

**COLLABORATION FACTORS: PERSPECTIVES ON FACILITATORS AND BARRIERS,
THEIR LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE AND DEGREES OF MANAGEABILITY**

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ABSTRACT

This paper details an attempt to investigate and shed light on factors that affect the collaboration of public organizations by asking two important questions. The first question is: what is the comprehensive list of positive and negative factors – factors that facilitate and factors that hinder – the collaboration of public organizations? The second question is: what are the characteristics of these factors, namely the degrees of importance and the levels of manageability of these factors with respect to the collaboration of public organizations? This paper is a result of a systematic literature review, a questionnaire survey, and a statistical analysis of state enterprises in Thailand engaged in collaboration projects in a campaign supported by the Ministry of Finance. It points to 11 positive factors (facilitators) and 14 negative factors (barriers) along with their degrees of importance, and levels of manageability. It provides findings that are insightful and thought provoking. The article contributes to practice-oriented theory on collaboration with a particular focus on the factors affecting collaboration and their characteristics.

Keywords: *Collaboration Factors, Importance, Manageability, Public Sector, State Enterprises.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Working together is not a simple task, especially in the public sector. Therefore, in practice, partnerships for collaboration have a high failure rate (Corbin & Mittelmark, 2008). This is because partnerships require relationships, procedures, and structures that are somewhat different from what organizations have worked with before. Building effective partnerships for collaboration is both time consuming and resource intensive (Cheadle, Berry, & Wagner, 1997; Fawcett, Lewis, & Paine-Andrews, 1997; Kreuter, Lezin, & Young, 2000; Mitchell & Shortell, 2000; Wandersman, & Butterfoss, 1997). However, when partners consider at least part of their investment, whether it be time, effort, or money, to be wasted, it results in *antagonism*; it is the opposite of synergy (Corbin & Mittelmark, 2008). Although it is true that some waste is, perhaps, unavoidable, when one of the partners considers it excessive, continued collaboration is in danger. This is one of the reasons why collaborations fail, why they come to an end before the desired aims have been achieved (Huxham & Vangen, 2004). In the public sector, the bureaucratic nature of government, both in the form of organizational and cultural restrictions, represents even more of a threat (Moore, 2009; Hartley, 2005; Harris & Albury, 2009; Mulgan & Albury, 2003). Goldsmith and Eggers (2004) also argue that governing in the collaborative, networked does require a form of public management that is different from what public managers have become accustomed to. Public managers cannot always command action, but unfortunately they are still responsible for their collaborative outcomes (McGuire, 2002).

Lasker and Weiss (2003) observe that there needs to be more studies on synergy as a result of collaboration, its determinants, or its measurements. Theoretical conceptualizations, rather than studies of what is being practiced, dominate the collaboration literature (Iedema, 2007; Brinkerhoff, 2002; Corbin, 2006; Gray, 1989), while in order to help partners increase their chances of having successful collaborations, and thus achieving synergy, knowledge about the processes and factors that facilitate or hinder collaborative functioning is required (Huxham, 2003). The present study aims to investigate and shed light on the factors that affect collaborations for synergy, both the facilitating factors (positive factors) and those that hinder the collaborative functioning (negative factors) in the context of state enterprises, especially in developing countries, such as the Asian countries. What is investigated is not only the identification of the factors, what is sought is also an insight into (1) the degree to which each factor is important to collaborative functioning, (2) the degree to which each factor is easy/difficult to be implemented or to be remedied, and as a result, (3) the matrix of factors for public managers to consider when deciding and engaging in a collaboration. The subjects of the study are state enterprises in Thailand that engaged in collaboration projects. The article thus contributes to practice-oriented theory on collaboration (Gray, 1989; Huxham, 1996; Osborn & Hagedoorn, 1997; Waddock, 1989) with a particular focus on factors affecting collaboration and their attributes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Collaboration

