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COLLABORATION QUALITY

Management and Organization

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study was to examine and understand what collaboration quality is and how participants of a collaboration construct the term in their speech. The phenomenon was considered challenging due to the existence of a gap in both research and theory when it comes to addressing quality issues in terms of processes and interpersonal relationships within collaborations. Typically, the issue is addressed from a point of view that links the quality of a collaboration strictly to its outcomes.

Our literature review suggested, that collaboration quality can not be precisely defined, unless the elements it is composed of are specified and described. The theoretical frameworks examined identified a total of 17 overlapping and strongly interrelated elements as determinants of collaboration quality.

The data for our analysis was generated by 5 in depth interviews and additional observational notes and printed materials, and a social constructivist view was adopted during the two-leveled analysis. First, content analysis was used with the purpose of narrowing down the volume of data without loss of meaning, and then the resulted data was further analyzed with discourse analysis, resulting in the naming of five interpretative repertoires.

Our empirical findings were consistent with our theoretical ones in that they both suggested that the answer to the question "what is collaboration quality?" will always be subjective, to some extent. We found, however, substantial differences between the theoretical and empirical perspective when it came to the viewpoint and basic assumptions from which the term was constructed, and minor alterations when it came to the elements it incorporated and the meanings associated to these elements.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Understanding collaborations

Today's business environment is characterized by complex inter-organizational relations between actors; the root of these relations go back at least to Adam Smith's argument for division of labor between organizations for the sake of productive efficiency due to specialization. However, a rapid growth in collaborative structures have started only relatively recently, due to the changes in the economic environment of the past decades, which were quickly followed by the realization of the facts that the world has never been so small, markets have never been this competitive, customers never so demanding and well informed. Never before were changes so rapid and the pressure to perform so high. It gradually became clear that no organization, public or private, can be and provide any longer all things to all people; "going it alone is clearly not the smartest option, and the business landscape is littered with poorly performing firms that have refused to share" (Lendrum, 2001, p.9). Turning confrontation into collaboration and conflicting strategies into shared goals, and in consequence the emergence of all sorts of collaborative structures was a logical answer for the challenges of this new environment.

The explanation for this growth in using collaborations as a means of doing business is also well contended by Chrislip and Larson (1994): "When collaborative initiatives are well executed, they achieve extraordinary results of unexpected dimensions" (p.108). A broad reasoning behind the emergence of collaborations is given by Keyton and Stallworth (2002), who argue that a collaborative group is formed when "representatives from different organizations come together to share decision-making responsibilities directed toward solving a mutual problem" (p.235). In more concrete terms, organizations find it necessary to work in collaboration with others to respond

effectively to financial pressures or to remain in competition with providers of similar goods or services (Berman & West, 1995; Johnson & Cahn, 1995; Quinn & Cumblad, 1994; Stegelin & Jones, 1991), to improve service delivery (Gray, 1989), or to be able to offer a certain service or product that is too complex or requires too many resources (Stallworth, 1998).

In an effort to find out what exactly collaboration means, we discovered that there is quite an inconsistency in the relevant literature in the definition of the term (Stohl & Walker, 2002). There seems to be, however, a movement towards a consensus on the critical elements that should be included in the definition, and nearly all agree that collaboration is a temporarily functioning group that is formed of representatives of the collaborating organizations. Similarly, nearly all definitions given so far recognize that both shared decision making and working toward a common goal are central to effective collaborative efforts (Gray, 1989; Yon, Mickleson, & Calton-La Ney, 1993; York & Zychlinski, 1996).

Keyton and Stallworth (2002) define collaboration as “the group of stakeholders or organizational representatives that engage in a collaborative process” (p.237), where the collaborative process is understood to be “a process in which two or more organizations engage in shared decision making and coordinated, joint action to address a common goal” (Stallworth, 1998, p.6). Gray (1989) also views collaboration as a dynamic rather than a static concept: “collaboration is essentially an emergent process rather than a prescribed state” (p15). Although they are temporary groups, collaborations develop like other task groups through a period of deliberation and decision making in preparation for a stage of task performance. Once decision making is complete, a collaboration can enter the performance phase where tasks are automated and only limited and infrequent interaction is needed between the collaboration members. In other cases, a collaboration may end because implementation following decision making is transferred to other individuals, groups, or organizations. In both

cases, the limited time span of a collaboration, coupled with members' attentions to their primary organization, may unconsciously affect negatively how members view the necessity or urgency of communication in the development of a collaboration.

In an effort to include further elements into our definition of collaborations, we take over Stech and Ratliffe's (1977) definition of working groups, and adapt it to our purpose:

Collaboration = Individual resources → combined through joint effort → to generate a common product

This definition allows for recognition of the fact that collaborations are formed from collections of individuals, each of whom represents a certain organization and has resources in the form of ideas, knowledge, skills, techniques, and competencies that can be integrated by group work to produce a final outcome that combines the talents of several people and the competencies of several organizations.

Combining each party's resources into an integrated product basically involves determining what each party's resources and core competencies are, and combining them into one integrated product. Two factors have to be considered in collaborations, and each of these affects and is affected by people, processes, and products. These factors are task activities and relationships between people. As shown in Figure1. (Stech & Ratliffe, 1977, p.9), the upper definition of collaborations can be diagrammed to represent both factors.

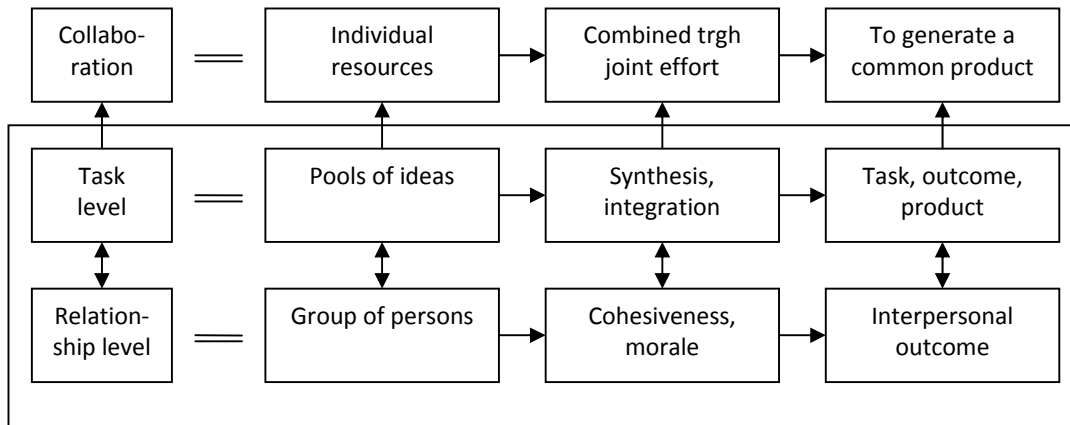


Figure 1: Diagram of collaboration elements

The most desirable outcome of collaboration can be defined in terms of both task and relationship concerns. Task outcome is a product consisting of the integration of the best resources available to the group through each member or organization. Relationship outcome is a set of relationships between persons that allows them to come together again to use the resources of any member or organization in future task-related efforts. An effective collaboration is one that arrives at useful products while maintaining positive relationships among group members (Stech & Ratliffe, 1977).

1.2. Purpose and process of the research

We have discussed so far what collaborations are and why are they so important in our current economic environment. We all use collaborative structures of varying scales on a daily basis, and we all belonged, at one time or another, to a group that never seemed to “get anywhere”. We have all experienced, too, groups with clear purposes and effective means for reaching them. People are generally quite sensitive to this feature of group functioning, which Chester Barnard has called “the effectiveness of cooperative team effort”. We, however, in this research will continue using the term collaboration

quality, as we do not examine the quality of collaborative efforts through their outcomes, but on the basis of the fluency of interactional activities taking place between the collaborative actors.

The interest of this study is to address what collaboration quality is (strictly in terms of the collaborative process), and what are the elements that affect it, as well as what are the dynamics between these elements. Furthermore, through our empirical study we aim at examining how participants of a collaboration construct the term “collaboration quality” in their speech.

1.2.1. The research process

The starting point for our research was a case, that we have been given. At the next stage the research was separated into two processes: (1) following the happenings in the organization of the project, which meant attending to project meetings and taking observational notes, and following material published on the project’s website; and (2) looking for a concept or phenomenon that matches with the essence of the case. We started the process (2) by reading quasi-random articles related to multi-stakeholder networks, multi-party collaborative projects, and generally any material on any type of collaboration that we came across, until we found two major lines of research that interested us: knowledge integration capability in multi-party projects, and collaboration quality. Researching both phenomena would have been too wide and complex for the purpose of this thesis, therefore we decided to abandon knowledge integration capability and work from now on only with collaboration quality, as this topic is more closely related to our major field of study.

The next step was a literature review on collaboration quality, which proved to be rather challenging as the phenomenon was not much written about under this name. To overcome this barrier we used several other synonymous concepts, as described in our theoretical chapter. In addition to literature on our focus concept, we had to review

additional literature on psychological and sociological concepts in order to fully understand the dynamics of the underlying principles. Based on this literature review and on presumptions on what data this case might provide us with, we came up with the preliminary research question “What is collaboration quality?” which we continued using until the first level of analysis on the data, when we came up with our final research question:

“What is collaboration quality and how is it manifested?”

We decided the type of data that could the most accurately answer our research question is interviews. Using our theoretical framework and matching it to our research question we started drafting the interview, conducted it on the first two interviewees then revised it for the third interview, and repeated this conduct-revise circle until the fifth and last interview. The interviews were then transcribed, and only after getting familiar with their substance did we decide on the methods to be used for analyzing them. We decided to perform the analysis on two levels, using two methods. The next step was to review the literature on our chosen methods and design our framework for analysis, followed by the actual level one analysis. The results of the first round of analysis were used as data for the second level of analysis, together with the observational notes and other printed materials. The end-point of our research was to report the findings of our research, in a way that it answers our research questions. A summary of the research process is provided in Figure 3 below.

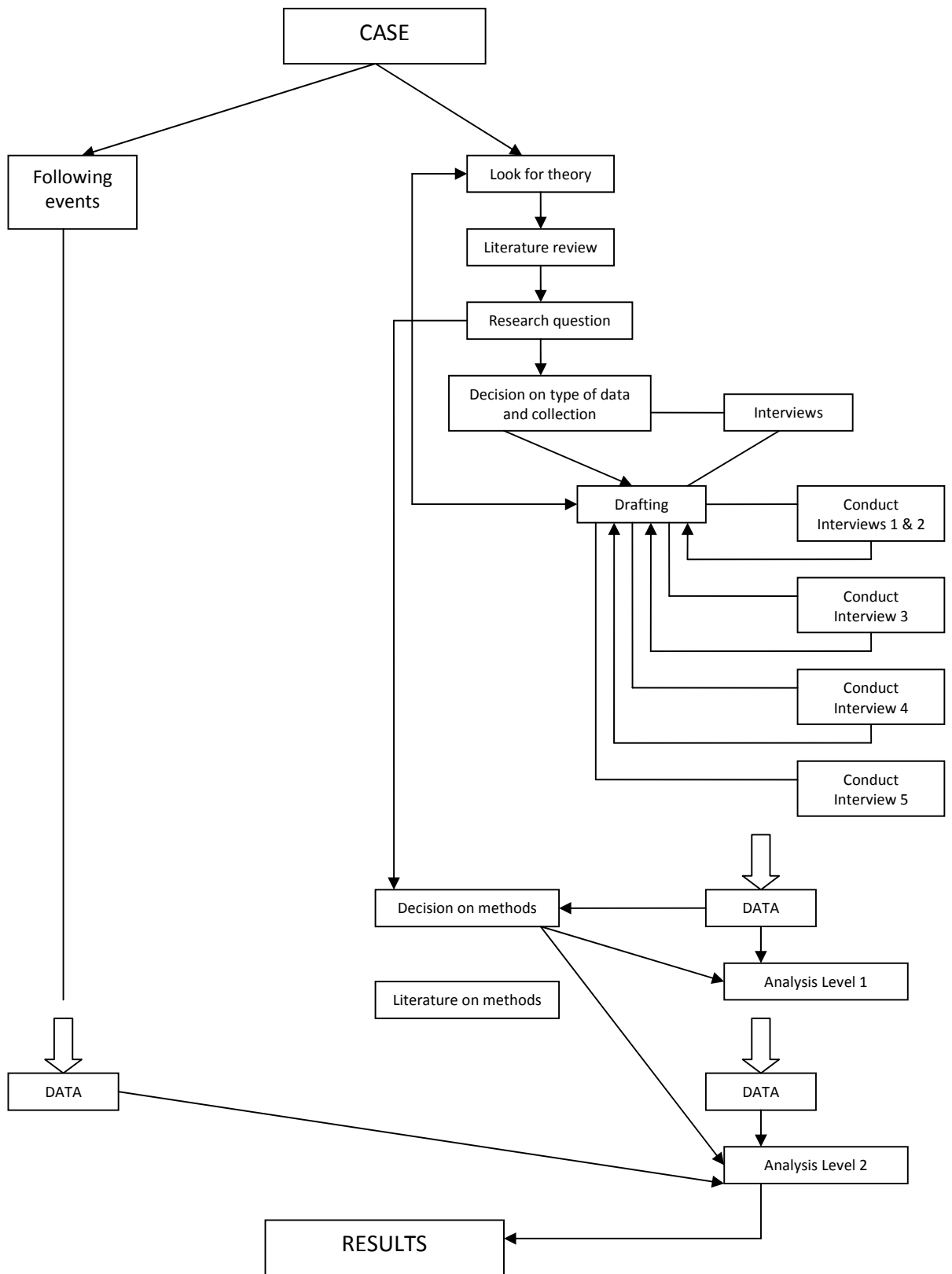


Figure 2: The Research Process

1.2.2. Report structure

After having introduced our topic in large and the way we conducted the research, the next logical step is to define the concept of collaboration quality in chapter 1.3. We will continue, in our main theoretical chapter, by presenting a synthesis of our literature review regarding the elements this concept is built on, explaining what they mean and how they affect other elements and the ultimately, the collaboration. Chapter 2 is closed with a short synthesis on the theoretical framework presented.

