming together to achieve their shared purposes. This chapter is not intended to be an exhaustive study on the human being, but rather to contextualize this specific study within the broader parameters of a subject area covering complex team collaboration; small group sociology, organization studies, studies in epidemiology, biology, and psychology. Key issues to be addressed will include the relevant aspects of our nature as human beings, the social process of group cohesion, and the practice of collaboration across organization boundaries. Finally, a view will be put forth on the primacy of emotion and affect in the process of social collaboration that leads to a shared and enduring commitment to results.

Since the 17th Century and the influence of Descartes, the language and metaphor of organizations has been one of describing a machine. At that time, the great breakthrough in analytical mathematics became generalized to human or living structures as well as the non-living. This observation is not new. Yet in the modern working world, few professionals pause to reflect on what it means to be human in today's context. Organizational life generally does not ask this of us, yet to do so would reveal useful information about when we are at our best working together.

2.1 Rational/ Cognitive/ Individual

The view of humans as rational beings following their individual economic self-interest goes back to antiquity. From the time of Aristippus, there were those who believed life was about controlling and molding circumstances to oneself, not the other way around. The issue of moral order and human rationality in early modern times are reflected in the writing of English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes,

who analyzed the problem of social order back in 1651. He came to the conclusion that humans were saved by their instinct of self-preservation and capacity for reason. Under this premise, individuals are led to form on-going communities and associations whereby people accept societal or group constraints in return for security and order. (Lawler, Thye, & Yoon 2009:7) Many philosophers and economists extended this utilitarian notion as society grew, became more diverse, and less ordered by religious beliefs. As the 'rational economic man' theory expanded with the growth of capitalism, the debate ensued as to whether rational self-interest was a good thing or not, and if it was good, was it really only about economic and material gain? Great thinkers took on the debate, among them – Marx, Weber, and Durkheim as sociologists; Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill as political and economic scientists. The world became increasingly influenced by rationalism, which Durkheim labeled the 'intellectual aspect' of moral individualism. (Giddens 1971: 114)

Today's version of the 'rational economic man' model as the neoclassical economic theory is taught in most western universities, derives from Adam Smith ([1776] 1937) and other 'fathers' of modern capitalist theory. It relies heavily on mathematical modeling and states that an individual will make informed choices based on rational self-interest. It is coupled with the assumption that the 'invisible hand' of free market competition will regulate these self-interests in a dynamic that will ultimately work for the common good. Governments are advised to keep a hands-off policy and let this self-organization work (Eisler 2008:10).

According to Granovetter (1985) classical and neoclassical economics today operates with an atomized, under-socialized conception of human action, continuing in the utilitarian tradition. In recent decades there have been numerous critiques of this model, the world has seen that people do *not* always act in their long-term self-interest, as witnessed by the recent global economic collapse. As Karen Ho explains in her contemporary ethnography of Wall Street, "The most obvious problem with neoclassical economic theory is simply that its core premises

... clash with any understanding of the firm as a social organization.” (Ho 2009:172) The theory was created a century before the modern corporation was established. Hence, the theoretical legacy, recognizing only the interests of the [individual] owner- entrepreneur, resulted in the understanding of public companies in that light, and not as social organizations. (Giddens 1971: 104; Ho 2009:174)

It does seem that the rational choice model is an oversimplification of what motivates individuals to interact with others, deciding whether they stay engaged or not when circumstances change. Max Weber’s life work became an effort to map the contested terrain of rationalism, that ‘superficially simple concept,’ its nature and varieties. (Schaff, Chapter 2: 64 in Stones 2008). In *Economy and Society* ([1922], 1968), Weber outlines four types of human orientation in action. The first, *purposively rational conduct*, aligns with the rational choice model in that an individual reasonably assesses the likely results of a given act in terms of the calculation of means to an end. But Weber doesn’t stop there. He puts forth three other bases for action. *Value rational action* is solely directed to overriding ideals of faith, duty, or devotion to a cause. *Affective action* by contrast does not require a higher ideal but rather is driven by an emotive state and can be meaningful or non-meaningful. Just like value rational action, affective action is not motivated by a means-to-an-end logic. Rather its purpose is the value of carrying out an act for its own sake. Finally, Weber’s *traditional action* is motivated by custom or habit much like being on automatic pilot, not requiring any real mental calculus. The majority of everyday action would fall into this category. (Giddens 1971: 152-3) Weber’s *value rational action* and *affective action* would be specifically relevant to this thesis.

Everyone would agree that the human’s capacity for rational thinking is a distinguishing feature of our species. And while the premise of individuals acting in rational self-interest may have stood the test of time for a while, it appears limited in addressing our relationships beyond the transactional realm. Even those who

have supported the importance of the rational choice model in linking the micro and macro levels of sociology (e.g. Hechter 1983) know there is more to the solution than that. It must be incorporated into something much broader. (Collins 1985: 133)

2.2 Emotional/ Affective /Social

It may be impossible to discuss theory and research on humans as emotional and affective beings without tying it to our incredibly social nature. But first, it's worth examining some historic assumptions about the early development of rational individualism.

For those who know Adam Smith's philosophies only through mainstream interpretation of his *Wealth of Nations* (1776), they may have missed his own insistence on the primacy of "immediate sense and feeling" (as opposed to reason) in determining a sense of right and wrong. Outlined in his other major work, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* ([1790] in Haakonssen ed. 2002), Smith develops a theory of human imagination that is naturally order seeking, desiring coherence and agreement in the world. Under this premise, human imagination creates a "spectator" (even of oneself) who seeks order and understanding by assigning rationale to an observed behavior, particularly when it is disconcerting. This, Smith describes as 'sympathy.' "The compassion of the spectator must arise altogether from the consideration of what he himself would feel if he was reduced to the same unhappy situation." (Smith [1790] in Haakonssen ed. 2002:15) Without this ability to imagine the intentions of others, it would be impossible to live together as we "only become aware of ourselves – gain self-consciousness – through our relationship to others." (Haakonssen 2002: xiv). Haakonssen explains that over the years Smithian sympathy has been wrongly interpreted as benevolence and selfish self-interest, taken to be the reductive basis for all human motivation. (p.xxiv) Smith did not shy away from discussing a range of human emotions, essential and unavoidable to forming any rational, moral judgment. "To be the object of hatred

and indignation gives more pain than all the evil which a brave man can fear from his enemies; so there is a satisfaction in the consciousness of being beloved, which . . . is of more importance to happiness, than all the advantage which he can expect to derive from it.” (Smith [1790] in Haakonssen 2002: 47-8)

Early on, sociologists steered clear of delving very deeply into emotions, which was traditionally seen as the principal domain of psychologists. The founder of social psychology, George Herbert Mead ([1934], 1964) is sparse in his mention of the role emotions play inside our social interactions. However, whether he was familiar with the work of Smith or not, Mead does himself define ‘sympathy’ in terms of our ability to pass “into the attitude of the other, take the role of the other, feeling the other’s joys and sorrows. . . In this way. . . by taking the attitude of the others in the group in their co-operative, highly complex activity, the individual is able to enter into their experiences.” (Mead [1934], 1964: 33)¹ C. Wright Mills and Hans Gerth acknowledge the centrality of “sensation, impulse, and feeling” as not only at man’s biological core, but also help to bridge these elements to our social person, revealed as “perception, purpose, and emotion.” (Gerth and Mills 1953: 20) Today there is convergence among many theorists and researchers arguing there is no such thing as a conscious mind without emotion or affect. (Izard 2007; cf. Lewis 2005, Phelps 2006, Russell 2003). (Izard 2009: 17) “From a sociological point of view, this meeting ground of mind and body is very important, for it is through emotional behavior that people exercise power, create religions and works of art, as well as enact bonds of solidarity among family and friends.” (Collins 2009: 56)

The human’s proclivity for the emotional can be explained both through modern day biology as well as social science. Going as far back as Darwin remarking on the existence of emotional phenomena in non-human as well as the human species, biologists have only taken it seriously in recent decades (Damasio 2001). Early

¹ Interestingly, Mead, like his contemporary Durkheim, may offer one of the earliest theories on how we feel and experience things together and not as separate individuals.

neurobiologists Maturana ² and Varela describe human beings as living in the emotional domain. “Every emotion . . . is a biological dynamic which is deep-rooted and defines structural patterns, stepping stones to interactions that may lead to different domains of [behaviors].”(1987: 247-8) From the physiology of emotions to discovery of mirror neurons (Keysers 2009), it has become evident humans are hard-wired to empathize, feel and synchronize with each other, in coordinating conversations and actions. This is what makes *emotional contagion* (Hatfield et al. 1993) even possible. Emotions are fundamental to being human and to enabling our social nature.

The work of sociologist Emile Durkheim came at a pivotal time in history as the industrial age was developing. Through his analysis in *The Division of Labour* (1893) he acknowledged that the emergence of modern society is associated with the expansion of *individualism*, however he attacked the “utilitarian individualism³ of the political economists and English philosophers.” (Giddens [1971] 2008: 72)

For Durkheim, interpreting the rising individualism of industrial society in terms of purely contractual, economic self-interest was reductionist and would not guarantee a stable social order. Rather his own ‘cult of the individual’ presupposed an organic stability⁴ underlying events such as the French Revolution and based on a belief in the dignity and worth of the individual, which is the basis of its social order (Giddens [1971] 2008: 72). While utilitarian explanations for the division of

² Following his work with Varela on the Biology of Cognition, Maturana went on to write about the Biology of Love, which he posits is central to our evolutionary development as well as the quality of our living. Maturana defines ‘love’ as seeing another as legitimate in one’s world,’ (i.e. inviting influence).

³ According to this philosophy, the more production increases, the more people’s needs are met, and the greater the degree of human happiness, a rather narrow and economically focused view of personal and societal well-being.

⁴ Giddens explains Durkheim’s notion of ‘organic solidarity’ as a form of social cohesion where relationships form where none previously existed, “bringing erstwhile separate groups into contact” and interdependence. ([1971] 2008:78) ‘Mechanical solidarity,’ while still present in some societies and groups, dominated an earlier time when societies were relatively simple and had a segmental structure. Mechanical solidarity made it almost impossible for people to individuate from a collective consciousness and societal order.

labor centered only on optimizing individual wealth through person-to-person transactions, Durkheim's view counters that the focus on individualism works only when cooperation among individuals [person to group] is legitimate and has its own intrinsic morality (Giddens [1971] 2008: 77).

“We may say that what is moral is everything that is a source of solidarity, everything that forces man to take account of other people, to regulate his actions by something other than the promptings of his own egoism, and the more numerous and strong these ties are, the more solid is the morality . . . Far from it serving to emancipate the individual, disengaging him from the surrounding environment, its essential function, on the contrary, is to be the integrating element in a whole, and in consequence it removes from the individual some of his freedom of movement.”
(Durkheim [1893] 1984: 331)

So, while the need for people to focus on individual skills and capability became crucial in the division of labor, it was always on behalf of building a greater co-operation and interdependence that would build solidarity and a healthy society.

As a functionalist, Durkheim's theories may differ from Weber's perspective in the consideration of social unity, but the two overlap in the area of affective and emotional importance in human interaction. As mentioned previously, Weber's *value rational action* and *affective action* are congruent with Durkheim's notion of social co-operation found in the organic solidarity of an evolving society expanding according to its moral or dynamic density. (Durkheim [1893] 1984: 201)

The work of Durkheim provided a breakthrough when he demonstrated that “interaction is not simply a matter of cold-blooded bargaining, but that strong social ties are based on emotional bonds to which we attach moral ideals.” (Collins 2009:5) Collins blends the two theorists in his own work on *Conflict Sociology*

(1976, 2009), explaining the importance of a micro-sociological approach to understanding human interaction.⁵ Specifically, Collins extends the research of Durkheim ([1915], 1954) on social ritual, shared feelings of ‘effervescence’ applied to religious experience, to the experience of any group that achieves emotional solidarity, religious or otherwise. This would not surprise nor upset Durkheim: “Wherever we observe religious life, we find that it has a definite group as its foundation. Even the so-called ‘private cults’, such as the domestic cult or the corporative cult, satisfy this condition: for they are always celebrated by a group; the family or the corporation.” (Durkheim in Giddens 1972: 223)

For Collins to connect his analysis to the organizational domain, he also incorporates the work of Goffman (1967) to show how power struggles are negotiated through the manipulation of ritual encounters. (Collins 2009:6) In organizations, despite cognitive reasons for pursuing a goal, all social encounters [i.e. in teams, workgroups] have an expressive side, and engage participants over time in “squaring off, determination, disclosure, and settlement” . . . arousing an affective state, “emerging transformed into excitement.” (Goffman 1967: 185)

It is worth mentioning that feelings, emotion, affect, and mood, are often conflated and used interchangeably in the literature. For the purpose of this thesis, I adopt the approach of Lawler and Proell (2001) and use the terms feelings and emotions interchangeably. These authors explain that ‘affect’ is often a broader term that subsumes discrete feeling states, moods, and sentiments. The intent in this thesis is to identify specific emotional experiences of people working across boundaries toward shared objectives, and the role those experiences have in creating and maintaining their social commitment to each other. This will also contribute better

⁵ Collins goes on to bridge the micro to the macro but always insists that what is claimed at a macro-sociological level cannot be taken seriously unless demonstrated in the day to day interactions of people being together. He maintains that “social interaction is a level of analysis in its own right, and that its most important features are the conditions of non-rational solidarity.” (p. 111)

understanding of a shared affective tone⁶, an area deserving of further research and explication. (Brief and Weiss 2002: 292)

Brief and Weiss (2002) argue for research that will better balance the interest in discrete emotions (e.g. happy, angry, proud) with an interest in shared affect or tone (e.g. effervescent, negative, interested). This thesis intends to focus on both but will begin with what specific, discrete emotions emerge in a working collaborative group and the path those take to a shared affective state. The research on discrete emotions is diverse. However, most relevant here is the research of Izard (2009), Frederickson (2000) and Cosmides and Tooby (2013). Izard maintains that the emotion of interest is “continually present in the normal mind under normal conditions, and it is the central motivation for engagement in creative and constructive endeavors and for the sense of well-being” . . . with interest-excitement being the most ubiquitous of all. (Izard 2009: 4) Izard’s work also illuminates the process by which the cognitive and the emotional coexist in a dynamic pattern of action. A “misconception is that once an emotion episode ends, the mind is free for purely rational processes.” This is not the case. Especially in significant personal and social matters, given how intertwined they are, it may not be possible to study cognition and emotion separately. While this presents a research conundrum, Izard is specific to advise that although emotion and cognition continually interact, they should not lose their separate identities obscuring what is most salient about each. “Emotion remains primarily about motivation. Cognition (particularly about goal concepts that typically have an emotion component) may be conceived as having a motivational aspect, but it remains primarily about knowledge. “(2009:18) This distinction will be further explored in the later section on cross-boundary collaboration where we see the majority of current research primarily focused on cognition/knowledge management.

⁶ Defined by George (1996) as “consistent or homogenous affective reactions within a group”

And apparently not all emotions are of equal importance. As Gerth and Mills (1953) pointed out half a century ago, the meaning of a situation sets the experience and the nature of the emotion. Positive affects with low meaning might include sensory pleasure, and feelings of safety, satiation and/or comfort (states that money can buy), whereas those with high meaning might include joy, love, and interest/ flow (states that money cannot buy) . . . negative emotions with high meaning might include shame, guilt, and remorse. (Fredrickson 2000:595) This is consistent with Izard's work previously mentioned.

As a social species, humans cannot afford to be completely self-interested. Cosmides and Tooby (2013) theorize that the human brain calculates whose interest to optimize and protect based on a dynamic 'welfare tradeoff ratio,' (WTR). They cite growing research and converging evidence that emotions such as gratitude are evidence that a person may have experienced their own welfare overvalued by another. Similarly, guilt would relay a sense that a person undervalued someone else contrary to what her WTR would have indicated was appropriate. "WTRs are person-specific stored values that display remarkable consistency across large numbers of benefit allocations between self and other . . . Gratitude, guilt, and anger may be social emotions that evolved to recalibrate WTRs." (p. 223) This research suggests our emotions are dynamic and evolved to enable building effective social bonds.

2.3 Intrinsic Needs

The work cited by evolutionary psychologists such as Cosmides and Tooby (2013) points to what may be the intrinsic motivations of humans in interaction. But the debate on what may be intrinsic and unique to human beings goes back at least to the time of Aristotle. The prolific work of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan regarding intrinsic and universal human needs has been tied to the body of research on well-being and all that it should encompass in human organizations. (Ryan & Deci 2000, 2001, 2010; Deci & Ryan 2008) While the study of human well-being is not a main

objective of this thesis, it will help to explore intrinsic needs and the importance they have in human motivation and well-being beginning with an historical perspective.

The 19th century utilitarian philosopher Bradburn translated Aristotle's "eudaimonia" to mean happiness. Empirical assessments followed that measured the extent to which people feel good, contented, or satisfied with their lives. This suggested that hedonia (maximizing pleasure, avoiding pain) and eudaimonia (feeling intensely alive, authentic) were one and the same, which was deeply contrary to Aristotle's distinctions. Bradburn's version had omitted the essence of eudaimonia – the idea of striving toward excellence based on one's potential. (Ryff and Singer 2008) The eudaimonic position then, suggests the important point concerning emotions is not feeling happiness per se, but rather the extent to which a person is fully functioning. (Ryan and Deci 2008:150) This disconnect may help explain one reason that individual self-interest became theoretically dominant until recently. What now emerges with respect to human beings is not only our intertwined rational, social, and affective capacities, but our underlying intrinsic *needs* that invite challenge, deep belonging, and legitimacy.

Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) created a body of work entitled Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and linked it to goal pursuits. This theory identifies there being universal needs of humans across all cultures that specify *innate psychological nutriments that are essential for ongoing psychological growth, integrity, and well-being*. These are the needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. (2000: 229) Originally building on the work of White (1959), who defined competence⁷ as "an organism's capacity to interact effectively with its environment," (Deci and Ryan 2000: 297) SDT defines competence as self-efficacy. In addition to this fundamental human need, the intrinsic need of relatedness is consistent with what

⁷ White preferred the idea of competence as opposed to concepts such as curiosity and mastery in defining the effects an individual may discover he has on the environment around him and the effects that environment will have on him. (p. 321)

has already been said about our basic social nature. SDT states we need each other and seek each other for a sense of safety, comfort and companionship and those with higher quality relationships experience greater social success and well-being. (Ryan and Deci 2008:155) The concept of autonomy may be the most important to the research on intrinsic needs. As Durkheim pointed out a century ago, autonomy does not mean someone is independent and operating apart from others. It means a person has volition in how they decide to relate and interact with their environment. This sense of freedom to enlist, vs. compelled to deliver, is so key to human functioning that it shows up as the most important element in a purposeful and thriving life - impacting performance, physical and emotional health, and self-fulfillment and satisfaction. The longitudinal Whitehall II studies in the UK found consistently over time how important a sense of autonomy was for workers' health on the job as well as their health and lifespan post retirement. (Marmot and Brunner 2004; Marmot 2004) Csikszentmihalyi talks about a thriving person as autotelic, a "self that has self-contained goals," (1991: 209) able to determine the quality and potential of her life. Another way to define autonomy is the ability to live coherently with one's purpose and potential, similar to Maslow's (1943; Hoffman interview 1992) definition of self-actualization.

However, autonomy is often misunderstood as 'being separate' and even Csikszentmihalyi states that goals for the autotelic person come from within. But that would be to overlook the importance of the need for autonomy *with* relatedness. Deci and Ryan succinctly describe the interrelationship of the two: "It is in people's basic nature to develop greater autonomy (as represented by greater integration within the self) and greater relatedness (as represented by the assimilation and integration of oneself within the social community). Not only are the two trajectories not antithetical, but the healthiest development involves both. The incompatibility arises only when the social context is structured in a way that turns the needs against each other." (Deci and Ryan 2000:242) Society's emphasis on a rational individualism, the 'individual narrative' contributes to this either/or

notion around autonomy and relatedness creating false tradeoffs in how we pursue shared goals.⁸

Deci and Ryan do not emphasize emotions, but rather prefer to talk about intrinsic need satisfaction. Their belief is that emotions themselves must be self-regulated for effective functioning, and that intrinsic needs are at the center of this self-regulation. (2000: 255). However, Isen and Reeve's research raises questions about this point. They found that positive affect was unrelated to the task itself and it also *influenced* intrinsic motivation. The experience of positive affect directly, not indirectly, affected intrinsic motivation for a task. (Isen and Reeve 2006) This is important as we consider the practice of conserving positive affect in working groups as a benefit in and of itself.

2.4 Cooperation

Based on the recent work of developmental psychologists, more is being written about how humans have evolved so that they can and do cooperate with one another. Tomasello and Vaish (2012) explored the link between human cooperation and morality. Just like the philosophers and sociologists of an earlier century, they maintain that human morality arose evolutionarily as a way of cooperating with others. Their research compares the cooperation of great ape societies with that of humans with the conclusion that "human social interaction and organization are fundamentally cooperative in ways that the social interaction and organization of other great apes simply are not." (p. 239) And the evidence appears consistently in early childhood. What distinguished their human subjects, was the young children began to take a mutualistic rather than a purely individualistic approach to cooperative activity. "They became deeply invested in not only their own but also their interaction partners' welfare – they began to care

⁸ For Durkheim (1956) it was a basic error to see moral authority and freedom as mutually exclusive opposites. An individual can only obtain whatever freedom he enjoys through his membership in society. (Giddens 1971: 117)

about the joint nature of their cooperative activities – and they began to care about how they were perceived by others as partners.” (Tomasello and Vaish 2012: 249) As Smith commented centuries ago, we desire not only praise, but to be *praise-worthy* in the eyes of others. Human beings seem to want, perhaps even need, more than individual success. They want personal efficacy deemed worthy by others. This may be the most valuable display of relatedness.

According to Tomasello and Vaish, cooperation (and therefore morality) is always problematic because it requires individuals to suppress their own interests in favor of those of others, or align their own interests with those of others. Humans have managed to evolve highly cooperative living through participating in a variety of collaborative activities in which they are interdependent. (2012: 251) This is consistent with Durkheim’s comments on the division of labor and the organic solidarity that underlies it, building a common morality through cooperation.

CHAPTER THREE

Social Commitment and Solidarity

Cooperation is one thing, and humans have the capacity to go further, to develop a shared commitment and cohesion that has them operate as one. Solidarity and relational cohesion enables a group to form social units capable of accomplishing outcomes not possible as a simple assembly of individuals.

Homan's (1950; 1958) theory of small group social exchange may indeed be true: the more people interact, the more they will like each other. As Granovetter (1985) discovered, people's attempts at purposive action are embedded in concrete, ongoing systems of social relations. And strong emotions of every sort seem to go along with strong interpersonal ties. (Collins 2009: 85)

3.1 The Inevitability of Social Conflict

Before discussing what brings people together in a shared commitment, it is instructive to understand the forces that keep them apart. Randall Collins introduced the notion of *conflict sociology* (Collins 1976; 2009) based on an understanding of human beings as "sociable but conflict-prone animals." According to Collins, conflict arises because coercion is always a potential resource, and an intrinsically unpleasant experience for people. This human tendency, with the simultaneous existence of what Durkheim saw as emotional reasons for solidarity, potentially "adds group divisions and tactical resources to be used in these conflicts." (Collins 2009:21-2) Conflict can be within group, between individuals, and between group members and stakeholders outside the group. Conflict, as part of ongoing social negotiations, is dynamic. The dance between whose ideas and intentions may dominate, leaving everyone's intrinsic need for autonomy (i.e.

volition) and relatedness at stake. (Deci and Ryan 2000; Ryan and Deci 2011; Maturana and Poerksen 2004; Marmot 2004) Groups may work it out, or not.

At a macro historical level, recent work by Riane Eisler (2008) questions the norm of “dominator societies,” where those on top control those below them, whether at home, in the community, or at work in the form of organizational teams and workgroups. Eisler states that to “maintain rankings of domination, caring and empathy have to be suppressed and devalued.” She illuminates an alternative “partnership system” which supports mutually respectful and caring relations. She is quick to say, hierarchy exists in both models to orchestrate work getting done. However, there is a real difference between *hierarchies of domination* and what she calls *hierarchies of actualization* where all players can pursue and achieve their highest human potentials. (2008: 30-31) This supports findings in SDT. Indeed, social commitment is found in organizational initiatives where caring, trust, and freedom to pursue intrinsic human needs are strongest. (Sen 1999; Sandow and Allen 2005; Senge 2006; Eisler 2008) In addition, there is strong evidence from longitudinal studies that people working in an environment that provides the opportunities for autonomy and relatedness in pursuing their genuine interests will benefit from better physical health and psychological resilience. (Frederickson 2000; Marmot & Brunner 2004).

When humans do resolve their conflict prone ways and build solidarity with each other, there are specific factors at work: shared language, identity, ritual practices, positive emotion/affect.

3.2 The Emergence of Shared Commitment

According to Mead (1934), Maturana and Varela (1987), Maturana (2004) and Collins (1976, 2009), humans live together in language and from this languaging arises their minds and their realities. These realities are cognitive *and* emotional. They are socially embedded as well. For even if an individual holds a sense of meaning/reality in his own mind, he creates it through a conversation with an

internalized ‘other’ if not with others in his external world. The truly amazing part is not so much that humans are capable of this level of creative complexity, but that we ever actually reach a shared view at all, given how diverse personal histories and intricate our emotions tend to be. Yet it is the ability, through language, to agree on a shared meaning to the physical world and events around us that allows individuals to build solidarity with each other. This in turn enables coordinated action toward a shared purpose or goal. What keeps groups engaged over time is the shared feelings and commitment to each other.

As mentioned earlier, Durkheim’s work ([1915], 1954) on religious experience and how solidarity is built and maintained through ritual is key to understanding group cohesion and solidarity formation in other domains. Interaction ritual encounters are described in general by Collins (2011: 2) to include a 1) bodily assembly, or co-presence, of participants; 2) barriers to excluding outsiders; and above all the interplay between 3) mutual focus of attention and 4) a shared emotional mood. This pattern is recursive and generates symbols that represent what the group shares in both the cognitive and emotional space.⁹ “What makes or breaks a ritual however, is the extent to which the group builds up a strong collective emotion.” The quality of the shared emotion, the shared affective tone at the center, is what determines the degree of social commitment and solidarity. To the extent this emotion is conserved through re-enacting the rituals/ symbols of that particular group’s collective history, the shared affective tone will be reinforced. Because of the key role that shared emotion and affect plays in creating social solidarity, Collins’ Interactional Ritual Theory (IRT) rejects cognitive rational choice and material choice theories. The Emotional Energy (EE) and Cultural Capital (CC)¹⁰ generated by solidarity and positive group membership are both the reason and the primary benefit for individuals who become part of the collective experience.

