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Effective performance management of inter-organisational collaborations through the construction of multiple identities

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ABSTRACT

Although inter-organisational collaborations can offer better services, their performance management is complex and can often fail. Through the exploration of multiple (collaborative and non-collaborative) identities formed by partners, the paper offers guidelines for a more effective performance management of inter-organisational collaborations. More specifically, drawing upon a longitudinal qualitative study of a Greek inter-organisational collaboration, the findings of the research illustrate that both collaborative and non-collaborative identities can lead to better collaboration performance. Secondly, the study suggests that it is better to maintain the tension between stability and change within the collaborative process than resolve it. Finally, it offers four collaborative patterns for a more effective performance management of inter-organisational collaborations.

KEY WORDS

Identity construction, multiple identities, collaboration performance, performance management, inter-organisational collaborations

1. INTRODUCTION

Many organisations form inter-organisational collaborations in order to respond to a demanding and unstable environment, achieve their aims, innovate, expand and become competitive. Even if inter-organisational collaborations are perceived as very important, they usually face many challenges requiring careful design, development and management (Prins, 2010) and they often fail (Gardner, 2003). Many studies focus on the failure of these collaborations and attempt to identify the frustrations related to collaborative working (e.g. Almog-Bar and Zychlinski, 2012; Rigg and O'Mahony, 2013). Other studies explore the factors that can increase collaboration performance (e.g. Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Gray, 1995). Decision making, aims, power, motivation, structure are some of these factors.

A few studies also explore the role of identity construction in the success and failure of

inter-organisational collaborations (e.g. Rao et al., 2000; Koschmann, 2012). These studies usually focus on the formation of a single collaborative identity that helps partners act in accordance with the interests of the collaboration. However, identity is a complex process (Ybema et al., 2009) and its relative standing is subject to change (Ellemers and Barreto, 2000) based on the specific collaborative context that partners experience. In this context partners will consider past and current experiences and interactions in order to form an identity which is situationally suitable (Beech and Huxham, 2003). Therefore, seeking the construction of a single and relatively stable collaborative identity contradicts the dynamic and changing nature of identities and inter-organisational collaborations, which are by definition built around temporary and dynamic organisational arrangements that evolve over time.

The aim of this study is to offer suggestions for a more effective performance management of inter-organisational collaborations through the exploration of the multiple (collaborative and non-collaborative) identities that partners form. This paper challenges managers' common approach to seeking the development of a single collaborative identity from partners and demonstrates that managers can encourage partners to construct both collaborative and personal, organisational, professional etc. identities in order to perform better.

This research advances the literature on the performance management of inter-organisational collaborations in three ways. Firstly, it suggests that it is not necessary for managers to request that partners develop a collaborative identity in order to have successful collaborations. In contrast, non-collaborative identities can also improve the collaboration performance. Secondly, this paper suggests four collaborative patterns for improved collaboration performance management. Finally, this research recommends that it is better to maintain the tension between stability and change within the collaborative process rather than resolve it. In this way, partners can perform better by adapting and innovating to the changing needs of the collaboration, while ensuring continuity in the collaboration process.

In quest of more effective inter-organisational collaboration performance management through identity formation, a longitudinal study was conducted with the KEDDY Aitoloakarnanias Educational Collaboration in Greece (KAEC - where KEDDY is the Centre for Differential Assessment, Diagnosis and Support of disabled children). KAEC was established by the Greek government in 2000 in order to improve the education of children with disabilities in the prefecture of Aitoloakarnanias. The research was conducted in four phases over a period of sixteen months; and 43 in-depth interviews, 48 documents,

observations of 13 partners' meetings and numerous field notes were collected. The data corpus was analysed qualitatively using thematic and narrative analysis.

The paper proceeds in the following way. First, the nature of inter-organisational collaborations is explored and the importance of exploring identity for better collaboration performance management is highlighted. Then, the methodological approach and the findings of the research are presented. The paper closes by presenting how this research advances the performance management of inter-organisational collaborations.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The following sections present the theoretical understanding of inter-organisational collaborations as dynamic, context-dependent and emerging through the partners' everyday interactions. They also highlight the role of multiple identity development for more effective collaboration performance management.

