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Leadership best practices in fostering collaboration for transformative change in international nongovernmental organizations: a phenomenological study

Colton Manley
coltmanley@gmail.com

Pepperdine University

Graduate School of Education and Psychology

LEADERSHIP BEST PRACTICES IN FOSTERING COLLABORATION FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN INTERNATIONAL NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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Colton Manley

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Doctoral Committee:

Gabriella Miramontes, Ed.D., Chairperson

Theresa Dawson, Ed.D., Committee

Maria Brahme, Ed.D., Committee

Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D., Committee

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ABSTRACT

For nearly a century, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) have spearheaded humanitarian relief and development efforts worldwide. However, the increasing complexity and interconnectivity of global challenges demand a fundamental shift in the operations of INGOs. Collaboration has emerged a key strategy in driving systemic change and addressing the root causes of complex issues. Leaders play a pivotal role in fostering these essential relationships and cultivating a collaborative ecosystem. While leadership remains paramount, there is a critical need to understand how INGO leaders can cultivate transformative collaboration, a collaborative approach aimed at addressing the root causes of complex issues and driving systemic change. This dissertation addresses this gap by exploring how INGO leaders foster collaboration for transformative change.

Using a phenomenological research approach, the study conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 16 high-level INGO leaders to investigate their lived experiences and insights regarding collaboration. The findings highlight the importance of a leader's collaborative posture, practice, and process in creating a culture of collaboration within and outside their organizations. Best practices that INGO leaders use include building trust and relationships, cultivating shared interest and ownership, and facilitating effective communication. The study also examines how INGO leaders measure success in collaboration, emphasizing both outcome-based and process-based indicators. The findings offer a valuable framework for understanding collaborative leadership in INGOs and provide actionable guidance for leaders seeking to enhance their collaborative practices, ultimately driving greater impact in addressing global challenges.

Chapter 1: Introduction

In today's globalized world, international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) have assumed critical roles in humanitarian relief and development efforts, international relations, and global governance (Baiden & Book, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2020; Brass et al., 2018). These organizations face unique challenges as they navigate complex political landscapes, manage diverse stakeholder relationships, and address resource constraints while striving to fulfill their humanitarian and development goals. The need for INGOs to collaborate and work together to tackle complex issues and bring about transformative change is becoming increasingly urgent (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). However, despite the growing call for transformative collaboration, there is still a lack of consensus and research on the most effective practices for organizational leaders to foster such collaboration (Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019). This study aims to bridge that gap by examining how leaders in INGOs cultivate cooperative relationships and facilitate collaboration with diverse groups and communities within and beyond their organizational boundaries. This chapter examines the emergence and significance of INGOs on the global stage, the role of collaboration within INGOs, and the critical importance of organizational leadership in fostering transformative collaboration. Additionally, it covers the research problem, the research aims, the research questions, the significance of the study, and its limitations.

Background

In 2023, an estimated 42,000 active international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) are operating worldwide (Union of International Associations, 2023). In the past decade, over 1,000 new INGOs have been established each year within the United States alone (Schnable, 2015; Union of International Associations, 2023). A recent report by The Business Research Company (2023) estimated the global market size of NGOs and charitable organizations at $288.97 billion in 2022, with projections for growth to $369.21 billion by 2027. This substantial growth and influence of INGOs can be attributed to globalization,

democratization, and the prevailing perception that INGOs are more effective and trustworthy than the public and private sectors (Anheier, 2014; Brass, 2016; Robbins, 2014).

The term "non-governmental organization" (NGO) is often used to describe a diverse spectrum of organizations, ranging from localized, smaller groups to large international entities (Balboa, 2014; Henriques et al., 2021). There is no universally accepted definition of NGOs due to the diverse nature and roles they play in various contexts worldwide (Watkins et al., 2012). The United Nations broadly defines NGOs as any organization not established by intergovernmental agreements (Alger, 2002). The World Bank, on the other hand, describes NGOs as "private organizations that actively engage in activities aimed at relieving suffering, promoting the interests of the impoverished, protecting the environment, providing essential social services, or facilitating community development" (Malena, 1995, p. 7). The ongoing discussion surrounding the definition of NGOs often revolves around how inclusive or restrictive the term should be.

Despite the ongoing debate regarding the precise definition of an NGO, existing literature consistently highlights certain vital elements, such as their non-state and non-profit status (Ahmed & Potter, 2006; Beyer, 2007; Brass et al., 2018). As the name suggests, NGOs are characterized by their independence from government entities. Although NGOs often collaborate with governments to provide services or support development efforts, autonomy from government control is a fundamental aspect that defines the status of NGOs (Martens, 2002). The primary distinguishing feature is that NGOs function independently, guided by their mission and objectives, without being subject to direct government oversight.

The literature also emphasizes the non-profit nature of NGOs, which means that the primary objective of these organizations is not profit generation (Brass et al., 2018; Kaloudis, 2017; Martens, 2002; Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). In contrast to for-profit businesses driven by earnings growth, NGOs adopt a mission-driven approach and focus on advancing specific causes, addressing social issues, and providing essential services (e.g., *Code of Ethics &*

Conduct for NGOs, 2002). Any surplus funds an INGO generates are reinvested into its programs and initiatives rather than distributed to shareholders or owners (Brass et al., 2018). Schmitz and Mitchell (2022) argue that emphasizing the non-profit character of NGOs is essential for understanding how they function within the complex web of societal structures and norms. The non-profit status of INGOs establishes a unique legal and cultural framework that influences their identity and behavior, allowing for specific governance and operational models while limiting others.

Some scholars have also highlighted non-violence as a defining characteristic of NGOs, and ensures differentiation from criminal or terrorist organizations (Ahmed & Potter, 2006; Beyer, 2007). While there is a debate about whether the term 'NGO' exclusively applies to international organizations (Kaloudis, 2017; Martens, 2002), the term can be used broadly to refer to regional, national, and local entities as well. This study uses the term 'international nongovernmental organizations' (INGOs) to refer to NGOs specifically with multinational operations.