The theoretical chapter is followed by presenting the data collection process and the methods used for the actual analysis. We will continue the report with a chapter presenting the focus case and the notations used, and will report the findings of our analysis in Chapter 5. The empirical part is concluded with a synthesis on the findings.

In our last chapter we will present the conclusions of this study. We will try to establish a “dialogue” between the results of our literature review and the findings of our analysis, and base our conclusions on the differences and similarities these two parts have shown in construction of the term collaboration quality. In other words, we will examine what the theory “has to say” to our case, and what insights our case can provide for theoreticians. The final subchapter will present the limitations of this study and some general practical implications of the results reported.

1.3. Defining collaboration quality

Collaboration quality as such was not much studied in the past, with very few works referring to the phenomena under this name. We therefore consider that in order to have a deeper understanding of collaboration quality we have to include in our research several other terms used to refer to this (or a very similar) phenomenon. Some researchers introduce their ideas through terms like relationship quality (Walter, Muller,

Helfert & Ritter, 2003), relationship atmosphere (Ritter & Gemunden, 2003), collaboration performance (Westphal et al., 2007) and teamwork quality (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). It is arguable that these terms are not perfect synonyms to each-other. However, for the purpose of our research, the differences between these terms do not pose limitations, but rather they offer an opportunity to understand this phenomenon in its context instead of focusing on its name.

Questions about the determinants of collaboration quality are easily confused with assumptions about how groups should perform. But it is clear that values can hardly ever be set aside entirely, because for any evaluation of the quality of collaboration there has to be a vision of the desirable states of the group. In considering the nature of collaboration quality and in conducting research on it, one must employ some criteria, such as efficient group locomotion, rewards, costs, errors, satisfaction to members, viability of the group, or quality of interpersonal relations. (Cartwright & Zander, 1960)

In view of the many values that may be brought into play in evaluating collaborations, it should not be surprising to discover that collaboration quality, like many other management-related concepts, has been defined in different ways by different authors. To some, quality refers to the output of the collaboration; to others, it designates the efficiency of operations; and to still others, it refers to the motivational or emotional returns to the members of the collaboration. Tannenbaum offers a comprehensive definition of organizational effectiveness, definition that indicates how complex notion collaboration quality must be. He defines organizational effectiveness as “the extent to which an organization as a social system, given certain resources and means, fulfills its objectives without incapacitating its means and resources and without placing undue strain upon its members.” Although the task of conceptualization would undoubtedly be simpler if it were possible to define collaboration quality in terms of a single criterion, it is clear that several must be considered together in research and theorizing.

Collaboration quality is defined by Heimeriks (2002) as being “specificities of alliance characteristics, which have significant positive effects on alliance performance”. We argue that the above definition would apply to high level collaboration quality, and for the initial definition to be valid it should not take into consideration the positive or negative nature of the effects, but only whether they are significant or not. The list of these characteristics (or elements) affecting collaboration quality varies from one author to another, consensus on them being a long road ahead. In the chapter to come, we would like to present some of the views on which elements should be considered as affecting collaboration quality, what do the authors mean by these elements, as well as giving a brief explanation on why and how they do affect collaborations.

2. ELEMENTS OF COLLABORATION QUALITY

We started our search for the elements of collaboration quality by a literature review; we started reading articles, textbooks and research papers that came up when using the search words “elements” or “factors” + “collaboration”, “partnership”, “teamwork” or “group work” + “quality” or “performance” combined in every possible way with each other. We stopped reading when we reached the point of saturation: the elements proposed by different authors started to repeat themselves without any new additions (however, it has to be noted that while the elements repeated themselves, their exact composition in constructing collaboration quality continued to vary from one author to another). We then included the researchers whose list and descriptions were the most different from one another into a table:

Table 1: Elements of Collaboration Quality

Heimeriks (2002)	Hoegl & Gemunden (2001)	Dietrich et al. (2001)	Keyton & Stallworth (2003)	Larson & LaFasto (1989)
resource configuration	communication	communication	shared goal	clear, elevating goal
compatibility	coordination	coordination	member interdependence	result-driven team structure
coordination	balanced contributions	mutual support	equal input	competent team members
mutual trust	mutual support	aligned efforts	shared decision making	unified commitment
commitment	effort	cohesion	communication	principled leadership
communication	cohesion		culture	standards of excellence
			leadership	collaborative climate
			member motivation and maturity	external support and recognition

After grouping some of the elements proposed and eliminating the ones which had different names but essentially meant the same, we were left with seventeen elements that determine the quality of a collaboration: Team Structure, Power and Status, Leadership, Shared Goals, Interdependence, Coordination, Standards of excellence, Group Cohesiveness, Cooperative Environment, Input and Efforts, Trust and Support, Commitment, Competence, Group Member Motivation and Maturity, Communication, Culture, and External Support and Recognition

We tried, for the sake of adding some structure and transparency to our work, to organize the upper-mentioned elements into categories and determine the relations between them. We attempted to use categorizations such as primary versus secondary elements; static versus dynamic factors; structural, behavioral or procedural elements; and individual versus group level elements. Needless to say: we failed. This assessment was not, however, useless. We found out that there is a very complex interrelatedness between all these elements, all of them containing parts of another or many others. We tried then, to organize the elements “chronologically”, as in which of them emerge as a result of which one; but the result was a “which came first, the chicken or the egg” kind of back-and-forth, endless argumentation.

Having explained all this, we do not propose a structuring of these elements, rather we will just present them as a list, in which the elements are ordered according to the order they appear in the table above; the order of presentation has no relevance and is not in any way meant to be a ranking in their importance.

2.1 Team Structure

A key factor often mentioned in the related literature differentiating high performance teams from low performance ones is the structure of the team itself. But what is an effective team structure? There has been tremendous research done on the topic, but none of these managed to appoint that one, or even a few, structures that guarantee

success. The reason for this is evident for anyone who has ever worked in teams: there are no two teams that are or function the exact same way. Larson and LaFasto (1989) offer a clear guideline for those of us, who are looking, against all odds, to find out more about “what is an appropriate structure?” They state that “effective team structure might be as simple as the communication required for the coordination of activities”. To put this in other words, structure is not something that can be defined in clear terms, it is not a concrete matter; structure is not just about clear divisions, leveling or formalizing relations and authority. Structure can be anything that helps team members have a systematic approach to their everyday purpose; anything that offers “instructions” or “hints” on how matters are handled and how decisions are made. Some examples of what can add structure to a team would be communication channels, or division of labor, or clear authority, or power relations, or even social networks, etc. However, when looking to add structure it must be kept in mind that there are times when an abundance of structure can be just as harmful or problematic as no structure at all.

We may then conclude that the importance of structure is not in its presence or absence, nor in having structure for structure’s sake. Rather, its significance lies in identifying the appropriate structure for the achievement of a specific performance objective, “a configuration that does not confuse effort with results and that makes sense to the team members involved” (Larson and LaFasto, 1989). Also, teams should be designed around the results to be achieved, and not around the preexisting circumstances. For a structure to be functional and useful it must be established in such way that individual and combined efforts always lead towards the desired goal.

When assessing the origins of structure, Cartwright and Zander (1960) found that most groups consider it beneficial to develop some specialization, some regularity of assignments and responsibilities, and some steadiness in its internal communication and coordination. Still, most research focuses on how communication structures and power

structures affect the performance of groups. Experimental studies on communication networks show a high consistency in results reporting a strong relation between the communication structure imposed on the group and group performance. However, Guetzkow and Simon (1955) found, when examining groups that achieved optimal work organization, that use of different communication networks had no effect on the time needed for problem. Thus, the communication structure appears to affect quality only by the relative difficulty it creates for the group in establishing an effective structure.

It seems from our discussion, that any given group may be structured according to the flow of communication, the flow of work, the mobility of people, authority and power relations, and ranking on such dimensions as importance, prestige, popularity, identification with the group, and ownership of resources, etc.

Larson and LaFasto (1989) found that beyond these structural variations four design features emerged when trying to characterize effectively functioning teams is general:

- (1) *clear roles and accountabilities*, meaning that each member's relationship to the team must be defined in terms of the role to be assumed and the results the role is to produce. As every team effort is essentially the sum of individual efforts, without clear roles and accountabilities, all efforts become random and chaotic;
- (2) *an effective communication system* which requires the information to emerge from credible sources and to be easily accessible, allows for opportunities to raise issues not on the formal agenda, and is documenting issues raised and decisions made;
- (3) *methods for monitoring individual performance and providing feedback*, because without knowing an individual's performance, it becomes impossible to determine, with any sense of accuracy, how the individual should be rewarded, what the individual's development needs are, and what increased or further responsibilities this individual might assume in the future;

(4) *an emphasis on fact-based judgments* as there is a strong need for objective and factual data as a basis for sound decision making.

The degree of emphasis of these features was found to vary according to the team objectives.

2.2. Power and Status

The power structure of a group provides another important set of influences on the group members. As it emerged from the research of Festinger (1950) and Cartwright and Zander (1960), the power relations between people determine the ways in which they can affect the opinions and behaviors of one another. A person's rank or location in the collaboration's power structure will greatly influence what he/she must do, what his/her degree of freedom is, how autonomous he/she can be, and whether he/she is subject to other members' arbitrary control. It is clear that the ability of a person to satisfy his/her needs is affected by person's location in the power structure.

Discussions on status have suggested that there may be a tendency in groups to "equilibrate" the rankings of members on different dimensions. A controlled study on the nature of status equilibration by Exline and Ziller shows in several different ways that interpersonal conflict was significantly greater in those groups where there are many levels of status or there is a large gap between the levels. Moreover, it appears that the status structure of these groups was unstable and that, if allowed to change, they will most likely modify their structures so that the levels in status disappear and all members become equal in ranking. Finally, the study provides evidence that groups with high degree of equality in status had a better quality of group performance.

2.3. Leadership

In any collaboration someone must convene and lead or facilitate the collaboration process, as a coordination of organizational representatives is necessary and vital for a steady progress towards the common goal avoiding resource waste or duplication of

efforts. A leader's style, including his or her organizational representation, can significantly influence both the collaborative process and the collaboration's outcomes. Larson and LaFasto (1989), when studying leadership in task-groups, found that there are three major characteristics of effective leaders: first, they begin by establishing a vision of the future; second, they create change; and third, they unleash the energy and talents of contributing members. As a negative aspect of team leadership, they discovered that more than any other single aspect members are disturbed by leaders who are unwilling to deal directly and effectively with self-serving or non-contributing team members.