2.1. Emergent inter-organisational collaborations

Inter-organisational collaborations are usually designed to meet needs that a single provider cannot fulfil (Rigg and O'Mahony, 2013). However, despite the fact that joint work between inter-organisational groups tends to have a powerful vision and rationale to provide better services and products, there is insufficient evidence to support the view that these collaborations achieve their aims (Gardner, 2003; Kourti and Garcia-Lorenzo, 2012). A large part of the collaboration literature seeks approaches to improve collaborative efforts among partners and ensure that collaborations perform well. This research contributes to these studies.

A current debate in the collaboration research concerns stability versus change in the collaborative process. On the one hand, some studies suggest that inter-organisational collaborations can be perceived as linear and ordered processes where managers can identify factors, stages and structures which could provide some stability and certainty to the management of the collaborative process (Hibbert et al., 2010). Another view is that every collaboration is a unique product of a specific context, time and circumstances and therefore constantly changing and it is not possible for managers to predict its outcome (Dickinson and Glasby, 2010; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Hibbert et al., 2010). This research follows a

processual understanding of inter-organisational collaborations which are perceived as resulting from many possible outcomes (Huxham, 1996) since partners can engage with the collaboration in many possible ways. On every occasion, partners try to capture the dynamic and temporary nature of collaboration, and treat collaborative phenomena as enactments and unfolding processes which involve their everyday local circumstances, choices, experiences, relationships and actions (Gherardi 2012). Inter-organisational collaborations are ongoing transformations emerging 'through continuously ongoing interactions among the parties involved' (Bouwen, 2003: 343) which makes their performance management a complex endeavour. It is therefore difficult to describe a priori their phases, structures, and success factors and techniques. In fact, new experiences and local circumstances will change the way partners usually act (Hibbert and Huxham, 2010) and inter-organisational collaboration will become the result of how individuals bring external and internal realities and experiences into its realm (Feldman, 2000). They are therefore not permanently constructed with easy routes to success and management (Gray, 1995) and it does not come as a surprise that many collaborations find it difficult to perform well.

Nevertheless, inter-organisational collaborations have become very common because through collaborative arrangements organisations attempt to respond variously to a demanding and changing environment, achieve their aims, accomplish interdisciplinary work, offer better products and services and perform better (Hibbert and Huxham, 2010; Prins, 2010). Given their prominence, much of the collaboration research has explored how these collaborations can be facilitated and managed more effectively. For example, alignment with the collaboration aims, clarity of roles and responsibilities, direct communication, distributed decision making, adaptability and flexibility of the partners, and constant nurture of the relationships can help collaborations perform more effectively (Gray, 1989; Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Collaboration research also looks at the impact that identity processes have in enabling collaboration performance, as described below.

2.2. Identity construction in inter-organisational collaborations

The majority of the studies that explore identity processes in collaborations suggest that the development of a collaborative identity helps partners act in accordance with the interest of the collaboration (Sammarra and Biggiero, 2001; Zhang and Huxham, 2009). It is also proposed that a shared collaborative identity helps partners fit into the collaboration and

develop specific perceptions of what they believe the collaboration is (Maguire and Hardy, 2005), and that it increases partners' efforts when handling the problems that arise in collaboration (Zhang and Huxham, 2009). It therefore seems that the construction of a collaborative identity improves collaboration performance.

Focusing solely on the collaborative identity that partners form implies the construction of a single, relatively stable identity when engaging with the collaboration. However, the construction of identity is a complex, multifaceted process (Ybema et al., 2009) that involves an ongoing interaction between the self and the social (Giddens, 1991), since individuals are 'incomplete or unfinished' beings and they will only be able to complete themselves through their engagement with the social (Geertz, 1993). Identity is therefore developed through interactions, activities and experiences with others which take place in a specific social context (Mead, 1934). As a joint accomplishment that arises out of social interaction (Goffman, 1959), identity is never completely stable or achieved. It is constantly transformed, based on a 'radical historization' (Hall, 1996), since, in a given social context, individuals take into account previous and current experiences and interactions in order to form an identity which is situationally suitable. Identity is therefore 'mobile, a process not a thing, a becoming not a being' (Frith 1996: 109), and the focus is not on who partners are but on who they might become.