⁹ Examples of ritual symbols in working groups may be running jokes, practices of ‘checking in’ with each other prior to starting a meeting, written charter of the group’s intent, meeting ground rules, etc.

¹⁰ What Collins labels ‘cultural capital’ may be called ‘social capital’ by others. This includes the expansion of one’s network and experience, which will yield further opportunities to contribute and greater standing within the organization or industry.

(Collins 2009: 279)

Also building on Durkheim's early theory, and adopting a branch of symbolic interactionist research methods based on affect control theory (Fine 1993:74), Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2009) developed the Theory of Social Commitments, a general integrative theory, of how individuals form direct ties with social units – regardless of size, scale or institutional character. Their research spanned a 20-year period and found that “under certain structural conditions (i.e. equal power, joint tasks, shared responsibilities) repeated exchange by the same people fosters positive emotions and feelings that in turn, produce affective ties to their relations and groups.” (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2009: xii)

While Durkheim spoke of shared ritual and symbols, researchers such as Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2009) reference shared identity research, “conceptions of self and other that enable them to coordinate their behaviors.” (Stryker 1980; Burke 1991; Hogg 2004; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2006) At a micro level, identities enable people to reliably anticipate each other's behavior, thereby strengthening trust. Some theorists focus strictly on the macro level of large group identity (Hogg et al. 1995; Hogg et al. 2004) and the two levels do connect in salient ways. However, for this thesis the focus is on identity formation and validation at the micro-level – i.e. person-to-group ties as opposed to group-to-group ties. Identity theory in the symbolic interactionist tradition focuses on roles rather than group and accentuates the differences in perceptions and actions of a person in role relating to counterroles. (Stets and Burke 2000: 226) Identity Theory is most salient to examining ‘jointness’ or ‘interconnected uniqueness’ in a group and how collective identities are formed. Further, while cognitive perceptions matter to most identity theories, only Identity Theorists have held the belief that the emotional component is key to understanding how *social* identities are formed. Sheldon Stryker, one of the originators of this theory, researched the connection and found “unanticipated emotional responses to interaction events amplify commitment and identity salience and vice versa.” (2008:21)

3.3 From Personal to Group Affect

The Theory of Social Commitments has implications for how people at a distance may generate and sustain shared affiliations toward some common task or purpose. The emotional or affective component of the theory is a distinctive feature and a central mechanism which explains “how and when person-to-group ties transcend transactional beginnings and become relational and expressive,” valued in themselves. (Lawler, Thye, and Joon 2009:9) Lawler and colleagues claim that their theory “integrates the implied rational, instrumental foundation of exchanges between people and between people and organizations, with non-rational emotional or affective experiences of people involved in social exchange and exchange.” (p. 10) Subsequent research by these authors, explores how “networks of competitive agents, each vying to maximize self-interest in a negotiated exchange context, can nonetheless come to see themselves as members of a common group and orient their behavior toward one another.” They conclude that under structural and incentive conditions that work against group formation in networks, there’s evidence of emergent group formation. Networks that have built structural cohesion through emotionally positive exchange relationships and high rates of inclusion, promote collective behavior and social commitment. (Thye, Lawler and Yoon 2011: 409) This research is of particular interest in this thesis, where exploring how individuals, with pressure to pull away or resist solidarity, subordinate their individual agendas on behalf of something larger.

Walter and Bruch (2008) describe a *positive group affect spiral* at play when there is emergent positive collective affect. This dynamic self-reinforcing spiral connects positive group affect with group relationship quality. In their theory, emotional contagion, emotional comparison, and empathy all play a facilitative role in building shared positive group affect.¹¹ They also put forth that charismatic leadership, organizational cynicism, emotional norms, and an attractive organizational identity

¹¹ Emotional contagion denotes a subconscious process of mimicking others expressions; emotional comparison is a more cognitive process of comparing one’s own emotions to the cues of another one cares about; and empathy where individuals deliberately assume others’ psychological point of view. They vicariously experience each others’ moods and emotions. (Walter and Bruch 2008: 242)

will either enhance the spiral or dampen it. These things must be considered in researching the development and expansion of group affect. (Walter and Bruch 2008: 253) This may be particularly true inside large organizations, operating under the same cultural norms and rules. However, in focusing on cross-organization, cross-sector collaborations, these enhancing/dampening factors may be less relevant.

It is noteworthy that affective states most closely linked with future-oriented social relations and/or personal growth carry relatively high meaning (e.g. love and shame), whereas those most closely linked with immediate individual survival carry relatively low meaning (e.g. pleasure and pain). (Fredrickson 2000:595)

Some may ask, “Why care how or even if solidarity and social commitment forms in a working group?” As global challenges multiply, there will be no one leader, organization, or country that can produce solutions that solve complex cross-boundary problems. Whether climate change, educational system transformation, or corporate innovation, these challenges will need to be met by networks of individual experts who agree to work across boundaries and sectors. And there is new evidence that such a thing as ‘collective intelligence’ (*c* factor) exists and is strongly correlated to empathy and inclusive behavior in groups. (Woolley, Chabris, Pentland, Hashmi, and Malone 2010) Beyond the process of managing these challenging initiatives, it will be critical to set the conditions where human beings will stay committed and high-performing even in the face of competing agendas and external pressures. This appears essential because seemingly intractable macro-level problems will only be solved by humans interacting at the micro-level, forming initiatives around key problems, and together staying committed until progress can be made and successful action can be scaled. “Affective ties to groups generate more widespread, more enduring, and lower-cost cooperation, because the expressive or intrinsic nature of the person-to-group ties makes people more willing to sacrifice their own interests for what they perceive as the collective good.” (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2009: 176)

CHAPTER FOUR

Cross-Boundary Collaboration

4.1 Why Do Humans Collaborate?

Just as Mead suggested that we need each other to bring forth our minds, our consciousness, we also need each other to get things done. Arguably, nothing is done without conversation, cooperation, and coordinated action with another. To move to action, we must engage others.

Humans are notable in the extent to which we participate in collective actions. Cooperation may be fundamental to life itself given its evidence throughout the biological realm. And it is certainly a fundamental human propensity to work in teams and form coalitions, coordinating the coordination of action. Understanding the psychological mechanisms that make complex cooperation possible is necessary to understanding organizational behavior, social systems, economics, and even politics (Olson 1965, Brewer and Kramer 1986, Ostrom 1990, Price et al. 2002). (Cosmides and Tooby 2013:213).

Historically, the area of human collaboration has been studied and explained primarily through the rational individual self-interest lens. Or as Granovetter observes, from the “atomized, *undersocialized* conception of human action.” (1985: 483) Searches in journals of psychological and sociological science turn up scant results for the topic ‘collaboration,’ preferring terms such as social interaction, coordination, and exchange. It is in the management and organizational journals where the concept of collaboration is found and studied, most often in the area of teams and team-building. Some of the earliest research on collaboration in organizations was undertaken by Aram, Morgan, and Esbeck (1971), attempting to study the association between collaborative relationships, individual satisfaction,

and organizational performance within sixteen product line groups. Given the era, their primary focus on the individual in teams was understandably very 'undersocialized'. But interestingly, it foreshadowed the research of Deci and Ryan mentioned earlier by finding significant associations between team collaboration and the satisfaction of the individual's need for self-actualization [autonomy], professionalism [competence], job conditions and status [relatedness] (Aram et al 1971: 292). The study also found an interesting interrelationship between high performance and knowledge-based risk taking, a non-hierarchical, more egalitarian approach to innovation and decision-making.

4.2 The Emphasis on Cognitive Studies

Today, cognitive research on theories of collaboration can be found in the literature on knowledge management, where collaboration is recognized as a primary process of developing and transferring tacit knowledge, and enabling innovation. And rather than talk of rituals and symbols for groups, there is more likely to be a mention of 'memes' as symbols and demonstrations of values and important cultural messages intentionally and rationally shared within a work system. This review will not provide a survey of this literature, as the thesis focus will be on the role of the social affective dynamic when collaborating in groups. However, several areas of research are relevant and worthy of review here.

One pertinent piece of research studies a complex cross-boundary, cross-organization collaboration at the micro-level focusing on the conditions and process of *cognitive* convergence. This thesis plans a similar methodological approach, but focusing instead on the conditions and process of *affective* convergence. Baba, Gluesing, Ratner, and Wagner (2004) believe their ethnographic study to have been one of the first accounts of "knowledge sharing in a natural team that is both globally distributed and culturally diverse." (p. 549) Their one mention of the role that emotion and affect play in the development of shared cognition indicates the need for this thesis research. "Given all of the

difficulties related to shared cognition in a globally distributed setting, it is likely that global team members will seek opportunities to reduce their need for interaction . . . especially if they have experienced affective conflict, which tends to produce mutual avoidance.” (p. 552) Yet reducing the need for interaction, and mutual avoidance had a negative impact on the performance in their case study. They observed it was only when self-interest was freed from factional allegiance that individuals reoriented their interests toward the global team as a whole and altered their mode of interaction to one that was more collaborative. (p. 580) Based on this observation, the reader is left wondering what the role positive interaction patterns may play in developing relational cohesion vs. mutual avoidance.

Gratton and Erickson (2007) surveyed members on 55 cross-boundary teams to determine eight significant ways to build collaboration. While this research was more at a meso-level, different than the micro-sociological approach emphasized in this thesis, it did show up some relevant findings - for example, the importance of building a shared identity, overcoming the negatives of a diverse group. Frequency of being physically together is a challenge in today’s virtual world and they found the quality of collaboration suffers as a result. Co-location, when possible, is key. There was a focus on building strong social relationships, without saying much about the emotional experiences. However, the intrinsic need for autonomy in pursuing the tasks and high relatedness to team members was clear. To some extent their findings conflicted with those of Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2009) in that *role clarity*, and *task ambiguity*, was very important to effective collaborative relationships. Finally, there was evidence of expanding emotional energy (EE) and cultural capital (CC) described by Collins (1976, 2009, 2010), for those participating in successful collaborations.

4.3 Complex, Cross-sector Research

Similar to Gratton and Erickson (2007) but taking it further, Wageman, Gardner, and Mortensen (2012) have commented on the changing ecology of teams and the direction new research is headed in understanding complex collaborations. Global trends such as value pluralism¹² and climate change, are having surprising and critical effects on the uses and methods of collaboration but have not yet been the subject of much teams research. (Wageman et al. 2012: 301) Conflicting with previous teams research, the authors state the drivers of effective teams that exhibit multiple characteristics of contemporary collaboration (i.e. globally dispersed, virtual, non-dedicated to only one team) demonstrates that members can and do perform well despite the lack of face-to-face interactions. (p. 304) Similar to the work of Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2009), they are finding that groups being *interdependent for a common purpose* (structural interdependence)¹³ is an important factor to building a successful social system of complex cross-boundary collaboration. More importantly, they assert “how the construction of interdependence toward a common goal is shifting before our eyes.” (Wageman, et al. 2012: 305)

Past research has shown that structural interdependence is an important construct in understanding team effectiveness because it is among the most powerful known drivers of collaborative behavior, more so than personal values, team-based rewards, perceived need to cooperate, or the quality of member relationships . . . there are global problems calling for

¹² Value pluralism has been thought to be important in two main ways. If values are plural, any theory that relies on value monism, e.g. hedonistic utilitarianism, is mistaken. The plurality of values is also thought to raise problems for rational choice. If two irreducibly distinct values conflict, it seems that there is no common ground that justifies choosing one over the other. (Chang 2002)

¹³ The degree to which the design of the work itself requires a group of people to interact and exchange resources . . . requires them to collaborate. (Wageman 1999)

ever-more-complex collaborations. The tasks call for structural interdependence, but the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources are distributed not only among many people but also among people from many organizations in many places, even among entities that might typically be in opposition to each other, such as business groups and environmental activist organizations collaborating on sustainability issues. People can be structurally interdependent now who neither would nor could have been before – and whether or not a teams scholar would call them a team. (p. 306)

The work of Chesbrough, Vanhaverbeke, and West (2006) and Chesbrough (2012) on ‘open innovation’ provides examples in the private sector, of groups that would years ago, never be considered as able to work together toward a shared goal, never labeled a ‘team’. Open innovation practices extend to suppliers, customers, partners, the community at large, and at times even to competitors. (Durkheim may not have been surprised by this phenomena but rather seen it as logical growth of the division of labor, and organic solidarity at work.) Just as cross-boundary collaboration to solve difficult global problems is growing, Chesbrough believes “designing and managing innovation communities is going to become increasingly important to the future of open innovation.” (Chesbrough 2012:26) Chesbrough, like many in business, has a cognitive/ knowledge management lens on this, and perhaps understates the emotional-affective side of the process.

Ostrom (1990) and colleagues (Ostrom et al. 1999) have dedicated much research to how to sustainably govern common resources that affect multiple stakeholders, countries, and interest groups. Her effort to address the “tragedy of the commons” greatly expanded successful approaches by illuminating eight key principles to follow in creating cross-boundary, shared governance of resources such as fisheries, forests, and fresh water. The problem of collective action is perhaps *the*

central theme of Ostrom's work, as it is for all social sciences. (Berge and van Laerhoven 2011: 178) And her work continues to spark further development and evolution of her principle-based approach in action (Acheson 2011; Berge and van Laerhoven 2011; Stern 2011). Her interest and deep exploration into how governing rules are generated and maintained has been a breakthrough in guiding successful efforts to bring multi-stakeholder groups with varying degrees of economic power together. Specifically, allowing players to first have face-to-face communication, second to sanction¹⁴ each other, and last to make agreements concerning future allocations (i.e. covenants) increased cooperation and shared commitment at every stage. (Acheson 2011: 326)

Much of Ostrom's work was at a more macro and cognitive level and dealt quite a bit with cross-government issues. However, one of the biggest takeaways from the work of Ostrom and her colleagues, which is relevant to this thesis, is the discovery that commitment needs to be *perceived* as shared in order for bonds to develop and trust to be maintained. An extension of this is that power needs to be balanced for this to occur, and transparency in place for the self-organizing, self-governing processes to stabilize. In other words, the participants need autonomy in designing their own contracts and not have them dictated from outside.¹⁵

For Wageman et al. (2012) self-governing teams is a trend that is growing for complex cross-sector initiatives today. According to the authors, it is also a relatively understudied form of group leadership structure. "Self-governing teams arise when complex problems require the resources and capabilities of multiple, independent entities – just the sort of problem the world is increasingly facing." (p.311)

In the non-profit and cross-sector areas, there is interesting research and new practice on collaborating across sectors for collective impact to be achieved. Kania and Kramer (2011; 2013) claim that the expectation that collaboration can occur

¹⁴ A mechanism of social control for enforcing a society's standards

¹⁵ Particularly related to design principles #3-7 (Ostrom 1990:90)

without a supporting infrastructure is one of the most frequent reasons why it fails. The concept of 'collective impact' adds more structured learning to broadened collaboration so that results can be achieved at scale rather than counting on the cumulative success of the isolated impact of many non-profits, competing for grant money. In the collective impact model, there is an emphasis placed on cross-organization, cross-sector collaboration and learning where learning happens simultaneously among all relevant stakeholders creating the cognitive convergence mentioned earlier. (Kania and Kramer 2013:6) Although innovative and intriguing, their research so far has not addressed any group affect element that keeps people at the table when their individual organizational agendas may pull them apart. There is an opportunity to round out and further strengthen this promising approach through research illuminating person-to-group ties at the micro-sociological level.

CHAPTER FIVE

Problems and Opportunities

Based on the review thus far, it is apparent that the social-emotional side of humans working together has been understudied and at the very least not well understood. The cognitive area, including knowledge management, has dominated the attention of organizational leaders and many research programs. This provides opportunities to deepen the field of understanding on what brings and holds people together when they share a common goal.

5.1 Balancing Cognitive Studies with Research on Social-affective Dynamics

According to Brief and Weiss (2002) perhaps the most exciting new area of research is that pertaining to group affective tone. Available theory is provocative, and growing empirical results now available generally support the ideas that have been advanced to explain how work group members come to share their feelings. (292) Others who are beginning to study emotion in organizations after decades of its absence believe this topic is a “growing and vibrant field of research with untapped potential.” (Ashkanasy and Humphrey 2011: 220) Yet there are challenges that need to be addressed for continued research to be of value.

According to Beck (1992) and Giddens (1991) the development of a risk society has changed the game in terms of how people will interact to get work accomplished. This is due to the popular observation that living with risk, complexity, and uncertainty rather than control and mastery, are characteristics of our time. Included in this circumstance is that jobs, projects and initiatives may exist one day, only to become unsupported soon thereafter. In this situation, people do not give

their loyalty to groups or to an assignment easily. Conditions true for Durkheim and even Collins may not exist in the same ways, and that challenges the stability and time limits of a thesis. For example, most cross-boundary collaboration today involves a significant amount of time where team members work virtually with one another. This flies in the face, or at least complicates, testing theories that emphasize members of a group being co-present, meeting frequently, or co-locating.

There is strong evidence that stability will increase cohesion and positive affect among team members, both of which tend to increase a team's viability over time. In teams with shifting membership, however, the stronger the bonds between members, the more difficult it becomes for new members to become integrated and high-performing. So high performance at one point may impede performance later. This leads Wageman et al. (2012) to recommend teams scholars "carefully conceptualize and define effectiveness *for a specified time-frame*" and measure performance longitudinally. (p. 308) This thesis will not be focused on measuring performance, but it will be important to join a team at the right time of its development to observe the targeted phenomena for this thesis.

5.2 Challenges of studying emotions in organizations

A researcher cannot expect that all people will be able to articulate emotional experience as it is occurring, especially since most workplace environments have conditioned people to speak in primarily cognitive and economic terms. Methods will have to triangulate on this phenomenon. Inability to put the feeling into words bars it from linguistic accessibility and thus from accessible consciousness, but not from phenomenal consciousness and various levels of awareness. "An emotion feeling in phenomenal and other nonlinguistic levels of consciousness retains its properties, including its power to motivate and regulate cognition and action. Thus, conceptualizing fully functional emotion feelings as processes in phenomenal consciousness (Panksepp 2005) provides an alternative way of explaining much of

what has been attributed by others to the psychological unconscious.” (Izard 2009:16) At the same time, the research of Frederickson (2000) illuminates another possible complication. “Global evaluations of past affective experiences are not merely perceived or felt; they are constructed.” (p. 579) Her research demonstrates a ‘peak and end’ rule, which says that two moments matter more in retrospect than the duration of collaboration or all other moments combined. Those two moments are: a) the most intense affective moment of that [collaboration] and b) the affect experienced at its end. (p. 585) This would have two ramifications for this research – that data be collected as the phenomena is occurring, and that particular attention be paid to peak emotional moments in the case study.

Many practitioners prefer research focused primarily on leaders as important variables in organizational and team success. Topics like emotional contagion (Hatfield et al. 1993) and emotional labor (Hochschild 1983) play well in this space as leaders consider how to model, manipulate, and dictate the affect of their organizational climate and culture. (Ashkanasy and Humphrey 2011) However, the ‘great leader’ lens is insufficient and may trivialize and obscure the social solidarity and relational cohesion processes that are a factor in successful self-governed cross-boundary teams.

Some argue that many actors joining cross-boundary collaborations come from highly scripted organizations. They are ‘straight-jacketed’ to represent the party line, not being fully given to the social bonding process. This actually, can make the research even more interesting. “ That actors are ‘corporate’ in that they represent positions or agencies does not mean that the interactionist perspective on social action is irrelevant. That these are ‘symbolic persons’ makes the dramaturgical and interpretive perspective more powerful, if it admits that these actors are motivated by corporate impression management and limited by organizational structures.” (Fine 1993: 79)

A most glaring example of the narrowness of organizational research to-date is the overemphasis of the study of mood at the expense of discrete emotions . . . Research on the consequences of affect looks at the effects of positive mood states on creativity or helping behavior. (Brief and Weiss 2002: 297) By taking a micro-sociological approach, discrete emotions and their relationship to group affect tone will be easier to identify. According to Fredrickson (2000) “steps to collect data on specific affects will be critical in future work because distinct affective states of the same valence and intensity carry different personal meanings.” (p. 594) These various sources of personal meaning are expected to dominate people’s thinking when they use past affective experiences to make decisions about the future. (p.596) – i.e. decisions such as staying committed to a shared purpose and to a specific initiative.

5.3 The Argument for a Qualitative Approach

Group effectiveness, performance, and well-being are most often studied today from a quantitative analytic perspective, often reducing elements in a research program to separate variables. (Deci and Ryan 2008, 2000; Wood, van Veldhoven, Croon, and de Menezes 2012; Wood and de Menezes 2011; Warr 2006, 2007)

There has also been an overemphasis on studying group collaborative dynamics from the position of performance. “Current research is driven by particular criteria. That is, researchers lay out the important dimensions of performance, look to see what the basic literature says about affect influencing those dimensions, and then demonstrate in the work setting the particular relationship . . . What has received less attention, but ultimately may be more useful, is research that is less focused on particular performance dimensions and more focused on broader affect processes.” (Brief and Weiss 2002: 298) The relationship between performance and positive group affect does need to be investigated over time, but given that affect at the work group level has been demonstrated to be a meaningful construct,

more effort ought to be expended to first understand the processes by which feelings do and do not come to be shared in the workplace. (p. 300) This is a primary goal of this thesis research.

Finally, individual and group emotions have been tied by many researchers to job satisfaction. Brief and Roberson (1989) discovered a paradox that remains troublesome today: Job satisfaction generally is construed in affective terms, but typically only its cognitive aspects are measured. It also tends to focus on individual feelings of one's job, rather than person-to-group ties.

It is time to unpack this topic while keeping a holistic view, and test some well-regarded theories (Lawler 2003; Collins 2009; Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2009; Thye, Lawler, & Yoon 2011) by choosing an appropriate case study in which to rely on the qualitative methods of ethnography, participant observation, open-ended interviewing, and content analysis. As Blumer (1969), Flyvbjerg (2001) established, theory and methodology are intertwined. "Because meaning emerges in social settings through interaction, researchers must enter those settings and observe interactions in order to understand the meanings people negotiate, experience, and attach to social life. This type of empirical observation has been at the foundation of some of the most influential studies of emotion." (Fields, Copp and Kleinman 2006: 173)

5.4 Conclusion: A Worthy Research Question

There is an opportunity to pursue meaningful research following micro-sociological methods in exploring a cross-boundary collaboration case study. This research could test and extend credible theories, among them Collins (2009, 2010), Lawler, Thye, and Joon (2009) and Thye, Lawler, and Yoon (2011) - these theories have much in common; and complement studies of similar method in the cognitive domain (Baba et.al. 2004). Well-known team researcher and organizational psychologist Hackman (2012) calls for a focus on questions of *conditions* not *causes*

in future research on complex teams and collaboration. In pursuing the research question, “Under what *conditions* will individuals subordinate a personal impact agenda on behalf of pursuing a collective purpose/impact?” the salience of person-to-group ties can be explored and the process by which individuals move from personal emotional experience to group shared affect and collective commitment to task can be further researched. Understanding the role of SDT (Deci and Ryan 2000, 2008), and concepts such as EE and CC (Collins 2009) as byproducts of social commitment and shared group affect, could go a long way in helping organizations create conditions for launching and supporting complex cross-boundary initiatives so that they more often survive and deliver valuable results.

CHAPTER SIX

Research Approach Part I: Strategy and Methodology

6.1 The Research Problem and Questions

The principal research aims of this thesis are to (1) explore how cross-boundary¹⁶ actors experience cooperating together to collectively impact a meaningful problem (2) enrich the body of knowledge in the area of Social Commitments Theory (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2009) through a single case study of a cross-organization collaboration. The phenomenon studied goes beyond the basics of team building. As cross-organizational teaming is required more often to address complex problems, the costs of failure are significant. And while many books and articles have discussed the mechanics in how to set up complex, cross-boundary initiatives for success, little has been done to understand the human experience, the person-to-group journey to shared commitment and sustained effort toward a common goal. Of course it is important to understand the rational, cognitive steps in making this work. Just as critical, and less studied, are the social-affective dynamics in which a commitment to a collective impact agenda can succeed – no matter what combination of organizations or sub-organizations are represented. While originating in the not-for-profit realm, Kania and Kramer's (2011) collective impact concept could be applied in any cross-sector initiative.

¹⁶ 'Cross-boundary' is a term that connotes people working with others who are not part of their immediate organizational unit. It assumes people working cross-boundary will not have the same immediate manager, 'boss', or stakeholders to be accountable to. This can be expanded to include those working in different companies as well as 'cross-sector' where individuals actually work together across government, business, and not for profit organizational boundaries.

Major research questions:

1. Under what *conditions* do individuals subordinate a personal impact agenda¹⁷ on behalf of pursuing a collective impact agenda?
2. How do participants explain their experience of pursuing a common goal across organizational boundaries?
3. What strengthens person-to-group ties in a complex collaboration?
4. What social and emotional factors influence shared commitment?
5. Why do actors stay committed in the face of personal agendas pulling them apart?

6.2 Theoretical Orientation, Research Purpose, and Why It Is Worth Doing

Blaikie (2010, 2011) defines social research as being either *basic* or *applied* in its purpose. The research for this thesis has its purpose primarily in completing Basic Research that intends to *explore, describe, and understand* the role that social-affective dynamics play in building shared commitment to a complex initiative spanning multiple organizational boundaries. Basic Research that *explores* conditions is given a substantial role by symbolic interactionists (Blumer 1969) and is particularly necessary where there is little research previously done. Basic research that *describes* the experience of participants adds important rigor to the research without which there may be nothing to understand or explain. Both exploratory and descriptive research serve the purpose of answering ‘what’ the phenomenon is. Rather than to explain, this research seeks to *understand* or answer ‘why’ according to the reasons participants give for their actions. According

¹⁷ ‘Agenda’ defined as a list or program of things to be done or considered

to Giddens (1976) *explanation* is produced by researchers looking in from the outside, while *understanding* comes from an inside view when researchers grasp the interpretations of the social actors involved. (Blaikie 2010: 72) This focuses on *verstehen* as opposed to causal explanations formulated by the researcher. Research on social-affective dynamics of cross-organization collaborations is relatively new research, making all the more important a focus on understanding through the direct experience of participants.