History

The historical legacy of private international organizations extends back to the 18th century, well before the United Nations formally introduced the term *nongovernmental organization* in 1945 (Davies, 2014). Early examples of INGOs include religious orders, missionary groups, merchant associations, and scientific societies that operated across continents. These organizations played pivotal roles in shaping societies and addressing various local and global issues. These early forms of INGOs laid the foundation for the contemporary understanding of nongovernmental organizations, which formally emerged in response to the complex challenges of the modern era (Chimiak, 2014).

The global upheaval of the early twentieth century transformed the operating landscape for international charitable organizations (Davies, 2014; Schnable, 2015). The devastation of World War I and II created an urgent need for humanitarian and reconstruction efforts, leading

to the growth of INGOs (Wright, 2012). These organizations were critical in addressing the post-war challenges, providing relief to war-torn nations, and assisting in restructuring (Iriye, 1999). Their capacity to operate outside government authority and the capitalist market allowed these organizations to pioneer a new approach to global problem-solving and address the substantial humanitarian need left in the wake of war (Davies, 2014).

In the aftermath of World War II, there was a gradual growth and diversification of INGOs (Davies, 2012; Watkins et al., 2012; Wright, 2012). The initial focus of these organizations on humanitarian relief and refugee assistance shifted towards development and modernization in the developing world (Thomas et al., 2008; Wright, 2012). This period saw a significant increase in the number of INGOs from 427 in 1940 to 2,296 in 1970 (Iriye, 1999). This growth was driven by demographic-structural processes and the changing dynamics of global affairs (Chimiak, 2014). The tensions of the Cold War further fueled the growth of INGOs as they dedicated themselves to bridging divides and fostering cross-border communication, understanding, and cooperation (Madon, 1999).

When the Cold War ended, there was another surge in the number of INGOs (Davies, 2014). Changing international relations and technological advancements created favorable conditions for INGOs to flourish and their influence grew (Chimiak, 2014). As globalization increased interconnectedness and interdependence among nations, the need for INGOs to tackle transnational issues such as poverty, human rights violations, and environmental sustainability became more urgent. INGOs assumed a crucial role in bridging the gaps in service provision that emerged from inadequate government resources or capacities and they took on more prominent roles in global governance (Brass, 2016).

In the 21st century, INGOs have assumed an increasingly pivotal role in addressing pressing global challenges and shaping the international landscape (Mitchell et al., 2020). The current magnitude of human needs has grown significantly, fueled by protracted crises such as climate change, the war in Ukraine, and escalating conflicts in Sudan (Urquhart et al., 2023).

This heightened demand has been met with a substantial increase in public funds dedicated to humanitarian aid, surging from $2.1 billion in 1990 to $46.9 billion in 2022. Additionally, social media and digital platforms have revolutionized the capacity of INGOs to amplify their advocacy efforts, raise awareness, and mobilize support for their causes (Kaloudis, 2017).

The Role of INGOs

The evolving role of INGOs as key players in global governance has led to greater awareness and acknowledgment of their roles and influence in various global issues and affairs. According to Chimiak (2014), INGOs perform various functions, such as articulating and aggregating interests, establishing norms and values in international relations, recruiting participants in the international political system, socialization, rule-making, rule application through publicity and moral pressure, providing information and operations, as well as service provision. INGOs are often classified into two general categories: operational INGOs and advocacy INGOs (Malena, 1995). Operational INGOs design and implement development projects, including service delivery, while advocacy INGOs promote specific causes and advocate for policy changes. While this study primarily focuses on organizations categorized as operational INGOs, it is important to acknowledge the interconnected nature of these categories. As noted by Walton et al. (2016), some INGOs can simultaneously engage in both operational activities and advocacy efforts.

INGOs play a prominent role in influencing how social, political, and economic issues are discussed and framed in the public sphere (Brass et al., 2018). Their impact is particularly significant in shaping how people in developed countries perceive and understand developing countries (Schnable, 2015). By influencing the information and perspectives available to the public, INGOs can shape their understanding and perceptions of people and problems (Kaloudis, 2017). Furthermore, INGOs can challenge state behavior, evaluate actions, and globally condemn those who violate human rights or democratic principles (Schnable, 2015).

Through their influential role, INGOs can impact government policies, public perceptions, and global norms (Mitchell et al., 2020; Wong, 2012).

INGOs are widely recognized for their efficiency, effectiveness, flexibility, and innovation, setting them apart from government organizations and enabling them to bridge the gaps left by inadequate or inefficient government services (Brass et al., 2018; Kaloudis, 2017). This positive perception is rooted in the sector's dedication to the welfare of others, their commitment to democratic and participatory pro-poor development, and their emphasis on accountability and transparency. These organizations engage in a diverse range of activities, including building and improving infrastructure, healthcare provision, emergency relief delivery, education programs, sustainable agriculture promotion, and tackling various social and environmental issues (Watkins et al., 2012).

INGOs are vital and indispensable in addressing global suffering, particularly in regions marked by poverty and conflict (Brass et al., 2018; Schofer & Longhofer, 2020). Their responsibilities have continued to expand with increased involvement in responding to humanitarian emergencies and providing essential relief following natural disasters (Sapat et al., 2019). These organizations deliver critical services, including healthcare, nutrition, education, sanitation, and clean water, which are fundamental to human welfare and development (Mitchell et al., 2020; Schnable, 2015). Through their presence on the ground and close collaboration with local communities, INGOs contribute to immediate relief efforts as well as long-term development and sustainable solutions. Their established networks and partnerships allow them to reach affected populations, even in remote or conflict-affected areas (Brass et al., 2018).