In fact, within the context of an inter-organisational collaboration, partners have multiple overlapping or cross-cutting memberships (van Knippenberg and Ellemers, 2003) or network of identities (He and Brown, 2013). These can be categorised at different levels, such as personal, interpersonal and social/collective (Brewer and Gardner, 1996) or at social, material and personal levels (Ashforth et al., 2008). Identification in collaborations will therefore occur not only at collaborative level but also at other levels (Kourti, 2013). For example, a partner can be a member of the collaboration, of the organisation, of a department, of a departmental group or of their profession. Therefore, when managers seek ways for partners to perform more effectively, they may not only come across the development of a collaborative identity but also of personal, organisational, professional etc. identities. Moving between these identities allows partners the necessary flexibility (Koschmann, 2012) to respond to the changing needs of the collaboration (Hibbert and Huxham, 2010) and improve collaborative performance.

In contrast with the majority of inter-organisational collaboration studies that focus on the formation of a collaborative identity (e.g. Sammarra and Biggiero, 2001; Hardy et al., 2005),

this research examines the development of collaborative and non-collaborative (e.g. personal, organisational, professional) identities. The overarching aim is to make suggestions for the improvement of collaboration performance and advance the performance management literature of inter-organisational collaborations.

3. METHODOLOGY

The following sections describe the inter-organisational collaboration used in order to collect interviews, field notes and documents that assisted in the investigation of the performance management of inter-organisational collaborations through the exploration of the multiple identities that partners construct. The data analysis process is also presented.

3.1. Research context

In 2000 the European Union urged the Greek government to improve state education for disabled children. This resulted in the establishment of KEDDY Educational Collaborations (KECs). KECs are responsible for assessing intellectual disability, determining children's placement in appropriate schools and offering educational support to disabled children. To ensure that disabled children receive support at a local level, KECs were established in every prefecture in Greece. This paper is based on a study conducted with KEDDY Aitoloakarnanias Educational Collaborations (KAEC) which was established in the prefecture of Aitoloakarnanias in 2000.

In accordance with the government's protocol, KAEC has four partners: KEDDY Aitoloakarnanias (KEDDY employees), a local parent council (parents of disabled children), local state schools (head teachers and teachers) and local government services (mainstream and special educational consultants). Local governmental services are responsible for a child's referral to KEDDY. KEDDY itself consists of a multidisciplinary team: psychologists, teachers, physiotherapists, social workers, occupational therapists and speech therapists. Its main role is the identification of the type and degree of children's disabilities and the development of individualised educational plans to help children overcome their disabilities. However, any educational plan suggested by KEDDY cannot be implemented unless a child's parents accept the diagnosis that KEDDY produces and agree with the disclosure of the KEDDY's diagnosis and plan to the child's school. Finally, local state schools are responsible

for the implementation of the KEDDY's educational plan.

Every child that engages with the collaboration has different needs and is a unique case for the partners. It is therefore very difficult to manage the collaborative process since partners find themselves often having to tread a thin line between following the collaboration's protocol, while having to improvise and remain flexible to accommodate the needs of the different children. In this dynamic and changing collaborative context, constructing multiple identities helps partners respond to emergent contextual and relational needs, thereby improving the collaboration performance.

3.2. Data collection

In order to explore KAEC's performance management through its partners' identity construction, a longitudinal study was conducted at four stages over a period of sixteen months. The data corpus consists of interviews, documents and field notes.