What is collaboration? Alter (2000) states that no agreement exists about a standard definition of the term in the literature. Therefore, one person's *collaboration* can be another person's *teamwork* or *alliance* (Lank, 2006). Besides *collaboration*, academics and practitioners from diverse fields use terms such as partnerships, cooperation, coalition, service integration, interorganizational relationship, relationships, or alliance to "connote two or more organizations working together to achieve a desired common goal" (Bailey & Koney, 2000; Bititci, Martinez, Albores, & Parung, 2004). Collaboration literally means working-together (Huxham, 1996; Jordan Jr. & Michel, 2000). Thomson, Perry, and Miller (2009) give a definition of collaboration as "a process in which autonomous or semi-autonomous actors interact through formal and informal negotiation, jointly creating rules and structures governing their relationships and ways to act or decide on the issues that brought them together; it is a process involving shared norms and mutually beneficial interactions". Conceptually, from the growing amount of research on collaboration, one can conclude that there are common elements, or dimensions, of collaboration regardless of the field of study within which it is referred to (Gray, 1989, 1996, 2000; Huxham, 1996; Huxham & Vangen, 2005). Literature on interorganizational relations (Ring & Van de Ven, 1994) and organizational behavior (Hellriegel, Slocum, & Woodman, 1986) strongly support an integrative view of collaboration as "a process through which parties who see different aspects of a problem can constructively explore their differences and search for solutions that go beyond their own limited vision of what is possible" (Gray 1989). Guo and Acer (2005) create a definition of *collaboration* specific to the nonprofit sector as multiple nonprofit organizations working

together to solve problems through joint decision-making, effort, and resources, as well as co-ownership of the end product. Mattessich, Murray, and Monsey (2001) conduct an extensive and rigorous systematic review of the literature on collaboration in *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (2nd ed.), and conclude that "collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals". They also add that "the relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and sharing of resources and rewards." This study uses this definition as a working definition.

Collaboration creates synergistic outcomes. Synergy is generally regarded as a product or capability of a partnership (Weiss, Miller, & Lasker, 2002). Gray (1989) describes synergy as the degree to which partners combine their complementary strengths, perspectives, values, and resources in the pursuit for better solutions. It is a power to combine the perspectives, resources, and skills of a group of people and organizations (Fried & Rundall, 1994; Lasker et al., 1997; Mayo, 1997; Richardson & Allegrante, 2000; Taylor, Rossing, & Geran, 1998). Lasker, Weiss, and Miller (2001) identify synergy as the proximal outcome of a partnership functioning, which, in turn, *influences* the effectiveness of partnerships.

Factors affecting collaboration

The literature on factors that are relevant to collaboration is huge. Huxham and Vangen (1996), who are pioneers and leading academics in the field, identify the key factors in collaboration as: common aims, compromise, communication, democracy, equality, trust and determination. Gray (1989) groups factors that are important with respect to organizing a successful collaboration into two categories: member factors and process factors. Member factors are factors related to the partners in the collaboration. It includes factors such as inclusion of stakeholders early in the stage of problem identification and definition, commitment, incentives, and effective leadership. While process factors relate to the process of collaborating, such as the *ripeness* of the issue, the decision-making structure, the organization of the collaboration, the relationship between the parties, and the availability of mediators when needed. Based on a review of 137 cases on collaborative governance, Ansell and Gash (2008) conclude that trust, interdependence, and sufficient time are the core components for successful collaboration. Hogue, Perkins, Clark, Bergstrum, and Slinski (1995), from the National Network for Collaboration, identify factors that influence collaboration, such as leadership, communication, community development, and sustainability. Keith et al. (1993), in their empirical study, identify the main characteristics as being leadership, communication, unity, participation by stakeholders, informal organizations, and successful accomplishments. Borden (1997) identified four factors: internal communication, external communication, goal setting, and membership. Borden and Perkins (1999) developed a self-evaluation tool to examine thirteen factors that influence the collaborative process in the public sector, especially when working in a community to assist existing and forming groups. The information provides partners the strengths as well as the challenges they will be facing. The thirteen factors are: communication, sustainability, evaluation, political climate, resources, catalysts, policies/laws/regulations, history, connectedness, leadership, community development, understanding community, and goals.