Leadership issues are often more complex in collaboration groups, because whoever takes on the leadership role must also be a member of the collaboration. This dual role of member and leader may cause a leader to momentarily suppress self-interests in favor of providing leadership to the group. Doing so, however, would lower the level of representation of the leader's home organization. The other problem associated with the dual member/leader role is that of control. A leader who is controlling a collaborative process can be as harmful as a leader who is controlling of the collaboration's interactive content. Whether a leader is appointed, selected, or it emerges, it is the leader's responsibility to balance both interests: interest in facilitating the group's process and in representing an organization. When a leader can facilitate a process in such way that neither of these interests is sacrificed, it is more likely that all members, including the leader, will have opportunities for equal input and shared decision making.

2.4. Shared Goals

A common or shared goal is both an impetus and a requirement for a collaboration to exist (Quinn & Cumblad, 1994; Stegelin & Jones, 1991; Yon et al., 1993). In fact, efforts to collaborate are unlikely to succeed unless the collaborative parties agree on the goal and have a common definition of the problem they are addressing (Gray,1989).

One might ask concerning any group at any given time whether, or to what degree, it has a goal; whether it has more than one goal, and, if so, whether these goals are compatible or conflicting; whether as a result of some group activity group progress has occurred; and whether any given progress was toward or away from the group's goal. The answers to these questions can provide a framework for quick assessment on quality issues resulting from goal setting.

Larson and LaFasto (1989) find in their research covering over 75 teams, that "in every case, without exception, when an effectively functioning team was identified, it was described by the respondent as having a clear understanding of its objective." From their interviews, two insights emerged consistently: first, in high performance groups there was a clear and common understanding on the goal, as well as a belief that the goal embodies a worthwhile and important result; second, whenever an ineffectively functioning team was identified the explanation for its ineffectiveness involved the goal, in one way or another. In fact, the idea of importance of goals was not a new one, as many researchers had similar findings before Larson and LaFasto, for example Garfield (1986) concludes in his research that "the one characteristic that appears in every peak performer I have studied: A sense of mission"; and as he understands mission as being "an image of a desired state of affairs that inspires action" (Garfield & Bennett, 1984), we might understand it as being a synonym for the term "goal" for the purpose of our study. Similarly, Bennis and Nanus (1985) support these findings, and according to Locke (1968), reasonably consistent evidence indicates that the act of providing subjects with clear and specific goals tends to lead to improved performance. "In fact, from Dewey in 1910 to Hirokawa and Poole in 1986 the point has been made repeatedly: The more an individual or a group of people have a clear understanding of the nature of a problem that confronts them, the more effective they will be in solving the problem"(Larson and LaFasto, 1989). Gerard (1956) in his research implies that "clarity" is the most important characteristic of a goal. Following the literature, we understand a goal to be "clear" when it describes a specific performance objective phrased in such concrete way, that it

is possible to measure or tell clearly whether or not it has been achieved. Raven and Rietsema (1957) found in their experiment that those with a clear picture had a closer involvement with the group goal, more sympathy with group emotions, and a greater readiness to accept influence from the group, than those who were unclear about the goals in their group

A second matter, found to be in correlation with performance is aspiration levels (Chlewinski, 1981); thus a goal must not only be clear, but also elevating. A goal is perceived to be elevating when it either challenges, offers an opportunity to excel, or when the performance objective itself makes a difference, is creating a sense of urgency (Larson and La Fasto, 1989).

However, as straightforward as our discussion above is, it has to be understood that while these two goal characteristics are a must for successful team work, they are not sufficient to achieve it. Research shows, that even in cases where the goal is clear and elevating, there are so many things to focus on, and pressures to respond to, that teams and their leaders become easily distracted from their initial goals. In order to truly understand the big picture, we have to note: this loss of focus is not necessarily a result of incompetence (or other easily explainable phenomena), but it rather is a result of the complex nature of problems and the strategies of solving them, which require constant and intense concentration of all parties working together.

2.5. Interdependence

In the literature on groups interdependence commonly refers to the interactions that result from a group having a shared goal. Interdependence means that both group and individual outcomes are influenced by what all members do in the group (Brewer, 1995). In collaborations, high interdependency between the collaboration's members created the reciprocity needed for mutual interests to be achieved through coordination and cooperation. As a positive force, cooperative interdependence required by the task

to achieve the expected outcome can significantly and positively influence group members' motivation, performance, satisfaction and learning, in addition to helping to establish positive group norms (Wageman, 1995). However, when interdependence is perceived to be unbalanced, collaboration progress is repressed and success is limited.

2.6. Coordination

Coordination is both a key element of collaboration quality and the most controversial one when it comes to definitions of what it is and description on what matters it includes. Dietrich et al. (2010) define it as being a shared and mutual understanding on necessary activities and contributions needed to be performed by the collaborative actors. According to them, the common understanding of the goal should also be included in this element; while others (e.g. Larson & LaFasto, 1989) treat goal setting separately, with a much higher emphasis on its importance. Hoegl and Gemuenden (2001) mean by coordination only the degree of common understanding regarding the interrelatedness and current status of individual contributions, focusing on the importance of harmonization and synchronization of these individual contributions. Heimeriks (2002) on the other hand emphasizes the specification and execution of roles with minimal redundancy or verification, and the importance of effectively deploying the resources brought in the collaboration. He also considers vital parts of successful coordination keeping the transaction costs and the "administrative noise" at minimum.

Following Mohr and Spekman (1994) we consider that high levels of coordination in collaborations provide clarity and certainty about roles and procedures, relieving the management of such ambiguous authority structures while securing responsiveness, allowing for the management of moving targets and ultimately enhancing effectiveness and efficiency of the collaborative processes. Also, well coordinated tasks are less susceptible to conflicts (Alter, 1990).

As a conclusion, we prefer to see coordination in a wider sense, excluding, however, goal setting. As discussed in the introduction of the chapter, we follow the many that prefer to treat it separately, as it is a much too important determinant of collaboration quality to be mentioned so briefly.

2.7. Standards of excellence

The importance of standards of excellence lies in their purpose to serve as guidelines to members of the collaboration on “where they have to get” and by what means they have to get there. Harley (1997) argues that unless clear and consistent performance standards are demanded of a group it will not develop the commitment and concern to become high-performing.

Larson and LaFasto (1989) define standards as pressures to achieve a required or expected level of performance. Standards define those relevant and very complex expectations that eventually determine the level of performance a team finds acceptable. These pressures to perform may be exerted in several different ways and can come from two major sources:

1. *individual standards* consist of those performance expectations that derive from one’s life experiences, thus every party will tend to have a different form or level of pressure that pushes them to achieve;
2. *team pressures* are determined by the extent to which a team requires itself to meet its objectives and the extent to which it finds important current ways of working together to achieve those objectives.

2.8. Group Cohesiveness

The term cohesiveness refers to phenomena which come into existence if, and only if, the group exists. A person must have some idea about the properties of a given group before he can react to it; and whether there will be attraction to the group will depend

upon two sets of conditions: (1) properties of the group, such as its goals, programs, size, type of organization, and position in the community; and (2) the needs of the person for affiliation, recognition, security, and other things which can be mediated in groups (Cartwright and Zander, 1960). Both the nature of the group and the motivational state of the person involved must be treated for an adequate formulation of group cohesiveness.

If a member sees possibility to receive a desired resource in a group, he/she will be more likely to help to maintain the group or work to ensure its effectiveness as an organization. In a variety of studies it has been noted that members who are highly attracted to a group more often display beneficial behavior to it than those who are less attracted. Those who are strongly attracted to a group more often take on responsibilities for the organization (Larson, 1953), participate more readily in meetings (Back, 1951), persist longer in working toward difficult goals (Horwitz et al., 1953), attend meetings more devotedly, and remain members longer (Sagi et al., 1955; Libo, 1953). Attracted members are more motivated to influence others (Schachter, 1951), are more willing to listen to others (Back, 1951), are more accepting of others' opinions (Festinger, 1950; Rasmussen and Zander, 1954), and more often change their minds to adopt the views of fellow members (Back, 1951). Members who are strongly attracted to a group place greater value on the group's goals, adhere more closely to the group's standards (Seashore, 1954), and are more eager to protect the group's standards by exerting pressures upon or rejecting persons who are not willing to obey group rules (Cartwright and Zander, 1960). Attracted members are less likely to be nervous in group activities and more often find security or release tension in their membership activities (Seashore, 1954).

Schachter (1951) examines also the way in which group cohesiveness affects group productivity. He maintains that cohesiveness as such does not necessarily increase or decrease the productivity of a group. Rather, "cohesiveness serves to heighten the

susceptibility of group members to influence from other members. Thus, if the predominant influences are to restrict production, cohesiveness will tend to heighten these influences and will lower productivity. If, on the other hand, the group influences are in the opposite direction, cohesiveness will tend to heighten productivity.”

Finding like those reported by Festinger (1950) and Schachter (1951), which show that group cohesiveness heightens the power of the group over its members, suggests that acceptance of group goals will also depend considerably upon the degree to which members are attracted to membership in the group. Although it is not definitely known whether all bases of attraction to a group have exactly the same effects upon the power of the group, there is good reason to believe that groups whose members like one another as people, groups that mediate personal need satisfaction, and group having high prestige can exert strong pressures upon members to accept group goals. Given correct knowledge about the nature of the group task requirements, such groups should perform with relatively good effectiveness.

2.9. Cooperative Environment

The concept of cooperation and the interrelated concept of competition are rarely missing in discussions of interpersonal and intergroup relations. In collaborations this is a central problem and many researchers and scholars attempted to determine what the optimal balance between these two concepts is. As there is no recipe, the partners' unique solution to this issue often single handedly determines whether the collaborative process can move forward or the whole thing falls apart.

Typically, in cooperative situations the goals for the individuals or their organizations are defined so, that no individual or organization can achieve their own goals unless all the other individuals or organizations have also achieved their goals. As opposed to a cooperative situation, in competitive situations the goals for the individuals or their organizations are defined so, that if an individual or organization reaches its own goals it

becomes impossible, to some extent, for the other individuals or organizations to reach their respective goals. However, most situations are not this straight forward; in real-life most organizations have a complex set of goals and sub-goals, thus it is possible for individuals or their organizations to cooperate with respect to one goal, while being in competition with respect to another goal.

Deutsch holds in his research, that to the extent that the results have any generality, greater group or organizational productivity may be expected when the parties are cooperative rather than competitive in their interrelationships. The communication of ideas, coordination of efforts, friendliness, and pride in one's group which are basic to group harmony and effectiveness appear to be disrupted when members see themselves to be competing for mutually exclusive goals.

2.10. Input and Efforts

Balanced member inputs (contributions) and aligned efforts have also been found to influence collaboration quality (Hoegl & Gemuenden, 2001; Dietrich et al., 2010). For the success of a collaboration, every member has to be able to contribute task-relevant knowledge and experience. The balance of these contributions is important in avoiding power conflicts between members, and ultimately in keeping the cohesiveness of the group. Similarly, setting norms on the level of efforts expected from team members can help in avoiding confrontation.

Larson and LaFasto (1989) refer to these as the competence of the members instead of treating them as two separate elements. They argue that it takes both technical competence for each member to be able to make a valuable contribution and personal competencies to have the ability and skills to identify and resolve issues, such as balancing inputs and responding to norms of expected efforts. Heimeriks (2002), on the other hand, does not consider any of these issues in his framework on collaboration quality. Instead, he focuses solely on the complementarity and idiosyncrasy of

resources, and the compatibility of partners in terms of relational rents created out of complementary assets, ignoring their ability and willingness to contribute.

Bringing in many sources to share in the making of decisions is often seen as the answer to complex community problems because stakeholders have varying expertise relevant to solving such problems. However, equal input can be difficult to achieve due to the varying degree of perceived power and status among participants. It is exactly this problem that has to be overcome for a collaboration to work democratically through shared decision making. Although connected, the mere presence of equal inputs does not per se ensure that decision making will be shared. A solution proposed by Keyton and Stallworth (2002) is to develop such processes procedures in collaborations that will encourage all members to contribute and in the same time assure that no one member can affect group outcomes much more than the other members. It is also important, that these processes and procedures are agreed to by all members and that they equally represent the perspectives of all members

2.11. Trust and Support

Trust is one of the core virtues of mankind, being the bond that allows any kind of significant relationship to exist between people. Larson and LaFasto (1989) found in their analysis, that trust is produced in a climate that includes four elements: honesty, openness, consistency, and respect. In cases where trust is not present, the problem seems to be not the fact that members do not understand these elements, but that trust is so fragile that if any one of the elements listed above is breached even once the relationship will be severely compromised, or even lost.