KAEC and 13 partners' meetings were observed at four different time periods in order to detect developments or changes (Bryman and Bell, 2011) in the social context, identities and collaboration performance over time. Observations allowed the exploration of "the evolution of the different voices as they develop and emerge in a living social context, expressing the construction and deconstruction of shared meaning' (Steyaert and Bouwen, 2004: 143). By observing the partners' everyday life it was possible to explore the partners' identities, working lives, (inter)actions and experiences throughout different emergent social contexts. The development and the performance of the collaboration at different periods were also captured. Numerous field notes were produced from the observations.

Observations of the collaboration were interwoven with interviews for further familiarisation with the subject matter and to ensure the collection of valid data (Flick, 2007). Semi-structured in-depth interviews provided an initial framework for areas of discussion, whilst allowing the respondents to set the agenda of the interview (Bryman and Bell, 2011), and offered a space for negotiation of meanings and surprise elements (Flick, 2007). In total, 43 semi-structured interviews were collected from all four partner-categories of the collaboration. The length of the interviews ranged from 18 to 80 minutes, with average duration of 55 minutes. Interviews were conducted with all the KEDDY employees and the three government representatives working for the collaboration. From a list of the state schools of the prefecture, four teachers and four head teachers from four schools, which had collaborated with KAEC were selected. Moreover, three parents of disabled children were

selected from a list that KAEC provided.

Finally, data was collected through informal and formal documents of the collaboration. 48 documents that appeared relevant to the research purposes and were fully understood within the broader context of the inter-organisational collaboration were selected for analysis (Steyaert and Bouwen, 2004). These documents allowed gathering information on issues that could not have been readily addressed through other methods (Bryman and Bell, 2011). They also allowed the triangulation of the data collected from the interviews and observations.

3.3. Data analysis

The data was analysed in two stages. Firstly, a thematic analysis of all the interviews, field notes and gathered documents was conducted. The aim of the initial analysis was the identification of the different social contexts which partners experienced. This contextual knowledge enabled the observation of the changes and similarities in the collaboration process and performance, in addition to the observation of the development of different identities over time in different contexts of interaction. This analysis also offered four phases that described the collaborative process which partners should ideally follow in order to perform well. Despite variations based on each case/child, partners follow these phases to ensure continuity in the collaboration process.

1. Referral stage - a disabled child is referred to the educational consultant who identifies the fact that a child is disabled. They then request that the special educational consultant examines the child and proposes an educational programme to help the child overcome their disability. If this programme fails, the special consultant refers the child to KEDDY.

2. Diagnosis stage - the KEDDY team (psychologist, social worker and teacher) examines the disabled child in order to diagnose their disability and produces an educational plan for their educational support.

3. Negotiation stage - The KEDDY team presents the report (diagnosis and educational plan) to the parents of the child and requests their approval for the report to be sent to the school. If the parents do not provide their approval, the educational plan cannot be implemented.

4. Intervention stage - the child's report is sent to their school and KEDDY's educational plan is implemented by the child's teachers.

The contextual knowledge obtained from the first analysis offered the basis for the second

analysis which was conducted with partners' personal stories as revealed in their interviews. Looking at personal stories provided knowledge about the context and performance changes as well as about individual and collective action located in particular times and places (Bold, 2012). Personal stories were also tools that allowed partners to fashion identities (Rosenwald and Ochberg, 1992) and disclose identities justifying their actions (Bamberg, 2010). Several personal stories were identified throughout the 43 interviews collected.

The personal narratives were analysed with the performative approach (Goffman, 1981). The performative element allowed focusing on the partners' "everyday practices that shape(d) the conduct of human beings towards others and themselves in particular sites" (Thrift, 1997 cited in Nash, 2000: 655). The analysis did not focus only on what was told (the events that the language described) (Bold, 2012) but also on the telling (the positions of the characters, listeners and self) of each story (Mishler, 1995). As such, partners' interactions and performance were placed at the centre of the analysis. In parallel with the contextual knowledge obtained from the first analysis, it was possible to explore the development of multiple identities through partners' everyday engagement with the collaboration.