There is one area of Applied Research that is relevant to this thesis - in the area of *change*, where the question of 'how' can be addressed. Those interested in seeing impact at scale for social innovation would benefit from understanding more about all factors influencing success of complex initiatives that require collaboration across sectors. This is at the heart of large social system change and collective impact research (Kania and Kramer 2011; Senge 2008). While providing anything robust in the domain of *how to* increase shared commitment to social change is beyond the scope of this thesis, there is some early discovered information which may point toward further fruitful research. The cognitive aspects of organizing for systemic change have been developing over the years. However, the social-affective aspects of what holds well-intentioned people together toward a shared goal in the face of competing agendas and interests is less well understood. Put together, these aspects are all important to understanding how to consistently achieve collective impact at scale.

6.3 Methodological Approach and Research Strategy

"All research is interpretive; it is guided by the researcher's set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied." (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 31)

To understand the experience of those working on a cross-boundary collaboration,

a micro-sociological approach has been adopted. "Micro-sociology has special significance in the empirical basis of sociology, because everything that happens socially is in a here-and-now sequence of particular people in action. Meso and macro sociology are perspectives constructed from aggregating, comparing and abstracting micro-sociological evidence, including such banal processes as asking people questions and then subjecting the answers to mathematics, or verbally describing them in nouns referring to entities which are mostly not actually seen in visible micro-interactions." Micro-sociology is above all a method. (Collins 2011: 1) Collins believes that anything that can be said about society at the macro-level must be observed at the micro-level as well.

According to Collins, Durkheim (1893) and his follower Goffman (1967), provide our best basis for a comprehensive theory of humans. The philosophical bias of some phenomenological sociologists focuses on humans as thinkers rather than as emotional beings of action. The Durkheimian premise is that *society is subhuman*, meaning that the "distinctively human forms of cognition and communication are *built on top of* the preexisting capacity for social ties; they are not the basis of it." (Collins 2009: 54-5) Additionally Durkheim's insight into the social nature of cognition is similar to that of Mead (1934, 1956), Maturana and Varela (1980), Collins (2009) and others - that is, human consciousness arises through interaction with others. Hence, to *understand*, the social-affective elements of humans working cross-boundaries toward a common objective must be first studied at the micro-sociological level where interactions occur. For this reason, a micro-ethnographic case study approach was taken to answer the research questions of this thesis.

Durkheim was one of the first to advocate for an Inductive Strategy where theories are born from observations and not the other way around. To study society as it *actually* occurs, the sociologist must first set aside his or her own assumptions and biases to make observations in terms of external characteristics of the phenomenon. For sociological researchers this was further reinforced with the birth of grounded theory introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Today the

Inductive approach is still quite popular among social scientists, but in its pure form has limitations that make it vulnerable to criticism. These criticisms include that Inductive Research can at best only produce a description of a pattern or association, not a cause. Yet, even well-established patterns require an explanation. Popper and others argue that all observation is interpretation, theoretical constructions and not derived from observed facts. (Blaikie 1993: 140-2)

Two alternative strategies have developed that would be useful to this thesis and overcome the limits of a purely Inductive approach. Retroduction and Abduction are based on cyclic or spiral processes rather than linear logic of Deduction and Induction. Retroduction¹⁸ is advocated in both the natural and social sciences and Abduction is now advocated as the appropriate method of theory construction in Interpretive social science. (Blaikie 1993: 162) While the Inductive research strategy can be used to answer 'what' questions, and Deductive and Retroductive can be used to answer 'why' questions, the Abductive research strategy can answer both types of questions. "However, it answers 'why' questions by producing understanding rather than an explanation, by providing reasons rather than causes." (Blaikie 2010: 89) It is therefore a good fit for the Interpretive tradition where it can be useful in moving between everyday concepts and meanings, lay accounts from case study participants, and social science explanations. (Mason 2002: 180; Blaikie 2010)

Abductive reasoning takes the approach that theory, data generation and analysis are developed simultaneously in a dialectical process. (Mason 2002: 180) The Abductive Strategy has many layers and for purposes of this research, can be described in stages:

- 1) *Listening* – discovering how social actors view and understand their world.
- 2) *Coding* – abstract or generate technical concepts from these lay concepts.

However, social actors do need to be able to recognize themselves in the

¹⁸ Retroduction is popular with Critical Realists and takes the approach of discovering underlying mechanisms to explain observed regularities by documenting and modeling regularities and motives to establish which mechanisms provide the best answer.

researcher's account.

- 3) *Member checking* – a process in which social actors are invited to respond to the researcher's account of their world.
- 4) *Researcher input* – supplementing understanding derived from the social actors with further input from the researcher. However, this strategy is 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' in approach and tries to present descriptions and understanding that reflect the social actors' points of view rather than adopting entirely the researcher's point of view.

(Blaikie 2010: 91)

The ontological assumptions that go with this approach and are consistent with this researcher's view on the social world fit the *Idealist* realm. These include:

- Reality consists of representations that are the creation of the human mind.
- Social reality is made up of shared interpretations that social actors produce and reproduce as they go about their everyday lives.
- There is a reality that exists independently of socially constructed realities, which can place constraints on or provide opportunities for reality constructing activities.
- How human beings interpret their world, determines what they will do.

The epistemological assumptions behind this research strategy are:

- Constructionist – Since social reality is constructed jointly, social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. Joining this process to observe, engage and learn is important to understanding the phenomenon. Being an objective, outside observer is not possible.
- Understanding the phenomena to be studied at the micro-sociological level, has to be done as it is occurring; interviews must be conducted while participants are engaged in the collaborative initiative (both in and outside of group meetings.)

- Dialogue, between and among social actors (including the researcher) in the collaboration, will be essential to access conversation beyond information exchange and should reveal person-to-group ties as they develop.
- Inviting reflection will aide in interpreting the experience and clarifying the meaning participants' put on their interactions.

Table 6.1: Summary Logic of an Abductive Research Strategy:

Aim:	To describe and understand shared commitment in terms of social actors' meanings, emotions, and motives
Ontology:	Idealist
Epistemology:	Interpretivist; Constructionist
Start:	<i>Explore and describe</i> social-affective dynamics in building shared commitment to a complex initiative spanning multiple organizational boundaries.
Finish:	1) <i>Understand</i> and produce a social scientific account from the lay accounts of the social actors that reflect their points of view rather than adopting entirely the researcher's point of view. 2) Provide recommendations for future research that will help to further illuminate <i>conditions</i> whereby individuals working in complex cross-boundary innovation initiatives can more easily subordinate a personal organizational agenda on behalf of pursuing a meaningful collective agenda

6.4 Proposed Methods for Data Generation

Multiple methods are essential when developing knowledge useful for theory *and* practice. (Mohrman and Lawler 2011) For the chosen field case, the research approach included the following methods:

- 1) Participate at regular in person meetings to gain context and make contacts. Official initiative documents (e.g. charter) would be analyzed for further background.
- 2) When ready and after designing for any confidentiality concerns, the researcher joins the effort as a *participant observer*, (Bryman 2008:410) where initiative members are aware of the researcher role and the participation in select meetings and activities. Field notes and a journal of the researcher's experience would be kept.
- 3) The use of *semi-structured* interviewing with selected participants in between meetings and group activities. (*See Appendix A for a complete list of possible interview questions designed for this case.*) This would be to capture their thoughts and feelings on the experience of working together toward the collective impact goal. The total number of interviewees not to exceed 15 people. These participants are chosen with a view toward meeting the criteria of individuals coming from different organizations with separate agendas for reaching the initiative goals, who will be tested to subordinate that agenda on behalf of the group's collective impact agenda.
- 4) A proposed meeting with the governing committee, on some regular basis (e.g. monthly) to *dialogue* about what is being learned and how that is affecting next steps in the initiative's process.

6.4.1 The Original Research Plan

The initial plan was that after each interview, to reflect back what has been captured and immediately ask each individual informant for further input,

corrections, points of emphasis (affective and cognitive). Coding of themes would be done by the researcher and final themes would be shared in dialogue with the group to test for accuracy of understanding. Individual accounts would not be shared with the group however. To illustrate themes, quotes from participants would be used. Individual statements and quotes would remain anonymous. The promise of methods that involve participants in data collection is that they enable the development of knowledge the individuals and team can use immediately while providing scholar-practitioners with a data set for theory development. (Mohrman and Lawler 2011) Findings of this research would be compared to existence of theoretical conditions put forth in Social Commitments Theory (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2009). These conditions, described by the authors, include (p. 194-5):

- a. Presence of a shared goal
- b. Diffuse and overlapping responsibilities (i.e. high levels of 'jointness')
- c. Joint responsibility for success
- d. Relatively equal power¹⁹
- e. Strong emotions people are willing to conserve (or avoid) as much as possible.
- f. Congruent goals between the participant organizations and the initiative (i.e. support for the initiative by those sponsoring the members of the initiative)

The authors propose that (a -d) are conditions that create shared responsibility, building social commitment. And (e and f) are what determine the strength of those social commitments. Depending on what actual themes emerged through the research, comparisons to other theories may be appropriate.

A final report out of themes and other findings would be done live with the team so that a 'multilogue' (Hosking 2011) could take place. The focus of this conversation

¹⁹ Lawler & Proell (2001) propose a 'power-process' model by which to evaluate perceived power *capabilities*, (whether used or not), and power *tactics* when someone decides to use their power.

would be to reflect as a group, share learning, and discuss implications for their joint success going forward. This would be consistent with the Collective Impact method already adopted by the collaborative team, where there is a value and emphasis put on shared learning. (Kania and Kramer 2011) According to Maturana and Bunnell (1999), change is more about what is conserved by those working together than by what is externally forced upon actors, such as the modern day notion of “management of change.” What allows social actors and teams to decide what is worth keeping and building upon (and by extension what can be let go of) is in the awareness building through group reflection and dialogue regarding what is serving them well, and what yet needs to be created. Maturana and Varela describe this as a natural process that is the “throbbing of all life.” (1987:100) So the final group conversation serves to confirm research findings as well as raise awareness of what the group should keep, or invest in further.

6.5. Theoretical Sampling / Selection of Case Study

In theoretical or purposive sampling, the process of data generation and analysis is viewed dynamically and interactively. The theoretical position at the beginning of the research comes from the literature review and the researcher’s early observations or direct involvement in previous situations. As the research continued, the understanding of person-to-group ties in cross-boundary initiatives was informed by the coding and theming of the actual data. While theoretical sampling can involve many quotas and targets, for the purpose of this thesis, a single case study of a complex, cross-boundary collaboration was chosen. Rather than view data cross-sectionally across many scenarios, this particular research strategy was best addressed through a deeper understanding of the intricately interwoven elements of a rich case. (Mason 2002: 138) For this thesis a case is the methodological choice for the source of research data. (Blaikie 2010: 187) A case that can be studied at the micro-sociological level using methods previously mentioned is true and consistent to a strategy of understanding how things work in context. Additionally, “The advantage of the case study is that it

can ‘close in’ on real-life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice.” (Flyvbjerg 2001: 82)

Potential cases²⁰ considered included:

- A. An ‘early learning hub’ (ELH) in the state of Oregon, made up of cross-sector players (government, business, and not-for-profit) collaborating on behalf of the community children’s well-being and school readiness prior to entering grade school.
- B. A collaboration between an international non-profit organization, agricultural business, and local governments attempting to manage fresh water cross-region in the Mississippi River Basin
- C. An acceleration of product innovation between corporations, government agencies, and non-profits in the homeland security and emergency response domain.
- D. A global cross-sector sustainable fisheries initiative funded by the World Bank and other private foundations.

‘A.’ was selected for the field study. This was based on timing and life cycle of the initiative; the strength of sponsorship for the collaboration research and the chosen methods. “The most important practical issues that influence the adoption of case study methods concern the availability of data, data consistency, the ease (or difficulty) of fieldwork, and the need for place-specific knowledge and skills.” (Poteete, Janssen, and Ostrom 2010: 37) The list of potential case studies from which to select were gathered based on the researcher’s ability to address these issues. The informed consent and support of the participants in the chosen cross-boundary collaboration was absolutely essential as well.

²⁰ A. and D. are following a Collective Impact methodology for cross-sector collaboration

As a micro-ethnography, this case study approach allowed myself as the researcher to be a participant observer in team meetings, during crucial decisions processes, face-to-face, and on phone calls over a period of approximately seven months. (Bryman 2008: 403) As Glaser and Strauss articulated “a firsthand immersion in a sphere of life and action – a social world – different from one’s own yields important dividends . . . [he/she benefits] both as a sociologist and as a human being who must ‘make out’ in that world.” (1967: 226) Being able to display genuine understanding and sympathy for the different actors permitted sufficient trust so that I was truly invited in to important events, conversations, and deliberations. Without this trust, the analysis would have suffered.

Any of these potential cases would be atypical to historic team research in that the traditional employer/employee relationship for project governance does not exist. As Hal Hamilton of the Sustainable Food Lab²¹ states, “They are not joining an organization per se – they are joining a collaboration.” However, a different type of power dynamic was expected to be at play. Non-hierarchical stakeholder and collegial relationships were found to be the governing context for negotiation, indirect influence, and pursuit of a shared mission. These sorts of complex, cross-sector collaborations are emerging more and more to address cross-boundary challenges that cannot be solved by single organizations. (Kania & Kramer 2011) As mentioned previously, the practice of constructing interdependence toward a common goal has been shifting significantly over the past decade. (Wageman, et al. 2012: 305). This makes the need for this specific research timely.

²¹ <http://www.sustainablefoodlab.org/>

Food Lab co-director, Hal Hamilton honored with [2013 James Beard Leadership Award](#).

6.6. Validation and Coding Strategies; Analytical Principles

With the chosen research approach, there was a need for systematic interactions between data and ideas. The emergent properties of Abductive Research design and data analysis are in constant dialogue (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 301).

Coding (and theming) of data is a cyclical act. Saldana (2013) advocates that qualitative research codes are “essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story that, when clustered together according to similarity and regularity (a pattern), they actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections.” (p. 8) Ultimately integration puts it all together. While Saldana is quite thorough in laying out at least 24 coding methods and strategies, several were initially selected that would have been a fit for this research strategy. Holistic, Structural and Provisional coding methods were considered as they were consistent with an Interpretive exploratory approach. ‘Theming the data’ was to be accomplished once any selected coding was completed.

Holistic Coding by definition does not occur line by line. Rather, it is an attempt to grasp basic themes by absorbing them as a whole. (Saldana 2013: 142) It is a good initial choice for research with a wide variety of data, self-standing units, such as this thesis produces. This includes interview transcripts, field notes/diaries, group reflections and dialogue. It is a straightforward approach that should make it easiest to engage the participants in the process of reflecting on what they have said, heard, and experienced. (p. 143) The researcher’s participant observation field notes authored in the first person are certainly worthy of coding as well since they capture relational interaction, analytical insights and include important interpretations of the team’s social life. (p. 16)

Structural Coding (referred to by some as ‘Utilitarian Coding’) is a good qualitative, inquiry-based complement to Holistic Coding. It is particularly appropriate for studies involving multiple participants, standardized or semi-structured protocols, and exploratory investigations to gather lists of major themes. Some sources

suggest that this approach is *best* suited for analyzing interview transcripts. (Saldana 2013: 84) It is usually applied by starting with each specific research question, then probing to understand the participant's response. The responses to each question are put into the related structural code for that research question. Structural Coding usually results in the identification of large segments of text on broad topics, which can later be analyzed for themes. (p. 86-7)

This research was not approached as a clean sheet of paper. *Provisional Codes* were generated upfront based on the work of Lawler, Thye, & Yoon 2009; Thye, Lawler, & Yoon 2011.²² However, these codes were held lightly. The intention was to revise, modify, delete, or expand based on actual findings. (Saldana 2013: 144) In practice, these coding methods can work together to lump the data in a way that prepares it for the building of themes to meet the research strategy as outlined earlier. According to Blaikie (2010: 196), certain authors following analytic induction as a logic for theory development (including Yin 2003, Platt 1988, and Mitchell 1983) believe case study research requires or at least benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data gathering and analysis.

It is often useful to *write memos* on, as well as code, one's field notes. (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 108). These memos can serve to identify specific examples for themes as they occur to the researcher and help with the theming process in general. They are an aid to the generation of concepts and theory. They also can serve as a reminder about terms being used, become building blocks for reflection, and help the researcher to crystallize ideas and not lose track of key insights. (Bryman 2008: 547). These memos could be shared with thesis supervisors as a way of providing updates on the progress of the research. Ultimately this research did not specifically include a "memo-writing" component, however for all the reasons listed above it was useful for this researcher to capture and organize emerging thought and reflections using a field journal.

While for some researchers, a *theme* is more or less, the same as a code, for others a

²² Research into Social Commitments Theory draws on Durkheim's Theory of Ritual Solidarity

theme transcends any single code and is rather built up from groups of codes. (Bryman 2008:554) Saldana defines a theme as an outcome of coding or analytical reflection, not something that is itself coded. (2013:14) For this project, a framework was used to identify key themes and note specific *in vivo* quotes that gave them color, substance and meaning. Two things kept the themes both grounded and relevant: the collaboration with the participants in the theming process, and the fluency of the researcher in their technical and relational work together. The latter is both enabled by and a benefit of the case study method.

To summarize the analytical principles used in compiling and understanding the data from this research:

- a. Transparency was paramount. Individual participants validated that the data captured accurately portrayed what they experienced.
- b. This was an Abductive Research strategy - learning was iterative and understanding developed through conversation for shared meaning of the data.
- c. The analysis was reflective on several levels:
 - a. The researcher self-reflection through journaling
 - b. The dialogue with interviewees and later with a larger group on what they were learning about the conditions that support a strong, shared commitment to the collective goal and outcomes.
- d. The methods and the analysis were intended to approach the study of group collaboration through the eyes and experience of the people who were living and hence developing the phenomenon. As a participant observer, the researcher played a role in the experience and brought a unique perspective. This perspective was not to dominate or drown out the voices and perspectives of the other participants.

6.7 Anticipating Ethical, Moral, and Political Issues

[Speaking in the first person seems most appropriate beginning in this section to convey commitment to principles and healthy, useful outcomes. Given the epistemological assumptions outlined, the first person will be used for the remainder of this paper.]

As mentioned, transparency is of foundational importance in this research and was accomplished in several ways. *Respondent validation* (Bryman 2008: 377) was used in that all interviews were summarized and sent back to the individual informants to confirm I was not putting words in their mouths or interpreting their words only through my filters. This is particularly important because I was focusing on the affective and social experience of each interviewee. It is extremely important I did not impose my own emotions into the interpretation of another's words and observed actions. Documents used by the program team to record the group progress were another source for checking accuracy and seeking to understand. These included the official notes and action items recorded from the meetings. In addition, I scheduled regular dialogues with the sponsors (aka Board Chair and Executive Director) to share observations as a researcher, and capture their own reflections on the group process of the initiative. My intention was by being transparent in approach and in findings, participants would not worry about a hidden agenda held by either the sponsors or myself.

Informed consent was received from all the participants in the research process, beginning with the steering committee for the initiative. When the Board officially approved going forward with this research, I still needed to partner with the sponsors to make sure all ethical and privacy concerns were addressed upfront for everyone participating. It is necessary to keep names anonymous and not record any interaction where a participant has not agreed to fully participate in

my research. Only those who wished to be interviewed were considered and if any member of a working group I may be visiting had not wanted me there, I would have left and not used research from that group. (*See Appendix B for Information and Informed Consent form*)

Hidden agendas on the part of sponsors could have existed in letting me into their conversations to conduct research. These may or may not have been overtly explained to me, so as part of my role, I was careful to explore the intentions and concerns of the sponsors upfront. I imagined potential hidden agendas including trying to control the research process, gaining access to member gossip about the leadership and program management team, learning if people are really as sincere as they wish to be perceived, etc. Much like Bridges (1989) who struggled with creating case studies within a police department, I imagined hearing something that would indicate work is not happening according to shared expectations. I was careful to spend time upfront with sponsors reviewing the purpose and philosophy of approach for this research and be clear that I would not be there to report or evaluate group or individual performance. I am there to observe and understand *conditions* that contribute (or not) to members acting to subordinate an individual organizational agenda on behalf of a collective goal. Finally, given that I am a management consultant by trade, I needed to make sure there were clear boundaries around how I was to appropriately participate. For example, I was not there to facilitate team meetings or mediate disputes. This needed to be clearly articulated and discussed ahead of time for my benefit as well as the participants in the collaboration initiative. More on how this all played out is discussed in Section 7.6.

I needed to make sure I heard back from the sponsors that they really did understand what the intention of the research was and why creating trust through the research process itself could be an enormous benefit. The sponsors for this field study project were already focused on trust-building as a critical success factor. Most cross-boundary collaboration leaders would do the same.

Collaboration without a common 'boss' usually means people are volunteering their time and can opt out easily. Trust is always essential for an initiative like this to move forward. However, I needed to feel confident of this understanding through their own reflections back to me, acknowledging the importance of these principles. And as previously stated, I needed to confirm there was informed consent with everyone involved. This began when I received the 'go ahead' to communicate directly with all the players – as a group and as individuals – and I was able to explain the research aims, methods, and answer any questions that arose.

Probably the most challenging ethical dilemma I anticipated was being in **the role of the observer**. McCotter (2001) refers often to the work of P. Lather (1986, 1994) when she discusses how to deal ethically being in this position. Criteria that McCotter says Lather recommends for research designs are reflexive subjectivity, face validity, catalytic validity, and triangulation of methods. I do believe my stated method allowed a fair amount of *triangulation* as listed above. The *reflexive subjectivity* struck me as a good idea because, as stated previously, I believe that in social science research, the observer cannot be separated from the observed even if he/she wanted to be. To try to maintain total (and false) objectivity could result in aberrant conclusions.²³ Keeping a journal on how my own assumptions were effected by the process and findings seemed both worthwhile and important to do. *Face validity* was built in as the notes were fed back to the participants following each interview. The group conversation on final themes also validated key insights. I would say that *catalytic validity* was built into this research method through convening the group of participants to hear the results and to comment themselves on what they are hearing and learning and wish to leverage from the experience. Finally, *internal validity* or *confirmability* (Denzin & Lincoln 2008: 33) can be considered a particular strength of

²³ My point of view on this is greatly influenced by the work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (1980) on the Biology of Cognition and the role of the observer. They are clear that our biology does not make it possible to separate how we see from what we see, and that the observer acts upon what he/she observes, influencing the observed.

ethnographic research. And in this case, as I stayed close to the initiative over a period of time, I ensured a high level of congruence between concepts and observations over time. (Bryman 2008: 376)

Participant observation was carefully considered. As previously mentioned, this is a 'micro-ethnography'²⁴ in which I was joining the collaboration over a period of seven months. In Bryman (2008: 410-11) there is discussion of this role from several viewpoints. Bryman summarizes the continuum of Gold (1958) putting 'complete covert participant' on one end of the spectrum, with a completely 'detached observer' on the other end. Neither of these extreme roles would fit for this case study. Since trust is essential, pretending to be someone other than a researcher is ethically wrong and the sponsors would never support it. Being a totally detached and objective observer did not fit with the research ontology and would not have helped me see the world through the eyes of my research subjects. It really isn't participant observation at all.

The two roles in the middle are that of 'participant-as-observer' and 'observer-as-participant.' (Bryman 2008: 411) The difference between these two is the latter is mainly an interviewer with some observation but no participation. While I imagined some meetings I would attend, such as Board Meetings, as fitting this category, when I joined the working group I would be in the participant-as-observer role where other group members knew my role as researcher but I participated in learning from presentations, opening rituals, and I lent a hand as needed in the mechanics of the meeting. The risk of participant-as-observer can be that of 'going native' where I could have identified with the project and developed a strong opinion and influence on the people and direction of their shared work. However, 'going native' is not an inevitable risk of ethnography. (Bryman 2008: 412) This was a legitimate concern, especially given my

²⁴ In a micro-ethnography, there is generally a focus on a particular aspect of a topic. (Bryman 2008: 403) In this case, that aspect would be the *affective-social experience* of social actors as they build shared commitment and work together toward the vision of the collaborative initiative.

professional interests. However as will be discussed in Section 7.6, this was successfully avoided.

Gans (1968) offers an alternative way to view participant observation in an ethnographic case study. He sees three roles that coexist in any field research project: total participant, researcher-participant, and total researcher. The researcher will employ each of these roles at different times in the study. As 'total participant,' the researcher may become completely involved in a particular situation, resuming a researcher stance once the situation has unfolded. As 'researcher-participant' she is only semi-involved in a situation so that she can function fully as a researcher in the course of that situation. As 'total researcher' she will observe without any involvement. These dynamic roles made sense to me. In a previous study I found myself totally involved being on a field trip with a group that was learning the context for their work together. I was an equal participant in all activities designed during that trip including the debrief and Q&A at the end. When that same group was attending a launch event, I saw myself in the researcher-participant role, attending breakouts, asking clarifying questions, but primarily sticking to my notes and observations. Finally, in attending a public meeting where various people were presenting results, I was a total researcher; just taking notes and not participating in any content decisions, flow of the meeting, or the conversations that ensued. I saw the research with this case as involving all of these roles at one time or another.

So, to minimize the risks of going native or inappropriately taking on a participant role, I adopted the following principles and practices:

1. I will not insert (nor allow) myself as a go-between in conversations between members of the group I am studying.
2. Prior to the beginning of the research, I will negotiate appropriate areas of participation in the working session. These will include participation in learning the context and the project specifics; participating in social greeting conversations, answering questions as a visiting member of the initiative;

- helping as needed with impartial assistance such as writing things on a flip chart (no facilitation). This will be put in writing and communicated upfront.
3. I will journal on all my activities and reflect on my role. I will proactively take all questions as to my role to my advisers for their perspective.

Other potential concerns specific to the chosen case:

- The purpose and primary goal of this specific collaboration is to impact child learning readiness across the entire community. The organization of this coalition was not to involve nor observe directly any child or classroom. It was rather a structure for engaging resources across community sectors so they would be coordinated and effective in their impact. This research was not interested in the content of the ELH goal areas but rather it was focused on the social phenomenon of working together cross-boundaries toward a shared and meaningful outcome. Any of the potential cases mentioned previously would have been just as relevant to this research topic.
- The sponsors of this initiative were interested in the learning that would come from this research, as it informs Collective Impact work going forward. Sharing output will be valuable and how it is shared will be important. As mentioned, there was a planned dialogic session that discussed the findings and had participants and sponsors reflect on what was useful and true to them. Simply sending a final report would not have been valuable and could have been misunderstood.