Patel, Pettitt, and Wilson (2012), in their rigorous and systematic literature search on collaboration, particularly collaboration in work systems, engineering, and design, summarize the evidence on factors, mechanisms, positive and negative effects. At the top level are the main factor groups which are: context, support, tasks, interaction processes, teams, individuals, and overarching factors relevant across all or most of the main factor categories. Each of the main factor groups also has sub-factors. The main factors and their sub-factors are: (1) context consists of culture, environment, business climate, and organizational structure; (2) support consists of tools, networks, resources, training, team building, knowledge management, and error management; (3) tasks consists of type, structure, and demands; (4) interaction processes consists of learning, coordination, communication, and decision making; (5) teams consist of roles, relationships, shared awareness/knowledge, common ground, group processes, and composition; (6) individuals consist of skills, psychological factors, and wellbeing; and (7) overarching factors consist of trust, conflict, experience, goals, incentives, constraints, management, performance, and time. Many factors, however, can be collaboration enablers or inhibitors. It depends on how they are implemented and supported.

Mattessich et al. (2001), through their extensive literature review in *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (2nd Ed.), identify 20 factors, organized into six factor categories that influence the success of

organizational collaborations. They are: (1) the environment, which consists of a history of collaboration or cooperation in the community, the collaboration group being seen as a legitimate leader in the community, and favorable political and social climate; (2) membership characteristics, which consists of mutual respect, understanding, and trust, an appropriate cross-section of the members, members see collaboration as in their self-interest, and ability to compromise; (3) process and structure, which consists of members that share a stake in both the process and the outcome, multiple layers of participation, flexibility, development of clear roles and policy guidelines, adaptability, and appropriate pace of development; (4) communication, which consists of open and frequent communication and established informal relationships and communication links; (5) purpose, which consists of concrete, attainable goals and objectives, shared vision, and a unique purpose; and (6) resources, which consists of sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time, and skilled leadership. However, Mattessich et al. (2001) also note that, “[a]ll factors are stated in the ‘positive’, even though studies may have stated their ‘negative’ dimension or indicated that the lack of a factor produced failure”.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research questions are (1) what are the facilitating (positive) and the hindering (negative) factors in collaboration in the public organizations? (2) What are the characteristics of these factors, namely the degrees of importance and the levels of manageability of these factors, to the collaboration of public organizations? There were 52 state enterprises in Thailand engaged in collaboration projects during the campaign supported by the Ministry of Finance during 2011–2014. The target group, therefore, was these state enterprises. This research collected data at the end of the collaboration campaign in 2014. The data obtained was statistically analyzed to provide information to answer these research questions using SPSS. In order to achieve these objectives, multiple data collections and data analysis were employed as follows:

1) An open-ended questionnaire survey that sought state enterprises’ opinions by asking them to identify factors that they deemed to influence the collaborative functioning. As this stage of the study was considered exploratory, a questionnaire survey was chosen as the appropriate approach (Bailey, Bemrose, Goddard, Joslyn, & Mackness, 1995). The questionnaire asked respondents to identify two separate sets of factors. One set comprising the positive factors, those that the respondents deemed would *facilitate*, or simply put, *help* the collaborative functioning. The other set was to comprise the negative factors that would *hinder* or *obstruct* the collaborative functioning. The wordings used in the questionnaire were technical or literature-used terms, accompanied by a short everyday-language description to ensure clarity and, thus, understanding on behalf of the respondent to those technical, or literature-used terms. Respondents were asked to identify as many factors as they could from their experiences with collaboration.

2) The theoretical and empirical literature on collaboration factors was systematically reviewed. The purpose was to compile a list of collaborative factors to be synthesized with those identified from the 1st round of the open-ended survey in order to establish a comprehensive list of factors for the next and final survey. The literature review utilized computerized bibliographic searches in the area of social science and public affairs, including health and education from 2000–2014. Two criteria were used to filter in only references that were relevant to this research. The first one was that they must cover collaboration factors, and the second one was that they must refer to the context of the public sector.