The personal stories were organised using the poetic structural approach (Gee, 1986; 1991). With this approach, the structure and meaning of the text in relation to its context were analysed through the exploration of the poetic features embedded in personal narratives. The analysis did not seek to identify a plot in the text. Instead, it left space for the open-endedness of the narratives and, therefore, the inclusion of the ambiguities related to identity processes. Following this approach, the text was organised in stanzas, scenes and parts (Gee, 1991; Riessman, 2008). Stanzas were used to incorporate into the analysis non-narrative parts of the interviews. "Each stanza (was) a particular 'take' on a character, action, event, claim, place of information, and each involve(d) a shift of focal participants, focal events, or a change in the time of framing of events from the preceding stanza...it represent(ed) an image, what the camera (was) focused on" (Gee, 1991: 23). Gee (1986) suggests that stanzas fall into related pairs that he calls strophes. "The strophe is a pair of stanzas of alternating form on which the structure of a given poem is based" (Gee, 1991: 24). However, because of the direct performative reference of the narratives of this research, stanzas were not organised into strophes, but into scenes (Riessman, 2008). Scenes described the action that took place in a different time and setting, and presented the different ways in which the narrators positioned themselves in their stories. Therefore, where narrative segments appeared, they were directly presented in scenes. Finally, the scenes fell into parts, in other words larger units that built the

story as a whole.

For each narrative the main image which framed the whole narrative, indicated its tone and provided its theme was identified. Turning points, moments where partners indicated a fundamental shift in the expected performance and identifications, were also identified in each narrative. Turning points in stories "open(ed) up directions of movement that were not anticipated by and could not be predicted by their pasts" (Mishler, 2006: 39) and "fundamentally change(d) the meaning of past experiences, and consequently an individual's identity" (Riessman, 2002: 706). They were therefore particularly useful in indicating identification and performance shifts in different collaborative contexts over time.

The emergent narratives that described how partners constructed multiple identities over time were placed in the four stages that the first analysis revealed. In this way, the narratives were "located in particular times and places and (were presented as) works of history, as much as they (were) about individuals, the social spaces they inhabit, and the societies they live(d) in" (Riessman, 2002: 697). The narratives were further enriched with data from documents and observations that illustrated how these narratives were placed in a specific social context and were affected by this context.

At the end of the process of analysis several narratives demonstrated how partners engaged in a dynamic and situational development of multiple identities in order to improve the performance of the collaboration. However, in order to be able to provide a complete picture of the different social contexts, identities and collaboration performance over time, and understand how partners formed multiple identities in order to respond to the changing collaborative contexts they experienced and perform better, four narratives are presented in this paper: those of George (parent of a disabled child), Maria (KEDDY psychologist), Christina (school teacher) and Rob (government representative) (see table 1). Through the presentation of these four stories, it is possible to illustrate identification processes that occurred throughout the four stages of the collaborative process, while taking into consideration contextual factors and performance changes. Moreover, through these four stories the voices of each partner category are represented.

Table 1: Narrative analysis of Maria, George, Rob and Christina's stories

Personal story	Collaborative stage	Main Image	Story segments
Rob *(Government representative)*	Referral	Breaking the rules	- Producing a diagnosis - Delays in the supportive process - Skipping the protocol
Maria *(KEDDY psychologist)*	Diagnosis	Dealing with disagreements	- Joining KAEC - One case two diagnoses - Experienced vs. inexperienced partners - Being a psychologist
George *(Parent of a disabled child)*	Negotiation	Learning to compromise	-Learning about the disability - Accepting the diagnosis - Working together
Christina *(School teacher)*	Intervention	Building trust through ambiguity and complexity	- Exploring the ground - Seeking assistance - Refusing to cooperate - Teaching the child

4. EXPLORING COLLABORATION PERFORMANCE IN KAEC

This section presents the four emergent narratives of Maria, George, Rob and Christina. Their stories illustrate how the partners of an inter-organisational collaboration constructed different identities in order to improve collaboration performance.

4.1. Referral stage: Breaking the rules

Rob is one of the three government representatives of the collaboration. His role is to diagnose a disabled child and then request the intervention of the special school consultant who is responsible for referring the child to KEDDY. His story refers to Marina, a disabled child, who needed urgent support from the collaboration.