INGOs are at the forefront of engaging with and addressing "wicked problems," which are complex and evolving issues that defy easy definitions and conventional problem-solving approaches (Grint, 2008; Head & Alford, 2015). These problems are characterized by their interconnected nature, involvement of diverse stakeholders, and inherent uncertainties, making them difficult to solve comprehensively. INGOs are often founded to fill a gap that the

government or private sector cannot or will not address (Brass, 2016). As a result, INGOs are at the forefront of tackling wicked problems such as poverty, inequality, climate change, humanitarian crises, and social injustices. These deeply entrenched problems require comprehensive, systemic solutions beyond superficial cause-and-effect relationships (Shrivastava, 2007).

Transformative change emerges as a key concept in the context of INGOs and their approach to wicked problems (Parthasarathy et al., 2021; Walton et al., 2016). Transformative change refers to profound and disruptive shifts that permeate various individual, organizational, community, or societal system dimensions (Brandt et al., 2019). It goes beyond incremental adjustments and seeks to address the root causes and underlying systems that perpetuate wicked problems. Unlike isolated interventions or linear approaches, transformative change recognizes the intricate interconnectedness and interdependencies of wicked problems (Costumato, 2021).

In the context of INGOs, transformative change is essential for addressing wicked problems because it offers a framework that aligns with these challenges' complex and dynamic nature (Grint, 2008). Wicked problems cannot be solved through isolated interventions, linear approaches, or singular actors (Head & Alford, 2015; Head, 2008). Instead, transformative change recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependencies inherent in wicked problems and seeks to address their root causes and underlying systems (Costumato, 2021).

Collaboration

Collaboration has emerged as an accepted strategy for addressing wicked problems (Costumato, 2021; Head & Alford, 2015; Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019). Through collaboration, INGOs can tap into collective expertise, resources, and perspectives from diverse stakeholders such as governments, corporations, local communities, and other NGOs (Gazley & Guo, 2020). Some studies have indicated that adopting a collaborative approach enhances the prospects of

fostering transformative change and contributes to a more comprehensive and sustainable response to complex, global challenges (Costumato, 2021; Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019).

Collaboration has gained increased attention in INGOs, driven by the need to demonstrate impact, address wicked problems, and cater to the needs of diverse stakeholders (Chimiak, 2014; Macmillan & McLaren, 2012; Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019). Collaboration between INGOs and other actors is vital for international development, as it leverages local understanding, promotes local ownership, fosters global solidarity, and enables access to resources and international networks (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). Key components of effective collaboration include local partnerships, capacity building, and resource sharing (Costumato, 2021). However, additional research is needed to understand the dynamics, forms, and motivations underlying collaboration in the INGO sector (Tran, 2020).

INGOs face numerous limitations and challenges in their work, making the creation of collaborative initiatives increasingly needed for their success (Brass et al., 2018; Elbers & Schulpen, 2010). Research has suggested that INGOs that actively engage in collaboration with other entities are more likely to achieve greater impact and effectiveness in their interventions (Costumato, 2021; Gazley & Guo, 2020; Vangen & Huxham, 2005). Collaborative efforts allow INGOs to leverage the diverse expertise, resources, and perspectives of partner organizations, resulting in more innovative and comprehensive solutions to complex global issues (Mitchell et al., 2015). By pooling their strengths and sharing responsibilities, collaborating INGOs can optimize their collective impact, reach broader audiences, and create sustainable change (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2015).

Leadership in INGOs

Effective leadership plays a critical role in navigating the ever-changing landscape of INGOs (Mitchell et al., 2020). A 2022 survey of 50 INGO leaders found that the INGO sector is at a critical juncture, with leaders actively seeking to redefine their purpose and adapt to the rapidly changing world (Baiden & Book, 2022). The mounting challenges organizations face and

the evolving global landscape necessitate transformative change that goes beyond mere adaptations and redefines the operational systems within INGOs (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). Although there may be some overlap in leadership qualities across different sectors, the unique context of INGOs requires specific skills and behaviors that contribute to their success (Hodges & Howieson, 2017).

In contrast to the public and private sectors, INGOs operate in dynamic and complex environments that are often more vulnerable to social, economic, and political fluctuations (Hopkins et al., 2014). The leaders of INGOs face the daunting task of navigating these uncertainties and swiftly responding to emergent humanitarian needs while ensuring organizational stability and a clear strategic direction (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Knox Clarke, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2020). INGO leaders often find their actions constrained by the imperative to secure funding, fulfill donors' expectations, comply with regulations and risk management requirements, and effectively navigate their organizations' internal governance structure (Baiden & Book, 2022). The role of an INGO leader requires decision-making, adaptability, and the ability to foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders to achieve their organizational goals and mission (Hermann et al., 2012).

The lack of leadership skills and personnel in the INGO sector is a significant constraint that must be resolved (Mitchell et al., 2020). Effective leadership is crucial for the success and sustainability of INGOs, as it shapes the organizational outcomes and the experiences and opportunities of the people they serve. One of the key challenges in the INGO sector is the need for more qualified leaders (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). The demanding nature of the work, limited resources, and lower salaries compared to other sectors make it difficult to attract and retain talented individuals (Do Adro & Leitão, 2020; Hailey & James, 2004). This shortage of leadership talent is exacerbated by the complex and dynamic environment in which INGOs operate.

Calls for a shift in leadership approaches within the INGO sector have emerged, recognizing the limitations of traditional top-down, individualistic mindsets in addressing the complex challenges these organizations face (Grint, 2008; Salem et al., 2019). Instead, there is a growing emphasis on embracing a more collaborative and collective model of leadership (Boyer et al., 2019; Brass et al., 2018). Studies have shown that effective leadership in INGOs entails establishing collaborative relationships and meaningful interactions with followers and stakeholders (Hermann et al., 2012; Mufti et al., 2020). This shift towards a more inclusive and participatory leadership style reflects the need to leverage diverse expertise and perspectives within and beyond the organization and engage stakeholders in co-creating solutions to complex problems.