After codification and compilation, the twenty factors from *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (Mattessich et al., 2001) emerged as a single reference that could represent collaborative factors from the literature review. Factors from the two sources – i.e. the open-ended questionnaire survey and the literature review – were tallied. When the wording of the factors of these two was identical, they would then be counted as the same. However, when the wording differed slightly, it would be carefully determined whether the factors were the same. The result was a list of two sets of factors for the next questionnaire survey, one having a positive and one having a negative impact on collaboration functioning. The positive factors (facilitators) identified were 11 in total, while the negative factors (barriers) that were identified were 14 in total.

3) A second questionnaire survey was conducted. It consisted of two sets of factors, the 11 positive factors and the 14 negative factors. Each set asked two major questions, concerning the *degree of importance* and the *degree of manageability* of each factor. The questionnaire used a five point Likert scale with “5” indicating “very high” and “1” indicating “very low”.

4) The data was analyzed using SPSS in order to provide the statistics required to answer the research questions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire was handed to every state enterprise (52 in total) engaging in the collaboration campaign. All of the respondents (100%) were in the middle or upper management level of each state enterprise. They were either in charge of, or were part of the collaboration teams. Overall, 39 replies from all nine sectors were received, equal to a 75% response rate. As a result, the survey cannot be considered biased, referring to Moser and Kalton (1971), who hold that the results of a postal survey are considered biased if the return rate is lower than 30–40%. Table 1 and Table 2 show the 11 positive factors (facilitators) and the 14 negative factors (barriers), respectively, with brief explanations.

Table 1: Positive Factors (Facilitators)

+ Positive Factors	
1. Mediator	State enterprises require a mediator when needed. This is not only to solve conflicts, but also to administer certain issues as a middleman and a catalyst.
2. Information	Information refers to the availability of the information deemed necessary in order to effectively and efficiently collaborate, as well as to gain insight for potential collaboration, especially resource sharing. Information also facilitates better decision-making too.
3. Advisor	Many state enterprises are rarely exposed to strategic management in practice. They need someone to advice them with respect to potential collaborations they might not have seen, and with respect to how to collaborate effectively.
4. Experience	Refers to collaboration experience, especially successful accomplishments which serve as a “quick win” to create momentum for collaboration.
5. Understanding	It is the understanding of how and why they collaborate.
6. Communication	Specifically focuses on informal communication, which reflects connectedness and relationships, or connections, between partners/parties.
7. Involvement	Refers to the inclusion of relevant parties, which are not necessarily state enterprises.
8. Evaluation	It includes the monitoring and evaluation of collaboration projects in order to create accountability.
9. Mutual benefits	Both partners gain something worth more than what they would get from not collaborating, or simply doing it alone.
10. Goals	Achievable and clear goals.
11. Leader	Effective leader that creates results, advocates, and serve as a role model for collaboration.

Table 2: Negative Factors (Barriers)

-Negative Factors	
1. Lack of understanding	Lack of the understanding of how and why they collaborate.
2. One-sided benefits.	Not a win-win situation. Some partners gain, while the others feel they do not gain anything from the collaboration. A no mutual benefit situation.
3. Inflexibility	Inflexibility includes the hindrances of rules/regulations, turf issues, and a strong culture.
4. Lack of information	Lack of information deemed necessary in order to effectively and efficiently collaborate, as well as to gain insight concerning potential collaboration, especially resources sharing. Information also facilitates better decision-making.
5. Lack of commitment	Reflection of not enough time, effort, and/or resources put together to accomplish the tasks required for collaboration.
6. Monopolistic nature	Most state enterprises are involved in basic utility services, which are capital-intensive and under monopoly by law, in many cases.
7. Lack of trust	Mostly fear of opportunistic behavior by others.
8. Inconsistent policy	Changes in either organization or government policy that affects the ongoing/potential collaboration.
9. Inequality	Seen as either relying too much on one party or a lack of contribution of certain parties in the collaboration.
10. No clear goals	Neither achievable nor clear goals.
11. Poor management skills	Managing collaboration requires skills that to some extent are beyond typical day-to-day management that state enterprises are accustomed to. Thus, it requires better than average management skills from those involved.
12. Lack of evaluation	Not sufficient or no monitoring and evaluations of collaboration projects to create accountability at all.
13. Lack of communication	Specifically focuses on lack of informal communication, which reflects connectedness and relationship, or connection, between partners/parties.
14. Lack of government support	State enterprises are one form of government agencies, which still rely on supports from government such as sufficient budget, clear and persistent policy, incentive, etc.