Table 6.2: Research Timetable

	Oct 2013	Nov	Dec	Jan 2014	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct-Dec 2014
Finalize Research Design Chapter	X												
Ethical Review	X	X											
Choose Case Study		X	X										
Secure Informed Consent; Contract With Sponsors			X										
Field Work Research				X	X	X	X	X	X				
Analysis								X	X	X			
Write-up									X	X	X	X	X
Submission													X

6.8 Proposed Uses of This Research

This study will interest various audiences who are seeking to design successful cross-boundary initiatives. Most interested will be consultants and leaders from all sectors (business, government, and not-for-profit) who want to increase effectiveness and accelerate action through launching and successfully completing complex initiatives which require more than a single entity (e.g. function, department, organization, sector) to accomplish. Currently there are many ‘how to’ books and articles on the process of managing and leading complex projects. These are mostly focused on rational-cognitive processes. This research may be one of only several (and perhaps the only in the qualitative space) that looks more closely at what holds human beings together on behalf of something bigger than their own individual agendas, even when there is incentive and pressure to walk away. This was done by exploring and understanding the social-affective dynamics that contributed to shared commitment in working cross-boundaries.

This research can contribute immediately to the growing research regarding *Collective Impact* in the area of social innovation, particularly in working cross-sector on social and environmental issues. (Kania and Kramer 2011; Senge et al. 2008; Senge et al. 2015) Also interested will be those studying high commitment organizations, cross-boundary collaboration, HRD professionals interested in supporting their organizations' success in new and more meaningful ways, future and current leaders of organizations who believe the conditions and processes for living and working together positively impacts the achievement of shared goals. Those that study and consult on ethics in management/leadership may find this research useful in helping organizations transition to more socially healthy and congruent ways of operating.

Most research done over the past few decades to develop and test theory embodied in social commitments theory (i.e Identity, Relational Cohesion and Affect Theory of Social Exchange) has been of a quantitative nature (Lawler and Yoon 1996; Lawler and Thye 2006; Thye, Lawler, and Yoon 2011). This thesis provides a qualitative look at principles and conditions already articulated by social commitments theory and provides a roundedness and richness of data, particularly on the social-affective element.

This thesis may inspire other case study research to further develop relevant theory for applied purposes and is only a beginning in understanding conditions that support person-to-group ties in cross-boundary collaborative initiatives. For those following a traditional grounded theory approach, a useful theory of social-affective conditions that commit persons to a collective effort to make a difference will ultimately require not only a sufficient number of general concepts but also accumulation of a vast number of diverse case studies in different situations. (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 243)

CHAPTER SEVEN

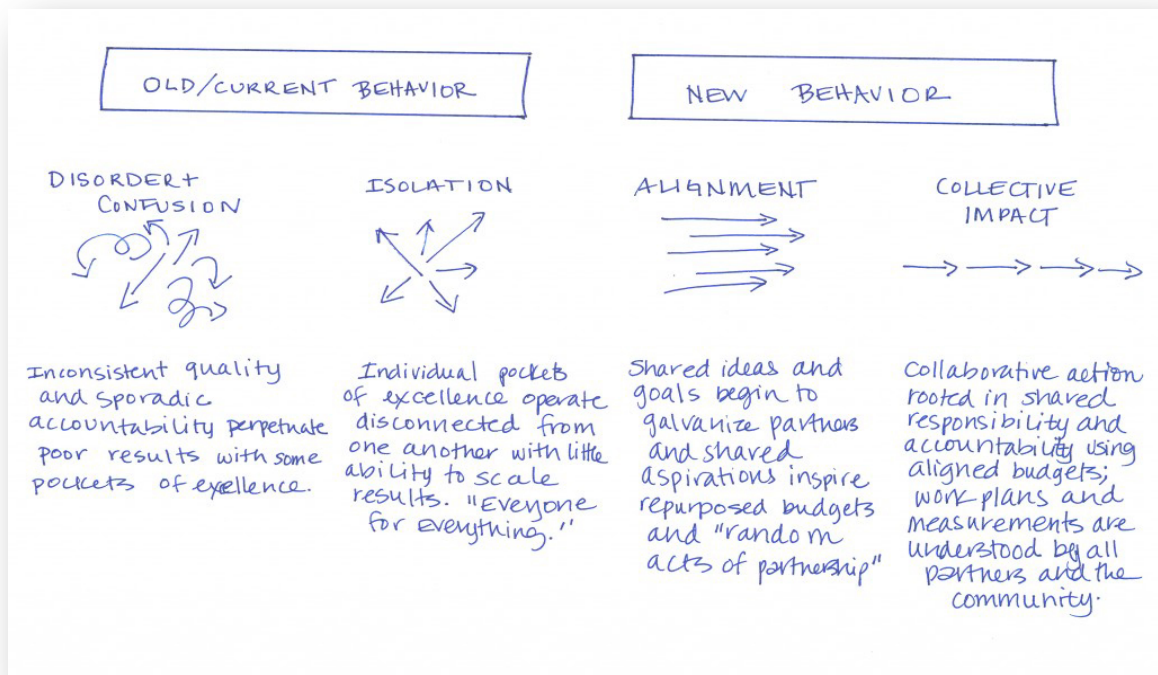
Part 2: The Research Approach and Fieldwork

7.1 Research Site and Participants

As mentioned previously, this research focuses on a single case study, the Early Learning Hub (ELH) in one county, in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. This particular case was chosen among several alternatives because of the organization's readiness and its enthusiastic interest in this research. The site is situated within an hour of the researcher's home, simplifying travel logistics and expense. Follow up meetings to clarify observations and interview content were relatively easy to negotiate. Most meetings I attended were located at the central office of the ELH, where the three staff members resided and where there were several conference rooms available. Most interviews were conducted offsite at participants' home offices or at a coffee shop of their choosing.

The illustration below is taken from the ELH executive director's introductory slide program used to orient new members. It is intended to briefly explain the purpose of a collective impact approach in dealing with a community-wide social challenge. The graphic was part of slide presentation intended to explain why a collective impact approach was different from previous attempts to provide services to children in the community through organizations operating separately, and what new behavior was being sought as an outcome in adopting this new approach.

Figure 7.1 Purpose of a Collective Impact Approach



The model conveyed through this drawing argues in favor of a *Collective Impact (CI)* approach to improving the community's growing challenge of children's readiness to learn and succeed in school. The aim is to have government agencies, non-profits, and interested businesses pool their expertise and programs to pursue funding together on behalf of something larger than their individual organizations' *isolated impact*. As reviewed earlier, on-going research by Kania and Kramer (2011; 2013) argues persuasively for this emerging approach to solving complex social problems. It is important to note that this case study is not about the content or specific mission of the ELH. In other words, children, families, and classrooms were not studied. Rather individuals from the administrative agencies and private organizations whose mission it is to serve this population were the participants in this field research. And the ELH as the 'coordinating body' for this effort was studied as the central organization. The ELH case study is intended to be a *common* case study (Yin 2014: 52) or as Bryman (2008: 56) defines, an *exemplifying* case

study chosen because it “epitomizes a broader category of cases” in the area of complex cross-boundary collaboration. More specifically it represents a typical Collective Impact effort, a context for which the research question is ideally suited. *Further background information on the ELH and their “First 2000 Days Partnership” can be found in the Appendix C.*

Case study methods usually involve multiple sources of evidence (Bryman 2008; Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Yin 2014). Typically these sources may include several of the following: direct and participant observation, open-ended interviews, archival records, documents, and surveys. The use of multiple sources increases the construct validity of the case study. (Yin 2014:121). The field data collection for this case study began November 1, 2013 and ended July 1, 2014. Multiple sources of evidence were collected during that time. As researcher, I joined the newly formed Early Learning Hub (ELH) as a participant observer, attending all Board meetings and all meetings of one (of four) of their Collective Action Teams (CAT). During this time I was careful to observe social-affective dynamics and keep a field diary of my own experience and reflections. Fourteen semi-structured interviews with various members of the Board, the ELH staff, and the CAT were completed. I also participated in the official ELH online ‘BaseCamp’ information exchange system and counted on two key informants to assist in making connections with interviewees and in expanding my understanding of the vernacular. Finally, there were ten key documents reviewed as part of this study and included in the theming of the data. My ability to ‘join’ the ELH for an extensive period of time served to increase the internal validity of this research (Bryman 2008: 376).

Figure 7.2

2014 Early Learning Hub Structure



* Participant observation involved *all* ELH Board meetings; *all* CAT-Literacy meetings. Participated in *several* conversations with ELH Staff informants outside of meetings. All participant interviews came from these specific subgroups, with the exception of one.

Figure 7.2 shows the structure of the ELH and my role as participant observer is noted with an asterisk. While I did not join every Collective Action Team, the sponsors felt the Literacy CAT was most mature and would provide the best diversity of participation in the study. As will be discussed in Section 7.7, participants compared themes to their experience in the other two CATs, providing an insightful point of triangulation.

7.2 Method One: Participant Observation

“The most advanced form of understanding is achieved when researchers place themselves within the context being studied.” (Flyvbjerg 2001:83) This is the only reliable way that a researcher can hope to understand the motives and emotions of

social actors. And to be successful, the researcher must establish a rapport where authentic sharing will occur. A relationship with participants was successfully built on trust, respect, disclosure and reciprocity. All who were interviewed appreciated the quality of listening during interviews and this seemed to encourage people to go deeper into their excitement as well as their fears and concerns. Connections were easy to establish based on my being similarly curious as other participants, and enjoying the banter and relational ties that come with working together over time.

As Gans (1968) stipulates, the researcher may wear several hats during an ethnographic case study. The role of *total researcher* was assumed at most Board meetings for the ELH. At those meetings I observed, took notes, and recorded reflections on the dynamics of the group, but I did not engage in the conversation or proceedings. The one exception was when the Chair of the Board asked for a presentation by the researcher on a framework with which to have authentic conversation. [In reality, this is my profession.] As a *participant-observer*, this request was honored in one Board session and a group conversation ensued on the benefits of using such a framework, its relevance for the ELH, etc. This presentation lasted approximately 45 minutes and while there was much interest expressed, no follow on practice of this framework was observed in subsequent meetings.

In the monthly CAT meetings, I was always in the role of *participant-researcher*, engaged in informal group conversation, asking clarifying questions, and sharing personal information and history with interviewees. Being participant-researcher allowed me to experience first hand the social and emotional dynamics, confusion and dilemmas of the group process and decision-making.

While an ELH staff member always recorded the minutes of official Board and CAT meetings, I always kept my own notes on the proceedings and the social and affective dynamics of each conversation. Afterwards I would review and type up to include as part of the Field Journal recording. Personal reflections were

interwoven and identified as such. In addition to notes from group meetings, informant meetings and phone call conversations were also captured in the Field Journal.

Collins (2009: 17) proposes that everything social science researchers refer to as 'structure' can be found "in the real behavior of everyday life, primarily in repetitive encounters." His assertion is that all social life exists fundamentally at the micro level where it can be observed directly. For this reason the evidence collected through participant observation is critical to any micro-ethnography research findings. In attending, observing, and recording my first hand experiences of the ELH participants going about their interactions and shared tasks, I was able to record social and emotional dynamics as they occurred and did not rely on the memory of individuals being interviewed later. This puts my role as researcher squarely as a participant, observing others as well as my own emotional and social responses during work interactions *over time*. While it often had me inferring the meaning of encounters, that meaning could be triangulated with participant interviews and evidence from artifacts such as ELH documents. Joining the ELH Board and the CAT over a period of months also helped assure that my context for interpretation of events was a shared context with other participants. The importance of recording not just the significant events of those meetings, but also the evidence of emotions – my own and others – helped to gauge when the energy fluctuated and when the phenomenon of shared affect appeared. This became important when theming data and comparing to the relevant theories.

7.3 Method Two: Participant Interviews

Participants were chosen for interviews based on the following criteria:

- 1) He/she played a unique role in the CAT or on the Board (e.g. Jared was one of the only Board members representing the business sector.)

- 2) Most or all of the other interviewees referenced this person. (e.g. although Ethan was co-leading a different CAT than the one being studied, other interviewees found him a critical player and informal leader in their work outside of CAT meetings.)
- 3) My two key informants believed a particular person would offer a valuable or different perspective, especially if that person exhibited agenda conflict in Board and/or CAT meetings (i.e. pressure to remain 'loyal' to their primary organization).
- 4) The researcher personally observed someone to be of interest to the research topic through their behavior in the group and their expressed feelings, ideas, and concerns about the ELH.

Some interviewees were selected ahead of time based on these criteria, and some emerged late in the study as a result of observing the dynamics in the group and seeing how their experience might further develop an understanding of the group dynamics. My sense is a number of other participants would have liked to have been interviewed but I needed to contain interview data collection to a reasonable number of participants. In the end, I believe the fourteen interviews represented a good cross-section of the ELH members.

Table 7.1: Relevant Data on Interviewees *(See also Appendix C)*

#	Name	Experience	Current Title	Sector
Member of Collective Action Team				
1.	(Bruce)	10 years	Director, NAA	Non-profit
2.	(Catherine)	3 years	Program Director, HSF	Non-profit
3.	(Michele)	9 years	Coordinator, Student Services	County School District
4.	(Susan)*	1 year in this position; previously 10 years on the HSF Board. 38 years experience as an early childhood education professional.	Director, HSF CAT co-lead	Non-profit
5.	(Ethan)	3 years	Program Manager, HSF	Non-profit
6.	(Jeanette)	< 1 year in current role; 30 years with current organization	Program Coordinator, ESG	School District - special services
7.	(Roberta)	10 years in various related State agency roles	Community Developer, HHS	Government agency
Member of Both Board and the Collective Action Team				
8.	(Claire)*	1 year in position; previous State agency	Executive Director, ELH	Non-profit (H)
9.	(Laurie)	1 year in current position; retired from various roles in State government agencies	Performance Manager, ELH	Non-profit (H)
10.	(Isabel)	1 year in position; previous FME Board member	Executive Director, FME	Non-profit
Board Member only				
11.	(Lenore)	2 years in current position; 6 years at other non-profit organizations	Executive Director, HSF	Non-profit
12.	(Melissa)	15 years	Executive Director, NAA	Non-profit
13.	(Lynn)	Previously 11 years leading HSF; 1 year in current ELH Board leadership position	Chair, ELH Board	Non-profit (H)
14.	(Jared)	6 years in current position; 12 years inside the business organization	Regional Bank President; newest ELH Board member	Business
(H) = works for the Early Learning Hub as a staff member				
* Key informants				

Interview questions:

The context given by the researcher at the beginning of each interview, explained that this research was focused primarily on the social and affective dynamics of collaborating across boundaries on a complex project. In particular the research

was looking at the conditions under which each player subordinates their 'sending' organization's impact agenda on behalf of the collective impact. Because a key mediating mechanism for attaining shared commitment is theorized to be emotionally and socially determined, they were encouraged to speak directly of both the social and emotional elements of their experience and resist an overly intellectual explanation of their experience of working together. Assurances were given through the informed consent process that no attribution would be given to specific comments. *(See Appendix B for Informed Consent letter.)* The standard interview questions became:

- What makes this work?
- Teach me how you work on this together.
- Who do you rely on to get things done?
- What creates positive energy in working together?
- What dampens positive energy in working together?
- What keeps the team committed to working together?
- How do your emotions towards team members fashion your experience on this collaboration?

(Other follow on questions were specific to respondent's answers)

Interviews were held at a location of the interviewee's choosing with the only stipulation that it be a place quiet enough to comfortably conduct a private one-on-one conversation. Sometimes the venue chosen was in their primary offices, several times at a larger coffee shop where ambient noise was low. One meeting was at a restaurant where the interviewee could get some dinner prior to leaving for additional evening appointments. Careful hand-scribed notes were kept and within 48 hours, I returned a typed document to the interviewee to review and make corrections or additions to their comments. Several of the participants required multiple reminders to return their edited document within a week. Most were quite responsive in returning their interview document with minor edits within three days. I found that interview notes returned with edits did not appear

to censor emotional content, but rather provided further clarity and context for those comments. Four of the interviewees required multiple appointments to complete the conversation and cover all the questions.

7.4 Method Three: Documents reviewed

As another source of evidence to round out the ethnographic approach, key documents were reviewed and analyzed for emotional content and statements of intent on the part of the ELH as to how it was to operate. The documents chosen are described in the **Table 7.2** below:

#	Name	Description
1	ELH "Structure & Functions" (ppt)	PowerPoint presentation, authored by the Executive Director, explaining the purpose, structure, and roles of the Early Learning Hub
2	ELH MOU (doc)	Early Learning Hub 'Memorandum of Understanding' with service providers – initiated in September 2013, expiring in one year.
3	ELL CAT Charter (doc)	Early Learning and Literacy Development (ELL) Collective Action Team Charter document drafted by the Executive Director. This was the specific CAT that the researcher joined as a participant observer
4	ELH Declaration of Collaboration (doc)	Later version of the MOU, approved in May by the Board. This version was 'borrowed' from another Hub located in a different county, edited for the ELH. This document is to be signed by all participating service providers in the Hub jurisdiction and will replace the earlier version.
5	DHS Hub requirements (doc)	State's Department of Human Services official document outlining Hub operating requirements in exchange for public funds
6	ODE PDP Grant (doc)	State's Department of Education's Professional Development Grant requirements (as illustrative of most grants pursued by the ELH)
7	Transition Announcement (BaseCamp-online)	The April 24 th ELH Executive Director (Claire's) announcement of resignation to pursue another opportunity in a different state.
8	ELH Executive Director Job Description (BaseCamp- online)	The new position description posted after Claire's resignation announcement. This document had been reworked from when Claire was first hired and was being used to target the 'right' person to replace her and move the Hub forward.
9	Board and CAT Agendas (doc)	Working agendas for all meetings attended by the researcher (a total of six Board meetings; six CAT meetings)
10	Board Executive Committee Minutes (doc)	This April 24 th meeting was captured in notes and reviewed as important background information for this research

While many more documents and meeting handouts were received and read as part of the participant observer experience, only the ten items listed above were identified as directly relevant to this research.

7.5 Method Four: Group Multilogue on Initial Themes

My participation in Board and CAT meetings effectively ended with the Board meeting to hire a new Executive Director the first week in June. Later that month, I invited a group of all participants via email and BaseCamp to a voluntary ‘report out’ meeting on the initial themes emerging from the research. A total of nine people attended (not including myself), comprised by a cross-section of interviewees, the new Executive Director, ELH staff, and a few other participants of the CATs who had not been previously interviewed.

The researcher report, “Research on ELH – *A checkpoint on the road to Collective Impact*,” was presented in a dialogic fashion. The research purpose for this group event was to invite group conversation for confirmation (or not) of theme patterns, as well as deeper meaning of the results shared. (*For a full list of comments made during this session, see Appendix E*). Interestingly, *all* the participants (through head-nodding and vocal expression) indicated that the themes and selected anonymous quotes were valid and true in their own experience working inside the ELH model. Surprisingly, they also enthusiastically volunteered that the same pattern shows up on *all* the CATs, with only small context-specific differences, indicating the dynamics captured by this research was probably typical of a larger ELH pattern. There were some dichotomies that emerged, for example where both a belief that there *is* a positive social dynamic, co-existing with a belief it was not strong enough. In all, five initial themes were shared which were later collapsed to three major findings that will be reviewed in-depth in Chapter 8. At this meeting, it was announced to the room that ELH will be taking on a second, adjacent county inside its charter, which will create new opportunities to serve children and families, but also poses potential conflict, further competition and the risk of diminished cohesion. Participants in this meeting expressed a need to *learn* from this research and think through the ramifications of all of this for the upcoming merger.

7.6 Ethical Issues Encountered

Case studies are about phenomena within their *real-world* contexts (Yin 2014). Since nearly all case studies are about human affairs, the researcher is obligated to adopt important ethical practices “akin to those followed in medical research.” (p.78) As mentioned earlier, ethical issues were anticipated and planned for in conducting fieldwork for this case. However, ethical issues may not appear the way they were imagined. ‘Going native’ it turns out, was never a real concern given the short total months this research was conducted and the limited knowledge and experience I had of the early childhood educational domain. However, because I work professionally as a consultant for organizations who are focused on creating greater effectiveness, it was extremely difficult to avoid falling into that consulting role during the research. Yet, to have done so may well have eroded trust and confused participants as to my motives. After every meeting attended, I had to refrain from giving advice to participants and to the informants, who had a leadership role for the ELH. This was tested the most when the Board Chair, a very persuasive and powerful person, would request insights and consulting advice for her executive director. While I was willing to recommend reading or ask reflective questions, advice giving was avoided.²⁵

I never felt pressure to ‘report on’ members of the Board or the CAT. The ELH participants always displayed professionalism and sophistication in this regard. There was one participant who was referenced in every interview conducted, and who spoke frequently at every meeting. That person was either seen in a good or negative light by others, but never in a neutral way. It was difficult to hear the Executive Director be especially negative on this person’s involvement. The temptation was to defend or help clear things up, which of course was out of the question. In these situations, I would simply encourage the individual with

²⁵ Following the completion of the field research, and theming of the data, I did provide a consultant’s report to the new Executive Director.

concerns to explore further or raise these concerns directly with the person in question.

While not all members of the ELH ultimately signed the informed consent form, all those who were interviewed and who were at the final group themes meeting did so. *All* ELH participants – Board, CAT, and staff- were verbally encouraged to ask the researcher questions or share concerns at any time. And everyone was assured on multiple occasions nothing would be shared about his or her participation without explicit consent.

7.7 Steps in Theming the Data

As mentioned earlier, this researcher is following an Abductive Research strategy. This approach focuses on my *understanding* as an inside participant rather than my *explanation* as an outsider. Hence I saw the importance of becoming a member of the ELH – at least for awhile – and focusing on interpretation of events and phenomena from the participants’ experience. Having participants clarify research data, participate in validating the themes and understand the theories applied was crucial to the validation and reliability of the research. With this strategy in mind, the data and theme analysis used took the following steps:

Table 7.3 - Steps in Analyzing Case Data	
1. Immersing Myself in the Data	• Reading several times through field notes, interviews, meeting observations, & ELH documents • Highlighting common phrases and statements • Noticing where emotion showed up and to what effect
2. Provisional Coding	• Completing several rounds of coding according to the theoretical diagram elements in several articles about <i>Social Commitments Theory</i> • Learning where there were/were not distinctions • Deciding what was relevant and what was not
3. Building a Conceptual Framework	• Reviewing articles and book chapters of Lawler, Thye, and Yoon • Juxtaposed conceptual diagrams from their recent writings
4. Thematic Analysis	• Theming data based on the integrated framework • Identified specific quotes from the data that were

	- representative of each theme - Created questions for the multilogue meeting
5. Presenting to Case Participants	- Preparing PowerPoint for multilogue session - Conducting the session and receiving feedback - Capturing further input
6. Write and Re-write	- Reflecting on data and themes through writing - Simplifying themes (from five to three) - Clarifying thinking on those themes - Adding additional theory to better explore and understand themes

Step One – Immersing Myself in the Data

According to Yin (2014: 135) a helpful starting point is to ‘play’ with the data that has been collected. That is an accurate image of what I did initially. Tables were created, flowcharts were drawn, frequency of comments was tabulated, pages were printed. The more the data was ‘touched’ and re-read, the more grounded the researcher became in the story that was emerging.

Step Two – Provisional Coding

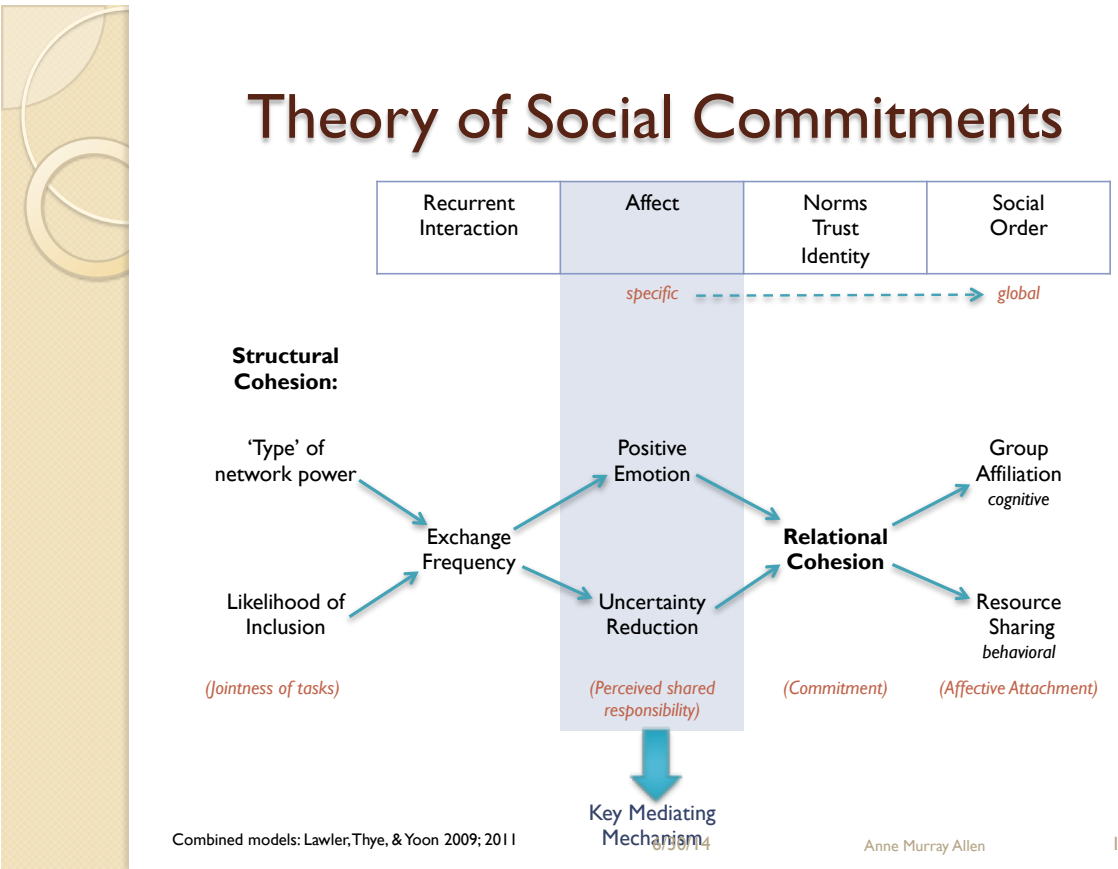
Blaikie (2010: 195) emphasizes that “a case study is not just a narrative account of an event or a series of related events; it must also involve analysis against an appropriate theoretical framework, or in support of theoretical conclusions.” While an initial attempt to theme the data was tried, I felt the need to return to a coding strategy, particularly because the Lawler, Thye, and Yoon framework was not clear. The authors’ conceptual model was slightly different as represented in their more recent publications (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2009; Thye, Lawler, and Yoon 2011), and as represented by Turner (2014). By coding the interviews and observations made during the fieldwork period, I could determine if there were important distinctions between the different representations of the theory. Through this process, I concluded there were no meaningful distinctions present.