Leaders of INGOs operate within a web of multiple stakeholder relationships, including beneficiaries, donors, volunteers, employees, government entities, partner organizations, and local communities (Boyer et al., 2019). Managing these diverse stakeholders is a critical aspect of leadership in INGOs. However, there is a lack of coherence and a scattered approach to leadership in the sector, emphasizing the need for special attention and reconceptualization of leadership within INGOs (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Knox Clarke, 2013). This study explores the dynamics of INGO leadership in fostering collaboration on three distinct levels: interorganizational, intraorganizational, and interpersonal.

Interorganizational collaboration focuses on establishing partnerships, alliances, and networks with external organizations to address complex challenges and leverage collective resources (Kramer et al., 2019). Intraorganizational collaboration promotes cooperation and coordination among different individuals, departments, or teams within the INGO, fostering a culture of teamwork, information sharing, and shared decision-making. Finally, interpersonal collaboration highlights the significance of effective communication, trust, and cooperation between individuals within teams, enabling the synergy of skills and fostering a positive and productive work environment (Colbry et al., 2014). By understanding and leveraging these

different levels of collaboration, INGO leaders can navigate the complex landscape of stakeholder relationships and enhance the organization's impact and effectiveness.

Statement of the Problem

The scale of human needs is growing at an exponential rate (Urquhart et al., 2023). In 2022 alone, the number of people affected globally by humanitarian crises grew by one-third. This surge is propelled by many complex and protracted crises that intertwine and compound each other. Such interconnected challenges defy simplistic solutions and cannot be effectively tackled by any single stakeholder or sector alone (Mitchell et al., 2020). In this landscape, INGOs play a primary role in addressing these wicked problems and alleviating the suffering of those affected.

Despite their global significance, INGOs face mounting constraints on their operations and effectiveness (Mitchell et al., 2020; Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). INGO leaders have recognized that INGOs' current structure and response mechanisms necessitate significant transformations to tackle the underlying causes of crises better and facilitate effective recovery and development (Baiden & Book, 2022). Such transformations must transcend the mere preservation of the status quo and cultivate change that encompasses reshaping systems, challenging prevailing norms, and establishing new paradigms (Shrivastava, 2007; Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019). There is growing evidence that collaboration and other collective approaches are necessary for achieving such transformative efforts.

The urgency for INGOs to collaborate and join forces to address complex challenges and drive transformative change is growing (Urquhart et al., 2023; Mitchell et al., 2020). However, the dynamics of collaboration within INGOs and their capacity to effectively engage with other stakeholders require deeper examination. While collaboration is increasingly acknowledged as a viable approach to addressing wicked problems (Costumato, 2021; Head & Alford, 2015), there remains a gap in research that can uncover the best practices for INGO leaders in fostering transformative collaboration. Further investigation is necessary to identify

the strategies and approaches to enhance collaboration among INGOs and maximize their impact in addressing global challenges (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2020).

Despite the growing call for transformative collaboration, there is still a lack of consensus and research on the most effective practices for organizational leaders to foster such collaboration (Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019). This research gap impedes the ability of INGOs to effectively confront complex global challenges and realize their humanitarian and developmental objectives. This study aims to investigate how INGO leaders cultivate positive relationships and foster collaboration with diverse groups and communities beyond their organizational boundaries. By doing so, this research seeks to elucidate the critical role of organizational leadership in fostering transformative collaboration.

The justification for examining leadership in INGOs is rooted in the recognition that the quality of INGO leadership profoundly influences all citizens' life chances and experiences (Howieson & Hodges, 2014). A comprehensive understanding of the leadership practices that foster transformative collaboration within INGOs becomes essential to enhance their effectiveness and impact in addressing global challenges. This research seeks to identify collaboration best practices for INGO leaders, improve the functioning of their organizations, and increase their positive impact worldwide.

Purpose Statement

This study investigates how leaders in INGOs foster collaboration for transformative change, which means working together to bring about meaningful and long-lasting change. These leaders are influential in cultivating positive relationships and facilitating collective efforts with diverse groups and communities, extending beyond their organizational boundaries. Specifically, this study seeks to determine:

- Common strategies and best practices INGO leaders employ to foster collaboration for transformative change

- Primary challenges INGO leaders face in fostering collaboration for transformative change
- How INGO leaders measure success in fostering collaboration for transformative change initiatives
- Recommendations INGO leaders have for emerging leaders who wish to foster collaboration for transformative change

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQ) were addressed in this study.

- *RQ1*: What strategies and best practices are employed by organizational leaders in International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGO) to foster collaboration for transformative change?
- *RQ2:* What challenges do organizational leaders face in INGOs when implementing the strategies and practices employed to foster collaboration for transformative change?
- *RQ3:* How do organizational leaders in INGOs measure the success of collaboration for transformative change initiatives?
- *RQ4:* What recommendations would organizational leaders in INGOs have for future practitioners entering the field to foster collaboration for transformative change?

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant implications for leadership development and transformative collaboration within INGOs. By exploring how leaders in INGOs foster collaboration, the study addresses a notable gap in the existing literature, highlighting its role in driving transformative change.

The results of this study carry various implications. First, it adds to the current body of knowledge by focusing specifically on the role of INGO leaders in cultivating collaborative relationships with diverse groups and communities. The findings can provide INGO leaders with practical strategies and effective practices to foster transformative collaboration. These

strategies can enhance the ability of INGOs to address complex global challenges, improve their humanitarian and development efforts, and achieve their organizational goals more efficiently and effectively.

Secondly, this research contributes to the broader field of organizational leadership and collaboration. By delving into the distinctive context of INGOs, this study offers valuable insights into the challenges confronted by organizations operating in complex political landscapes and with diverse stakeholders. The knowledge acquired from this research can inform leadership theories and practices, extending beyond the realm of INGOs to other sectors where collaboration and stakeholder engagement are pivotal. By identifying effective leadership strategies and best practices, this study provides practical guidance for INGO leaders dedicated to strengthening their collaboration endeavors and optimizing their impact in addressing complex, wicked problems.