The questionnaire survey provided valuable information on the level of importance, as well as the degree of manageability, of each positive and negative factor. From a five-point Likert scale, the results are interpreted using a guideline (Ferguson, 1976) in Table 3.

Table 3: Interpretation

Score	1.00–1.50	>1.50–2.50	>2.50–3.50	>3.50–4.50	>4.50–5.00
Importance	Very Low	Low	Fair	High	Very High
Manageability	Very Low	Low	Fair	High	Very High

Table 4 provides a summary of the positive factors, while Table 5 provides a summary of the negative factors.

Table 4: Results Concerning the Positive Factors

Factors	Importance (Mean)	t-test	p-value	Manageability (Mean)	t-test	p-value
1. Mediator	4.21	0.76	0.45	3.18	0.77	0.45
2. Information	4.37	2.09	0.04	2.76	-1.53	0.13
3. Advisor	3.92	-1.12	0.27	3.24	1.13	0.26
4. Experience	3.95	-0.95	0.35	3.16	0.71	0.48
5. Understanding	4.16	0.55	0.58	2.97	-0.65	0.52
6. Communication	4.23	1.01	0.32	3.15	0.79	0.44
7. Involvement	3.54	-3.55	0.00	2.92	-0.95	0.35
8. Evaluation	4.03	-0.52	0.61	3.28	1.75	0.09
9. Mutual benefits	4.50	3.48	0.00	3.03	-0.21	0.84
10. Goals	4.28	1.66	0.11	3.11	0.30	0.76
11. Leader	3.82	-1.77	0.08	2.84	-1.28	0.21
Overall	4.09			3.06		

Positive factors have an average mean of 4.09 for importance, meaning that the factors identified are, on aggregate, viewed as *important* by the correspondents. While the average mean of ease to implement them, or to facilitate them, is 3.06 meaning that these positive factors, on aggregate, are viewed as being neither easy, nor hard (fair) to implement. In terms of importance, the factor that has the highest mean score on importance is “Mutual benefits”, with a mean of 4.50. The second highest mean score on importance is “Information”, with a score of 4.37. The lowest mean score is “Involvement”, with a mean of 3.54. The next lowest mean is “Leader” with a mean of 3.82. Of the 11 factors, there are seven factors that have average mean scores of 4.00 or above. They are, in descending order: mediator, information, understanding, communication, evaluation, mutual benefits, and goals. Thus, there are four factors that have mean scores on importance that are lower than 4.00. They are, in descending order: advisor, experience, involvement, and leader. No factor has a mean score above 4.50, meaning no factor was viewed as “very important”.

In terms of the degree of ease to implement, or manageability, “Evaluation” has the highest mean of 3.28, meaning it is viewed as fair, i.e. neither easy, nor difficult to implement. The next highest mean is “Advisor”, with a mean of 3.24. The lowest mean is “Information”, with a mean of 2.76. The next lowest mean is “Leader”, with a mean of 2.84. Of all the 11 factors, there are seven factors that have average mean scores of 3.00 or above. They are: in descending order, evaluation, advisor, mediator, experience, communication, goals, and mutual benefits. Thus, there are four factors that have mean scores on ease to implement that are lower than 3.00. They are: in descending order, understanding, involvement, leader, and information. In fact, however, all 11 factors are viewed as neither easy, nor difficult (fair) to implement, since they all fall within the 2.51–3.50 score range.