Step Three – Building a Conceptual Framework

“Individual case studies, like experiments, are generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes.” (Yin 2014:21) Under these circumstances, the appropriate method of generalization is *analytic generalization*,

in which a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study. This approach increases the external validity. In this case research, the reference will be to the previously developed theory from the work of Lawler, et al (2009), and Thye et al. (2011). Their ‘Theory of Social Commitments’ integrates earlier work on Relational Cohesion Theory (Lawler & Yoon 1993, 1996; Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2000; Lawler and Thye 2006; Thye, Yoon, and Lawler 2002) with the more recent Affect Theory of Social Exchange (Lawler 2001, 2002, 2003). For reference in theming the ELH case study data, two models were taken from the authors’ 2009 and 2011 publications and juxtaposed. The resulting framework is represented in the graphic below:

Figure 7.3 (See also Appendix F)



Once this framework was developed, theming became straightforward and it was clear where to locate specific comments and statements of observation. When this framework was 'tested' with the group meeting, everyone confirmed they understood it and found it useful in exploring the social dynamics of the ELH.

Step Four – Thematic Analysis

The qualitative analytic process is more cyclical than linear (Saldana 2013) and is why the analysis was considered iterative until after the group session was held, and draft versions were written. First, the data for all sources previously listed were reviewed multiple times against the framework developed in step three. Even though the ELH is in an early stage of its existence, the data showed activity in all elements of the framework. However, the patterns that emerged related more specifically to structural constraints, exchange/ interaction frequency, type of exchange, diversity of emotions, relational history and trust dynamics, and the desire for true group commitment, affiliation and impact. Based on five themes that emerged, I prepared a PowerPoint presentation to feed back to a voluntary group of ELH members during a meeting where the nine were present. This prepared presentation organized quotes and observations according to the framework elements, and was intended as a backdrop for a group conversation on shared meaning and relevancy. The meeting was scheduled for two hours on the final day of my time with the ELH case study participants.

Although the Lawler, Thye, and Yoon framework provided a relevant lens through which to view the data, I found the notion of *emotional energy* as defined by Collins (2009) to be a valuable addition in looking at the results. For both Lawler et al. and Collins, Durkheim's analysis ([1915] 1954) on interaction rituals and the arousal of emotions is foundational. Additionally, the symbolic interactionist view, originally established by Mead (1934) and later named and developed by Blumer (1969) and others, adds an interesting view of some identity issues that emerged for participants in the field research. The impact the verification of an individual's

identity has on group cohesion has been explored by many including Lawler (2003), Stryker and Burke (2000), and Turner (2014, 2007).

Step Five – Presenting to Case Participants

For the qualitative researcher, there can be no single or triangulated truth (Denzin and Lincoln 2008). However, there *is* power in discovering a shared view or interpretation. In this case, an early ‘report out’ of themes to a cross section of research participants was useful and showed a high degree of respondent validation of findings (Bryman 2008: 377). This validation was important for two reasons. First, it confirmed that I did indeed understand their world. Secondly, it provided me with additional insight into the importance of specific comments and themes. During the session I was careful to invite any and all feedback based on my research, including those relating to the framework, themes, and the specific evidence used to support the themes. An outside facilitator was used to capture notes as well as those I captured. These were combined later. Being true to the research question itself, I was careful to sense the energy level in the room during the presentation and dialogue. People in the room became energized when hearing about the diversity of emotions and affect in the group and wanted to address past issues they felt would hold them back from creating greater shared commitment. In listening to each other talk, there were some surprises for the group in the form of different assumptions for what was holding them back and what was possible to ask for. These will be discussed in depth later in Chapter Eight.

Step Six – Write and Re-write

After much thinking and playing with the data, writing becomes a method to go deeper and explore what is most essential in describing emergent themes. According to Richardson and St. Pierre, “We do not triangulate; we crystallize.” (Denzin and Lincoln 2008: 478). And one of the best ways to crystallize the different evidence within a case study is through writing. A very early version of the themes and supporting evidence were drafted for review with academic supervisors. The purpose of this was to begin to match the themes with

appropriate examples, observations, and quotes from the field research data. This was where the Abductive Research strategy was employed, “in a process of moving between everyday concepts and meanings, lay accounts, and social science explanations.” (Mason 2010, 2002: 180) My supervisors confirmed there was something valuable in the themes and provided questions to explore further. This led me to collapse themes from five to three, and to iterate key findings through a cycle of writing and rewriting. This served to integrate evidence, crystallize meaning, and recommend expansion for existing theories.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Social Commitments, Affective Ties, and Collaboration

8.1 Introduction to Analysis

As an exemplifying case study, the purpose of this research was twofold. First, the aim was to capture the conditions and dynamics of an everyday situation for what can be revealed about social processes related to the research question. (Yin 2014: 52) The second aim was to compare research evidence to the group theories of Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2009), Thye, Lawler, and Yoon (2011). Previous research done by these authors involved controlled experiments, not situated in the domain of everyday interactions. A case study allows for the further exploration and richer description of their Social Commitments Theory, with the possibility to expand and enhance the theoretical framework.

According to Layder (2013), an adaptive approach is appropriate for qualitative studies, particularly when the desire is to contribute to existing sociological knowledge. This iterative approach, consistent with an Abductive Research strategy (Blaikie 2010), requires the researcher to chose 'orienting concepts' from established knowledge, in this case Lawler, Thye, and Yoon, as opposed to following an open-coding technique. (Layder 2013: 140) These concepts provide the initial framework for analysis and suggest possible explanations of the data. Hence, my use of a provisional coding strategy for testing of the Social Commitments Theory in explaining the research results. With an Abductive research strategy, as Blaikie (2010:156) emphasizes, "*Research becomes a dialogue between data and theory mediated by the researcher.*" I discovered much in support of Lawler, Thye, and Yoon's Theory of Social Commitments through an iterative process of reviewing multiple sources of evidence against that framework. And particular deeper themes were discovered as well in the areas covered in Sections 8.3-8.6, where evidence

suggested new insight in answering the question, “Under what conditions do actors subordinate an individual impact agenda on behalf of a collective impact?”

8.2 Social Commitments in a Collective Impact World

Coding and the theming were done against the combined framework for Lawler, Thye, and Yoon’s Theory of Social Commitments (2009) and Thye, Lawler, and Yoon’s (2011) embedded relations in group formation. (*See Figure 7.3 in the previous Chapter Seven, or Appendix F for conceptual model illustration.*) As discussed earlier in Section 7.7.3, this framework follows the group process to relational cohesion and affective attachment beginning with the power structure of the group (type of network power and likelihood of inclusion for all members); mapping number and types of meetings (exchange frequency); paying attention to the emotions that arise from these meetings (including the reduction of uncertainty in interactions); and ending with the degree to which a new identity is established as a group (as demonstrated in shared affect, affiliation, and resource sharing). Coding according to this model was helpful in the subsequent theming of the data presented in this chapter beginning in Section 8.2.1; and in exploring the three deeper findings of the research in the following chapter/section.

8.2.1 Structural Cohesion

To begin with, Thye, Lawler, and Yoon (2011) define *structural cohesion* to be a function of both power and the likelihood for inclusion. The first element, *power*, is defined as “a structural capability that promotes unequal resource distributions, favoring some actors at the expense of others.” (p. 391) The second element, *likelihood of inclusion*, is defined as “the average probability for each [actor] to be included in exchange.” (p. 393) When power is relatively equal, the likelihood of inclusion increases. Part of the power structure includes the degree to which tasks are designed to be shared, creating an interdependence or ‘jointness’ that requires a larger degree of inclusiveness. This creates conditions for the highest structural

cohesion. The theory states, “higher structural cohesion and the processes it unleashes have a cumulative effect and generate a collective sense of shared experience among actors in the network. Shared experience involves the perception . . . that they share a common fate.” (p. 395) Wageman and colleagues discuss how past research has demonstrated that structural interdependence and cohesion are among the most powerful known drivers of collaborative behavior, more so than personal values, team-based rewards, perceived need to cooperate, or even the quality of member relationships. (2012: 306)

In the case of the ELH, power was largely determined by the legislated mandates, outcomes and financial constraints of the State guidelines; the pre-defined roles of the ELH Hub, Board Chair and staff; historical relationships of some of the larger provider organizations; and size of budgets. Even though the stated objective was for providers to cooperate and collaborate on behalf of early childhood learning, grants available from the State were of a competitive nature, forcing some of the larger providers who covered more than one county, to submit a separate application themselves in addition to participating in writing the Hub grant. This was confusing and uncomfortable for all who were interviewed and caused debate in both Board meetings and in the CAT. The executive director felt she had to ask the people submitting a competitive proposal for the same grant to leave the room when they discussed it in the CAT meetings. While most participants understood the dilemma, the dynamic did not *feel* good and caused resentment. An observation I captured in my field journal states: “There was some dis-ease with the notion of people within the CAT competing on grants. Those that are don’t seem to see it that way, but rather see it as spreading the net widely. Others worry about losing a grant due to members using the Hub grant conversations to their individual organization advantage elsewhere.” One CAT member rationalized, “It may not be *us* as individuals who have a conflict of interest, but rather our agencies.” Furthermore, ELH power was established in the roles that the staff and Board Chair assumed as strong and directive leaders. Although always courteous and respected by everyone, they drove the agendas very hard, limiting conversation unless time

allowed. As Roberta, representing a government agency on the CAT commented, “The Hub was supposed to be a symbol of us. They are now acting like the boss of us.” And another stated, “I thought the Hub would be a coordinating body. They are not.” Also, reflecting on the concern she feels from several CAT members, Susan the CAT co-lead asks “Will there be room for everyone?”

And power is defined as much by what isn’t present as what is. The lack of definition on membership and decision rights for members contributed to lack of clarity on where the power for ultimate decision-making resided, whom to turn to in influencing the assignment of funds. Based solely on the ELH documents and CAT charter, the likelihood of inclusion appeared high. Statements of inclusiveness were pervasive. Statements supporting the sharing of information, the openness of meeting attendance to the community, and the job description of the executive director to “maintain an environment of contact and open communication among all partners,” evidenced that the plan was to create a high level of inclusivity. The Chair herself commented several times, “The CATs need to see themselves as inclusive! The Hub does not have the staff to support everything nor has all the expertise.” For example, most interviewees felt that Claire, the Executive Director, was inclusive and inviting of conversation, although hard-driving. An initial day long retreat for the CAT had been planned in January where ground rules, teambuilding, and role clarity would have been on the agenda. However, due to severe weather it had to be canceled. No alternative date was set. Claire later stated that pressure to keep moving and time constraints due to grant writing deadlines kept her from arranging another retreat date. This unfortunate circumstance may have contributed to feelings of confusion and fear of being left out that surfaced for some actors over the ensuing months.

8.2.2 Frequency of Exchange

Strong structural cohesion should drive a higher frequency of exchange. (Thye et. al. 2011: 393). Exchange can be defined as either *economic* (i.e. one shot

impersonal transactions) or *social* (i.e. recurrent interactions between/ among same individuals). In this study, since the research is concerned with looking at the phenomenon of person-to-group ties, the focus is on social exchange among actors and on relational commitment that emerges across the network. (p. 388-9) This is explained extensively in the *affect theory of social exchange* (Lawler 2001; Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2008, 2009). The theory of social commitments implies that different forms of social exchange have different propensities to produce strong or weak shared commitment to social units. (Lawler et. al. 2009: 83) The four forms of exchange the authors define are *negotiated*, *reciprocal*, *productive*, and *generalized*. (p. 81-3) This research is relevant to the first three and some of the most interesting findings occurred in looking at how these played out for the ELH participants. The *types* of exchange, their co-existence and interaction emerged as very important.

For the ELH collaboration, there were specific and official ‘exchanges’ instituted. They were in the form of monthly, two hour-long, Board meetings and CAT meetings. There was also a voluntary online, asynchronous BaseCamp information exchange, which appeared to be used only for announcements and simple inquiries across the network. The CAT chartering document was clear in stating the expectation that members attend 75% of their meetings, that the meeting also be open to all who wish to attend and that there would likely be “smaller work teams or clusters that meet outside of the normal CAT meetings.” Some interviewees expressed concern as to what was being accomplished in between these official meetings. Bruce stated, “We have to be able to *do* stuff and do it outside of the monthly meetings too. . . Just showing up to one monthly meeting and giving a thumbs up is *not* Collective Impact.” Half those interviewed longed for more opportunity to get things done, as opposed to only “talk and plan.” And several mentioned a willingness and desire to meet more frequently. This surprised the Chair in the final group session dialogue, as she had always assumed everyone was too busy. In addition, it became evident that most members of the CAT had known each other for years and had history in working together. They often mentioned

their “meeting for coffee” to check in on each other and to sort specific details out together, even if their bosses were not doing the same. These informal meetings are clearly exchanges as well, however invisible they may be to the whole of the ELH membership. There is more in Section 8.4 on the ramifications of both frequency and forms of exchange on the emotional dynamics.

8.2.3 Emotion, Shared Affect, and Uncertainty Reduction

The emotional or affective component of this framework is what Lawler, Thye and Yoon claim as distinctive to their theory, enabling them to explain, “how and when person-to-group ties transcend transactional beginnings and become relational and expressive.”(2009: 9) Furthermore, they claim *positive affect* and *uncertainty reduction* are key mediating mechanisms for frequent exchange producing cohesive relational ties or commitment. (Lawler et. al. 2000; Thye et al. 2011)

As participant observer, I recorded positive emotion and affect that emerged during the field research, which was validated in the final group presentation and dialogue. My observations included expressed respect and appreciation for each other in meetings, in interviews; laughter and joking (which became more prevalent over time); openness and interest in each other and the Collective Impact work; and the stronger verbal expression of “joy” and “love” in working a different way. For examples, Susan and Roberta stated their love for the people they work with in the Hub. For Isabel, it was her love for this new way of working together. And even for Melissa, who could be conflicted at times, there was “joy that we can now pursue these things . . . and meet on common ground.” There was also the conservation of some negative emotion from past working relationships that affected as many as six Board members and the same number of CAT members. These included a sense of fear and distrust, anxiety, discouragement, lack of support, and skepticism that this will all work. Susan claimed, “Our own directors (on the Board) can feel a bit paranoid. We have to be careful.” Certainly the previously mentioned practice of sending members with competing grant proposals out of the room and away from

group discussions caused some ill feeling. Bruce, one of the CAT members from a larger provider organization, expressed dismay with “lack of transparency and questioning my intentions.” All these emotions, positive as well as negative, will be explored in more depth in Section 8.3.

The theory states that when individuals become more familiar with each other and the expectations and preferences they hold, this makes actual exchanges and interactions more predictable. This predictability points to a *reduction of uncertainty* in social transactional relations. Lawler et al. (2000) found that emotional/affective *and* uncertainty reduction processes are parallel, complementary routes to shared commitment and to group formation. (Lawler et al. 2000, Thye et al. 2011: 395)

For the ELH case participants, predictability seemed to go up over time as they learned more about how to work differently together. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, it could be said that predictability grew as identities became *consensual*. (Lawler 2003) And as already mentioned, many wanted to increase the frequency of meetings and interactions, feeling that things were moving too slow, decisions not being made. Most interviewees expressed confusion as to how this Collective Impact approach was supposed to work and did not want to be the one asking tough questions. As a matter of fact, Isabel was consistently mentioned in all interviews as someone who was always asking questions. This annoyed some people and not others, but no one was indifferent. When interviewed, Isabel stated, “I’ve been at all the meetings [Board and CAT] and I still don’t know how contracts have been determined. I’m trying to figure out where I fit in. Because I’m small, will they [Hub] come to me? They seem to be interested in larger providers so far.” Those that supported Isabel’s practice of asking questions believed they were the right questions and needed to be answered for others too. In the final group dialogue, Isabel enthusiastically stated, “I’ve been saying this over and over again – I want to reach every child in [this] County and look at census data to measure how we’re doing. I think this would unite us.”

Isabel in some ways appeared as the spokesperson for the members who did not feel certain they were big enough to play. I saw her as seeking some level of predictability for her organization to operate inside the Hub and to survive, supporting others who may have had the same concern. Hence I saw something beyond the theoretical assumptions emerge. An interrelationship *between* emotion and uncertainty was also observed. But more on this and how it goes beyond the present theory will be covered in Section 8.3.4.

8.2.4 Relational Cohesion

Collins theorizes that individuals feel like members of a group (person-to-group ties) with shared commitments to each other due to the positive emotional effects of repeated interaction. (1989: 17-18) Building on this insight, Lawler, Thye, and Yoon have found that “relational cohesion specifies an endogenous emotional or affective process that links social structures to cohesion and commitment.”(2009: 44) The theory assumes people initially form instrumental exchanges to get transactional needs met. However, with time and repeated exchange an expressive component arises in the relationships due to the positive feelings resulting from successful exchanges. *This expressive element is a benefit in and of itself*, and when present acts to build shared commitment or cohesion among the involved actors. Those that interact frequently and successfully experience an “emotional buzz” or increased energy of interest, excitement, and satisfaction. (Lawler et al. 2009: 44) This appears much like the phenomenon of shared ‘effervescence’ Durkheim (1915) references and that Collins extends and renames as ‘emotional energy’. (1989: 20; 2009: 275) In terms of the social commitments model applied to this thesis, the important point is that relational cohesion can be observed and understood only based on the quality of the social dynamics that go before. Positive individual feelings from interaction yield stronger group attachments; negative feelings yield weaker cohesiveness. (Lawler 2003)

The ELH is young in its lifecycle as an organization and a network. I was not sure if enough time would pass where much would emerge in the domain of relational cohesion. However, there was clear evidence of it, although not pervasive. Discussion as early as February's Board meeting had one member stating out loud, "It's starting to feel like a Hub." Susan, an influential CAT member said in her interview, "We trust each other. . . each knows the others have their back." She primarily was referring to those who had positive past history. Nonetheless, it was a clear observation based on attending these CAT meetings that "people are working together in spite of their bosses' tension and lack of collaboration." Their interdependencies were real to them as well as the strong desire to make a bigger difference. Even with the confusion around competitive vs. collaborative grants, the majority of CAT members appeared to resonate with the statement from one person in the room, "We are stronger together than separate." In one of the last Board meetings attended, I noted the palpable enthusiasm in the room when one leader suggested, "I prefer our contract [MOU] with each other and the Hub be titled 'A Declaration of Collaboration' and not the suggested 'Declaration of Cooperation.' We've always cooperated. Collaboration means something more." This statement brought instant unanimous and enthusiastic support and was an acknowledgement of the consensual identities developing relative to the ELH mission.

On the lack of cohesion, there was usually an undercurrent of concern for several of the larger provider relationships with the ELH staff and Board Chair. While Claire, the Executive Director had tried to work on resolving longstanding issues, she did not feel successful in those attempts. And in interviewing these actors, they definitely felt that meetings with the Hub staff and Chair were not at all successful. The emotion was one of disappointment and fear of survival, much of it anchored in patterns established previously. During the group dialogue on themes, there was a specific conversation in the room around this threat to group cohesiveness. One small provider commented, "The Hub *is* honoring of existing relationships, *but* we need to address past issues – we can't just ignore them." In this conversation the

group identified not only the threat to immediate progress, but was also concerned given the recent announcement that another smaller county would join ELH. The players from that county had their own history with the founding ELH county and had less than satisfying interactions over the years in sharing resources.

8.2.5 Group Affiliation and Social Order

Lawler, Thye, and Yoon's working definition of 'group' is "a perceived or recognized social unit or entity that encompasses a set of ongoing relations among the members and shapes their interactions with each other and with those outside the social unit or entity." (2009: 199n2) According to the theory, the phenomenon of group *affiliation* yields a shared identity greater than an amalgam of separate identities of smaller group networks and individual organizations that may participate in a Collective Impact effort. A network is not automatically a group, but can evolve that way when people come to identify with a network of relationships as a singular social unit to which they belong. In the case of the ELH this would mean treating each other more favorably and orienting their behavior and loyalties to the network itself as a group entity. An emergent group affiliation "may crosscut or bridge other groupings" and alliances, as people perceive themselves belonging to a common social unit. (Thye et al. 2011:388) This would create a new social order in how ELH members relate to each other and pursue their collective mission.

From this theory, it is conceivable that the network of service providers and agencies for early childhood development in Marion County could foster interactions and positive emotions that would render that network an object of commitment with *affective attachment*. As mentioned previously, I believe that how groups reach a state of affective attachment is worthy of deeper understanding for more Collective Impact efforts (or any cross-boundary collaboration for that matter) to succeed over time.

During the research window of this first year of the ELH existence, I did not see a new social order clearly achieved; no unifying social structure of cooperation/collaboration across the group was observed. While I did see social order among sub-groups based on their past history, the reforming of the ELH as its own social system or group had not yet occurred. This is understandable, in part, due to the relatively short amount of time since the group had been chartered. However, there is reason to believe that even six months without more evidence of a social system for collective action forming increases the risk that they will ultimately fail. Hackman (2012) has found that as much as 90% of successful group formation occurs in the preparation and launch of that group.

While I did not observe pervasive group affiliation and resource sharing, as the Social Commitments Theory would suggest, there always did appear to be demonstrations of mutual respect. And there did seem to be shared concern that they keep working on coming together. In her reflections, Susan chose to rate the Board as a '6' on a scale of 1-10 in terms of living up to the promise of Collective Impact thus far. Isabel stated, "We need to care enough to be in community." Interviewees like Michele and Claire talked about a commitment to making this work and to "*believing*" it was even possible. Most thought that improving the social structures would improve odds that they would get there as a successful group, i.e. closing the gap between 'ties that are possible' and 'ties that are actualized.' (Lawler, et al. 2009: 75) Ideas vocalized by Jeanette, Lenore, and others included taking the time together to develop operating rules and agreements, better tools and information for sharing, creating space for reflection and social time together, and not just jamming two hours each month with business agenda items. In Section 8.5 this is covered more deeply and the extraordinary yearning for group affiliation that emerged will be explored and its potential influence on future success.

The conceptual framework for Social Commitments Theory was certainly useful and validated in reviewing and theming the data. That is one interesting outcome

of the analysis and there was more. Additionally, as was previously stated in section 7.7.4, deeper patterns emerged when iteratively reviewing all sources of evidence used in this micro-ethnography. The following three that stood out as particularly relevant to the contribution of this research.

8.3 Emotion as Key Mediating Mechanism

8.3.1 Emergent Emotion

As stated before, the Theory of Social Commitments is built on the Affect Theory of Social Exchange and Relational Cohesion Theory. This overarching theory puts emotions as a key and indirect mediating mechanism in the formation of group commitment and cohesion. “The actors of exchange theories are individualistic, instrumental, and emotionally vacuous, whereas those of emotion theories are socially oriented, expressive, and emotionally deep and complex. The former are driven by reason, the latter by passion.”(Lawler and Thye 1999: 238) Interest in integrating our social and emotional nature into rational exchange theory led to the development of Lawler’s Affect Theory of Social Exchange. Research by Izard (2009) and others clearly demonstrates that passion (emotion) and reason (cognition) are intertwined which poses the question, what role do emotions play in the bigger picture of group dynamics?

In the role of participant observer, I did experience emotion as present in all meetings and conversations, which became more expressive as participants were encouraged to be increasingly transparent with the research. This was exemplified in my field notes capturing moments when meeting laughter occurred and expanded as well as when positive affirmations were offered by members to each other. Over the course of my involvement, I also saw evidence of positive emotions growing over time, although seldom demonstrated in unison, at one time across the board. There were usually a few people withholding their voice or concerns when others were most vocal and energized. What became clear to me was that a subset

of actors, based on previous experience with those now running the Hub, were cautious and guarded in their feelings and interpretations of direction and meaning in the group.

8.3.2 Amplification of Emotion

The emergence of emotion through group interaction (or social exchange) is one thing. The *amplification* of emotion – positive or negative - also influences the speed to cohesion as one group or team.

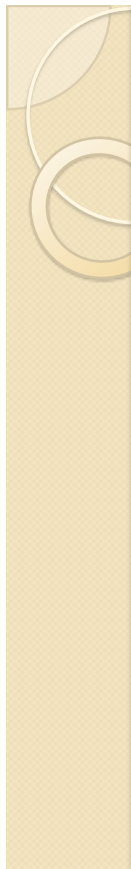
As Turner points out, “Expectations are important in understanding all exchange dynamics. The higher are the expectations for payoffs, and the more these expectations are realized or exceeded, the more intense will be positive emotions.” (2014: 7) The Collective Impact model chosen by ELH and explained to the Hub members, sets very high expectations of what is possible. Success stories demonstrate breakthrough results in the field of education, environmental cleanup, public health, and economic development. (Kania and Kramer 2011) The State Governor set a high bar when he announced he would select six initial early childhood ‘hubs’ to invest in and learn from. Counties had to apply for and be accepted into this early grouping of Hubs which no doubt, were under a microscope. Joining the ELH in early 2014, I found there was a sense of excitement as well as urgency to get going. This pressure created an atmosphere of “We don’t have time to talk about everything.” As the Chair, Lynn is a highly respected and accomplished leader and politician. One of the Hub staff commented on her leadership approach as “driving people and organizations – fairly hard at times – and that is likely what has made her successful through the years. She’ll ride a horse until it’ll ride no more!” Lynn set expectations for maintaining a pace at which launch of the ELH would happen, when ways of working differently together would start happening. Finally, with success in grant writing also comes deadlines for executing those grants and that puts pressure on the group to figure things out quickly and decide how they’ll disperse funds and work together differently.

Laurie, an ELH staff member commented, “these CATs need to start deciding things or we will lose the money we have been awarded.”

“Justice norms and calculations can, however, lower the positive affect if the distribution of resources to actors is not considered fair, even when payoffs meet expectations.” (Turner 2014: 7) This is when negative emotions such as anger and resentment emerged. Hub members were up for making a bigger difference in their work but had different expectations about how that would unfold. Some believed, as Roberta stated, the work would be more about “raising issues of overlap, leverage, and better coordination. The Hub is instead directing work, based on information learned . . . outside of the collaborative process . . . This Hub is getting very money-minded. They seem too grant-focused.” So while high expectations and grant success created interest and excitement, it also served to raise the level of uncertainty, confusion and fear of being left out in the rush to get going.

An overall summary of the different emotions that emerged, confirmed by participants in the final group conversation, is represented in the following table. The words selected in the table came from conversations in meetings and from the interviews. The organization of those words into the categories was my own.