Additionally, this study can provide a basis for future research on transformative collaboration in the context of INGOs. It can inspire further exploration into specific aspects of collaboration, such as the role of technology, the impact of cultural differences, or the dynamics of partnerships with local communities. The findings can lead to a deeper understanding of effective collaboration strategies and contribute to developing best practices for INGO leaders.

To summarize, the implications of this study hold significance for INGO leaders, the field of organizational leadership, and future research endeavors. The valuable insights generated can catalyze positive change, amplify the effectiveness of INGOs, and advance knowledge in transformative collaboration. By shedding light on effective strategies and offering practical guidance, this study has the potential to enhance the effectiveness and impact of INGOs in addressing wicked problems and driving transformative change. Its significance lies in its ability to advance scholarly understanding, equip leaders with actionable insights, and empower INGOs to make a lasting impact in addressing global challenges and driving societal transformation.

Assumptions of the Study

The assumptions of this study include:

1. The study assumes collaboration is crucial for addressing complex global challenges and driving transformative change. It assumes collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including INGOs, is necessary to leverage collective expertise, resources, and perspectives for more effective outcomes.
2. The study assumes that addressing wicked problems requires transformative change beyond incremental adjustments. It assumes that INGOs must challenge prevailing norms, reshape systems, and establish new paradigms to address complex global challenges effectively.
3. The study assumes that effective leadership fosters transformative collaboration within INGOs. It assumes that leaders can cultivate positive relationships, navigate complex stakeholder landscapes, and create an environment conducive to collaboration.
4. The study assumes that collaboration among diverse groups and communities beyond organizational boundaries can bring together different perspectives, expertise, and approaches. It assumes that embracing interdisciplinary perspectives can lead to more innovative and comprehensive solutions to complex global challenges.

Definition of Terms

This section will examine key terms used in this research and offer definitions to clarify their meaning within the study.

Nongovernmental Organization (NGO). In this study, 'NGO' is used to describe a private, voluntary, nonprofit association that operates independently of government control and engages in activities to address social, economic, environmental, or humanitarian issues (Martens, 2002; Schofer & Longhofer, 2020). NGOs are typically not-for-profit organizations that promote common goals, often at the national or international level, and work toward social or political change without seeking governmental power. They are characterized by their formal

organizational structure, independent funding sources, non-violent approach, and focus on public goods rather than profit (Kaloudis, 2017). NGOs can be local or international in scope and may collaborate with other actors, including states, to achieve their objectives.

Operational NGO. A type of NGO that primarily focuses on implementing projects and providing direct services to address specific social, humanitarian, or environmental issues (Malena, 1995).

Advocacy NGO. A type of organization that promotes specific causes or issues and advocates for policy changes at various levels, such as local, national, or international (Malena, 1995).

International nongovernmental organization (INGO). INGO refers to an NGO that operates internationally. These organizations work across borders and have a presence in multiple countries (Kaloudis, 2017; Walton et al., 2016). INGOs typically focus on humanitarian aid, development projects, advocacy, and policy work on an international scale (Lee, 2010). Examples of INGOs include Oxfam, Amnesty International, and Doctors Without Borders (MSF).

National Nongovernmental Organization (NNGO). An NNGO is a non-governmental organization that operates at the national level within a specific country (Walton et al., 2016). NNGOs primarily focus on addressing issues and promoting social change within their country.

Local Nongovernmental Organization (LNGO). LNGO refers to an NGO that operates at the local level within a specific community, region, or country (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). LNGOs typically deeply understand the local context, culture, and needs of the community they serve. They often rely on local resources and expertise and may collaborate with other NGOs, government agencies, and community stakeholders to achieve their objectives (Kaloudis, 2017).

Public Sector. The public sector encompasses government agencies and institutions funded and managed by the state (Costumato, 2021; Howieson & Hodges, 2014). It includes government departments, agencies, and entities at federal, state, and local government levels.

The public sector provides public goods and services, enforces laws and regulations, maintains infrastructure, and manages public finances.

Private Sector. The private sector refers to businesses and organizations that are independently owned and operated, aiming to generate profit (Brass et al., 2018; Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). Industries within the sector include manufacturing, retail, finance, technology, and services. Private companies strive to generate profits and add value for their owners or shareholders. They compete in the market, make independent business decisions, and are subject to market forces and regulations.

Third Sector/Civil Society. The third sector, commonly known as the nonprofit sector, consists of organizations that operate independently of both the public and private sectors (Do Adro & Leitão, 2020; Hodges & Howieson, 2017). These organizations are typically mission-driven and operate for the benefit of the public or specific communities rather than pursuing profit as their primary objective. The third sector includes various organizations, such as charities, foundations, community groups, religious organizations, advocacy groups, and social enterprises (D. Lewis, 2015). These organizations often rely on a combination of government funding, donations, grants, and volunteers to operate and deliver their programs.

Humanitarian assistance. Refers to providing aid and support to people and communities affected by crises, emergencies, or disasters. It aims to alleviate human suffering, protect and restore human dignity, and promote the well-being of individuals and communities facing significant hardship (Urquhart et al., 2023).

Relief. Refers to the immediate assistance provided to individuals and communities in crises, such as natural disasters, conflicts, or other emergencies (Saab et al., 2013; Salem et al., 2019). The primary objective of relief efforts is to address the urgent needs of affected populations, including providing life-saving aid such as food, water, shelter, medical care, and protection services. Relief activities are often characterized by their rapid response, short-term

nature, and focus on mitigating the immediate impact of the crisis. The goal of relief efforts is to alleviate suffering, save lives, and stabilize the situation.

Development. Development refers to the process of improving the well-being, living conditions, and opportunities of individuals, communities, and societies (D. Lewis, 2015). It encompasses economic, social, and human progress to enhance people's quality of life and promote sustainable and equitable outcomes (Henriques et al., 2021). Development involves efforts to reduce poverty and inequality, expand access to education and healthcare, protect the environment, and foster inclusive economic growth (Banks, 2021). The concept extends beyond economic advancement and includes social justice, human rights, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation (D. Lewis, 2015). Development can be pursued at various levels, including individual, community, national, and global scales, and it often involves the collaboration and coordination of multiple stakeholders, including governments, NGOs, and businesses.