Table 5: Results Concerning the Negative Factors

Factors	Importance (Mean)	t-test	p-value	Manageability (Mean)	t-test	p-value
1. Lack of understanding	3.41	-2.47	0.02	3.08	3.26	0.00
2. One-sided benefits.	3.70	-0.38	0.71	2.50	-1.37	0.18
3. Inflexibility	4.15	3.24	0.00	1.74	-8.69	0.00
4. Lack of information	4.00	1.89	0.007	2.51	-0.86	0.40
5. Lack of commitment	3.79	0.27	0.79	2.59	-0.28	0.78
6. Monopolistic nature	4.03	1.99	0.05	2.16	-3.40	0.00
7. Lack of trust	3.45	-3.14	0.00	2.68	0.49	0.63
8. Inconsistent policy	3.74	-0.10	0.92	2.37	-1.71	0.10
9. Inequality	3.69	-0.42	0.68	2.54	-0.67	0.51
10. No clear goals	3.79	0.25	0.81	2.95	1.83	0.08
11. Poor management skills	3.53	-1.66	0.11	2.82	1.20	0.24
12. Lack of evaluation	3.54	-1.29	0.21	3.24	3.91	0.00
13. Lack of communication	3.73	-0.14	0.89	3.18	3.95	0.00
14. Lack of government support	3.97	1.34	0.19	2.50	-0.74	0.46
Overall	3.75			2.63		

Negative factors have an average mean of 3.75 for importance, meaning that the factors identified are, on aggregate, viewed as *important* by the correspondents. While the average mean with respect to the ease of remedying them is 2.63, meaning that these negative factors, on aggregate, are viewed as being neither easy, nor difficult (fair) to remedy. In terms of importance, the factor that has the highest mean score on importance is *Inflexibility*, with a mean of 4.15. The second highest mean score with respect to importance is “Monopolistic nature”, with a score of 4.03. The lowest mean score is “Lack of understanding”, with a mean of 3.41. The next lowest mean is *lack of trust* with a mean of 3.45. Of the 14 factors, there are three factors that have an average mean score of 4.00 or above. They are, in descending order: inflexibility, monopolistic nature, and lack of information. Thus, there are 11 factors that have mean scores of importance that are lower than 4.00. They are, in descending order: lack of government support, lack of commitment, no clear goals, inconsistent policy, lack of communication, one-sided benefit, inequality, lack of evaluation, poor management skills, lack of trust, and lack of understanding.

In terms of degree of manageability, *lack of evaluation* has the highest mean of 3.24. The next highest mean is *lack of communication*, with a mean of 3.18. The lowest mean is *inflexibility*, with a mean of 1.74. The next lowest mean is *monopolistic nature*, with a mean of 2.16. Of all the 14 factors, there are three factors that have average mean scores of 3.00 or above. They are, in descending order, lack of evaluation, lack of communication, and lack of understanding. Thus, there are 11 factors that have mean scores with respect to the ease of remedying them that are lower than 3.00. They are, in descending order: no clear goals, poor management skills, lack of trust, lack of commitment, inequality, lack of information, one-sided benefits, lack of government support, inconsistent policy, monopolistic nature, and inflexibility. Nine factors are viewed as being neither easy, nor difficult (fair) to remedy, since they all fall in the 2.51–3.50 score range. They are, in descending order: lack of evaluation, lack of communication, lack of understanding, no clear goals, poor management skills, lack of trust, lack of commitment, inequality, and lack of information. Five negative factors are viewed as difficult to remedy, since they all fall within the 1.51–2.50 score range. They are, in descending order: one-sided benefits, lack of government support, inconsistent policy, monopolistic nature, and inflexibility.