In the related literature, mutual trust is understood to be the confidence that partners will behave in a predictable manner, without acting against the others (Barney and Hansen, 1994). It is mentioned, without exception, in every work done on any type of collaborations, but it is usually not much discussed. The reason for this seems to be that

trust is mostly considered to be a pre-existing condition, and there is not to be done if it is not present from the first stages of collaboration. Its importance lies mainly in the fact that contracts can not possibly account for all contingencies that may occur during the lifetime of a collaboration, therefore partners need to feel assured that in case of any unexpected events the others will act according to the benefit of the team and not their own interests.

In their study, Larson and LaFasto (1989) provide explanations to why a climate of trust fosters teamwork through themes commonly emerging in their interviews. First of all, they found that trust allows team members to stay focused, while the absence of trust tends to divert the members' focus from the group goal to other issues. In these cases team becomes politicized, communication becomes distorted, and personal agendas take priority over the team goal. Second, it emerged that trust promotes efficient communication and coordination, thus not only allows people to stay focused on team goals, but also promotes a more efficient use of time and energy resources needed for achieving those goals. Third, trust was perceived by the interview respondents as a factor that improves the quality of collaborative outcomes; it was found to facilitate disclosure and open information sharing, especially in cases where the information was negative, allowing also for team members to take risks and be permitted to fail. Finally, trust was found to lead to compensating or enabling team members to take over tasks of other members when they fail.

Hoegl and Gemuenden (2001) argue, that "the intensive collaboration of individuals depends upon a cooperative rather than a competitive frame of mind" (p.437). Thus, the importance of mutual support derives from the fact that, in case of interdependent tasks, support within a team is more productive than is forces of competition. Dietrich et al. (2010) add more content to the above description of support: (1) adaptability and the ability to compromise, (2) the existence of mutual flexibility in case of unforeseen incidents or changes, a trust-related matter, as they do not consider trust as a separate

element in their framework. Thomas's findings indicate that group effectiveness is increased by increasing mutual facilitation, or as we call it: support. Group members move with greater speed toward the goal, have a stronger sense of responsibility, and form a more cohesive group when the level of mutual support is high.

2.12. Commitment

Much of team success involves intangibles, traits like attitudes and energies. The teams that accomplished truly remarkable things are always characterized by genuine commitment to the goal and willingness to spend extraordinary amounts of energy to achieve it. Commitment or dedication was the distinguishing feature of the people Larson and LaFasto (1989) interviewed in their study of effective teams. They define commitment as mental energy strongly linked to effort, as commitment is what determines members' willingness to invest their time and energy into the group project. And as Anundsen (1979) concluded from her analysis of teamwork, teams do not excel without serious individual investment of time and energy.

Unified commitment is a very vague property that is difficult even to conceptualize, let alone systematically and deliberately build. Having a clear and worthwhile goal helps considerably. But beyond the significance of the activity itself, there are several recurring themes identified by team leaders and members as having positive effect on the emotional tone, spirit or identification with the team.

- (1) Involvement enhances commitment. Participation, especially in the planning of strategies for achieving goals, increases motivation, effort, and ultimately, success.
- (2) Balancing differentiation and integration. There is a delicate balance between appreciating individual differences and requiring unity.

2.13. Competence

According to Larson and LaFasto (1989), when addressing issues of competence, what most matters is selecting members who possess both the necessary technical skills and abilities to achieve the desired objective and the personal characteristics required to achieve excellence while working well with others. Possessing the necessary technical skills is the minimum requirement for entrance in any team. They consist of substantive knowledge, skills and abilities related to the team's objective. In other words, they are the technical knowledge needed in order to have a reasonable chance of achieving the set goal. While technical skills are a bit easier to identify, the best teams are composed with a selection of strategy that attempts to capture both qualities. The personal characteristics refer to the qualities, skills and abilities necessary for the individual team members to identify, address, and resolve issues. It is personal competencies that allow people to function as a team. The types of individuals, their qualities as people, the talents they bring with them and their abilities to work together toward a common objective are critical determinants of team success.

2.14. Group member motivation and maturity

Stakeholders must be motivated toward involvement in a collaboration if it is to succeed. Most are motivated by a desire to solve an important problem; however, other motivations –such as political power, financial incentives, desire to control outcomes – may be impelling forces for stakeholder involvement. In addition to being motivated, collaboration members must also possess a certain degree of maturity or political knowledge to be effective in representing their organizations. Gray (1989) noted that varying levels of member maturity is a common problem within collaborations.

2.15. Communication

In the literature addressing issues on the determinants of the quality of collaboration the most frequently mentioned element is communication (Keyton & Stallworth, 2002;

Dietrich et al., 2010; Hoegl & Gemunden, 2001; Heimeriks, 2002; Larson & LaFasto, 1989). Seemingly all researchers and scholars agree that communication is essential to collaboration success, and there is also quite much consistency on what they mean by the term communication. However, different authors attribute different levels of importance to it; some consider it the most crucial element (usually those whose research evolves from the biggest, more complex issues to the smaller ones); and others (those whose research evolves “chronologically”), while they do agree on its importance, consider it useless without all the other elements that in the process of setting up the cooperation “precede” the phase of communication (e.g. resource configuration, compatibility).

The process of communication is an integral part of task activities. At a minimum, task effectiveness requires that a group be able to pool available resources and combine them into a reasonable solution. To share ideas, individuals must interact. Since the resources are generated by people, feelings associated with ideas, self, and other group members are involved in the group process. Some people are shy and hesitant to talk, while others are abrupt and may stimulate negative feelings that restrict effective communication of ideas. Personalities and relationships are potential barriers to effective group work. Angry, anxious and antagonistic group members cannot provide synthesized solutions to complex problems. Therefore, it is necessary not only to take into account how ideas are integrated but also how people are interacting. While task groups are primarily concerned with task activities, they must also be concerned with relationships in terms of how they affect the task.

The importance of communication does not hold true in theoretical discussions only; studies have also found that internal communication structures and processes have significant influence on collaboration effectiveness (Taber et al., 1979; Yon et al., 1993) and that creating an effective communication network between collaboration members is the essential component for collaborative success (Stagelin & Jones, 1991).

2.16. Culture

Commonly refers to the values, norms, assumptions and practices associated with a collective. The development of a culture that characterizes a collaboration is important for two reasons. First, like any task group, a collaboration must develop a culture of its own that motivates members, establishes an effective social environment, and provides norms for accomplishing the task. Second, a culture unique to a collaboration can supersede tensions and conflicts that can occur when members rely on the cultures of their primary organizations when working in a collaboration. As Yon et al. (1993) explained “institutions have different rules, regulations, policies, target populations, budgets, methods of supervision and evaluation, and operational language” that fuel power issues within a collaboration. Thus, the extent to which a collaboration can form a culture that is unique to its members and activities, and one that is owned by all collaborative group members may be central predictors of a collaboration’s success.

2.17. External support and recognition

Typical factors signaling these include the following: the team is given the resources it needs to get the job done; the team is supported by those individuals and agencies outside the team who are capable of contributing to the team’s success; the team is sufficiently recognized for its accomplishments; the reward and incentive structure is clear, viewed as appropriate by team members and tied to performance. Following Heimeriks (2002), in the upper description we mean the resources in the broadest possible way, considering monetary and resources as well as time, and other facilities needed to complete the task.

Interestingly, some argue that this factor seems to be more an effect of team success than a cause of it. However, we hold that there is both a cause and effect relationship: providing the necessary resources to a team will enhance their performance, and long-term well performing teams tend to attract more resources and manage them in a

better way. An other interesting fact is that in related research and literature this element is noted more for its absence in poorly functioning teams than for its presence in effective ones.

2.18. A short synthesis on the theoretical perspective of collaboration quality

Collaborations are a temporary way of organizing individuals or representatives as a group to address complex, shared problems. They are temporary in that they are formed for specific purposes, cases, or situations. The limited time frame for which most operate, however, does not necessarily mean that their members can not communicate and perform effectively with improvised procedures and structures. One should not mistakenly relate temporarily with lack of attention to the process by which collaborations are formed and maintained. Since a collaboration's outcomes are directly linked to the efficiency and effectiveness of its processes it is important to identify the elements that affect collaboration quality; good communication and coordination, an appropriate team structure, shared goal setting, high level of team cohesiveness, balanced member contributions, aligned efforts, mutual trust and support, equilibrated power and status, principled leadership, interdependence, competent and motivated members, standards of excellence, commitment, a common culture and the external support have all been proven to have their benefits in collaborative structures.

A collaboration was considered of high quality in the literature reviewed when all elements were present and well functioning. The way theoreticians present their frameworks on collaboration quality is in the form of "checklists", or "recipes" to use when establishing a collaboration. Thus, from this perspective, *collaboration quality is defined as the sum of all the elements affecting it* (this view is most visible in Heimeriks' definition of collaboration quality: "specificities of alliance characteristics, which have significant positive effects on alliance performance"); in consequence, collaboration quality can be defined only through the definition of its elements.

The basis for our theoretical framework was provided by 5 studies on collaboration quality, and synthesis on these resulted in naming and describing 17 elements as determinants of collaboration quality. It is visible from the description in Chapter 2 that these elements overlap, and have a very complex network of interrelatedness and the dynamics between them is virtually impossible to describe accurately. It has to be noted, that there was a division among these elements according to whether they affect the efficiency of the tasks, or the interpersonal relationships between the members, and a fairly equal importance was attributed to both categories as determinants of collaboration quality.

As a conclusion, we found that there is no agreement in the literature regarding the answer to “what is collaboration quality?” The task of conceptualization would undoubtedly be simpler if it were possible to define collaboration quality in terms of a single criterion. Nevertheless, there seems to be an agreement on the idea that that several criteria must be considered together in research and theorizing, thus collaboration quality can be defined only as a combination of certain elements that affect it. Our review shows that these elements will always vary in their meanings and the decision on which elements will gain meaning at all will always be at the judgment of the researcher.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Ontological and epistemological positioning

This study is built on the main ontological assumption that reality is plural, holistic and constructed by the ones experiencing it (Hudson & Ozanne 1988, Hirschman 1986), it is not fixed, but it rather emerges from social and cognitive processes. Therefore, we do not attempt to “measure” reality, but rather aim at understanding it. These assumptions position this thesis within the *social constructivist* tradition. Social constructivism is based on specific assumptions about reality, knowledge, and learning. Reality is believed to be constructed through human activity, as a result of which members of a society invent together the properties of a world (Kukla, 2000). In the social constructivist view reality cannot be discovered: it does not exist prior to its social invention. Similarly, for social constructivists, knowledge is also a human product, and is socially and culturally constructed from meanings created by individuals through their interactions with each other and influenced by the environment they live in (Gredler, 1997; Prawat & Floden, 1994). Consequently, learning does not take place only within an individual, nor is it a passive development of behaviors that are shaped by external forces (McMahon, 1997). Learning is a social process and meaningful learning can occur only when individuals engage in social activities. Social constructivists view learning as a social process. Thus, we hold that the knowledge emerging from this research is co-created between researcher and research subjects. This thesis also holds that all ways of understanding are historically and culturally relative, and they can be seen as products of that culture or history. The meanings associated to things will always be dependant upon the specific social and economic conditions existing in that culture at that time, thus one should not assume that their ways of understanding are the only correct ones, or are in any way better, “in terms of being any nearer to the truth”, than other ways of understanding. (Burr, 2003, p.4)

On the epistemological level, we believe that that research is always subjective, contextual and dependent on the values, culture, beliefs, etc. of the researcher. In consequence, the results of any analysis will always be just one possible interpretation of the studied phenomena, thus the knowledge produced is not absolute or globally valid truth but a point of view. This thesis is *relativist* in that it holds that truth is always contingent or relative to some discursive and cultural frame of reference.

3.2. Data collection and analysis

Graneheim and Lundman (2004) pointed out that the most suitable unit of analysis in qualitative research is whole interviews that are large enough to be considered as a whole and small enough to be kept in mind as a context for meaning unit during the analysis process. Thus, our primary data is the result of five in depth interviews conducted on a non-random sample; our sample consisted of representatives of the major parties in the collaboration. The number of interviews could seem relatively low; however, we obtained data from all relevant points of view, with exception of one party, to whom we did not have access. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, were unstructured and had open ended questions. No questions were defined as such before the interviews but they evolved from the conversation. However, attention was paid to touch the same main topics in every interview. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees, then transcribed and coded on multiple levels. The length of the interviews varied from 42 to 87 minutes and transcription resulted in 82 pages of data. The interview data was completed, where necessary, with information from the observational notes taken during the operational group meetings, and with other printed materials from the official website of the institution coordinating the project.