Wicked Problems. Wicked problems are complex social or cultural issues that resist straightforward solutions because their causes are often deeply intertwined with other issues (Head & Alford, 2015; Grint, 2008). Wicked problems often have multiple causes and effects, involve numerous actors with conflicting interests, and their solutions may have unintended consequences. Examples of wicked problems include climate change, poverty, social inequality, global health crises, and sustainable development.

Transformative Change. Transformative change refers to profound and disruptive shifts that bring about fundamental and lasting transformations in systems, institutions, behaviors, and norms (Brandt et al., 2019). It involves moving beyond incremental adjustments and aiming to radically restructure existing systems and paradigms.

Collaboration. Collaboration refers to the process of working together, often across organizational or disciplinary boundaries, to achieve common goals or address shared challenges (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Costumato, 2021; Mitchell, 2014; Wood & Gray, 1991). It

involves individuals or groups pooling their knowledge, expertise, resources, and efforts to achieve outcomes greater than what could be accomplished individually. Collaboration emphasizes cooperation, communication, and coordination among diverse stakeholders, fostering synergy and collective decision-making. It often requires trust-building, open dialogue, and a willingness to share responsibilities and resources.

Transformative Collaboration. Transformative collaboration refers to collaborative efforts beyond traditional cooperation and coordination, aiming to bring about profound shifts and innovative approaches to address complex societal challenges (Cooperrider et al., 2007; Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019). Transformative collaboration involves diverse stakeholders coming together to challenge and transform existing systems, paradigms, and power structures. It emphasizes equity, inclusion, and diversity in decision-making processes and outcomes. Transformative collaboration seeks to generate new knowledge, foster critical thinking, and create sustainable and transformative solutions to wicked problems.

Partner. A partner refers to an individual, organization, or entity that collaborates with another individual or organization to work together toward a shared goal or objective (Atouba & Shumate, 2015). There are various forms of partnerships, such as formal agreements, contractual relationships, or informal collaborations. Partners often bring complementary skills, expertise, resources, or perspectives to the collaboration, enhancing the collective capacity to achieve desired outcomes. Partnerships can occur between organizations within the same sector, across different sectors, or even between sectors such as public-private partnerships.

Network. A network refers to a connected group of individuals, organizations, or entities that share information, resources, and relationships to achieve common goals or address common challenges (Atouba & Shumate, 2015; Madon, 1999). Networks can be formal or informal and exist within a specific sector, across sectors, or in a broader context. They can be characterized by various types of connections, such as professional relationships, collaborations, knowledge-sharing, or resource-sharing. Networks provide a platform for

communication, coordination, and collaboration among members, enabling them to leverage collective expertise, influence, and resources.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 highlighted the growing importance of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) in global governance and delivering relief and development services. With the substantial rise in the number and influence of INGOs over the past century, the sector is now facing a critical moment that demands significant changes for long-term sustainability. Collaboration emerges as a key driver for transformative change, and this study aims to explore how INGO leaders foster such collaboration across different levels. This study provides practical guidance for INGO leaders dedicated to strengthening their collaboration endeavors and optimizing their impact in addressing wicked problems.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The following literature review examines scholarship from various disciplines to shed light on the context of INGO leadership and the challenges INGO leaders face in fostering collaboration for transformative change. INGOs stand at a critical juncture in their evolution, contending with geopolitical shifts, emerging competitors, heightened accountability demands, and the need to bridge the gap between their stated intentions and actual actions (Mitchell et al., 2020). To tackle these formidable challenges and ensure organizational sustainability, INGO leaders have recognized the imperative for transformative change (Baiden & Book, 2022). There is a growing consensus on the necessity of enhanced collaboration within INGOs and across sectors, driven by its potential to usher in substantial and positive change (Gualandris & Klassen, 2018). This research examines the context of INGO leadership and how leaders initiate, foster, and enhance the effectiveness of collaborations both within and beyond organizational boundaries.

This review encompasses literature from leadership theory, social sciences, organizational behavior, and management studies, presenting a comprehensive understanding of the context in which INGO leadership functions. First, the chapter addresses the sector-specific environment of INGOs including sectoral norms, organizational culture, and prevalent challenges. Following this, it explores the foundational theoretical frameworks within INGO studies, such as resource dependence theory and institutional theory. Subsequently, the review offers insights into collaboration within INGOs, highlighting its transformative potential, and explores intraorganizational and interorganizational collaboration. An extensive overview of INGO leadership is also provided, shedding light on common leadership challenges and the diverse leadership perspectives documented in the literature. Finally, the review concludes by addressing research gaps and emphasizing the significance of this study within the broader context.

The Context of INGO Leadership

In order to understand leadership best practices in fostering collaboration, it is imperative to contextualize leadership within its operational environment (Knox Clarke, 2013). Contextualization acknowledges that leadership is not a one-size-fits-all concept but is shaped by the unique challenges, cultural nuances, and organizational dynamics that define a particular setting (Hamrin, 2016). In the context of INGOs, leadership is shaped by the unique organizational culture, sectoral norms, and challenges INGOs face. Embedded within the fabric of INGO culture and norms are a myriad of factors that shape how INGO leaders navigate their roles, arrive at decisions, and engage with stakeholders (Do Adro & Leitão, 2020). A leader's ability to navigate and respond to these contextual factors greatly influences their success in guiding teams, achieving organizational goals, and cultivating transformative change (Heiss & Johnson, 2016).