Table 8.1 Emotions of the ELH



Emotions of the ELH

Positive	Negative
Joy / Love • That we can have a different relationship • Aha moments when we see how this can work • Making progress • Want the best for each other • We have each other's backs Fun • Doing business with these people • Sense of humor Respect / Hope • Start from a place of respect and believing • Everyone's validated, legitimate • People will do the right thing Safe • Open-mindedness	Fear • Failure and/or mediocrity • For self-preservation • Money – who gets it, who doesn't Sad • Past unresolved issues • Perceived betrayal • Feeling excluded Disappointed/ Impatient • With those absent or disconnected • Not producing results, getting things done • Not feeling heard • When words and actions don't match

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8.3.3 Positive vs. Negative Emotion

Evidence that emergent *positive* emotion was translating into shared responsibility was expressed in comments such as: “Partnerships between the groups were discouraged before but not now. I’m happy it’s headed this direction.” “There’s a common bond and hope that we really can make a difference.”

Evidence that *negative* emotion was getting in the way of developing shared responsibility was expressed in comments such as: “[Others] not preparing, coming late, and asking questions that take us off course. People turn to me and roll their eyes – this is when we lose cohesion and they are losing interest.” Unresolved

issues were apparent in comments such as, “When [our bosses on the ELH Board] are fighting – this has a dampening effect on our enthusiasm.” And finally, an example of the structural cohesion elements that diminished inclusion and transparency creating negative emotions: “Fear. Competition. I’m frustrated with the State for making grants competitive. That means we are hiding our papers from each other.” Nine of the fourteen people interviewed referenced a perceived fear of being excluded or a lack of enough inclusivity as what would dampen positive emotion for themselves and others.

There was a clear theme around those who had past relationships vs. those who were new to this ELH network of early learning providers. Past history was both positive and negative in the feelings and beliefs of participants. For those working at the CAT level, past emotions were for the most part favorable. Susan summed it up well: “There’s this historical piece – we’ve had experiences together that have been fun. I really love these folks. . . We’re in the same community. A small one. If I step out and then come back, I know these people and they know me.” Another from Lynn on the Board: “There’s a sense of loyalty to one another. After working together 15 years, we have had battles and disagreements but we still appreciate each other and the tough business we are in. We want the best for each other. We’re not in this for the money. It’s about the common bond and hope that we really can make a difference.” This phenomenon I observed in the ELH does tend to support the premise of Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2009) that “affective ties in groups are an important basis for collectively-oriented behaviors such as the trust of others or the willingness to sacrifice self-interest for group interest.” (Lawler 2013: 346) The theory states that frequent interaction around joint tasks is a major cause of these positive emotions that create person-to-group ties and “that people associate those individual feelings with social units, local or larger, within which they repeatedly occur.” (p. 347)

In the *social-formations approach* to exchange outcomes²⁶, the concept of emotional energy (EE) that Collins (2009) puts forth through his Interaction Ritual Theory also explains the mediating role of positive affect in motivating people and building cohesion. It is a complementary but distinct theory to Theory of Social Commitments. EE consists of such things as “a feeling of solidarity or inclusion; confidence, enthusiasm, and positive self-regard. . . Durkeimian moral sentiment; a readiness for action; a feeling of pride . . . and trust in others.” (p. 275-6) To the extent that EE grows *across the group* and is not isolated to a few people, the interactions are empowering and demonstrate that everyone has agency, thus expanding shared commitment. By contrast when EE is low across the group, people may feel depressed, solidarity is low and there is distrust. The phenomenon of emotional energy inside ELH was easy to observe through the interviews, through sensing the interest in a meeting where people literally leaned in to what was being discussed, and in listening to the animation and laughter as the flow of interaction brought people together in what Collins calls *mutual entrainment*. When I asked what created positive energy, interviewees stated: results, appreciation, role clarity, problem-solving, generosity, shared view, validation, discovery of something new, and “seeing that we are in it together.” As I explored this further with them, it became apparent that the energy and enthusiasm would increase when participants could experience results, or “getting stuff done.” This had a lot to do with the notion of having productive exchanges, where ideas were actually implemented and decisions got made together. Some of these decisions were around who/how many participating organizations would get to participate in the funding of new initiatives generated by the grants. Jared, a Board member and the only interviewee representing business, was particularly keen on seeing some actual results come from all the ELH meetings. He was not certain how these would be measured but rather felt inherently unsatisfied with current progress and demonstrated readiness for action. Role clarity is also key to group readiness for

²⁶ Thye and Lawler (1999) review six approaches that help explain where emotions enter the exchange process, in the exchange context, process, or outcomes. Collins work is relevant to exchange outcomes where social cohesion is the focus.

action as it makes clear who will be in action about what. Similarly Bruce, Michele, Ethan, and Laurie all emphasized the importance of demonstrating progress as important to building positive energy. Other responses point to the role of having a shared identity on building high EE. Bruce, Claire, Lenore, Isabel, and Lynn all commented on solidarity and inclusion, which would yield appreciation, generosity, shared view, and “seeing that we are in it together.”

Yet not everyone had the same good feeling, optimism and hope. Several of the ELH members from larger provider organizations were struggling with a more negative history with key players in the Hub. This is because frequent exchange over the years did *not* yield positive emotions for a significant minority of the participants. This lack of shared positive affect across the population of those collaborating on both the Board and the CAT was risking the cohesion of the ELH as a whole. The group dialogue on themes identified this as something that needed to change if they were going to ultimately succeed. It essentially was the ‘dead elephant on the table,’ and hadn’t been addressed in a transparent way. This was creating a low level anxiety for both groups and eroding confidence that the Collective Impact mission would be realized. Because of this observation, it is worth understanding emotions as more than just an outcome of social processes like exchange.

Identity theory (Stryker and Burke 2000) was developed in the symbolic interactionist tradition and is helpful in understanding the ELH emotional phenomena. There is much that could be said about the development of identity theory but what is most salient is that *all* approaches in this tradition involve actors who integrate roles with actions and reactions of others, defining self and other for that situation. (Lawler 2003) Identity Theory conceptualizes *self* as being important to the interaction dynamics of building positive emotions, which translate into person-to-group ties. This is something underemphasized by Collins and Goffman before him. (Turner 2014:3) Interactionist theories state that humans are motivated to verify their identities when working together and when this occurs, positive emotions emerge. When their identities are not verified in the interaction

with others, their choices are “change their identity, alter their behaviors, selectively perceive and/or interpret the responses of others, or shift their appraisals in an effort to perceive that self has been verified by others.” (p. 2) In contrast to the notion of building EE, “when negative emotions are aroused from failures to verify self, this *negative* EE works in the opposite direction to lower commitments to the group.” (p. 4) Statements from interviewees who felt most negative about ELH interactions and future prospects came from those with longstanding feelings of being discounted:

“[Years ago when Lynn pursued a competing grant] she said she didn’t care about my feelings. ‘It’s about the kids.’ I took that as ‘by any means’ are OK. I don’t agree . . . I feel like Lynn didn’t value our working relationship. I’m sad for the wasted opportunities because of this.”

“The Chair has no history of sharing. She will need to step aside if this is to be collaborative. I never see her sharing her power. Efficiency would be her #1 word. She saw a business opportunity to get this Hub up and running and to be the first.”

“When Melissa [Bruce’s boss] got pissed off with Sandy [Michele’s boss] for putting Pre-K in the elementary schools, Michele and Bruce got polarized. I think they are a little more back together and talking but this made it difficult and is an example of what diminishes energy and action.”

It does seem evident that when negative emotions were present, especially those conserved over time, there is a *distal bias* where the causes of negative emotions are attributed to the ELH itself and the key players. (Lawler et al. 2009) Loyalty seemed to be held close within each person’s immediate organization and smaller network of validating relationships. For example, Melissa, Lenore, and one other Board member (all from separate organizations) were supportive of each other and shared some skepticism that the ELH staff was fully transparent and well-intended toward their organizations. Their skepticism served to weaken their resolve to a CI model. Claire commented, “We have a contingency of people who have their own Board to answer to and haven’t negotiated well the change in working as a Hub. They are less emotionally committed. The reason they would stay at this point is mostly out of fear (i.e. How would this look in the community? What if we miss out

on funding?]).” All of this serves to externalize the cause of negative emotions, protecting the bonds of the smaller network, but at the expense of undermining the commitment to and legitimacy of the larger ELH social unit. This sets the stage for a fragmented order. (Lawler 2013: 347) However, we will see in Section 8.5 that the negative emotions, while a risk factor to ELH and Collective Impact success, were not necessarily an indication of a desire for the concept to fail.

8.3.4 The Interplay of Emotion with Uncertainty Reduction

In the social commitments theory put forth in this thesis, key mediating mechanisms are both emotion and uncertainty reduction. In social exchange theory, “the *frequency-to-emotion-to-cohesion* pathway reflects a *social bonding* process. The positive emotion from frequent exchange can be construed as “rewards” generated by the exchange and completion of joint activity. . . In contrast, the *frequency-to-uncertainty reduction-to-cohesion* pathway can be construed as a *boundary-defining* process wherein exchange partners become salient, distinctive, and set off relative to other potential partners.” (Lawler and Thye 2006: 310) Positive emotion is thought to have a significant effect on perceptions of group cohesion, where uncertainty reduction does not have the same explanatory power. While immersed in ELH I did not experience these two phenomena as separate, as Lawler and Thye suggest. I saw people’s negative emotion being driven to a noticeable degree by the predictability of whether co-participants and ELH staff could be counted on to be transparent, to show up regularly for meetings, and to invite participation in decision making. The negative emotion summarized in Table Y above was driven in large part by these uncertainties and the structural constraints of insufficient time to raise and resolve them as issues. One example was given in an interview: “I believe the distrust among a few creates an atmosphere of conspiracy or concern that there are back door deals or ulterior motives. I think this is perpetuated by the disconnect between Lynn, Melissa, [and one other] and the historical issues. I believe that there are others that may share this view, just less intensely. But a few can derail the many.”

Lawler (2003) does argue from the symbolic interactionist perspective that the concept of consensual identities “is broader than and can subsume the uncertainty problem of exchange theory. . . because having a consensual view of self and other renders the behavior of each predictable.” (p. 139) For exchange theory, benefits or *outcomes* are interdependent. For symbolic interactionists, *identities* are interdependent. When theoretically combined (versus separated) it becomes easier to understand how positive emotions from exchange with others is fragile or incomplete without the reliability of knowing that one can now count on colleagues to be there for continued validation, valuable exchange/interaction going forward. Together *both* these elements emerged as a powerful mediating mechanism in moving from person-to-person to person-to-group ties. They did not appear separable.

In summary for Section 8.3, emotion was ever present in all forms of exchange I experienced as a participant observer. Positive emotions did appear to facilitate social bonding as a group. Negative emotion clearly worked the other direction and got in the way of larger group cohesion. The emotion, whether newly emergent or longstanding, did appear to shape the cognitive experience and belief about the future prospects of the ELH, as opposed to the other way around. This phenomenon was best understood as I looked through the lens of both social exchange theory and identity theory. Furthermore, in this first key finding, I came to understand that the root of current feelings in an interaction may predate the interaction and come from multiple sources, and this has ramifications for the type and frequency of exchange found in the ELH interactions as well.

8.4 Social Exchange and Relational Cohesion

Molm and Cook (1995) originally articulated the categories of social exchange. The four types from their research have been referenced and discussed previously. Three are relevant in this case: *negotiated*, *reciprocal*, and *productive* exchange.

8.4.1 Evidence of Non-separability of Social Exchange Type

First, it is important to note that I experienced all three forms of exchange in this case study. However, their interrelatedness and frequency were quite complex and non discrete. For example, reciprocal exchange was observed in the everyday meetings of the ELH, and outside the official meetings. However, it was not pervasive among the entire group. The conversations I had with CAT members like Susan, Roberta, Ethan, and Bruce all referenced getting together informally for coffee or walks, particularly with those they had a longstanding history with, to work things out and make sure relationships were OK. Board members and CAT members who reported a connection with each other demonstrated more humor with each other in meetings. One example was Catherine passing a note to Bruce while he was speaking. After pausing to look at it he stated, “That was a fake \$20 bill to get me to shut up.” Newer members like Jeanette saw her relationships with fellow CAT members as more formal and restricted to existing meetings. She was one person who suggested more social time would be a good idea for the Hub. Board members like Ryan felt unclear on how his contribution fit in as he did not know the players but accepted the Board position based solely on his positive relationship with Lynn, the Chair. He admitted this lack of familiarity with other Board members made him quiet at meetings because he was “trying to figure out my place.”

Negotiated exchange was present in much of the interactions, however non-existent between some members with the ELH staff. I saw this when the Board negotiated the Declaration of Collaboration, when those participating in grant writing were asked to stay or leave, and when Lynn and Claire asked for help on follow up action items such as hiring a new staff member. Several Board members, were quiet almost entirely for every meeting, seemingly not participating in actively working on Board processes. And many times negotiated *and* reciprocal forms of exchange seemed entwined in a non-linear way. Molm, Melamed, and Whitman (2013) refer to this phenomenon as *embeddedness* of negotiated in a

relationship of reciprocal exchange. Evidence for this was when Lenore and Melissa would offer to share resources with each other, negotiating exactly when and how much. They demonstrated a friendly reciprocity in giving each other credit in front of the larger group and expressing support for each other's organizations. Lenore even kept other Board members up to date on Melissa's upcoming surgery.

Furthermore, the intent for productive exchange was a stated goal, of the ELH and its members, although I rarely observed this type of exchange and never across the entire group. According to Lawler, Thye and Yoon (2000), productive exchange involves higher degrees of interdependence, across the entire group, not simply between a few actors. Given that the ELH aspired to this level of collaboration and weren't accomplishing it in an observable way, I was left with the question, is productive exchange toward a collective impact even possible without the prior history and successful outcomes of both negotiated and reciprocal exchange among all members?

Theory states that both negotiated and reciprocal exchanges are dyadic – they occur between two individuals. “Negotiated exchange involves explicit and binding agreements, about actor-to-actor flows of benefit, made at a single point in time. Reciprocal exchange involves sequences of unilateral giving among two actors over time.” (Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2000: 617) Productive exchange²⁷ usually involves more than two people and has higher degrees of interdependence among actors where “the flow of contributions are from person to group, and the flow of rewards are from group to person”(Lawler, Thye, and Yoon 2000: 617). There is strong support in the research of Lawler and colleagues that productive exchange, more than the other forms of exchange, is most likely to unleash the emotional affective process described earlier, which will generate relational cohesion or person-to-

²⁷ Sometimes termed “group cooperation” (Molm 1994), or “group generalized exchange” (Yamagishi and Cook 1993). (Lawler et. al. 2000: 618)

group ties. Follow on research suggests that after productive exchange, negotiated exchange is most salient to relational cohesion, followed to a lesser extent by reciprocal exchange (Thye et al. 2011).

Evidence of negotiated exchange (*not* embedded in reciprocal) within the ELH appeared particularly in the interactions between the Board Chair and others, and between the Executive Director and others, especially with CAT members. Examples on the Board included instances of Lynn promising to manage time effectively in exchange for her role in planning and driving the agenda. She would also ask specific people for input and effort on certain topics, but require a specific timeframe for their input and delivery. Furthermore, she decided on whom she wanted to participate in executive sessions or hiring committees, but only after hearing from those expressing interest. Her control of timelines was a demonstration of her power in the exchange. People who negotiated with her for their involvement knew exactly what time and engagement was being asked of them. Two people in particular on the Board had negative history over a number of years with Lynn. They felt threatened by her new positional power at the Hub and did not trust her intentions. Lenore and Melissa managed two of the largest provider organizations within the Hub and tended to be evasive and questioning of Lynn's process and requests. Lynn and her executive director both felt the negotiated commitments with these two Board members were being undermined after the meetings. Even with a shared mission and shared sense of responsibility this dynamic persisted. From Lynn: "Lenore and Melissa fear the Hub will take something away from them. Lenore especially talks with her staff negatively about the Hub. We've only known each other for about two years. I have had conversations with her over coffee and another time over a glass of wine, to explain the Hub and how I see it can work. I always walk away feeling as if we connected and then I get backdoor comments from other people that tells me we are not aligned."

Molm (2003) explains this dichotomy in her own research. "The more an actor

attributes responsibility for inequality to the partner and perceives the partner's behavior as intentional and dispositional, the more likely that the actor will perceive the partner's behavior as unfair, evaluate [her] in a negative light, and resist making unequal exchanges with the partner." (p.14) In this case, the history of feeling betrayed and feeling disempowered caused the two Board members to resist being available or committed to negotiated exchange with the Chair and the ELH staff. On the other hand, negotiated exchange occurred frequently *between* Melissa and Lenore – sharing work space and other resources for the mutual benefit of their organizations' programs. I observed their negotiations as embedded in reciprocal exchanges of support and trust. Although the Chair attempted to address concerns through informal meetings and reciprocal exchange (e.g. over coffee, a glass of wine), these attempts were not taken seriously nor reciprocated. According to the Executive Director, emails and calls to the two Board members for engagement and clarification on their intentions often went unanswered. This continuing dynamic was felt by most of the rest of the Board and CAT and experienced negatively.

I saw a similar but less intense dynamic for Claire, the Executive Director, who co-chaired and developed the agendas for all CAT meetings and agenda development for the Board. One of her CAT co-leads commented on their negotiations to lead meetings, "She's already quite a bit down the road on the agenda before we meet. It's hard to steer it back." Another co-lead stated, "My relationship with Claire was one of letting her take over. Usually she really felt like she knew where things should go and I was just a figurehead." While this unbalanced negotiated exchange was not as emotionally charged as the one on the Board, it was further evidence that balanced power did not exist yet for the ELH, encumbering the collective impact process.

Reciprocal exchange existed in all meetings as people offering to help each other without requiring immediate reciprocity. I observed reciprocal exchange between all members of the Board, but sparingly between Board members and the ELH staff.

Only a few Board members interacted in that way with ELH staff members. On the CAT, reciprocal exchange was more pervasive and I observed this even with ELH staff members, including Claire. When reciprocal exchange occurred, it was generally accompanied with a positive feeling and enthusiasm, a willingness to help and contribute. Roberta said: “I find solutions by networking existing resources and initiatives. I inspire partnerships between decision-makers by telling them I’ll help. Then they find a way to come together and end up not needing much help from me at all.” Catherine also commented: “Debriefing [one-on-one] outside of the meeting makes sure everyone feels an important part of the process.”

Arguably, productive exchange was present and operating among many of the players *prior* to the ELH being formed. As someone commented, the “rules are changing now,” and cooperation and sharing as a group was expected on a larger scale, not simply between several agencies and providers. As one Board member stated, “We’ve always cooperated. Collaboration is something more.” Productive exchange is important to understand as more than just personal friendliness and productivity. Productive exchange is distinguished from pools of positive relationships at the dyadic level by a single pool of group-generated resources (Lawler et al. 2000: 619). This occurs when people feel trusting of the group and the process enough to contribute their time, money, and people with the faith that it will benefit their individual organizations as well as the community they serve. That benefit may look different than before, but they believe it will be comparable or better. As one CAT member commented, “Team members who are active and players in some capacity over the years, those partnerships continue to get stronger. We are meeting more often because of this Hub design.” But what was implied in my conversation with this person is that for those who are disconnected or new to the network, the ELH process was not bringing them effectively into one partnership. “After yesterday’s CAT subgroup meeting, it should be renamed ‘Isolated Impact Team.’ A rep from the community health organization attended and talked about one of the grant projects that involved physicians. When we tried to make suggestions, she became defensive. Most of the work on that project has

been done by them with no input from early learning (EL) providers. This is just an example but it made the rep feel unappreciated, the EL providers devalued, and the process very siloed. *This type of thing could be avoided if everyone invests the time to come together for real work.* (italics added) This was one attempt at a productive exchange that failed. While the ELH stated purpose is to bring everyone together for the purpose of doing meaningful work together, the structural cohesion elements discussed earlier – particularly around network power, likelihood of inclusion – were making it difficult for trust, commitment, and shared positive affect to grow across the entire network of players. This leads again to the question of whether productive exchange for ELH can actually emerge when negotiated exchange and reciprocal exchange are fragmented.

8.4.2 Exchange Dynamics in the Real World

Unlike much of the design assumptions for experimental research conducted on exchange, there are in reality, few if any examples of individuals joining a collaboration devoid of any history working together. In this case Susan estimated that 90% of the CAT members already knew each other and had prior experience in working together. A significant number had actually worked in multiple organizations that comprised the ELH. Informal investigation of other Collective Impact efforts reveals a similar phenomenon. This makes ethnographic research in the social exchange domain increasingly important, especially when the assumptions of controlled experiments leave this important element of prior relationship out of the equation.

The notion that negotiated, reciprocal, and productive exchange can be discretely different and studied as such also remains suspect. My experience as a participant observer supports the findings of Molm and colleagues that when negotiated and reciprocal exchange “are combined in an embedded relationship, the positive effects of each form of exchange – the greater structural cooperativeness of negotiated exchange, and the positive relational climate of trust and perceived partnership created by reciprocal exchange – will work together to produce

stronger behavioral commitments than either of these forces alone.” (2013: 94) For ELH what this means is negotiated exchange in the early stages must be successful and move toward an embeddedness within a reciprocal exchange relationship for everyone involved. This is a logical progression since “reciprocal exchanges produce lower power use and inequality, higher levels of trust and feelings of affective commitment with stronger perceptions of fairness.” (Molm 2003: 6) The clarity of expectations that comes with negotiated roles and behaviors sets conditions for trusting patterns of reciprocal exchange to expand and become pervasive.

I suspect that a newly forming organization such as ELH cannot jump to productive exchange without clearing up past negative emotional interpersonal patterns and continuously inviting a larger group process that leads to negotiated expectations (such as through the Declaration of Collaboration, team building offsites, etc.) These new agreements will be fragile until tested successfully through a larger network of successful reciprocal exchanges. When trust and relational predictability is felt between enough members, only then can productive exchange emerge where group purpose with positive affect becomes a beneficial shared goal *and benefit* in and of itself.

8.4.3 Importance of Exchange Frequency

According to Lawler, Thye, and Yoon, *frequency* of exchange is also different for productive exchange. In one of the few studies done focusing on productive exchange, they found the frequency of productive exchange to be only two-thirds that of negotiated exchange (2000: 646). Complexity of coordination is often the early problem, until people become more committed to each other and the cause. My observations of the ELH revealed that reciprocal exchange – both separate and with embedded negotiated exchange, - was certainly occurring as frequently as negotiated exchange alone if not more prevalent. However, productive exchange was rare. In addition to the relational barriers explored previously, there are other reasons for the lower occurrence of productive exchange as Lawler et.al.

discovered. The desire in productive exchange is to transact to work together, and the main obstacle is coordination of calendars so critical players can connect. The many expressed desires in ELH meetings and especially in the interviews to “get results,” “start getting things done,” to not only talk and plan, exemplify the desire for productive exchange. But the work of aligning expectations, coordinating schedules and setting rules of engagement has clearly not been completed. For ELH, the few official meetings set for each month were not enough in the eyes of the CAT. And on the Board, Lenore suggested a retreat “where we can discuss what we value and how we will interact. We need social time. I don’t know [all] these people!” One could argue that frequency of meeting to complete negotiated operating agreements, decision processes, etc. across the membership coupled with social time to broaden reciprocal bonds among the members would set the stage for greater productive exchange, in part because participants would enjoy working together. And “more frequent productive exchange generates positive emotions that, in turn, enhance perceptions of group cohesion.” (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2000: 648-9) Lawler et al. found that in multi-actor productive exchange, this endogenous process *becomes stronger over time* whereas in dyadic negotiated exchange, feelings and cohesion become set early and are conserved. (p. 647) This becomes the challenge for the ELH - to essentially reset old patterns among individual actors within a larger context and group, to allow for a new productive exchange among all members to emerge, build, and sustain over time.

8.4.4 Contribution of Identity Theory Perspective

A final thought from the symbolic interactionist perspective – successful interaction (or exchange) is when actors establish and respond in terms of consensual definitions of self and other. (Lawler 2003: 138) As stated previously, for exchange theorists, benefits and outcomes are interdependent, while for symbolic interactionists, it is the identities that are interdependent. “Social interaction entails a negotiation of *both* identities and outcomes.” (p. 139-140) (*italics added*) Lawler proposes that if actors are validated in their own identities they are more

easily able to generate and affirm collective identities. In putting this together, a re-negotiated, more trusting relationship with disaffected Board members and the ELH staff, would confirm the “me’s” and promote then a sense of “we” or mutual consensual identity. (p. 141) This is what should open the possibility for more frequent and successful productive exchange and the affective as well as cognitive benefits it yields in building group cohesion.

8.5 Desire for Affective Commitment and a New Order

I felt a palpable emotional energy in the room during the group dialogue session when the following quote from one of the interviewees was projected on screen:

When will we soberly look at the negative things that happen in our community and ask, “What do we do collectively to make sure *that* never happens again?” The collective or collaborative approach is an opportunity for us to be accountable for the things that happen in our community – good or bad. This should be our rallying cry. Let’s face *that!* . . . We should have the conversation as a team – “Do we see ourselves as a collective impact/action group?” I wouldn’t say that we do right now. Yes, we’ve participated together but the process has been driven pretty hard. Are we taking what’s handed to us or are we owning it? The more we engage, the more we will own it.

The response in the room was, “Who said that? I wish it was my comment!” “That’s exactly right.” “This comment is the most hopeful for me. This is our humanness.” All heads were nodding and energy was building. I was struck with a feeling of yearning from this group. While all of them throughout the six months had been cognitively committed to the Collective Impact model, only a smaller group actually believed it could be real. The statement on screen brought them back together to discuss the potential and state resolve to deal with old issues blocking the way.

I remembered at the final Board meeting I attended, when the new executive director was hired, that even Lenore who was so guarded and noncommittal with the previous executive director spoke up with enthusiasm about hiring the new candidate, “I believe she can pull us together.” She subsequently initiated a motion to make an offer to the person, which was unanimously accepted. Additional

evidence of a desire for greater affiliation as one ELH community was evidenced in the following interview statements:

“We should appreciate the risk we each are taking and create a supportive environment to have these conversations in.”

“My sense is people really believe it’s going to be better, as they learn and see possibilities.”

“Our commitment to kids and families is what holds us together when this gets difficult. And we need each other to be most effective.”

“I think every single person who sits around that table believes that working collectively is the way for us to survive and for humans on the planet to survive.”

“If we are seen as problem-solvers who can advance something that needs to be done, bringing things to the table that benefit more than each of ourselves, this builds social capital. The first need is to get trust in place.”

“It should now be about who WE are.”

“None of us can succeed as an island. We need to step forward to meet on common ground.”

“This will take superhuman commitment. We need to feel that we don’t want to be in this community without the others. We need to realize we are better together.”

“We all realize this could be big and lasting. *Now* is the time. The size of the opportunity is exciting. We should fold up shop and go home if we fail. We have the potential to change the whole system.”