Before presenting the methods and the process of analyzing our data we would like to note, that we did not attempt, at any stage, to measure whether the collaboration is successful or not, to express opinions or take sides. We simply wished to assess what

collaboration quality means, and how is it conceptualized by our interviewees. Thus, the case itself has no other relevance, than providing us the context in which these people can speak about the phenomenon. Furthermore, in the analysis, we did not wish to attend to questions of truthfulness or morality of the interviewed persons, in fact they are of no relevance either in that it has no importance who said what, but only what has been said.

3.3. Approach and Methods

The methods that fit the area of interest of this particular research are qualitative in nature. Qualitative research methods are valuable in providing rich descriptions of complex phenomena; tracking unique or unexpected events; illuminating the experience and interpretation of events by actors with widely differing stakes and roles; giving voice to those whose views are rarely heard; conducting initial explorations to develop theories and to generate and even test hypotheses; and moving toward explanations (Sofaer, 1999). In our research, qualitative methods are used for two main reasons: (1) as we aim at addressing quality issues not from the point of view of the process's outcomes but on an ongoing basis, quantitative data such as numbers and measures could not provide us with understanding of the phenomenon, and (2) the nature of the topic requires that complexity, context and persona are addressed (Gummesson, 2006).

The data processing started with reading the transcripts repeatedly, until well familiarized with their substance, then an analysis was carried out on two levels, using a different method for each level. These methods and steps along the research process are presented summarized in the table below, incorporating information such as the setting or subjects on which the method/step was carried out, the aim of the method/step and its results.

Table 2: Methods and steps used in the research

Methods and steps in the research process	Subjects/ setting	Aim	Result
observation and field notes	meetings	document the events, dynamics, processes, collective sense-making	assessment of emerged issues
interviews	5 collaboration participants	collect data for analysis	data for content analysis
content analysis	5 transcribed accounts	selection of relevant data	data for discourse analysis
discourse analysis	sections from accounts	assess perception of collaboration and its quality	findings for discussion

3.3.1. Content Analysis

The first method we use in this study is *content analysis* as the nature of our research question suggested that our main data be interviews. The crucial distinction between texts and what other research methods take as their starting point is that a text means something to someone, it is produced by someone to have meanings for someone else, and these meanings therefore must not be ignored and must not violate why the text exists in the first place. We believe that qualitative methods are not strict in their rules, but are adaptable to the nature of the research, within the limits of logics. We will, in the part to come, set the “rules” of content analysis used in our case. We used as a starting point the definition of this method given by Berelson (1971), who defines content analysis as a “research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (p18). As we argued before, we do not believe that our analysis can be objective, as the classic work, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger & Luckman, 1966) points out, there is no such thing as true objectivity – “knowledge” and “facts” are what are socially agreed on. According to this view all social inquiry is inherently subjective (Neuendorf, 2002), but still we must strive for consistency among inquiries, so we particularly like that Berelson argues for systematicity, in an effort to fight the tendency of reading and analyzing material selectively. Scholars refer to this standard as intersubjectivity (Lindolf, 1995).

By including the attribute “manifest” in his definition, Berelson intended to ensure that coding of content analysis data be reliable; this requirement literally excludes “reading between the lines”. Also, he did not elaborate on the concept of “content”, as at the time he was writing there was no doubt about the nature of it: content was believed to be inside the text, and was restricted to what was common to all accounts. We will in our design of methods follow him in the latter two ideas: we attend only to the manifest content within this method putting the emphasis on what the message says instead of who and how said it.

Shapiro and Markoff (1997), among others, have criticized such definitions as too limiting; from a general philosophical point of view we agree with these critiques, but for the purpose of our study, the simpler the definition, the easier to see through the process. Therefore, for the purpose of our study, we take content to be inherent in a text, and we choose not to attend to latent meanings at this stage. Our approach to content analysis is descriptive, and we are being careful to limit our conclusions to the content being studied. We will use content analysis to distil words into fewer content-related categories(Elo & Kyngaas, 2008).

Returning to our starting point, trying to define our way of doing content analysis, we must mention one more definition we took into account: “content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the context of their use.” (Krippendorff, p 18). We will use this definition in the way that it does not limit content analysis to be quantitative, like Berelson does, as our research is purely qualitative, and in that we are striving for validity in our design. Or definition of content analysis would therefore sound something like this: *a research technique for systematic, replicable and valid qualitative description of the manifest content of textual data.*

In practical terms, we started content analysis by examining only the manifest content, not the latent one at this stage. We followed the theoretical guidelines described and explained in above. The process itself started with a “non-targeted” coding, meaning that we started by reading again each interview transcript several times, without focusing on any specific questions and started to underline whatever seemed interesting, raised questions, or made us think, still without following any research questions. We then coded the underlined text parts according to topics or theme and only then did we cross-reference them with our specific research topic. This way we narrowed down the volume of text to what particularly interests us in this research but without pre-maturely eliminating any data that could provide us with insights on the phenomenon. Our unit for analysis was “theme”, as all others (word, sentence) seemed too restrictive; we took elements of collaboration quality described in the theoretical part and looked for references to them in the accounts. The next step of coding was to categorize these themes according to their connection to the different elements of collaboration quality. We then took each category¹ and analyzed the contents of the texts of each participant separately, then made conclusions based on an overview of all accounts within the same category. The result is a smaller amount of data, focused on elements of collaboration quality, obtained without summarizing the original text, therefore avoiding loss of meaning. This focused data was further analyzed, as described below, with discourse analysis in an effort to find answers to our original research questions. Since the results of the first level analysis are not considered results of our research as a whole, but only a means to focus our data, we will not report these in our Results and Discussions chapter. We, however provide a summary of these findings below.

All together, there were direct or indirect references made to twelve elements from our theoretical chapter. These elements are presented in the table below, with information

¹ Ex.: we grouped every mentioning of “funding”, “time”, “money” or any reference to “Resource Configuration” under the element “External Support and Recognition”

about the number of accounts they appeared in, and how many of these times was the context they were mentioned in positive and negative, respectively².

Table 3: Elements mentioned in accounts

Element	Nr of accounts with direct reference	Of which positive	Of which negative
External Support and Recognition	5	0	5
Team Structure	4	1	3
Culture	5	2	3
Trust	5	2 (both conditional)	3
Collaborative Environment	5	0	5
Power and Status	1	0	1
Commitment	4	2	2
Communication	4	0	4
Input and Efforts	2	1	1
Leadership	1	1	0
Shared Goal	5	5	0
Competence	5	5 (one conditional)	0

Additional observations made are listed below:

(1) The most mentioned element was External Support and Recognition, with reference both to financial and time resources. The accounts were consistent in that all five interviewees were concerned about or felt challenged by financial or time related issues. According to the accounts, there is high level of insecurity about funding

² Ex.: resource related issues were mentioned in all five interviews, of which 0 times positively and 5 times negatively (not enough money, not enough time, not enough people, etc.)

availability; there are “fights” for remuneration; and the timetable for the project planning has been too short considering the goals.

(2) Related to the Team Structure element, the most common observation has been that the roles of parties have not been specified, and that there are some incompatibilities due to different levels of bureaucracy in each party’s organization. There were concerns on the informality of the roles and status of participants.

(3) Culture has been mentioned on two different levels. First, on the level of cultural differences between Finland and Russia; and second, on an institutional level, referring to the lack of an organizational culture common to the project team.

(4) References to Trust were the most controversial, some stating clear trust or distrust, while some expressing trust generally, with exceptions to certain people or certain process outcomes.

(5) On Collaborative Climate element, issues were mostly mentioned related to the competitive nature of relations between universities, which all accounts agreed upon. The difference appeared in the attitudes towards this phenomenon: some were considering it normal in the given situation, while some being seriously concerned about its effects. (6) Power fights were also reported between these universities.

(7) The Commitment element was also divided to two levels; commitment to the pilot project on one hand, and commitment to further collaboration on the other hand. All agreed that there is a high level of commitment to the pilot project, with the exception of FinEc, who was considered to be committed “on paper” but not in actions. However, the general attitude towards commitment for further collaboration was skeptical.

(8) Each account included some negative aspects of Communication: it is too formal, it is not timely, it is not frequent enough, it is not open or honest enough.

(11) The Shared Goal element is indeed shared, all interviewees providing the same description of the goal for the project. However, one account took it to the next level, saying that the aim of this project is to create further, real collaboration.

(12) There seems to be a very clear, common view among the parties about each of their core competencies. There is however some references to distrust towards these in terms of outcomes.

3.3.2. Discourse Analysis

The second method used in this study is *discourse analysis*. Following Wetherell, we hold that the relationship of words to meaning is many-to-one rather than one-to-one, in both directions, or to put it differently, words typically have various meanings, and meanings are typically worded in various ways. The choices producers make in word and wording usage have meanings beyond the words themselves, therefore discourse analysis explores meanings that are produced and mediated textually and can be “a way of finding out how consequential bits of social life are done” (Wetherell, 2008) which hopefully will help us understand deeper what actors mean by the things they say, things a simple content analysis would have not revealed.

But what is discourse analysis? There is quite a debate on how should one define this concept, debate in which we do not wish to take a stand in this study. For our purpose it is enough to use the most simple and straight forward definitions such as “the study of discourse is the study of language in use” - however, discourse analysis should not be seen as the study of language per se (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008) or “the study of discourse is the study of human meaning-making”. It is a fact, that contemporary

societies are mediated through discourse. A central point discourse researchers make is that language is constructive of social life, it doesn't just reflect it. In other words, to "do" social life is to "do" discourse. (Wetherell, 2008)

Discourse research typically involves working with texts, which include commonly transcripts of recorded conversations. As we mentioned before, as producers we are always faced with choices about how to use a word and how to word a meaning, and as interpreters we are always faced with decisions about how to interpret the choices producers have made. Thus no matter how descriptive the data, an analyst is inevitably interpreting all the time and there is no phase of analyses which is pure description. In consequence, description is not as separate from interpretation as it is often assumed to be. Knowing the difference does not only distinguish "good" discourse analysis from "bad" one, but decides whether a study is or is not in fact discourse analysis. Since it is difficult to give a blueprint on how to carry out this type of research, Antaki et al (2003) provide the practitioners with a few guidelines on what is not considered discourse analysis instead. According to them, it is not considered discourse analysis if the original data is summarized, as doing so does not yet involve any kind of analysis, while it makes the original data loose information and meaning and adds none. Taking sides also does not offer any value, as scholarly research does not care about one's moral, political or personal stand on what has been said in the data. While we did say that we accept the subjective nature of research, this subjectivity should only come from interpretation of the original data and not from criticizing what has been said. Furthermore, listing an extensive amount of quotations and not explaining on them, or as Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) puts it letting quotations speak for themselves also does not count as discursive analysis. Finally, they clarify, that interpretation does not involve commenting on the speakers' cognitive or mental processes, and results should not by any means be treated as generally valid. However, they add that profiling (or compiling quotations into a profile) can be part of discourse analyses, if one wishes to investigate whether the participants use shared discursive resources.

In business studies three types of discourse analysis are generally used: Foucauldian, social psychological, and critical. The kind of discourse research which is favored for any particular research has to be chosen according to the type of data collected, the topic, the academic discipline and the discourse tradition which seems most appropriate. In this thesis, we will be using the social psychological approach, which is mostly concerned with how “identities as versions of self are constructed as factual and real, and how people position themselves in relation to other people, groups, ideas and objects” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). As a tool for our analysis we will be using *interpretative repertoires*, which are “relatively internally consistent, bounded language units which we have called interpretative repertoires” (Wetherell & Potter, 1988 p.171), or in other words, coherent and systematic ways of talking about things (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008), and can be used to describe discursive resources that speakers share and draw upon in their accounts.

In practice, we started this level of analysis by taking into consideration all accounts, and looking for significant patterns of consistency and variation. Our most challenging task was to forget about the person, and stop asking questions like “what are the motives behind the speech”, “what interests might this particular speaker have in saying these particular things”, and ask instead, *from the data* not from the person “what is the starting point behind this account”, “on what kinds of limitations of perspective is this description based”, “what other statements in participants’ accounts are based on the same perspective”, etc.

In the first phase, we started to look for inconsistencies and internal contradictions in the account of one participant, and interpreted these as differences between relatively internally consistent interpretative repertoires. For example,

“I don’t see any problems now (pause 7 seconds) the first problem I see is that this competition between universities and I would say that the problem is financing” (Irene)

The upper sentence quoted from an interview exemplifies very well the nature of the whole interview; it was all based on a contradiction that the interviewee on one hand, holds that everything is fine, and on the other hand names a list of problems.