Between the two sets of factors, positive and negative, there are factors that appear on both sets, implying that lacking them would have a negative effect on collaboration, while having them would have an opposite effect, i.e. a positive effect on collaboration. The people managing collaboration projects could pay extra attention to these *common* factors, since by implementing one would literally affect both sides of the collaboration. There are six of them: evaluation (lack of evaluation), communication (lack of communication), goals (no clear goals), mutual benefits (one-sided benefit), understanding (lack of understanding), and information (lack of information). The other factors affect onedimension only, i.e. they have an either positive or negative effect on collaboration. These *common* factors have an average mean of importance of 3.98, meaning that they are on aggregate viewed as *important*. While in terms of the ease with which to implement/remedy them, they have an average mean of 2.98, meaning they are neither easy nor difficult (fair).

There are other alternatives for the management to consider with respect to collaboration as well. For instance, if management opts for one dimension only, they have two obvious sets to choose from. One set is the importance dimension. In this case, factors considered to be of *importance* (a mean score of 4.00 or above) should be taken into account when it comes to taking deliberate actions, regardless of how easy, or difficult they are to implement. For this reason, there are seven positive factors with mean scores 4.00 or above. They are, in descending order: mutual benefits, information, goals, communication, mediator, understanding, and evaluation. The other set is the ease of implementation dimension. Since no positive factor has a mean score of ease 4.00 or above, the next logical choice would then be to take into account factors considered “neither easy nor difficult” (a mean score of 3.00 or above) when it comes to taking deliberate actions, regardless of how important they are. This alternative suits management, which desires a *quick win* solution when it comes to collaboration. This might be the case for a successful pilot project to gain momentum previously described. For this reason, there are also seven positive factors with mean scores of 3.00 or above. They are, in descending order: evaluation, advisor, mediator, experience, communication, goals, and mutual benefits. On the negative side, there are three negative factors with mean scores of 4.00 or above with respect to the importance dimension. They are, in descending order: inflexibility, monopolistic nature, and lack of information. The other set is the manageability dimension. Again, since no negative factor has a mean score of ease of 4.00 or above, the next logical choice would then be to take into account factors considered “neither easy nor difficult” (a mean score of 3.00 or above) when it comes to taking deliberate actions, regardless of how important they are. This alternative suits management who desires a *quick win*, or a *quick fix* solution when it comes to collaboration. For this reason, there are also three negative factors with mean scores of 3.00 or above. They are, in descending order: lack of evaluation, lack of communication, and lack of understanding.

Another alternative for the management to consider is a two-dimensional criterion. In this case, the management might opt for factors that are both of *importance* and *easy* to implement (or manage). As has been previously noted, no factor, either positive or negative, has a mean score of 4.00 or above on the ease of implementation (or manageability); thus, the alternative would then be the factors that are of *importance*, with a mean score of 4.00 or above, and at the same time *neither easy nor difficult* to implement (fair). In this case, there are five positive factors that qualify. They are: mutual benefits, goals, communication, mediator, and evaluation. However, there are no negative factors that qualify under this criterion, meaning negative factors that are considered important are all low in manageability. To take into account the two perspectives of the negative factors, the mean score of importance has to be lowered to 3.00 (fair), while the easy to implement (manageability) factors can still retain a mean score of 3.00. In this case, there are three factors that qualify. They are lack of evaluation, lack of communication, and lack of understanding.

Another point worth mentioning is the issue of “Information”. It is on the positive list with a mean of 4.37, which is 2nd on the list, while its level of ease of implementation has a mean of 2.76 and is at the bottom of the list. On the surface, this result might appear illogical. However, given the circumstances and the policy given to these state enterprises should reveal the rationale to this. It is the information needed to gain insights into what is available and what is demanded, so a possible match could be made. It is a source of opportunities for collaboration, especially resource sharing of these enterprises. It is not something of a routine operation. It is not something that only has to do with information during collaboration. It is something before the collaboration takes place, and it has to be delicate enough so that both parties are able

to decide whether or not there is a potential for sharing. It is an outside factor, which explains why it is considered difficult (bottom on the ease to remedy list).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The choice for public organizations today is to narrow down to how to tackle the monumental challenges that come with higher expectations and a narrower tolerance for excuses, while doing all of this with limited resources too. This is not counting complications from cross-border activities, emerging technology, or never-before-seen-and-heard-of public issues, whether related to health, education, or whatever matters. The solution is obviously clear. They cannot afford to do anything alone anymore. Thus, the era of network and collaboration has come, to quote what McGuire (2006) says. It is not surprising, then, that public organizations are increasingly engaged in working together with other organizations – public or private – and with communities to attain mutual benefits, which is the idea of synergy. Collaboration brings synergy (Gray, 1989). Unfortunately, working together, or to collaborate, cannot be taken lightly. It is not a simple task. It is beneficial to seek, investigate, and learn what truly contributes to the success or failure of collaboration.