“Envisioning ‘what *could* be’ gets very exciting – Having those Aha moments of how agencies could be working together.”

I believe the voices are important to share verbatim as each person had their own authentic take on both what it means to come together as one body, but also why it is so important to them. Whether expressed in Board and CAT meetings or through interviews, the emotion in the statements listed above was one of co-inspiration and shared yearning. The excitement of what the size of this accomplishment could mean and the importance of *doing it together* is evident.

8.5.1 Micro Social Order Defined

And what does accomplishing something this big mean in terms of what the group becomes? Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2009) as well as Collins (2009) reference a group becoming a unit, entity, or micro social order. *Micro social order* is defined as a recursive pattern of activity (interaction, transaction, exchange) among two or more actors when those actors orient their behavior to each other, experience global emotions from their interactions, perceive they are a social unit, and over time develop affective attachments to that unit. "Together, these behavioral, emotional, and cognitive conditions imply that actors define themselves with reference to a larger social unit and are willing to act on its behalf." This requires the development of person to group ties. (Lawler et. al. 2008:520) Although rational choice, social constructionist, identity, and social exchange theories approach the self-to-collective phenomenon in different ways, they have somewhat overlapping and convergent themes. The Affect Theory of Social Exchange used within the theoretical framework of this research analysis interweaves elements from each approach to understand an actor who experiences emotion or affect from exchange. (p. 521)

Under what conditions do actors attribute their emotional experiences to a social unit, hence deepening shared commitment and relational cohesion? Any social order has an emotional foundation (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2009; Turner 2007, 2014). The theory states that joint responsibility and balanced power will most likely yield positive emotions from exchange which actors will attribute to the social group, building cohesion. There was evidence in this case that there could be better interdependence of tasks – agenda management, shared ownership of funding decisions, identifying overlaps, frequency and types of meetings. One of the factors that seemed in the way of ELH members progressing their purpose of collective impact appeared to be their role confusion as to what ELH staff would and should provide vs. what their network should have more responsibility in determining. "*Commitment* is generally defined as the tendency of actors to stay

with and continue to exchange with those they have exchanged with in the past.” (Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2008: 522) This was certainly the case with ELH actors who had a positive history coming into the Hub structure. What was not clear was whether they would develop shared commitment among *all* ELH members, redefining the social order for delivering early childhood learning readiness in their community. However, there was the stated and observed evidence that they were hopeful for this to occur.

Durkheim was one of the first to observe that by coming together collectively, people generate intense emotion that can be felt – an effervescence. ([1915], 1954) This is a desired state that many groups wish to recreate through practicing ‘rituals’ that bind them together. In modern day, this can be observed in any trusting team through the pattern of their interactions, humor, caring expressions, and enjoyment in being together. According to Collins like Durkheim before him, “the pleasure of belonging to a group, of interacting with others, is the most important of human motivations.” (1989: 14) As previously stated, Collins’ concept of emotional energy becomes a desirable benefit and reward for those who successfully attain relational cohesion as a group. Agreeing with Collins, Lawler, Thye and Yoon state the importance of affect in going beyond person-to-person cohesion and getting to person-to-group ties making those groups expressive objects and ends in themselves. (Lawler 2013; Lawler et al. 2009) While this observation may ring true, what can explain this phenomenon?

8.5.2 Self-Determination Theory and Human Intrinsic Needs

If we look to the research and writing of developmental psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, we may find one answer. Their work over decades in outlining Self Determination Theory (SDT) has withstood the tests of time and provides a valuable insight into human intrinsic needs.(Deci and Ryan 2000, 2006, 2008; Ryan and Deci 2000). According to SDT, to contribute something meaningful and to do it with others in a spirit of mutual caring is an intrinsic human need. A *need* is

associated with people's growth and health, differentiating it from a mere *desire*. (Baard, Deci, and Ryan 2004) Their identification of autonomy, relatedness, and competence as 'nutriments' for human well-being have been validated also in the area of human epidemiology (Marmot 2004; Marmot and Brunner 2004). Deci and Ryan identify the need to freely choose to contribute as *co-existing* with a need for relatedness. They do not accept the dichotomy of individual autonomy vs. community. What makes one's autonomy meaningful and one's contribution valuable is within the context of serving one's social system (Deci and Ryan 2000). Further explanation is beyond the purview of this thesis, but there is clearly much research to back up their claims. When applied to the ELH findings, SDT would explain the longing expressed by the broader ELH CAT and Board to come together and achieve the promise of their collective impact goal, even in the face of frustration, disappointment, competing demands, and negative past history. I do not suggest this yearning can't be thwarted at some point, as everyone has seen these types of complex collaboration fail more often than not. What I do suggest is that there is a basic human need to affiliate and together accomplish big and purposeful things. If timely attention is given to removing the barriers to this natural predisposition to social order, more collective impact efforts may likely succeed.

8.6 Reflections on Findings

The micro-ethnographic research pursued in this thesis was filled with rich emotional texture, layered experiences, many sources of evidence, and colorful actors. While I did broadly comment on the validity of the Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2009), Thye, Lawler, and Yoon (2011) framework I developed to understand the data, the three key findings that emerged as most interesting to me related to where I was surprised – either pleasantly or not. With respect to Emotion as Key Mediating Mechanism (Section 8.3), I was fascinated by the validation of Lawler, Thye, and Yoon's theories in experiencing the emergence and mediating role of positive emotion in building a shared affective state which strengthened ELH group

commitment, or in terms of the negative, was blocking group cohesion. Most practitioners focus solely on the cognitive variables of group effectiveness, things like knowledge creation and sharing, visioning, leadership development, and strategic planning. I also see power in the notion from Identity Theory that if identities of individuals are verified within the group, then emotions are even more intensely positive. I am left wondering if that is most fundamental to the rest of Lawler, Thye, and Yoon's Social Commitments Theory. Seeing actors as primarily social and emotional beings, with an affective underlay to their group formation is important, exciting and potentially crucial to helping future complex collaborations succeed.

Social exchange and relational cohesion (Section 8.4) interested me because I see the potential to add a dimension to social exchange theory – one that questions whether 'types' of exchange are really that cut and dry. And I was interested that there may actually be a process to developing what has been labeled 'productive exchange.' In addition, through this field research, I've come to see that controlled experiments alone cannot do justice to social exchange interactions as actors seldom if ever have the clean history that is assumed in the experiment design.

Most exciting is a pervasive desire for affective commitment (Section 8.5), where I could see a human longing emerge – a desire to be together in service of something great, coupled with the belief we can all care about both the cause *and* each other. That caring is rewarding on both counts. These three key themes have ramifications for further understanding under what conditions person-to-group ties are formed and for how practitioners and others can support cross-boundary collaboration teams in continuing despite pressures, history, and constraints that may pull them apart. This will be covered in chapter nine on conclusions.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusions

9.1 Summarizing Overview

There are three principal aims of this chapter: 1) To provide a summary of how the major findings of this thesis have contributed in answering the main research question; 2) To consider implications of the findings to opportunities and directions for further research; 3) To review the potential contribution of this thesis to the knowledge and practice of designing and advising on successful complex collaborations.

Through this thesis I have sought to explore and understand the main research question, “Under what conditions do individuals subordinate a personal organizational agenda on behalf of a collective impact agenda?” Beginning with a review of the literature on cross-boundary teams, cooperation, and collaboration, I chose to focus the research on the social-emotional aspects of people working together toward a shared purpose. This choice was intriguing because the social - affective dynamics of cross-boundary teams have been less studied and understood than has been the rational-cognitive elements. While both rational-cognitive and social-affective dynamics are interwoven, there is merit to understanding their distinctions and what specific role social and emotional interaction patterns play in setting a path from person-to-person to person-to-group ties as cohesive groups. I have pursued this by selecting a complex, real world, cross-sector collaboration for study as a micro-ethnography. This case study approach was chosen under the premise that social order (cohesion and identity as a ‘group’) has a foundation in experienced positive emotions which first emerge at the micro-sociological level, and then expand and are attributed to meso and macro levels. (Collins 1989; Lawler, Thye and Yoon 2009; Lawler 2013; Turner 2014) In other words, the

shared affect of groups is first established through person-to-person, then person-to-group level before becoming embedded at the organizational level. For this reason, the specific focus I chose as a researcher was 'joining' a cross-boundary collaboration as it was actually occurring. Because previous research focusing on these social-affective dynamics was primarily done through controlled experiments, I believed an ethnographic approach would round out the body of knowledge and allow for a deeper understanding of the underlying conditions that enable positive emotions to emerge with a group or team, creating a shared identity and commitment in pursuing complex collaborative goals.

Some readers may wonder why this dynamic is deserving of such an in-depth focus. The organizational phenomena social researchers study are in considerable flux these days, mirroring the rapid changes and shifting interdependencies of today's global context. Teams, or groups working with a shared purpose, are working in ways and in circumstances that did not exist decades before. To be successful in solving difficult challenges inside global corporations or across communities, people from different organizations are having to figure out how to work together more effectively. Cross-boundary collaborative teams chartered to address intractable problems such as chronic social, economic, and environmental issues are on the rise. Organizations from all sectors see that to take on complex issues they need to move beyond any one organization's isolated impact to a collective impact. (Kania and Kramer 2011) These groups do not have common bosses, and few if any dedicated resources. They struggle with juggling multiple roles and memberships with numerous distractions that would pull them away from their stated shared goals. As Wageman and colleagues (2012) have discovered, the way corporations and communities construct interdependence toward a common goal is shifting dramatically. Suspecting that the traditional roadmap for success with complex teams is incomplete, my purpose with this thesis has been to go deeper to better understand what builds stability, cohesion and hence improves the rate of success for these types of initiatives.

This thesis has argued that social-affective dynamics are fundamental to the abilities of actors to bond with each other around a common goal, perhaps more fundamental although no less important than the rational reasons that may exist. Rational reasons for working together are important but insufficient and will not mediate the relational cohesion necessary to keep people together through thick and thin. In a sense, team members must fall in love with each other – when ‘love’ is defined as seeing each other as legitimate contributors worthy of mutual influence. (Maturana and Poerksen 2004) Whether the conditions that allow for positive emotional energy to develop are understood or not, they no doubt will impact longevity of a group and greatly influence effectiveness. With better understanding of these social-affective patterns comes greater awareness for complex team members, providing them more choice in how to launch and manage collaborative initiatives, therefore reducing the risk of failure.

Given the complexity of today’s context for working globally and interdependently, several areas are outlined for consideration in this chapter both in terms of research and in practice for forming and launching effective collaborations. The notion of considering what conditions enable the most effective social-affective dynamics to emerge for teams becomes an intriguing question since looking for simple cause and effect has been illusive for those working to understand indicators for success. (Hackman 2012; Kania and Kramer 2013) Secondly, there are clear opportunities where the findings of this research can extend and combine existing theory to provide new points of intersection and answers to age old questions about how individual feelings and experiences transform to shared affect and experience, bringing surprising benefits to those involved. Finally, this chapter will look at the implications of this ethnographic case study on future research particularly in the micro-sociological realm of complex teams.

9.2 Conditions vs. Causes

“Knowing that there are no easy answers to truly complex problems, system leaders *cultivate the conditions* wherein collective wisdom emerges over time through a ripening process that gradually brings about new ways of thinking, acting, and being.” (Senge, Hamilton, and Kania 2015: 8) (*italics added*)

The focus of the research question on *conditions* vs. causes of group cohesion and commitment was carefully considered. But as the working world has become increasingly complex, searching for specific causes to issues is less relevant and potentially misleading. It used to be that groups in organizations tended to be intact, stable, and relatively simple teams. They were co-located in the same building, if not the same floor. This created a single, more tightly bound organizational context. Today, a team’s composition more often spans membership from multiple locations, organizational structures, and is seldom anyone’s full time assignment. It is sometimes difficult to know if we even would call actors working together a team, group, collaborative, partnership, coalition, or something else entirely (Chesbrough et al. 2006; Chesbrough 2012; Wageman et al. 2012). But as Hackman (2012) asserts, cross-boundary teams operating today are certainly social systems. As members of an interdependent group, together pursuing a collective purpose, they are capable of *relating as a unit* to other groups and individuals. As a social system, they are perceived by both themselves and by non-members as an *entity*, or what Lawler, Thye and Yoon refer to as a micro social order (2008, 2009).

The bottom line is that describing a collective entity, such as the ELH, as having thoughts and feelings significantly increases the difficulty of explicating how the states and processes of individuals combine to shape group-level affect, structures and outcomes. (Hackman 2012) Being a social system, the ELH community is not a mere collection of cause-effect relationships. Instead this collaboration exhibits emergent and dynamic properties that are not well understood by standard causal thinking. While the framework in this thesis, derived from the work of Lawler,

Thye, and Yoon (2009), Thye, Lawler and Yoon (2011), does assert positive emotion as a mediating mechanism, this is not intended to force a premise that is too linear and reductionist in nature. Rather this framework specified a manageable set of general assumptions and concepts developed over time and considered important in investigating particular social behaviors in the ELH. It told me what concepts would likely be important in studying the process of person-to-group ties. Making use of the concepts provided by this frame, I have sought to better illuminate the social-affective dynamics of the ELH, and test understanding according to several theoretical explanations of my experience and observations.

A focus on *conditions* (vs. causes) can honor the complexity of person-to-group cohesion and the recursive and evolutionary effects of all interactions acting upon the social system, whether endogenous or exogenous. If it is true, as suggested in Section 8.5, that groups yearn for collectively, being part of something meaningful and big, then an understanding of the conditions under which they can chart their own journey is worthy of examination.

Hackman postulates six conditions he has discovered in working with complex teams.²⁸ He considers these ‘minimum critical specifications’ so as not to overprescribe what must be put in place for success. I see five conditions based on my experience with ELH, some of which overlap with Hackman and previous research. They are as follows:

- a. *Interdependence and alignment to a common worthy purpose* – Similar to Lawler, Thye, and Yoon’s ‘jointness of tasks’, the existence of structural cohesion gives group members a reason to work together and the control over their work processes and outcomes. A purpose being ‘worthy’ means it presents an attractive, meaningful challenge, one that would be difficult to

²⁸ i) ‘real team’ with boundaries around membership and collective accountabilities; ii) shared compelling purpose; iii) right skills, right diversity; iv) clear norms of conduct; v) supportive organizational context; vi) access to team coaching (2012)

pursue alone. And it is important to note that agreement and alignment are not the same thing. Alignment requires all players investing in a shared understanding and commitment at an emotional as well as cognitive level. There is evidence in the ELH early history that many actors representing different provider organizations, business, and government entities worked side by side to define the collective purpose and basic structure of the organization during the proposal stage. This early work served to energize the proposal and engaged a broad cross-section of the community resulting in ELH's selection as one of the first Hubs. The pride I heard expressed in this and the pervasive yearning to succeed that I encountered underscores the power of this condition.

- b. *Group reflective processes* – These are processes that build reflexive awareness leading to learning and needed adjustments to social interaction dynamics. In their interviews, ELH participants were asking for more time together where they could learn from each other and build shared rules of engagement. The final group dialogue I facilitated was a high energy encounter where participants validated each other's perspective and reflected on what they were learning, and how that would inform what they should do next to become a more effective Collective Impact team. Because of the highly social nature of humans, reflecting together leads to a shared sense-making of what is happening, a shared experience of what it feels like, and shared language on how to describe a collective experience. This in turn aids in clearing up misunderstanding. In short, the condition whereby group reflection is embedded in the on-going work process helps support individuals becoming a coherent social system.
- c. *Minimum critical spec approach to rules and processes* – ELH participants wanted clarity but were suspicious of controlling leaders. Self Determination Theory has found that the only thing that depletes human interest, vitality and energy, is the controlled regulation by others. (Deci and Ryan 2008) Rules and structure are needed for any group to operate but over-control, particularly by a few, can drain interest and excitement for the effort. ELH

actors wanted to get work done, and they wanted more of a say in the prioritization of what was important to work on as well as how to go about it. Having volition and choice in how one contributes is vitalizing for the individual, and seeing one's contribution to the community would have a positive effect on the overall emotional energy and momentum of the group.

- d. *Powerful launch* – This helps to put work and relationships in context and can reduce anxiety around questions of “How will I play? What influence do I have?” The ELH agenda for a launch that never happened would have answered many of the unresolved questions that emerged in interviews, in informal gatherings, and in the CAT and Board meetings. I imagine what a difference it would have made having a kick-off event with a goal to re-form past relationships around a new purpose, with everyone participating in creating the rules of interaction, and negotiating roles and responsibilities. Had it occurred, this event could have explicitly clarified and negotiated the structural and contextual conditions the Hub was operating within. Launching a cross-boundary initiative in a powerful way relates to Hackman's first condition about forming a ‘real team’ with collective accountability. His own experience in researching work teams over the years is that 90% of how well a group eventually does is based on the pre-work and initial launch of that group. The fact that the launch for the ELH was thwarted due to weather and availability of facilitators to help was further exacerbated by it then slipping in priority, subordinated to the ELH staff's urgent need to get the grant writing process going.
- e. *Leadership that removes roadblocks vs. controlling and driving* – It is difficult to examine group dynamics without paying attention to power and leadership within that group. In the ELH example, well-intentioned Hub leaders drove things hard and controlled the agenda inviting but allowing little influence by others. This stalled energy and reinforced prior negative history, having a dampening effect on all actors. There is a plethora of writers today underlining the importance of leadership that does not direct or control but rather plays a role to identify and remove things that get in

the way of a group self-organizing process (e.g. Hock 2005; Senge 2006; Wheatley 2006; Hackman 2012). In this case, examples of removing barriers would be to create opportunities for more ELH reflective dialogue (*condition b*), commitment to resolution of past issues, lobbying the State to remove criteria from grants that forced ELH members to compete. Doing all this while allowing for greater participant ownership of CAT agendas and direction, would allow for the balanced power and inclusiveness described in Lawler, Thye, and Yoon's research and theory (2009).

These conditions are what emerged in the analysis of the ethnographic data collected during a seven-month period of time for the ELH. It may not be an inclusive list of conditions to enable social and emotional group success, but it is clearly relevant within the timeframe this research was conducted.

9.3 Opportunities and Contribution to Knowledge

Three key findings of this research have been discussed in some detail in an earlier chapter. These findings have been reviewed primarily through the work of Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2009) and Thye, Lawler, and Yoon (2011). Other related theories have been helpful to round out and provide further understanding of the social phenomena observed within the ELH as the group pursued its collective impact mission. Two overarching opportunities emerge from these findings:

1) Opportunities for intersection and integration of theory; 2) Emotional energy as a benefit in itself for individuals and for teams.

9.3.1 Finding Intersections

Rational with emotional:

This thesis has sought to hone in on social-affective factors to group formation and commitment to a shared cause, leaving similar ethnographic methods and questions studying the cognitive side to the work of researchers like Baba, Gluesing,

Ratner, and Wagner (2004). Historically, rational-cognitive assumptions have dominated the social sciences, skewing the realm of practice in how to create successful teams and collaborations. This has contributed to a mixed track record for complex teams and initiatives. The rational cognitive bias for building effective organizations is now being challenged in the sociological domain with growing interest over the last few decades. Today, the study of emotions is on the leading edge of research in sociology and the social sciences in general (Turner 2014). And while shining a light on the unique role emotions play in forming group bonds is needed, it is also important to realize that the cognitive and emotional must at some point be seen as integrated processes in overall group success. It cannot be an either/or. At the most basic level, Izard (2009) proposes that the emotion of interest, when generated, captures and sustains attention to particular cognitive goals. It is not a stretch to see that within the ELH context, actors 'seeing' and being attracted to each other - their work, expertise, and desires to contribute - was helping to solidify their shared thinking, learning and development of new mental models for working together. Those interviewed stated repeatedly that they wanted to know more about what each provider organization brought to the table. Likewise, they were eager to share their own perceived best practices. In her interview, Jeanette stated a key success factor for the group would be "having a mutual understanding of what an agency does but also *who they are*, what they are good at." This thesis plays a role in understanding that the separate and distinct functional properties of emotion (motivation) in groups can have an indispensable influence and work in concert with the properties of group cognition (knowledge) in better understanding a more accurate and balanced view of how individuals working in a complex context truly come together to accomplish something of significance.

Autonomy *with* relatedness:

Another dichotomy worth bridging is that of the modern day view that the individual's freedom to pursue their own meaningful endeavors is somehow at odds with being part of a community. That argument has existed since at least the

17th century with the Hobbesian social contract, a philosophical assertion that all individuals in society will begrudgingly cede some individual rights for the sake of protection by a ruling civil society. Of course, the assumptions of this view, which have carried on into modern western thought and economic practices, include that humans are individuals first and motivated *primarily* by their own self-interest, rather than by an interest in the common good. This premise set up the belief that the natural order is individual and that only of necessity for survival do humans give up some rights in order to be protected. Beginning with Adam Smith, followed by Durkheim and others, this underlying assumption has been challenged with logic and evidence that suggests just the opposite. Man is human only because he is socialized. And that our nature and the very emergence of our consciousness and well-being are dependent upon our interactions, positive feelings, and solidarity with each other. In short, there is a fundamental human need to live and work together, and to care for one another. The autonomy to pursue a meaningful life, in fact, can only have traction in relation to whom we belong to, and who matters most to us. When carefully considered, it is really a paradox rather than a dichotomy, since it is indeed true as Durkheim suggested long ago, “that which is intrinsically collective only exists through the medium of the consciousness of individuals.” And as Mead’s writings explicate, individual consciousness only arises through social interaction with others. In more recent times, Deci and Ryan (2000) have effectively described how the human need for greater autonomy, volition, and choice is represented by greater integration within the self. And an equally strong need for social relatedness is represented by the integration of oneself within the community. When our political and economic context turns these needs against each other, we end up with a false choice. In satisfying intrinsic human needs, any individual narrative is only coherent inside of a larger social system, and sympathy for our fellow man is what enables us to rationally pursue our interests. It is not the other way around. “Collective life did not arise from individual life; on the contrary, it is the latter that emerges from the former.” (Durkheim 1984:220)

Perhaps it is time to examine the power of thinking in a more integrated fashion about these basic human needs and the connection they have to people working in groups. This would lead to designing complex team structures, like CI initiatives, according to conditions that give weight to the social-affective elements as they integrate with the cognitive. It is time to transcend the duality of individual self-interest against the yearning to belong and vitally contribute to one's community. Any separation behavior I observed inside the ELH and among its members was not about wanting independence for one's organization; it was about loyalty to a subset of actors, solidarity with a smaller community that was supportive of each other. It seems clear that at least in part, designing for successful CI efforts should entail enabling conditions that allow participants to redefine their community boundaries, settle old history, and see a future together inclusive of all players – a new expanded community of people pursuing the same mission inside the same social system. All the conditions mentioned earlier, but particularly *d* and *e* apply here.

Theoretical integration:

As previously stated, I viewed ELH findings primarily through the Theory of Social Commitments, which exists already as an integration of the Affect Theory of Social Exchange and Relational Cohesion Theory. We have the work of Lawler, Thye, and Yoon (2009) to credit for that. This thesis also brought in a symbolic interactionist lens by discussing the findings from the perspective of Identity Theory (Stryker and Burke 2000; Lawler 2003; Stryker 2008) and then briefly touched on the relevance of Interaction Ritual Theory developed by Collins (1989). Lawler Thye and Yoon clearly share a philosophical grounding with Collins that is Durkheimian in its roots. Few social science philosophers have been as cogent as Durkheim in discussing both the process and the importance of person-to-group ties. While originally viewed through the phenomenon of religious experience, Durkheim clearly extends this process of shared ritual and energetic effervescence to any group with high collective aspirations and commitment. The micro-sociological focus of this research, demonstrated that the interactions between individuals quickly became

the interactions across the ELH social system. I saw these group interactions time and again effect the individual's experience, which reinforced and strengthened the group interactions, and on again in a recursive pattern.

Lawler (2001, 2003) introduced Identity Theory to the research of emotions and social exchange. This thesis discussed this perspective in examining what was occurring at the ELH. I found Lawler's insight using a symbolic interactionist lens to be very relevant and suggest this would be another theory with which to explore deeper integration inside of Social Commitments. While this would not be a new idea given the work already published by Lawler and colleagues, the notion of actors seeking verification of their individual identities and moving toward *consensual* identities in their social exchange seems to further enrich a Theory of Social Commitments and does not compete with, but rather complements it. I find it profoundly useful in understanding my own observations while being part of the ELH. I also find it less cumbersome than social exchange theory in charting and describing the path from interaction to relational cohesion in groups.

9.3.2 Emotional Energy as a Benefit in Itself

"Sentiments created and developed in the group have a greater energy than purely individual sentiments." (Durkheim, in Giddens 1972: 228)

One of the most challenging observations to understand from this thesis and the cited research, is the phenomenon of positive group affect and group experience of increased emotional energy. Moving from "I" feel something to "we" feel something has been difficult to describe, yet clearly exists. Much research on teams and groups does not move past the concept of teams as a collection of individuals, with a bucket of personal experiences and feelings. This thesis sought to go deeper and look at the conditions and the process by which 'me' becomes 'we' in terms of emotional experience and commitment. This process cannot be taken for granted as not all teams achieve this solidarity. As one ELH actor expressed, "We have always cooperated. Collaboration is something more." Cooperation in this case

means, 'I help and coordinate with you when asked and if I can.' Collaboration is 'we are structurally interdependent to achieve our goals. We are willing and must work together.' I would argue that when groups of individuals move from cooperation to true collaboration, a shift occurs from 'my' individual self or organization being most important, to the needs of the *group* or collective being primary. And that shift does not mean a loss, but rather a gain in benefit for most actors – when the emotions are positive, identities are validated, and mutual caring is evident. And of course, the context of shared and worthy group purpose has to have been articulated. Lawler, Thye, and Yoon sought to explain with their theory how groups, initiatives, organizations form enduring affective sentiments that are "voluntary, noncontractual constraints on individual action." (2009: 10) At the heart of the Theory of Social Commitments is a delineated process backed by research that finds person-to-group ties that, when achieved, are valuable in and of themselves. The question remains, *what explains this value?*

Once again we face the dominant paradigm of the individual narrative and the cultural norm of subordinating group affiliation and affective attachment to individual self-interest. Besides what has been argued to dispel this notion, it is worth exploring why a person-to-group identity and affective attachment can be experienced in itself as so beneficial. Once again, a quote from Durkheim (1887) sets the stage for this consideration: "The feeling which society has for [the individual] enhances the feeling which he has for himself. Because he is in moral unison with his fellow men, he has more confidence, courage, and boldness in action." (in Giddens 1972: 231) Durkheim believed that group psychic life has an unusual intensity, and that intensity makes the individual feel larger, more capable, and not alone in his/her search for fulfillment. In other words, that intensity, when positive, *feels good* and cannot be attained when remaining primarily focused on one's self-interest.