When dealing initially with Marina's case, George identified himself as a *governmental partner* who should follow the collaboration rules and work together with the other partners for the successful support of the child.

> *I went to the school (to diagnose Marina's disability)... It wasn't hard to conclude that Marina*
> *was depressed... I wrote my report. It usually takes me one week, but in this case the problem*

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was clear and the case urgent. -- I sent it (the report) to the head teacher and the special school consultant, Andy.

Rob explained to Andy (special school consultant) the urgency of Marina's case and expected that his partner would take immediate action to support her. Yet, the special consultant ignored Rob's request and delayed the examination of the child: *'He told me that he was still very busy and he was planning to go to Marina's school at the end of the term.'* Rob had to reconsider his collaborative identity if he wanted to help the child.

Forming the *personal identity* of the *rebel against the system*, Rob distinguished himself from his unhelpful partner and was able to ignore the collaborative protocol that caused unnecessary delays in the child's support process. He therefore contacted the KEDDY manager and asked his permission to personally refer Marina to KEDDY. The manager agreed that Marina's case was urgent and decided to make an exception by accepting Marina's referral directly from Rob.

> *He (KEDDY manager) therefore told me that he would make an exception and would accept a child in KEDDY with the school consultant's referral and not the special consultant's referral. I didn't think about it.*

Inter-organisational collaborations are the result of many possible outcomes (Huxham, 1996) and partners' engagement with the dynamic context of the collaboration (Bouwen, 2003). Partners therefore do not have only a single collaborative identity but, based on contextual needs, they form multiple identities in order to perform better. In Rob's case, he had to move between his *personal* and *collaborative identity*, between confrontation and coalition with the partners, to ensure the necessary flexibility that would allow him to ignore the collaborative protocol and ensure the effective support of a disabled child. His case therefore shows that even if coalition is ideal, confrontation is also necessary in order to achieve effective collaboration performance.

4.2. Diagnosis stage: Conflict is part of the collaborative process

Maria is a KEDDY psychologist and, according to her job responsibilities, she needs to work together with the KEDDY teachers in order to diagnose children's disabilities.

When she first engaged with the collaboration, she was an *excited new partner*, willing to adapt to her new environment and work together with the partners to help disabled children.

> *I didn't know much about the collaboration. I had to learn how it works ... Everyone was nice ... when I saw how nice they were, I relaxed and put forward my friendly face. ... I made it clear*

to my colleagues that I wanted to work hard, learn my job well and help.

However, two months later, Maria disagreed with Kate (a KEDDY teacher) on a child's diagnosis. Following this disagreement, competition within the collaboration emerged and the context of interaction changed, making the *collaborative identity* that Maria had originally formed inadequate for the new situation.

> *She (KEDDY teacher) thinks that, because she has been working in KEDDY for four years, she knows everything. However, she has never taken a course on special education ... But, as a psychologist, I know more about disabilities because I have studied this field.*

In order to validate her diagnosis Kate requested the support of another KEDDY teacher: *'She (KEDDY teacher) actually told me that we should proceed with Kate's diagnosis because I had been in KAEC only for two months and I didn't have enough experience.'*

Seeking ways to separate herself from the unhelpful partners and prove the validity of her diagnosis, Maria developed the identity of the *psychologist.* Her *professional identity* gave her the necessary professional knowledge to support her diagnosis against that of the KEDDY teachers and to deal with the child's case effectively.

> *And in the end, it was proved that my diagnosis, not theirs (teachers), was correct but we worked together for the production of the final report. I guess we can also collaborate even if we have conflicted views. ... I don't see myself just as one of the KEDDY psychologists. ... We are here to support children that need our help.*

Maria's story indicates that partners have multiple foci of identification available (van Knippenberg and van Schie, 2000). By developing both a *collaborative* and a *professional identity* Maria was able to overcome obstacles and perform effectively in the collaboration. As such, even if Maria originally believed that partners should work together to achieve their aims, by the end of her story, she had incorporated a more complex view of the collaboration, indicating that collaboration can be achieved even if there is conflict between the partners. Conflict therefore appeared as part of the collaboration and as part of what working together means.