In the next phase, we were looking for regular patterns of variability among all accounts (repeatedly occurring descriptions, explanations and arguments). For example, all accounts described a seemingly low-importance actor in this case, Stephanie, to be the key person in the initiation of (Pilot) project, all interviewees bringing her name up without being asked about her. Finally, in the third phase, we attempted to identify the basic assumptions and starting points, which underlie a particular way of talking about the phenomenon. For example, related to cultural differences between the Russian and the Finnish part, the basic assumption common to our accounts was that to some extent these differences affect negatively the quality of collaboration. (see process summarized in Figure 3)

The end point of the analysis was systematic linking of descriptions, accounts, and arguments to the viewpoint from which they were produced, and the naming of different interpretative repertoires. These repertoires are presented and discussed in the next chapter. A visual representation on how the data collection and analysis was carried out is provided in the figure below.

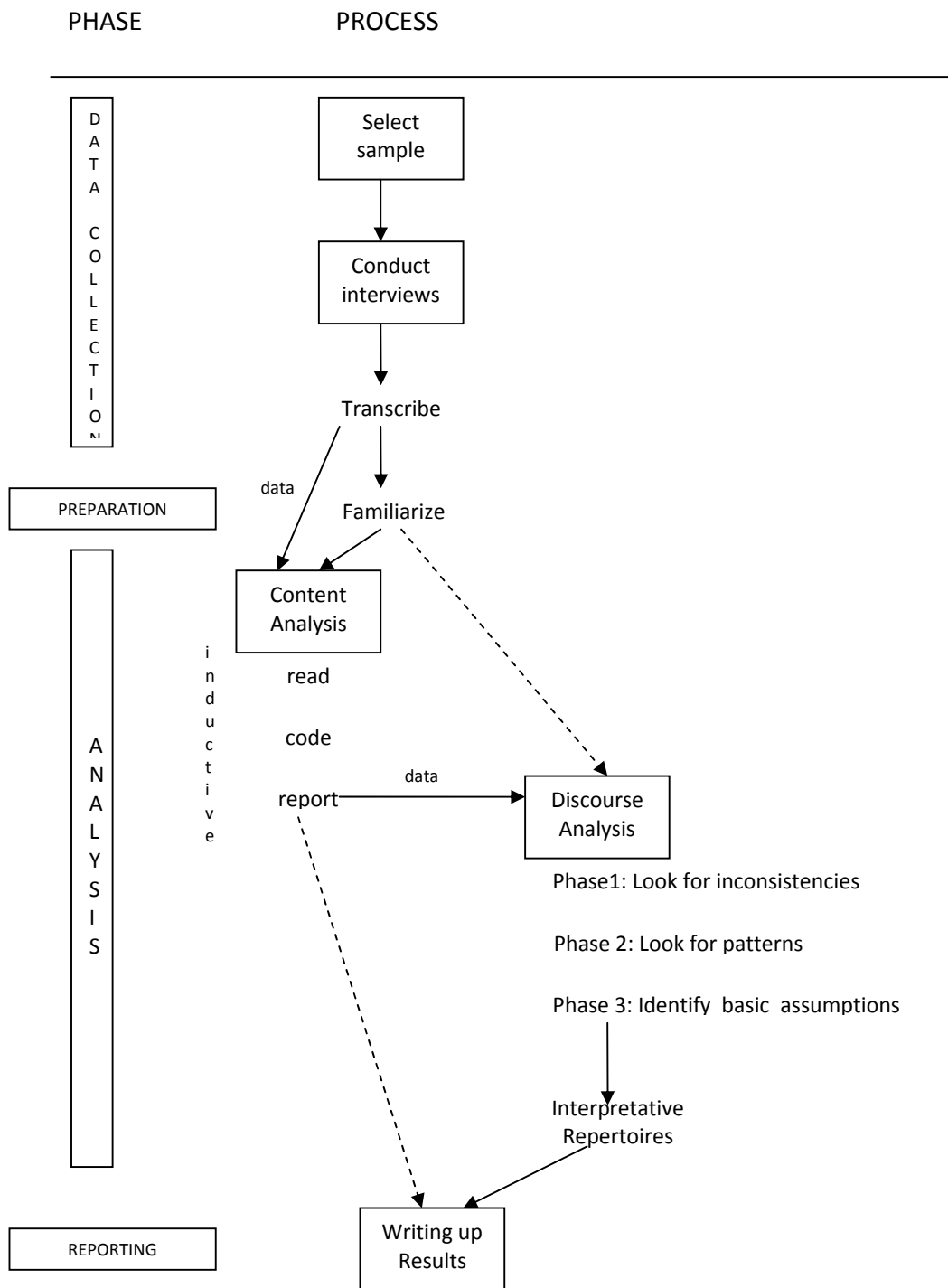


Figure 3: Flowchart of the Data Collection and Analysis

4. THE CASE

4.1. The (Pilot) project

The case in context of which we attempted to assess collaboration quality is the pilot of an innovative educational project: a joint MBA program between three universities with different cultural backgrounds and key competence areas, mediated by a non-governmental organization, and with public sector funding, targeted for companies with the purpose of enhancing trans-border collaborations and bench-learning from each other.

(Campus) is a bench-learning network for Finnish companies operating in (city Rus). The aim of the project is to enhance joint learning between the project's member companies by implementing bench-learning methods among the Russian personnel of the member companies, by exploring apprenticeship training opportunities in Russia, and by creating partnerships with local stakeholders in order to develop mutually beneficial training programs. Furthermore, the project aims at developing Finnish-Russian recruitment cooperation and public recruitment services in (city Rus). The project is co-funded by the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy under the Finnish neighboring area cooperation financing facility. The project is coordinated by (Inst), and the local coordination in (city Rus) is provided by the Committee for Economic Development, Industrial Policy and Trade. The main objectives of the (Campus) project are (1) make bench-learning become a natural way to develop Russian-speaking personnel in Finnish companies participating in the project; (2) creation of partnerships with local stakeholders; (3) help member companies obtain a cost-effective and high-quality training for the personnel; and (4) develop the recruitment services in cooperation with local employment offices in (city Rus) to help member companies find enduring solutions for their recruitment needs in Russia, as well as to develop the cooperation between the employment offices and member companies into long-term partnerships.

The (Campus) project started in St. Petersburg on 30 September 2009 within the framework of the II St. Petersburg Innovation Forum. Representatives from the St Petersburg City Administration, General Consulate of Finland in St Petersburg, Finnish companies working in St Petersburg and other partner organizations took part in the meeting. The event was aiming at introduction of the partners, discussion of the goals, tasks and activities of the two-year project. The goals of this project were presented as enhancing networking and sharing of experiences on HR training, on-job learning and recruitment among Finnish companies located in St. Petersburg and with local authorities. The project supports the goals of the St. Petersburg city innovation program and related efforts to enhance foreign investments as well as development of vocational and continuing education.

The (Pilot) was initiated by Stephanie, HR manager of (Nordic), who contacted (Inst) with the request to organize and coordinate this project. Our interviews revealed that the choice of Stephanie on (Inst) was due to a long successful collaboration in context of (Campus) project, and the existence of the network and task-relevant knowledge needed for the new project. The two Finnish universities to be involved were also suggestions of Stephanie, while the Russian university involved was suggested by Irene, the coordinator of (Pilot) due to her network and professional relations within (Uni Rus). (Uni 01 Fin) is a university with key competence areas in leadership and management, and is represented in (Pilot) by three people: (1) Henry, who has a dual role, he is the head of the (Pilot) program and in the same time, in his quality of vice-rector he is representing the interest of (Uni 01 Fin); (2) Hayley, who ultimately took up the role of program manager of (Pilot) and is responsible for the overall content of the program while also being the “face” towards the students; and (3) Jenna, who is a professor at (Uni 01 Fin) and is closely collaboration with Hayley on content-related issues.

(Uni 02 Fin) is a technical profile university, which is represented in (Pilot) through their center for continued education, (EduCentre). Within this organization a visible role is assumed only by Susan, who is a development manager with extensive experience in organization of MBA programs.

(Uni Rus) is the leading university in economics and finance in Russia. Their representation has been unclear, officially they are represented by vice-rector level (Ivan), but the real persons of contact have not been identified.

Finally, the institute coordinating the project is represented by (1) its director, Edward, who is responsible for funding related issues; and (2) Irene, who is the project manager of (Campus) and is responsible for keeping contact with participants and general administrative issues.

4.2. Notations used

We note that the names of cities, organizations and interviewees in question will not be revealed. The actors involved in our study and their notations in the prior description can be found in the table below.

Table 4: Notations used

Description of actor	Notation of actor in study
City in Finland	(city Fin)
City in Russia	(city Rus)
Two universities from (city Fin)	(Uni 01 Fin) (Uni 02 Fin)
Centre for continued education within (Uni 02 Fin)	(EduCentre)
University from (city Rus)	(Uni Rus)
Institute specialized in project management	(Inst)

Various Finnish companies, of which one active in organization	(Nordic)
Head of Program	Henry
Representation from (Uni 01 Fin)	Hayley Jenna
Representation from (Uni 02 Fin)	Susan Petra
Representation from (Uni Rus)	Ivan
Representation from (Inst)	Edward Irene
Representation from (Nordic)	Katelyn Stephanie

These notations will be used also when quoting from interviews and when reporting findings. Further people mentioned are of no relevance from the point of view of what is studied, therefore will be randomly disguised. Furthermore, the notation of the current project examined by this study is (Pilot), while the project that the pilot project evolved from is referred to as (Campus).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The way we wish to report our findings is a synthesis of our whole analysis, quoting only the most accurate examples for each repertoire, not all relevant sequences. The reason for this is simply the limitations in length of this thesis. However, we report the conclusions based on the whole research, not only the examples presented.

5.1. Interpretative repertoires

5.1.1. The “Pride” repertoire

This repertoire is based on the common behavior of admitting the problems and shortcomings to self, but not wanting to admit them to the outside world. We included an alternative of this behavior to the same repertoire too, when interviewees did admit to the problem but tried to minimize their impact or joke about it. In both cases the manifest content of message ignored or tried to minimize problems, but the latent content confirmed their existence, causing internal inconsistencies that we interpreted as being results of the pride taken in own efforts and in an effort to keep “face”.

The sequence below, quoted from an account is meant to exemplify this repertoire:

“I don’t see any problem now because I think that uhm it is uhm we are leading a very natural project life we have some uhm you know well problems arrive and we have uncertainties (...) I don’t see any problems now (pause 7 seconds) the first problem I see is that this competition between universities and I would say that the problem is financing” (Irene)

In this account we can observe how the speaker opens with the “positive” side of there not being any problems, but this message is not entirely transmitted to the reader, who will ultimately focus on the problems that arose. This might be due to multiple reasons: first, the in coding of the message the choice of wording makes it a negative sentence (saying “I don’t see any problem” instead of wording it something like “everything is working well, but, except, etc”); second, the repetition of “I don’t see any problems” (twice in this sequence, but a total of seven times in the whole paragraph) within a list of problems makes it sound that the speaker is trying to convince someone that there really are no problems. This way of presenting is all that much more interesting considering the fact that the speaker was not asked about problems when giving this answer; the question simply was “if you could change anything in the functioning of this group what would that be”.

An other example for pride towards external parties is present in the account below:

“there is kind of tension came between those two universities and we weren’t sure that we are able to work with both of them...we wanted both of these universities to participate but at the start it wasn’t easy...it was kind of not spending my time vey effectively listening to those parties arguing that they are going to be able to work together or not but this is not a big deal even though I talk about it quite a lot” (Katelyn)

In the whole account, the theme of tension between two universities reoccurred six times, without being asked about it, as we did not knew about the existence of these tensions before this interview. The contradiction is apparent; it lies between saying “this is not a big deal” and returning to the theme with every opportunity. The account also mentioned having special meetings with only one other party concerning these tensions.

In consequence, we found that in face of external inquiry, participants will tend to describe the collaboration process as being smoother than it is in reality, or then as they perceive it to be when discussing it with other internal parties.

5.1.2. The “Insecurity” repertoire

The underlying attitude of insecurity had multiple roots within the texts analyzed. First, without exception, all accounts expressed worry or distrust towards obtaining the necessary funding for the completion of the (Pilot).