The INGO landscape is marked by extensive diversity, which can be seen in their varying sizes, missions, geographic reach, and operational strategies (Brass et al., 2018; Mitchell, 2014). The sector’s diversity is also evident in the broad array of issues INGOs address, such as humanitarian relief and development, human rights, and environmental conservation (Mercer, 2002). Some scholars propose that considering factors of diversity is valuable for gaining a deeper understanding of how the variations among INGOs can shape their results, influence, and overall effectiveness (Balboa, 2014; Banks et al., 2015; Brass et al., 2018). Other scholars have noted the increasingly blurred boundaries within INGO subsectors, which challenge traditional categorizations (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Walton et al., 2016). Debates regarding the applicability of general statements about the entire INGO sector have long persisted (Banks et al., 2015; Martens, 2002; Vakil, 1997). However, some scholars have identified shared norms and cultures that permeate the INGO landscape (Mitchell et al., 2020; Vijfeijken, 2019). Understanding this interplay between diversity and commonality is pivotal for effective leadership and decision-making within this dynamic INGO sector.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture and leadership are two interconnected elements that play a crucial role in the success and effectiveness of an organization (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Shiva & Suar, 2012). An organization's culture is the collection of shared values, beliefs, and everyday practices that shape how employees work and interact (Schein, 2017). It is a multifaceted concept that influences interactions among individuals, decision-making processes, and perceptions of the work environment. (Shiva & Suar, 2012). On the other hand, leadership involves the process of unifying people, directing their efforts, coordinating actions, providing support, and motivating them toward shared goals (Boyer et al., 2019). There is a symbiotic relationship between the leadership of an organization and its culture, as leaders have the power to shape and influence an organization's culture (Hopkins et al., 2014). At the same time, an organization's culture can also shape its leaders' behavior and effectiveness (Do Adro & Leitão, 2020).

Within the diverse landscape of INGOs, scholars have identified recurring themes that provide insights into their organizational culture (Banks et al., 2015; Brass et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2020; Salem et al., 2019; Walton et al., 2016). One prominent theme is mission orientation, which refers to an INGO's firm commitment to its mission, encompassing its core values, purpose, and envisioned impact (Dromi, 2016). The organization’s mission can unite individuals with diverse backgrounds and expertise, fostering a sense of purpose and collective identity (Walton et al., 2016). The culture of INGOs is often characterized by a strong belief in the organization's mission, a commitment to social justice, and a focus on making a positive impact (Shiva & Suar, 2010). A culture with a strong mission orientation can cultivate a sense of purpose and commitment within employees, driving them to work toward achieving the organization's goals (Shiva & Suar, 2012). However, INGOs must ensure that their organizational culture aligns with their mission and values, as any incongruence can undermine the organization's effectiveness and credibility (Ossewaarde et al., 2008).

While central to INGOs' identities, a strong mission orientation has potential downsides, which can hinder constructive collaboration with other organizations or stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 2015; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). INGOs' mission orientation can lead organizations to believe that their work is more critical or more legitimate than the work of other organizations and foster a culture of moral superiority (Duchon & Drake, 2009). This *organizational narcissism* can result in leaders being highly protective of their missions, and it may deter them from engaging with partners who do not share the same principles (Mitchell, 2014; Mitchell & Schmitz, 2014). A strong sense of organizational distinctiveness can breed *us versus them* thinking, which can lead to feelings of superiority over other organizations and suspicion of their motives (Mitchell et al., 2020). INGO practitioners often lack awareness of and interest in collaborating with those who hold different views and may lack the skills to interact with and influence those outside of their organization effectively (Mitchell, 2014).

Scholars have also highlighted the defining role of uncertainty within the organizational culture of INGOs (Watkins et al., 2012; MacIndoe & Sullivan, 2014; Salem et al., 2019). Uncertainty is deeply intertwined with the difficult and multifaceted challenges that lie at the core of INGO missions (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). INGOs often grapple with complex and persistent problems, including global poverty, climate change, and public health crises, which inherently contribute to the organization's prevailing sense of uncertainty (D. Lewis, 2015). Uncertainty can also arise from other factors to which INGOs are especially susceptible, such as political instability, economic fluctuations, changing donor priorities, and evolving social and environmental challenges (Tran, 2020; Watkins et al., 2012). In these uncertain environments, a greater need for adaptability and innovation can foster a culture that values flexibility and risk-taking (Glazer et al., 2019).

Given the complex and often deeply rooted global issues they address, INGOs attract individuals who are deeply passionate and committed to these causes (Mufti et al., 2020). Consequently, INGO culture frequently cultivates and celebrates these attributes as key

indicators of organizational success (Mitchell et al., 2020). INGO governance structures often prioritize inputs and processes over measurable outcomes, which can foster a culture that values effort over tangible results (Banks et al., 2015).

The tendency of INGOs to emphasize inputs over outcomes stems from various factors, including the complexity of INGO missions, where cause-and-effect relationships between interventions and lasting impacts are often difficult to establish (Watkins et al., 2012). Additionally, resource constraints can hinder INGOs' ability to invest in robust measurement systems (Mitchell et al., 2020). For instance, consider an INGO's feeding program aimed at combating child malnutrition. The organization might measure success by the number of meals distributed; but this metric fails to capture the program's true impact on reducing malnutrition rates and improving overall child health. Embracing outcome-based measurements, such as tracking the decline in malnutrition-related illnesses or the average increase in weight-for-height among program participants, offers a more robust understanding of the program's effectiveness, and would enable the INGO to make data-driven decisions and maximize their impact.

Prioritizing procedural aspects over actual outcomes within INGOs can inadvertently create a blind spot in identifying unintended impacts (Brass et al., 2018). Strong organizational convictions and good intentions often reinforce this tendency and can foster a false perception of innocence. Mitchell et al. (2020) asserts that "being convinced of doing good work creates a culture often incapable of recognizing the harm done, including to the very people whom they claim to support" (p. 36). Within INGOs, this *myth of my own innocence* may manifest as believing that the organization's actions are consistently virtuous, ethical, or morally superior while attributing negative behaviors or outcomes to external factors or actors (Duchon & Drake, 2008). This perspective can blind organizations and their leaders to critical organizational shortcomings, leading to significant repercussions for their reputations, staff, and the communities they aim to serve (Brass et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2020).