4.3. Negotiation stage: Compromise is necessary

George is the father of a disabled child and he engages with the collaboration in order to help his son, Mike, overcome his disability.

Following his son's diagnosis by the KEDDY team, George met with the KEDDY social

worker to discuss his son's diagnosis and draw up a plan that would help his son overcome his disability.

> *He (the social worker) said that Mike's home environment was not appropriate. ... I was shocked with his diagnosis. I was doing my best to support my child. How could he claim that it was my fault? I was so disappointed and sad.*

George was frustrated and angry at the diagnosis. By constructing the *personal identity* of the *frustrated father*, George opposed the diagnosis and tried to defend himself to the social worker explaining that he could not be responsible for his son's disability.

> *No, I knew that it couldn't be my fault. I was sure that I was doing everything I could for Mike. Yes, I was working hard but only because I wanted to provide the best for my son. I would do anything for my son!*

However, George soon realised that by resisting his son's diagnosis and his involvement in his son's disability, he would not be able to help Mike overcome his learning difficulties. He therefore sought alternative ways to perform effectively within the collaboration. George constructed his identity as a *collaborative member* willing to work together with the social worker.

> *Although I was trying, maybe it wasn't enough. I made clear that I was happy to follow the social worker's suggestions in order to improve the home environment for Mike... I decided that I should make clear that I was there to support my son.*

George story illustrates that in the constantly changing context of the collaboration (Gray, 1989), partners do not form a single collaborative identity but different identities (Hall, 1996) that allow them to respond to the shifting needs of the context and to perform better. In fact, through his embeddedness with the collaboration, George changed his identity from a *frustrated father* to a *collaborative member*. This identity interplay allowed him to overcome resistance to his son's diagnosis and work together with the social worker to achieve the collaboration aims. His story therefore illustrates that, even if the ideal way to collaborate is by compromising, compromise may be achieved after resistance.

4.4. Intervention stage: Collaborating through ambiguity and complexity

Christina is a new school teacher who does not have experience and knowledge of working with disabled children and the collaboration.

When she first started working for the school, she had in her class a disabled child. In order for Christina to be able to teach this child, KEDDY told her that a teacher who was a

specialist in disability issues would be employed to help her. Even though Christina did not have experience working with disabled children, she identified herself as a *helpful partner* willing to follow KEDDY's suggestions.

> *When KEDDY sent me Jenifer's educational plan ... (it indicated that) I had to support the child with extracurricular activities. He (KEDDY employee) told me that I could organise my teaching activities with the help of a specialist teacher. ... However, the (KEDDY) employee told me that it would take some time for the establishment of the integration unit, and therefore for a specialist teacher to be available. He actually told me that it usually takes one to two months. ... How could I say no (to helping the child)? -- I just couldn't!*

However, Christina's colleagues explained to her that there was no guarantee that a specialist teacher would be employed, since KEDDY could only request a teacher's appointment from the government. The government could then reject this request.

Christina realised that she was not part of a supportive and trustworthy group of partners: *'They (KEDDY employees) weren't honest with me. How can we work together if we do not trust each other?'* She therefore reconsidered her *collaborative identity* and sought ways to protect herself from the dishonest partners. Christina identified herself as an *uncompromising teacher* and decided that she would not teach the child before the appointment of a specialist teacher.

> *I decided not to accept the responsibility. ... I didn't mind that I had to work extra hours but it wasn't fair to ask me do something beyond my responsibilities without having the appropriate support.*

In this way Cristina put pressure on KEDDY to expedite the appointment of the specialist teacher. As a result, KEDDY soon assigned a specialist teacher and Christina was able to overcome delays and obstacles in the process, and offer timely support to the child.