“I am a bit worried that I know there is still some lack of money and we are not sure how we are going to finance the later part of the program” Katelyn

Second, most accounts showed insecurity in relation to the speakers’ role in the project, and all accounts reported confusion when speaking about who is responsible for what.

“I’m not sure who is responsible for what” Susan

Third, insecurity was expressed when addressing the possibility of smooth collaboration between parties too, as shown also in the sequences quoted in the previous repertoire with reference to collaboration between universities. Further insecurities were related to the effort invested by partners and the outcomes and continuation of collaboration after the project ends. There was a general distrust towards the idea that the willingness of parties to invest themselves will actually be expressed in actions;

“the big issue is that whether these universities really want to continue and how will they want to continue” (Hayley)

“I am not totally convinced that they are willing to uhm at the end of the day put effort and time” (Hayley),

and a general skepticism in reference to reaching the goal of forming a real MBA program on the base of this pilot.

“personally I do not believe in this”(Henry)

“I am skeptical towards this kind of outcome” (Susan)

The frequency of references towards insecurity makes this the biggest repertoire, and in result set the general tone when speaking about this collaborative process.

5.1.3. The “Confidence” repertoire

This repertoire emerged from the way interviewees described other participants’ competencies. All parties presented the competencies of their partners in a positive light, and the fact that these descriptions matched almost word by word means that there is a very clear division between these areas of competence. In addition, in every description the sum of these competencies equaled the whole list of competencies needed to achieve the goal of the collaboration described by the interviewees. However, this confidence was common only as far as competencies go; confidence in the efforts or commitment of parties was conditional or non-existing in all accounts. One account reported *“I think that we make a good combo all together” (Henry)* at the end of listing the competencies of partners, but as soon as the discussion came to efforts or commitment of others the message became negative, stating for example *“and then we look this from (Uni Rus) perspective this is not very important for them”(Henry).*

There was a conditional confidence when it came to finishing this project or the outcomes of it. This conditionality was mostly related to insecurities about obtaining the

necessary funding, which was a commonly reoccurring theme in all accounts, even from the administrative side, and seemed to be one of the biggest worries of all participants. There also seemed to be a relative confidence in the outcomes of the project, in terms of achieving the goal. One account presented the goal as being the development of a joint MBA program combining the expertise of three universities, and when asked to predict the outcome or success the answer was *“yeah we will make the (Pilot) successfully and we will evaluate its experiences but then I am a bit skeptical that there will be a real MBA on the basis of this” (Henry)*. When considering the whole account as a context for this statement, we may conclude that this lack of confidence is a result of a general skepticism towards the existence of enough common interests and a genuine commitment of parties.

5.1.4. The “Critique” repertoire

We profiled into this repertoire every critical way of expression regarding resources or other organizational issues. There were critiques addressed to other parties too, but we did not include these in the repertoire as they were not commonly occurring, therefore not relevant in forming a general idea on how partners view this collaboration. Additionally, we noted that the issues criticized in the accounts were identical to those they expressed worry about.

The funding issue was “double faced” in the accounts, when speaking about this issue people not only expressed worry towards obtaining the necessary funding, but also criticized the organization for not having done that in time and each-other for fighting over the existing resources. The other biggest insecurity, regarding the roles, was also translated into critiques. Interestingly, not the organizing party per se was criticized in this issue; instead accounts reported miscommunication and lack of communication as the reasons for unclear roles:

“there should be more discussion concerning the roles and project” (Susan)

On the organizational-administrative side, a commonly critical attitude was noted towards the timeframe of the project; all account reporting that the timeframe was unreasonably short:

“I think that challenge is the time resource there should have been a little bit more time to make the planning together and arrange meeting” (Susan)

“the time table has been too tight we have proceeded in a way much (2X) too fast that is reasonable with these kind of efforts” (Henry)

Additional commonly occurring critiques were found towards lack of other resources, mostly in term of human capital; and in reference to communication, that was characterized to be infrequent, not timely, not targeted, not open and too formal.

5.1.5. The “Us vs. Them” repertoire

This repertoire has multiple levels, meaning a division is set:

(1) between Finnish and Russian

“and in a way here is a border it’s a border between Finland and Russia but it’s also in a way border since we are so close together we talk the same language and we cooperate in a daily basis” (Henry)

“it turned out to be very challenging for me because I was in between two cultures between two different systems and two ways of dealing with projects uhm even different languages different paradigms different understanding” Irene

(2) between (Uni 01 Fin) and (Uni 02 Fin)

“I think that there are different kind of of uhm hopes or different kind of aspirations concerning the functioning and outcomes of the program and it’s mainly because we are coming from different kind of university cultures” (Henry)

Regarding this difference in the university cultures between (Uni 01 Fin) and (Uni 02 Fin) there were many indirect observations made in the accounts. It has been expressed that not only the bureaucratic procedures of these two organizations are incompatible, but there are problems arisen from the “place” this program is coordinated from in both sides. One party argued, that the continued education centre is not the correct place for coordination of these kinds of programs, and that representation should come from the substantial structure of the university instead. The other party argued, naturally, the exact opposite.

(3) between Finnish universities and (Uni Rus)

“They (Uni Rus) were much more aggressive yeah this kind of attitude is very different and at least visible” (Irene)

After we found out about the conflicts between (Uni 01 Fin) and (Uni 02 Fin) we asked both representatives to speak about these tensions, but we did not specify the conflict between them two. Surprisingly, both accounts made a division here between Finnish universities and the university in Russia instead, one account reporting tensions between them and (Uni Rus) exclusively. We understand this phenomenon to be related also to the Pride repertoire. Both Finnish university representants agreed with the upper quoted sentence, and profiled the general relationship hostile, and the Russian party aggressive.

(4) between the core organizational group and the rest of participants

All three “core” persons delimited this small group from the rest of the people involved either by emphasizing their roles “in detriment” of the rest of the peoples’, or by emphasizing the closeness, trust, or frequency of meetings between them three.

This division present in all data lets us believe that there is no unified culture within the collaboration, or in other words the team working on this project did not develop a culture of their own, separate from their “home” national or organizational cultures. It was suggested in our data, that from this division other issues arise as well, such as trust or power.

5.2. Findings outside the interpretative repertoires

In this part we would like to report findings that do not fit under our repertoires, but we consider them too interesting to be left out. These findings mainly come from the team structure figures we asked our interviewees to draw. During the interviewing phase our intention with these drawings was solely to compare them, trying to find out what the structure of the collaboration is or whether the parties perceive this structure similarly. When we arrived to the point when we started to actually compare these drawings, we found out that they carry much more information that we initially expected. For the sake of simplicity, we will now shortly present and interpret each drawing separately, then make conclusions based on those at the end. In these descriptions we will count for the respondent’s status and role too, as these set a big part of the context in which the drawings should be interpreted.

Figure 4 is restricted to institutional levels, no persons are indicated. There are no relationships marked between the actors, the emphasis is more on an input-output way of viewing the collaboration. This last observation can be justified with the fact that

Katelyn is the representing the “customers” of this project, therefore her interests are more towards the ratio of resources used and gains then towards the collaboration process itself.

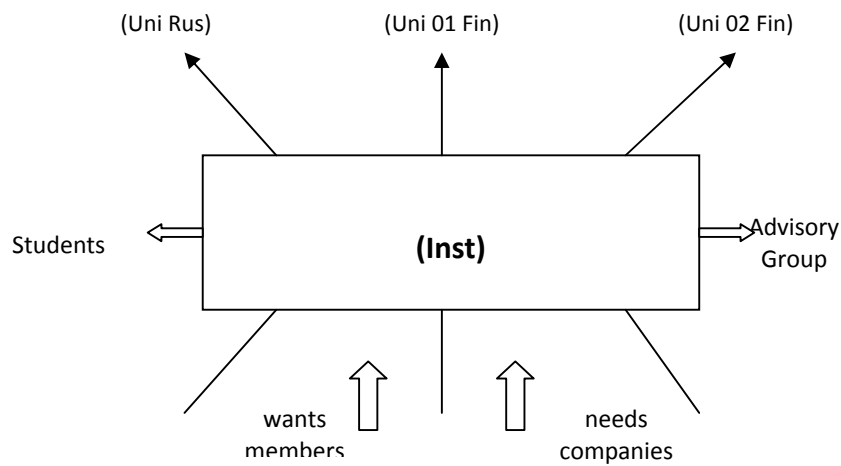


Figure 4: Team Structure (Katelyn)

The next drawing (Figure 5) also does not account for the persons involved, except for Stephanie, who is presented because she was told to be the key person in the initiation of (Pilot). This way of representing the team puts the emphasis on actions and interactions, and internal groupings within the collaboration. There is a clear division between (Uni Rus) and the rest of the players, and moreover, there is no relationship marked between them and anyone else. The two Finnish universities on the other hand are grouped together illustrating geographical and cultural closeness, and there is a clear notation of active cooperation outside this (Pilot) project too. The (Inst) is placed above the universities as a sign of them being the coordinative-administrative part at the moment, and leveling the universities suggests no differences in perceived power.

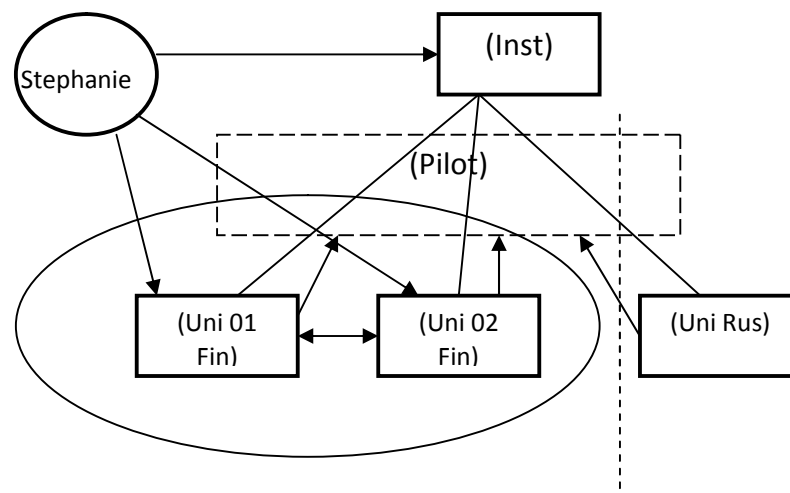


Figure 5: Team Structure (Henry)

Figure 6 goes beyond the institutional levels, and moreover it divides the people representing the parties into figureheads (the ones represented in squares at the top of each party’s “bubble”) and the people actually doing the daily collaboration (the ones in the ovals under the “bubbles”). There are no relationships marked, as if the (Pilot) was the only common ground keeping these “bubbles” together. To use a more appropriate metaphor matching the general tone of the account this drawing is taken from, it looks like all these people gathered together with the sole reason to “feast from the plate of (Pilot)”. Further observations are the illustration of the source of funding, and the confirmation of the importance of hierarchies inside (Uni 2 Fin), mentioned by other accounts too, by presenting herself as primarily part of (EduCentre) and secondarily part of (Uni 02 Fin).

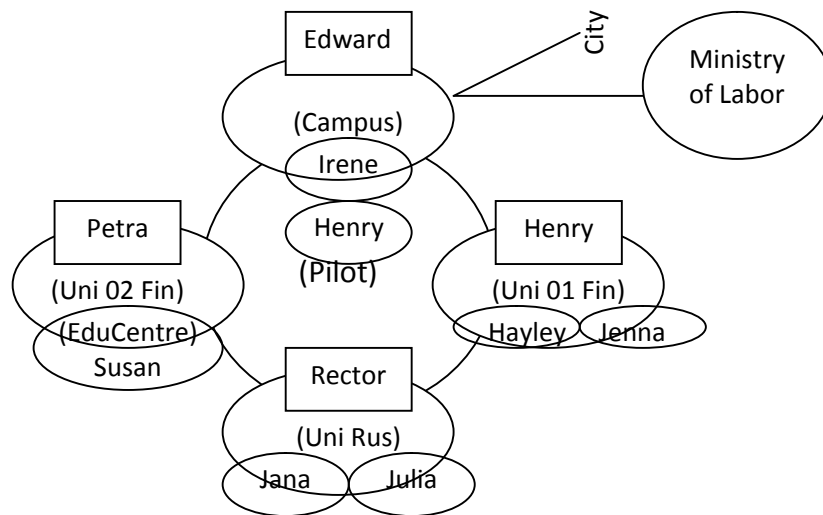


Figure 6: Team Structure (Susan)

Figure 7 also deals with both individual and institutional levels; furthermore it includes the background people too. The core team is the most clearly represented in this figure, consisting of the Hayley-Susan-Irene triangle, where Irene is marked to be the central node, in that she is the only one linked to all other parties. Also, she is the only one presented to have contact with (Uni Rus), indicating some sort of isolation of the Russian party from the rest of the collaboration.