And what creates positive intensity? Given human social nature, coming to an agreement is one accomplishment that makes the actors feel good. Coexisting

together as legitimate contributors to a course of action validates identities and builds bonds. These positive emotions, especially when experienced repeatedly through productive exchange, generate perceptions of a unifying, cohesive relation which the actors are then motivated to conserve net of the effects of the exchange outcomes themselves. (Lawler and Yoon 1993, 1996; Lawler and Proell 2001)

For Collins (1989; 2009) the clear benefits to a shared affect and social solidarity is in the emotional energy (EE) and cultural capital (CC) that gets created. At the micro sociological level this solidarity is achieved through a process of interaction he terms mutual entrainment. This is more than coordination; it is harmonization of individuals' emotions, gestures, and other action. When this way of being together is achieved, there is physical evidence in things such as common voice pitch and body language. At this point EE and CC expand. Particularly with higher EE, a feeling of attunement and trust in one's network emerges and that translates into resources (i.e. excitement, support, inspiration) that individuals can use. Collins maintains creativity is only possible within these cohesive networks. So in addition to feeling better, actors feel there are more resources at their disposal to be effective, to be creative and to enjoy maximum impact and contribution. While Collins' conception of EE is that it may not be balanced for all group members, and at a macro level would most probably not be, my experience with ELH and other complex collaborations is if participants do truly reach a shared affective attachment, these resources are equally shared by the group. And there is reason to aspire to that. In Section 8.5, the yearning was strong for a successful ELH where all members are engaged and legitimized, everyone sharing equally in the emotional benefits of their commitment. When asked about emotional energy, most participants referenced the importance of being interdependent and achieving something great together. Susan stated enthusiastically "That's when we are on fire! When we connect and depend upon each other." And Laurie commented, "When we discover a new paradigm and feel incredible validation for what we're in together. All the lights come on and we realize, 'We can make this happen!'" And for Roberta, "Collaboration, common cause, give and take, being

invested together, finding mutual benefits, acknowledging and leveraging strengths, and being interdependent.”

Deci and Ryan (2006, 2008), in delineating autonomy, relatedness, and competence as intrinsic human needs also tie need satisfaction to overall health and well-being of human actors. They have found that these intrinsic needs are “nutriments” by which people thrive as human beings. Marmot and Brunner (2004) have shown the physical implications of this ability to thrive in their longitudinal research, which clearly reveals the importance of job autonomy and caring by others in the workplace as affecting one’s physical health and lifespan. Research in the field of adult lifelong learning also emphasizes how these intrinsic needs, when fulfilled, promote positive flourishing throughout life, supporting social network building, which in turn has a recursive positive influence on self-efficacy and self-esteem. (Field 2009). Other case research has described this group phenomenon of reaching consensual identities, viewing others as equally legitimate in their contribution and competence, as “the expansion of social well-being,” (Sandow and Allen 2005) something experienced as very similar to a ‘buzz’ or ‘effervescence’ in that it is palpable to those who are participants across the network of collaboration.

It seems truly unfortunate that so many organizational leaders dismiss as “soft” the importance of setting conditions for this shared emotional phenomenon to emerge in work groups, valuing only task management and financial analysis as being “hard” or worthy of attention. Nothing could seem more naïve. Social affective elements live in the relational domain and may therefore be more difficult to appreciate, to see with one’s own eyes. But they can be felt. And to favor only the cognitive analytical work of cross-boundary teams, that which can be measured in exact numbers, is to dismiss what underlies those results and what may indeed be the secret sauce that keeps talented people committed to each other, working across their organizational boundaries, when circumstances conspire to pull them apart. The unintended consequence of ELH leadership being so focused on speed

and efficiency was a delay in the group co-creating a shared commitment and affective attachment across the entire network. Designing for the enabling conditions outlined earlier would help participants in an effort such as ELH find the benefits of social solidarity on the path to great achievement as a group. Particularly relevant would be conditions *a*, *b*, and *e*, where purposeful interdependence, group reflection and dialogue, and a focus on removing barriers vs. administrating outcomes could support fragmented sub-groups on a path to cohesion as one ELH, a path they yearn for but fear may not be possible.

9.4 Implications going forward

9.4.1 Introduction

There are a number of considerations for further research in the study of person-to-group ties and the successful launch and delivery of complex collaborations. As the world becomes increasingly more global, corporations, government agencies, and non-profits will turn toward partnerships and collaborations to creatively address complex issues and to co-create new solutions. There are many people focused on assisting in the funding and launch of such initiatives, but the knowledge of what it takes, from a cognitive design and especially from a social-affective process, is still in the early stages. Regardless from which sector this work may originate, deeper understanding of what actually reduces the risk of a failed effort becomes quite important as funders scrutinize evidence of effectiveness and as critical players evaluate where to spend their valuable time. Those who seek to launch such initiatives should realize that to attract the attention of funders and talented team members, the promise of an impact greater than any one organization can deliver might very well be a determining factor in gaining their interest and commitment. “Impact at scale” is a value proposition increasingly used by the larger non-profit organizations as they seek the procurement of resources they need to make a difference.

This thesis has sought to round out and deepen existing experimental research in the field of complex group dynamics and social cohesion. While this CI effort had the stated purpose of dramatically improving early childhood readiness for school, it could have been about any challenging social, economic, or environmental issue. The group process by which people representing different sectors – government, non-profit, and business – came together and pursued this purpose was the focus of this study. That process is instructive to any complex collaboration that spans multiple organizational boundaries. This thesis has argued this is not just about team-building the way it was conceptualized decades ago. The nature of work and the teams relied upon to tackle tough challenges have changed dramatically over the last few decades. Research on what truly brings and holds people together through thick and thin still has a long way to go. The focus of this thesis was to apply theories already developed, pointing the way to further areas of enrichment, clarification, and theoretical integration. Given the specific qualitative design of this study, the ultimate indicator of whether this thesis adds value to the relevant body of knowledge is the transferability of these findings to other settings. Hence, more qualitative research is recommended at the micro sociological level to see if these theories and conditions are applicable in other Collective Impact-like efforts as well as for collaborations across complex global corporations.

9.4.2 Limitations and Future Research

There was rich material uncovered in the ELH case, much of it reviewed in Chapter Eight and in this chapter under Section 9.3. However, there are also specific limitations of this research and the methods chosen. While a micro-ethnography added unique texture to the findings of quantitative research conducted by others on person-to-group ties, a longitudinal study would certainly add a more complete picture. Since the duration of this ethnographic research was just seven months, it really only covers an early ramping phase for most Collective Impact efforts, which usually continue for years. The time I was with ELH, was a specific snapshot in

time. Group interactions and patterns of relationship are dynamic and tend to evolve over time. Course corrections can occur and learning can be internalized by both the leadership and the members of the Hub. Likewise, things can get worse. Follow-on research with the ELH would be highly recommended to observe how solidarity continues to build or erode.

In general, more qualitative study is recommended for furthering the Theory of Social Commitments. I believe it is time to examine Lawler, Thye, and Yoon's premise and the related theories in this thesis within the context of actual collaborations. The decades of research behind this theory serve as a foundation and this foundation needs to be assessed outside of the laboratory and in more real world circumstances. Additionally, as Hackman states, "Ethnographies provide rich and detailed descriptive accounts of what transpires in groups but leave unaddressed the gap between what exists and what might be done to change or improve group behavior or performance." (2012: 434) Combining ethnographic research in this domain with action research would be a powerful future direction to take. The participants in the ELH research were hungry for feedback on how they were occurring, and hearing what if anything could help them accelerate becoming a more cohesive group. The final group dialogue and reflection on social-affective themes could easily have moved to an action learning discussion, where the group agreed to try new things together and continue to be a learning community. While I was engaged in participant observation, it was out of the question for me to provide advice and action learning was outside of the scope of this research. However, I do believe future longitudinal research could be designed to include an action learning component and would be welcomed in the field of practice.

Furthermore, continued future work looking at the distinctions between social-affective group process and rational-cognitive is important. I agree with Izard (2009) that too many social scientists and organizational leaders still believe that most emotions are episodic, of limited duration and once ending, the mind is free

for purely rational purposes. In fact, there is more and more evidence supporting the notion that emotion and cognition continually interact and that phenomenal consciousness is not possible without feelings to motivate and regulate cognition and action (Burgdorf and Panksepp 2006; Stets 2010; Turner 2014). This is critical if core conditions to group success, and in particular groups in complex circumstances, are to be fully understood and nurtured. Future directions in this research may find a link showing emergent properties when both the social-affective, relational dynamics are working in concert with the rational-cognitive. For example, what could be said about the expansion of well-being and performance for groups who had these elements truly optimized and integrated? Research on the relationship of social well-being to group performance has been mixed. However, I suspect that is because the focus has been narrowly placed on causes as opposed to conditions. Group performance and well-being is quite complex and very dynamic perhaps challenging researchers to consider a conditions-based approach.

The Theory of Social Commitments has embedded Social Exchange Theory within it. As the discussion of section 8.4 suggests, there is further research for social exchange researchers to pursue that should look at the developmental path of groups to productive exchange. As Molm (2003) comments, it is time to “widen the lens” through which the social world is viewed with respect to future social exchange research. And a qualitative research focus on productive exchange in particular may yield new insights as to conditions that will support this.

Because this thesis was focused on the social-emotional processes of group formation, individual data was not collected nor examined. It is possible that some ethnographers interested in this area may chose to evaluate the age, gender, and socio-economic context of individual actors as preconditions to understanding the group dynamics and patterns of solidarity that unfold.

Finally, as Hackman (2012) posits, not much is yet known about the general potency of a condition-focused approach for collaboration processes and outcomes. However there is reason to believe that as the context becomes more complex, trying to pinpoint exact *causes* of emergent group affect and solidarity becomes futile. Much more accessible might be further work to understand the conditions with which groups may chart their own paths to shared commitment and collective outcomes. Condition-based research fits well with the research design strategy of this thesis and I would encourage other researchers who share the same social constructivist philosophy to consider the same.

9.5 Final Reflections

“To be successful in collective impact efforts we must live with the paradox of combining *intentionality* (that comes with the development of a common agenda) and *emergence* (that unfolds through collective seeing, learning, and doing).” (Kania and Kramer 2013:8)

The authors of Collective Impact refer to a phenomenon that has long fascinated me. Cognitive biologists and neuroscientists agree that each individual’s cognitive process is internal and closed-loop in nature (Maturana and Varela 1987, 1998; Damasio 2003). This means we really *each* see our own world based on the physical material, felt emotions, past experience, and the people we encounter. We interpret and create meaning and in that fashion, each of us brings forth our own world. Yet, we cannot move to action on virtually anything without each other. So the power indeed lies with coming to a shared view of what our reality is. And creating that shared view requires us to acknowledge each other and reflect together to align on what we jointly believe is most important at any given time. We cannot assume people will see what each of us as individuals may see. And we must be intentional in choosing others with whom to co-create our work and our world together. While that can seem exhausting at times, we can also experience great joy and fulfillment in the process of finding our shared purpose and acting in

solidarity to accomplish great things. Actually, once united we can even end up with surprising results, beyond whatever goal we could have imagined or may have analytically targeted. The Hobbesian problem of social order need not pose a dilemma as individually rational action *and* collective interests can work together. Indeed, it is our nature that they must. Our shared human biological history, shows that we are hard-wired to collaborate, and that we are not fully human if we do not. (Maturana and Poerksen 2004; Burgdorf and Panksepp 2006; Keyzers 2009) It is our positive emotions that reward our work together and that keep us committed to each other and the course of action we have chosen.

Consistent with Durkheim, Collins, Sanderson, and Lawler, Thye, and Yoon, I believe that “social interaction is a level of analysis in its own right, and that its most important features are the conditions of non-rational solidarity.” (Collins 2009: 111) This thesis has endeavored to explore this in a meaningful and unique way, through joining a real Collective Impact initiative as members figure out a shared view and a path forward in a journey to person-to-group ties, the ties that bind. Those ties are primarily social and emotional and they enable our best rational cognitive work to emerge.

There is often trepidation by social scientists about concentrating on the emotional side of human interaction. It is true that people can be manipulated by others, allowing an appeal to their emotions while ignoring the importance of rational checks and balances. It is smart to be vigilant about these things. But to avoid and diminish the study and appreciation of the social and affective side of human interaction, and the mediating role it plays in building shared commitment, is to always limit our potential to harness the conditions that allow us to accomplish the extraordinary. For me, I see the key to avoiding the domination and manipulation of a few is to practice self and group awareness building through shared reflection and dialogue with a commitment to learning as a group over time. Wonder and curiosity are important characteristics for a group, possibly the most important to protect and conserve. And reflective, dialogic processes can keep them alive. This

is what makes *condition b* so critical for group success. Dialogic practices are also key to finding confidence with the process of emergence as complex collaborations like Collective Impact unfold. When power and contribution is relatively balanced and legitimized for *all* actors in a group endeavor, and not only a few leaders, there tends to be smarter outcomes through caring and healthy contention. When one individual's view is influenced, informed, and improved by the view of others, manipulation is much more difficult to accomplish. And all actors can be strengthened by knowing they are not taking risks alone.

Finally, it was interesting to learn how very intricate the topic and research questions were as I went deeper into understanding what was actually occurring at the ELH and what the literature revealed about research done by others for decades before me. This phenomenon at first seemed deceptively simple, yet proved to be quite complex when looking more closely. This was humbling and made me appreciate the many layers of human dynamics in working together and especially the transformation of personal to collective affect. At the most basic level, this is about understanding the chemistry between people and among members of a group. It provides insight into why role clarification, shared operating agreements, group potlucks, and other seemingly mundane ways of relating, build and sustain critical ties across a group of people who share a common purpose. And these positive and continuous interactions have one common characteristic - They are all performed in a state of confidence, joy and even enthusiasm. Who would not want that every day? Examining these simple social and emotional ways of co-existing as groups who embark on seemingly daunting tasks opens a portal to understanding both how humans flourish and how collective impact can be achieved. And that continues as fertile ground for further inquiry and research.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Semi-structured Interview Questions Designed for ELH Case

Major research question: Under what conditions do individuals subordinate a personal impact agenda on behalf of a pursuing a collective impact agenda? Subsidiary research questions: * What social and emotional factors influence the shared commitment of this group? * What social rituals has this group put in place? * How do participants explain their experience of pursuing a common goal across organizational boundaries? * What strengthens person-to-group ties in a complex collaboration?		
<i>Potential interview/ questions, distributed over 3 instances</i> Question in yellow would be the starting point for interviews and responses would determine which follow on inquiry would be necessary.		
What Questions	Why Questions	Other
What makes this work? What helps your effectiveness as a group? What hinders it? What role do emotions play in your participation and commitment to this effort? Think about a specific situation when you experienced strong emotions on this collaboration:	How do your emotions towards team members fashion your experience on this project? How do you make sense of the experiences you describe? How do you make sense of your experience of the interplay between emotions and shared commitment as a group?	Teach me how you work on this together? Who do you rely on to get things done? Given your experience, would you choose to work on this effort (or similar) again with these same people? What would you recommend to others in setting conditions for

- Describe the emotions you experienced - Describe the actions you took and your thoughts during that experience What creates positive energy in working together? What dampens positive energy working together on this? What conditions help you to work together as a team? What gets in the way of working together on this? To what extent do you perceive others on this team share your experience? Share your feelings for others on the team? Describe the way decisions are taken on this project? How do you feel about the timing and quality of these decisions? How frequently do you come together with others on this team? Describe what benefits you personally experience from being part of this effort? What social and emotional factors affect the success of this group?	[What holds you / why do you stay] together as a group when this gets difficult? What keeps the team committed to working together? <i>Or</i> Why do the members stay committed to working together?	success in a similarly complex collaboration? (How question?) How would you describe your emotional commitment to this group of people?
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APPENDIX B

Information Letter / Informed Consent

Anne Murray Allen
University of Leicester
Field Research 2014

Claire Smith, ELH program manager and Lynn Jones, Chair of the ELH Board, have invited me to explore the ELH initiative as a research case study. To accept this, I need your approval, support, and informed consent.

About this research

Purpose:

This thesis research has its purpose primarily in completing Basic Research that intends to *explore, describe, and understand* the role that social- affective dynamics play in building shared commitment to a complex initiative spanning multiple organizational boundaries. Research on social-affective dynamics of cross-organization collaborations is relatively new research, making all the more important a focus on understanding through the direct experience of participants. This research could add to the body of knowledge on Collective Impact.

Methods to be used:

Participant observation, semi-structured interviews of up to 12 people on a Collaborative Action Team; observation of Board Meetings; dialogue on final themes and findings.

I, (ELH Team Member), understand and agree that . . .

- ☐ My participation is voluntary
- ☐ I am free to refuse to answer any of the research questions
- ☐ I can withdraw from the interview(s) at any time
- ☐ I can retract/ or correct my data within two weeks of any interviews

Interviews will not be recorded, but rather captured in the researcher's notes. Within 48 hours these notes will be typed and returned to each interviewee for further comment and correction. If I do not respond with any further comments or corrections, the researcher will assume the notes are accurately representing my perspective.

I further understand and agree that . . .

- ☐ Notes from my interview will not be shared with others without my permission.
- ☐ The researcher and her research supervisors will be the only ones to review notes from my interview.
- ☐ All identifying information will be removed prior to any publication of the research thesis.

- ☐ I have been encouraged to share any concerns, issues, or questions that arise throughout this research with the researcher so that they may be addressed immediately.

By signing, I acknowledge that I have read and agree with the principles of informed consent for this research and I have had the opportunity to discuss it further with Anne Murray Allen.

Signed:

Date:

Print:

My promises/ commitments to you, as a participant observer on this team, is to behave in the following manner:

1. I will not insert (or allow) myself to act as a go-between in conversations between members of the group I am researching.
2. Prior to beginning the research in 2014, I will negotiate appropriate areas of participation in the working sessions with you. These will include participation in learning the context and the project specifics; answering questions as a visiting member of the team, helping as needed with impartial assistance but excluding direct facilitation.
3. I will journal on all my activities and reflect on my role. I will proactively take all questions as to my role to my supervisors for their perspective.
4. I will always be open and approachable regarding questions, concerns, or requests.

Signed:

Date:

Print: Anne Murray Allen

APPENDIX C

Background Information on the Case Study Organization

Early Learning Hub, Inc.

Vision: Every child is safe, healthy and prepared to learn. Every family is strong and resilient. Early learning services are coordinated, effective and efficient.

Purpose: Early Learning Hub, Inc. (ELH, Inc.) is the coordinating body to identify resources focused on children ages 0 through 6 and their families and to help align resources toward high impact and shared goals of the community. ELH, Inc. is focused on the overarching outcome of increasing school readiness for children, especially at risk children, while supporting stable and attached families and ensuring a coordinated, efficient early learning system.

- We intend to represent the needs of young children and their families at the community, regional and state level.
- We operate under the principle of the “few but powerful” goals. We identify goals shared across communities with coordinated strategies and success metrics.
- We function as a backbone organization of a collective impact model. We intend to develop pathways to specific outcomes and goals.
- We operate under a prevention model and aim to focus our screening services on children ages 0-3 and their families.
- We are committed to communicating a message to families and our community that is relevant, clear and motivational.

Coverage Area: Early Learning Hub, Inc. serves one of the largest counties in the State, and home to a diverse set of economic and cultural influences that impact families’ needs and their children’s early learning outcomes.

- 17.3% of the County’s population is living at or below the poverty level, which exceeds the state average of 14.8% (2011).
- 25.1% of the population is Hispanic compared with 12.2% statewide (2012).
- Of the K-12 population, 39.17% is Hispanic compared with a statewide K-12 average of 19.65% (2012).

Target Population: The County is home to 32,574 children, approximately 76% of whom fit the definition of at risk for arriving at kindergarten unprepared to learn. Through its coordinated efforts, Early Learning Hub, Inc. will focus on service coordination for the area’s 19,427 children on the State’s Health Plan⁶, representing 85% of the community’s at risk population. Of these children 5,581 speak Spanish as their primary language.

In addition to identifying its target population via Government Health Plan enrollment, Early Learning Hub, Inc. will further target its coordination efforts toward families and children living in Priority or Focus elementary school catchment areas.

APPENDIX D

Background Data on the Interviewees

#	Name	Experience	Current Title	Sector
Member of Collective Action Team				
1.	(Bruce)	10 years	Director, NAA	Non-profit
2.	(Catherine)	3 years	Program Director, HNF	Non-profit
3.	(Michele)	9 years	Coordinator, Student Services	County School District
4.	(Susan)*	1 year in this position; previously 10 years on the HNF Board. 38 years experience as an early childhood education professional.	Director, HNF CAT co-lead	Non-profit
5.	(Ethan)	3 years	Program Manager, HNF	Non-profit
6.	(Jeanette)	< 1 year in current role; 30 years with current organization	Program Coordinator, ESG	School District
7.	(Roberta)	10 years in various related State agency roles	Community Developer, HHS	Government agency
Member of Both Board and the Collective Action Team				
8.	(Claire)*	1 year in position; previous State agency	Executive Director, ELH	Non-profit (H)
9.	(Laurie)	1 year in current position; retired from various roles in State government agencies	Performance Manager, ELH	Non-profit (H)
10.	(Isabel)	1 year in position	Executive Director, FME	Non-profit
Board Member only				
11.	(Lenore)	2 years in current position; 6 years at other non-profit organizations	Executive Director, HNF	Non-profit
12.	(Melissa)	15 years	Executive Director, NAA	Non-profit
13.	(Lynn)	Previously 11 years leading HNF; 1 year in current ELH Board position	Chair, ELH Board	Non-profit (H)
14.	(Jared)	6 years in current position; 12 years inside the business organization	Region Bank President; newest ELH Board member	Business
(H) = works for the Early Learning Hub as a staff member				
* Key informants				

APPENDIX E

Group feedback on themes uncovered in the research.

The presentation was shown in a dialogic fashion – “Research on ELH – *A checkpoint on the road to Collective Impact*”. Group conversation for confirmation of trends and patterns was sought as well as deeper meaning from the results shared. People who had not yet signed the Informed Consent were asked to prior to the meat of the presentation.

Heidi took her own notes shared later with this researcher, who made some accuracy corrections and returned to her. In addition to Heidi’s document, observations made during this one-hour meeting are listed as follows:

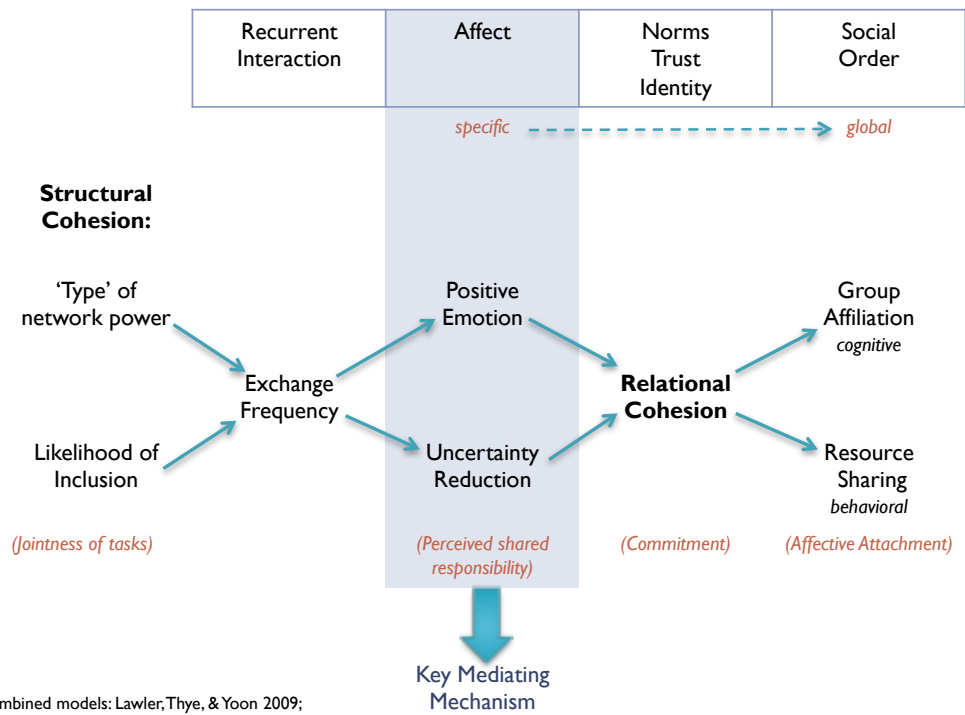
- People expressed interest in the combined Lawler, Thye, and Yoon models. They seemed to be understandable and not too academic.
- All participants expressed the same pattern shows up on all the CATs, with only small context-specific differences.
- They all expressed (through head nodding and vocalizing) that the themes and expressed statements in anonymous quotes were valid and true to their own experience.
- They underscored that the focus on grant –getting activity flavored their experience so far.
- The State context is very real and does place structural limits on grant writing
- CATs need to see themselves as inclusive! Don’t have the staff to support everything or have all the expertise.
- There were differences in opinion at last two CAT meetings (Early Learning & Literacy as well as the Parent Engagement group). The focus was on making more clear decisions – what are the levels of decision authority? . . . There was questioning around role and function of CATs, who should decide and who does what. What promises can be made in these meetings? For example, Can grant participants be decided? This was a good sign in terms of getting more clear and being able to move from information sharing and connecting to action.
- There is a tension between planning vs. doing. “But doing requires money. When will I know if I’m a player in this?”
- The Hub is honoring of relationships
- Isabel: “I would love to see us talk more about our vision and objectives. How will we know we are being successful?”
- We need to address past issues. Can’t just ignore them.
- Lynn: “It’s interesting we want more social time. Also a surprise that people may want to meet more frequently. People always seem to be so busy.”

- There's a desire to visit each other's location and environment – to learn more about what each other is doing.
- Think deeply and do work on the second to the last bullet: *After working together for 15 years, we have had battles and disagreements but we still appreciate each other and the tough business we are in.*
- The list of “evidence of a desire for Group Affiliation “ gives me optimism.
- The third from the last bullet: *The collective or collaborative approach is an opportunity for us to be accountable for the things that happen in our community – good or bad. This should be our rallying cry. Let's face that! The more we engage, the more we will own it.*
- Being part of the Hub makes me get out and meet other organizations. This has been great!
- We need to learn from this and think through the ramifications of all of this with the upcoming merger with [another] County. (*Note: This was the first I had heard of this decision!*)

APPENDIX F

Theory of Social Commitments Conceptual Framework

Theory of Social Commitments



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