This article has detailed the results of a questionnaire survey of collaboration factors from a study group of state enterprises in Thailand. The results reveal 11 positive factors, which enhance or facilitate collaboration, and 14 negative factors, which hinder collaboration. The positive factors are: mediator, information, advisor, experience, understanding, communication, involvement, evaluation, mutual benefits, goals, and leader. The negative factors are: lack of understanding, one-sided benefits, inflexibility, lack of information, lack of commitment, monopolistic nature, lack of trust, inconsistent policy, inequality, no clear goals, poor management skills, lack of evaluation, lack of communication, and lack of government support.

The findings shed light on two characteristics with respect to each factor; one is the degree of importance and the other is the level of manageability (reflecting the level of ease or difficulty in implement it). At the top of the list for positive factors that are of importance to collaboration is “Mutual benefits”, followed by “Information”, while “Involvement” is at the bottom of the importance list. On the level of ease to implement, at the top of the list is “Evaluation”, followed by “Advisor”, while “Information” is at the bottom of the list. On the other hand, the negative list has “Inflexibility” at the top of the importance list, followed by “Monopolistic nature”, while “Lack of understanding” is at the bottom. “Lack of evaluation” is at the top of the level of ease to remedy list, while “Inflexibility” is at the bottom of the list.

With this valuable information, several alternatives are available when it comes to the management of collaboration; a contribution to practice. One alternative is to pay attention to factors that appear on both positive and negative lists – duality factors –, which suggests that lacking them would have a negative effect on collaboration, while having them would result have an opposite effect, i.e. a positive effect on collaboration. There are six of these factors, leaving the other 19 factors with one perspective only. These six factors are: evaluation (lack of evaluation), communication (lack of communication), goals (no clear goals), mutual benefits (one-sided benefit), understanding (lack of understanding), and information (lack of information). The other alternative is when management opts for a criterion with one dimension only. If the focus is on the importance of the factors to collaboration, then a set (a list) of positive and negative factors with a degree of importance equal to, or above, the predetermined level could be generated. The same applies when the focus is on the level of ease, or manageability of the positive and negative factors. Still another alternative might be when the management considers two, instead of one, characteristics. In this case, a set (a list) of factors that qualified for both *degree of importance* and *level of manageability* from predetermined levels of both characteristics could be generated. Having obtained the lists of factors, their degrees importance, and their levels of manageability, the people managing public organizations and scholars would have the power to generate other alternative sets to be considered for use, or to be explored in further research.

It is necessary to mention the limitations of this study, and thus, its applications as well. The context of this study is, first of all, state enterprises. The study group is state enterprises in Thailand. With this in mind, several limitations and precautions are quite obvious, such as the culture, or organizational type. The directive given to the state enterprises that participated in this study from the Ministry of Finance was to initiate and engage in collaboration for synergy projects between and among state enterprises only; cross sector collaboration was discouraged, although there were some. Having mentioned the limitations, further researches are encouraged, first of all, to expand beyond these limitations. There are areas and issues for

further researches to explore that are both challenging and at the same time could contribute to the literature as well as the practice of collaboration too. This includes the grouping of and focusing on factors and conditions to initiate potentials for collaborations and synergy; the key here is to *initiate for potential* especially the aspect of resource sharing, the management tools and techniques to cope with the negative factors, as well as the management tools and techniques to nurture the positive factors, or other characteristics to be investigated besides the *degree of importance* and the *level of manageability* of factors affecting collaboration.

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