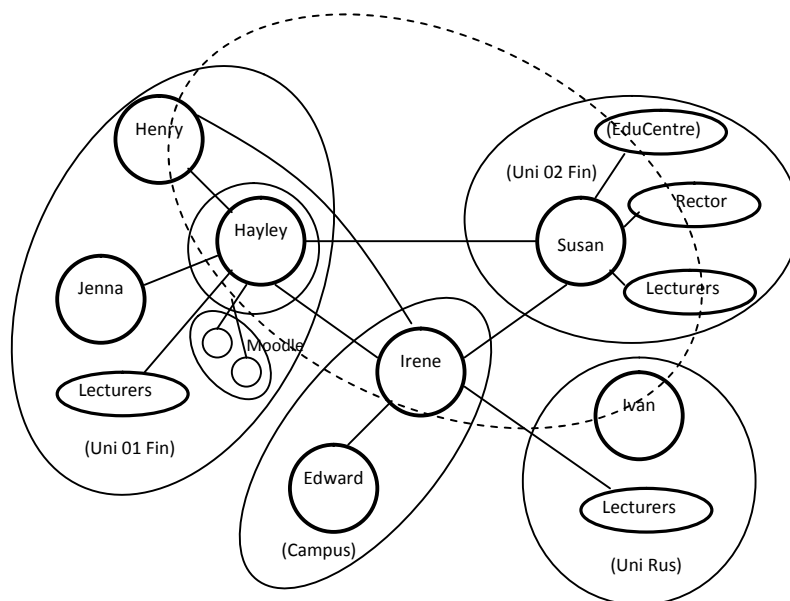


Figure 7: Team Structure (Hayley)

What caught our attention was the variation between using individual or organizational actors within the drawings. We could not explain this variation from the drawings alone therefore we looked for common things in the accounts that used individual levels, and the ones presenting both, respectively. First we looked at the status and role of the speaker, and we found that the two drawings using institutional levels only came from persons outside the core team, who are less involved in daily duties therefore might not be familiar with the exact dynamics of the collaboration. The other two, more specific drawings came from two of the three core persons working on the project. In their way of speaking about the teams, the accounts containing the personal level drawings expressed a much higher level of closeness and comfort towards the group. Second, we looked for the problems they spoke about and the ways they reported them. The accounts the institutional level drawings belonged to had a more “diplomatic” style in presenting problems; they typically disguised negative comments with wording that aimed at making it more neutral. In contrast, the critiques in the accounts of the latter two drawings were more sharp, targeted and blame-like.

When we looked deeper into the accounts belonging to each drawing, we also found that in the accounts of the institutional level drawings, when speaking about trust issues, trust or distrust was expressed towards the organization the people represent, and not the people themselves. The same applied to commitment issues too; and the opposite applied to the individual level drawings: the accounts containing those named the persons they trust or do not trust, and specified names not organizations when attributing any kind of characteristic or behavior.

5.3. Preliminary conclusions based on the case findings

We discovered that when asked to relatively freely speak about the collaboration process and its quality, participants spoke about and tried to describe and make sense of predominantly those elements that did not work as they were supposed to. We also

discovered that the importance parties attribute to different problem areas depends on their level of involvement in the process the problematic elements are related to. How our respondents constructed collaboration quality depended at large on their status in the project and level of involvement. This latter finding lets us believe, that collaboration quality means different things to different people; everyone's reality about what the term means will be dependant on their experiences within the collaboration, therefore there will be no unified definition or description of what collaboration quality is. Our analysis also suggests that the ways of operating one will interpret as the "right ones" within the collaboration will depend on the processes and procedures used in the "home" culture. Not having access to the Russian party our view on national cultures is one-sided, thus we report this as finding only for organizational cultures.

In their construction of reality on the quality of collaboration, the accounts commonly used five underlying attitudes: pride, insecurity, critique, confidence and a division between "us" and "them". When profiling the discussed elements according to view they emerged from, we found (1) that in face of external inquiry, participants will tend to describe the collaboration process as being smoother than it is in reality, or then as they perceive it to be when discussing it with other internal parties; (2) resource allocation was the most spoken about, both critically and as the biggest cause of insecurity; (3) there was a general confidence in "visible", technical skills, but a general distrust towards behaviors; (4) the "us vs. them" division was used in multiple levels, for multiple reason such as isolating self from source of the problem or comparing processes and attitudes. Under these repertoires, the following elements seemed to gain meaning: team structure, external support and recognition, culture, trust and support, cooperative environment, power and status, commitment, communication, input and efforts, shared goal, cohesion, and competence. The table below provides the categorization of these elements under the repertoire they were mentioned in. Some of

the elements are present in multiple repertoires, as they seemed to be linked to multiple underlying attitudes or assumptions in the accounts.

Table 5: Categorization of elements

Pride	Insecurity	Critique	Confidence	“Us” vs “Them”
external support and recognition			shared goal	culture
cooperative environment		communication	competence	cohesion
	coordination			power and status
	commitment	team structure		
	trust			
	input and efforts			

The upper table provides us with insights on how these elements taken over from our theoretical framework were perceived by respondents in our case. However, what our interviewees meant by these elements was slightly different in some cases from the descriptions given in our theoretical chapter. These differences in meaning were based in the way our subjects spoke about the presence (or absence) of these elements and in the basic assumptions these ways of speaking emerged from (as described in our interpretative repertoires). Thus, we consider these differences in meaning call for “renaming” of these elements, where the new names will be based solely on the meanings our accounts attributed to them.

The external support and recognition element was present in our data in a form that is best suited with the name *resource configuration*; since as described in our results chapter, our accounts were concerned with lack of resources in terms of money, time and workforce, but did not refer to any issues of recognition. In terms of cooperation

versus competition, our accounts suggested that the tensions and competition was a result of the participants' mindsets; therefore we consider that *cooperative attitude* would be a better suited name for issues covered by our data in reference to the cooperative environment element from our theory. Furthermore, we include team structure under the *unified culture* element, as references made to structural incompatibilities were due to a lack of a separate culture just for the collaboration, and incompatibilities between the participants' home cultures. We do not treat cohesion as a separate element based on our data, as based on our accounts it would be situated on the overlapping area between the cooperative attitude and the unified culture elements. We also decided to group trust and commitment into one element, as they were closely interrelated in our accounts. The rest of the elements (shared goal, competence, coordination, communication, power and status, and input and efforts) were found to have the same meanings as in the theoretical works presented. However, we do not treat the power and status element separately either, as in our respondents' speech it was incorporated under issues related to the lack of common culture.

As a general remark, based on both the interview data and observations, we would like to note that in our case the most visible sources of problems were control issues (as when people concern themselves more with questions of who is in charge than with finding the best solution to a problem), political issues (as when individuals worry more about the action taken than about whether the action is effective in achieving the goal), individual agenda issues (as when members of a team are more concerned with protecting themselves or obtaining personal advantages than with the success of the collective endeavor), and trust issues. All these, together with lack of time were a barrier for the collaboration in creating its own culture, and this lack of culture in turn caused more display of all the issues.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to find out what collaboration quality is and how is it manifested in a practical case. The phenomenon was considered challenging because there is quite a gap in both research and theory when it comes to addressing quality issues in collaborations on an ongoing basis rather than based on collaboration results. This study can be considered relevant in terms of this research gap, keeping in mind however the limitations described in Chapter 6.2 before generalizing any of the results.

In the theoretical part of this thesis we attempted to find out what is collaboration quality and how is it described by scholars in theorizing. To answer this part of the research question a literature review was carried out, which resulted in a list of elements the studied phenomenon is composed of. In the empirical part we attempted to answer the same question, but from the perspective of practitioners, looking for how they construct this term in their speech. The data collected in our interviews was approached from a social constructionist perspective, and analysis resulted in naming five interpretative repertoires. Based on our results we attempt in the next chapter to answer the research question from both theoretical and empirical perspective, while explaining differences and similarities in the two ways of constructing the concept of collaboration quality.

6.1. A dialogue between theory and case

Both theory and analysis came to the conclusion that collaboration quality is *the specificities of collaboration characteristics that have significant effects on the collaboration's performance*. According to our research, there is an obvious difference between the viewpoints from which theoreticians and practitioners construct

collaboration quality; while in theoretical frameworks a holistic approach is attempted to be used, describing all elements that could affect the quality of a collaboration, our interviewees spoke predominantly of the problematic elements related to the collaboration they worked in, mentioning the well-functioning elements only when specifically asked about them. In other words, theoreticians hold that to achieve a high level collaboration, all elements have to be build up carefully, and this is more of a pre-condition for the group to function at all. In contrast, practitioners do not consciously think about what could affect the quality of the collaboration they work in until the problem is already present. Moreover, in theory there is a fairly equal focus on elements affecting both the task and the interpersonal relationships, while in our case the focus seemed to be on the tasks in terms of collaboration quality, even when task-related problems were resulting from problematic relationships or power struggles.

An additional difference between theory and empirical findings when defining collaboration quality was that while theoretical frameworks aim at presenting an integrated view on *how collaborations would ideally work*, the interviewees in our case described the collaboration in terms of *how does it actually work*.

Both theoreticians and practitioners defined collaboration quality in terms of a sum of elements; while theoreticians purposely looked for a “recipe”, practitioners enumerated these elements implicitly in their speech. However, there were also differences in these elements collaboration quality is constructed of. To illustrate these differences, we return to our Table1 presenting a summary of the elements of collaboration quality as found in the literature, and add a column with the elements resulted from our analysis, described in Chapter 5.3.

Table 6: Reworked table of the elements of collaboration quality

Heimeriks (2002)	Hoegl & Gemunden (2001)	Dietrich et al. (2001)	Keyton & Stallworth (2003)	Larson & LaFasto (1989)	Our research (2011)
resource configuration	communication	communication	shared goal	clear, elevating goal	resource configuration
compatibility	coordination	coordination	member interdependence	result-driven team structure	collaborative attitude
coordination	balanced contributions	mutual support	equal input	competent team members	shared goal
mutual trust	mutual support	aligned efforts	shared decision making	unified commitment	unified culture
commitment	effort	cohesion	communication	principled leadership	trust and commitment
communication	cohesion		culture	standards of excellence	competence
			leadership	collaborative climate	coordination
			member motivation and maturity	external support and recognition	communication

Based on our prior observation, that collaboration quality is defined in terms of the sum of the elements it is composed of, and on the alterations between the elements listed as constructing collaboration quality in the table above, we conclude that what collaboration quality precisely is will always depend to some extent on the specificities of the very collaboration it is examined within. This conclusion incorporates the observation that elements included in the term's definition will always depend too, to some extent, on the interpretations of the persons carrying out the analysis. Thus, theoretical frameworks, such as presented in our Chapter 2, do not describe the phenomenon as an absolute whole and attention has to be paid to the extent to which they can be generalized. Our research results confirm the idea of a subjective definition of collaboration quality, therefore while all conceptualizations of collaboration quality

will have a certain common ground, there is no one element that will be common to all descriptions.

6.2. Limitations and practical implications

The limitations of this study have multiple roots. Firstly, our case-collaboration is very specific, giving us possibility to look only at a very small portion of the whole phenomenon. Second, as mentioned before, we did not have access to the Russian party, therefore we can not claim having a holistic view even for this small portion. Third, our limited experience and expertise in the use of the methods and in research generally, might have caused us to overlook or miss certain information that would have been able to provide us with more insight on collaboration quality. However, keeping in mind these limitations we do believe we were able to provide specific and valuable information for this case, and some general insights into the phenomenon at large.

From a more normative perspective we can summarize our findings on collaboration quality in the form of a general “collaboration ideal” that carries practical implications. In an ideal collaboration, each element would develop early in the collaborative process and effectively contribute to the collaboration’s success. In addition, collaborative members would be engaged in effective communication aimed at creating positive working relationships and establishing a unique and useful culture for their collaboration. Procedural norms developed in the early meetings of the collaboration would promote equal input and shared decision-making and, thereby, create an effective culture. Both coordinator and members would balance the relational needs of collaboration members with the task demands of the group. As a result, the resources, skills, knowledge, and perspectives brought by members would benefit the collaboration’s ability to produce innovative and effective outcomes.

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