At the end of her narrative, Christina explained that the partners cannot collaborate if they do not trust each other:

> *I was new and I didn't know how KEDDY worked. ... If KEDDY employees had been honest with me and had explained the process (for the appointment of a specialist teacher) to me, I would have agreed to support the child. You can't work with someone you don't trust!*

In her efforts to perform effectively according to the changing needs of the collaboration, (Hibbert and Huxham, 2010) Christina went from a *collaborative identity* to an *organisational identity*. These identities offered her the necessary flexibility (Koschmann, 2012) to develop an innovative behaviour and fulfil the collaboration aims. Her story

illustrates that trust between partners is necessary but is difficult to achieve and it is a long process.

5. CONCLUSION

This research contributes to the performance management of inter-organisational collaborations. First, it offers four collaborative patterns that managers can take into consideration in order to improve collaboration performance: First, while coalition is ideal, confrontation is also necessary when collaborating. Second, although trust between the partners may be a necessary starting point in collaboration, it appears that trust may be gained after a long process. Third, even if the ideal way of collaborating is by adapting to the emergent needs of the collaboration, in practice, adaptation or agreement is only reached after discussions, disagreements and conflict. Four, even if partners enter the collaboration believing that the ideal way of collaborating is by compromising, they are forced to adapt to the emergent needs of the collaboration and accept that resistance is sometimes necessary for achieving compromise. By offering these collaborative patterns, this research does not suggest that there are easy and fixed ways of managing collaboration performance. This is because inter-organisational collaborations are ongoing transformations (Bouwen, 2003), and the outcome of the collaboration depends on the partners' interactions, relationships, misunderstandings, disagreements etc. that take place in particular social contexts (Gherardi, 2012). Even though there may be some patterns that managers could follow, the performance management of inter-organisational collaborations is a very complex and difficult endeavour that cannot be accurately planned in advance.

As the analysis demonstrates, when partners collaborate they construct a collaborative identity (Koschmann, 2012) which comes with perceptions regarding the collaboration, what their role is and who they are in the collaborative process (Gray, 1989). However, when the partners engage with the collaboration daily, they face misunderstandings, disagreements and obstacles that challenge established realities, roles, ideas and processes (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). All these challenge an established collaborative identity and require partners to form new identities (collaborative and non-collaborative) in order to make sense of the new context they are experiencing and to adapt to the shifting needs of the collaboration. Through the development of multiple identities partners can organise their activities in a flexible way by either following the protocol of the collaboration or breaking it. In this way they can constantly nurture the collaborative process and improve collaboration performance.

As such, this research suggests that it is not necessary for managers to request that partners develop a collaborative identity in order to have successful collaborations. In contrast, personal, professional, organisational etc. identities can, in fact, improve collaboration performance.

It is common for collaboration research to either explore factors, stages, techniques and structures (e.g. Walsh and Maloney, 2007) that can offer stability in collaborations and improve their performance, or to suggest that collaborations constantly change and their performance cannot be predicted (e.g. Huxham and Vangen, 2005). However, this study goes beyond these traditional approaches and demonstrates that the issue concerns neither stability nor change. Instead, this research offers an alternative perspective to the performance of inter-organisational collaborations by suggesting that, in order to manage collaboration performance more effectively, both stability and change are required. The findings of the research have demonstrated that, by moving between collaborative and non-collaborative identities, partners create, on the one hand, spaces of regulation and stability that offer continuity in the collaborative process, and, on the other hand, spaces of learning and change that offer innovation and adaptation within the collaborative process. These spaces allow inclusion and exclusion, innovation and stability, learning and regulation, thus helping partners perform more effectively, even if only temporarily. This research, therefore, suggests that it is not necessary for the managers to seek to resolve the tension between stability and change, between separation and integration, between following and breaking the rules. In contrast, by maintaining this tension they can make sense of the changing collaborative process and improve collaboration performance.

Despite the evidence offered by this research, more studies are needed in order to further explore the relationship between identity construction and performance management in inter-organisational collaborations. Further examination of the formation of collaborative and non-collaborative identities in different types of collaborations would also be useful in order to establish whether processes of separation and integration are used by partners to perform effectively in different collaborative settings. Finally, other studies could use identity processes in order to reveal further collaborative patterns that managers may use to improve collaboration performance.

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