The power dynamics within an organization also shape organizational culture (Schein, 2017). In the context of INGOs, the distribution of power significantly influences the organization's values, decision-making processes, and, ultimately, its ability to effectively fulfill its mission (Banks et al., 2015; Guo & Acar, 2005). Leadership, in particular, plays a pivotal role within these power structures, as leaders often wield considerable decision-making authority and influence throughout the organization's hierarchy (Hermann & Pagé, 2016). In many INGO structures, power tends to be concentrated, raising concerns about transparency and accountability and prompting criticisms that many organizations may not fully uphold democratic principles despite often advocating for them (Kaloudis, 2017).

Furthermore, external funding sources, including governments, foundations, and private donors, can exert substantial influence over INGOs, potentially compromising their autonomy and mission (Tran & AbouAssi, 2020). It is common for an INGO to rely heavily on external funding, which gives donors significant influence over their activities. Donors usually have specific objectives that align with their funding priorities, which can lead to INGOs shifting their focus to meet donor preferences (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). The pressure to secure funding can lead to *mission drift,* where INGOs gradually shift their focus toward activities that are more likely to attract donor support, even if those activities are not directly aligned with their core mission (Banks, 2021).

The power dynamics between local and international staff can also play a significant role in shaping organizational culture in INGOs and impact project design and implementation (Salem et al., 2019). For instance, international staff are more likely to be given positions of authority and exert more influence over decision-making processes (Pedraza Martinez et al., 2011), potentially resulting in projects that do not adequately address the specific needs of local communities (Salem et al., 2019). Furthermore, the cultural biases and assumptions brought by international staff may lead to projects that lack cultural sensitivity and long-term sustainability (Brass et al., 2018). However, collaboration between the local and international staff members

in INGO field offices is linked to better overall organizational performance (Salem et al., 2019). Furthermore, INGO leaders have the potential to boost operational effectiveness by actively promoting cooperation among local and international staff in these field offices.

INGOs operate in complex environments with diverse stakeholders, including governments, local communities, international bodies, donors, partner organizations, and project beneficiaries (Henriques et al., 2021). These stakeholders' expectations and the organization's relationships with them can shape its culture. For example, collaborating with government entities involves navigating complex legal frameworks and regulatory compliance (Gazley & Guo, 2020), which may cultivate bureaucratic tendencies within the organizations (Salamon & Toepler, 2015). Community engagement requires understanding local contexts, building trust with community members, and ensuring their commitment to and ownership of program outcomes (McMahon, 2014), which may foster a greater sense of compassion or advocacy.

Other stakeholder relationships include donors who may demand transparent financial practices and push organizational functions to align with their priorities (Banks et al., 2015). INGOs also form partnerships with other NGOs and civil society groups to enhance their collective impact, especially in crisis response or addressing global challenges (Tran & AbouAssi, 2020). Lastly, INGOs are challenged to adapt to the evolving needs of their beneficiaries and build collaborative processes for their empowerment and development (Chimiak, 2014; Wright, 2012). Effectively managing these diverse stakeholder relationships is critical for INGOs in fulfilling their missions, securing resources, and bringing about positive change.

Sectoral Norms

In addition to organizational culture, INGO leadership is situated within the context of the INGO sector norms. Sectoral norms serve as informal guidelines that influence organizational behavior and decision-making (Heiss & Johnson, 2016). These norms are often essential for

establishing and maintaining legitimacy and trust among stakeholders (Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023). Organizations experience pressures to conform to social rules and norms to appear legitimate (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Adherence to sectoral norms contributes to INGOs' legitimacy, effectiveness, and ability to collaborate with other organizations (Wood & Gray, 1991). However, sector norms possess the potential to significantly shift an organization's conduct, leading them to abandon actions that would theoretically serve their best interests. (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This complex interplay illustrates the complicated landscape in which INGO leadership operates. Leaders are required to skillfully navigate sectoral expectations while also driving their organizations towards impactful and innovative approaches to address global challenges (Mitchell et al., 2020).

The pressure for INGOs to conform to sectoral norms increases in uncertain external settings, such as political, social, or economic environments (Brass et al., 2018). Watkins et al. (2012) characterized INGOs as organizations that must manage uncertainty in various forms. One key form of uncertainty is financial instability, as INGOs often rely on a diverse funding base that is susceptible to fluctuations (MacIndone & Sullivan, 2014). Additionally, political uncertainties emerge as INGOs must operate within the shifting landscapes of government regulations and geopolitical influences (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). Furthermore, INGOs frequently grapple with the uncertainty surrounding the efficacy of their interventions and programs, given the inherent complexity and intractability of social and humanitarian challenges (Brass et al., 2018). In these situations, adhering to established sectoral norms enhances legitimacy and offers a sense of stability amidst a backdrop of uncertainties (Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023). This conformity plays a pivotal role in building trust with stakeholders and fortifying the organization's capacity to withstand external disruptions.

INGOs, under their nonprofit status, heavily rely on external funding sources to sustain their operations and fulfill their missions (MacIndone & Sullivan, 2014). Donors to INGOs, whether individuals, foundations, governments, or other entities, typically have certain

expectations for how their contributions should be utilized. They want the majority of their funds to directly support the programs and services provided by the INGO, as opposed to being spent on administrative and operational costs (Charles et al., 2020). Additionally, information intermediaries, organizations that assess the quality of nonprofits, often evaluate INGOs based on the ratio of funds allocated to program expenses versus overhead costs, with higher program expense allocation leading to more positive evaluations (Lecy & Searing, 2015). As a result, INGOs face pressure to minimize profits, maintain low administration and fundraising expenses, and keep less financial reserves (Calabrese, 2013; Mitchell, 2017). Adhering to these financial management norms preserves organizational legitimacy and makes them appear trustworthy in the eyes of donors and other stakeholders (Gregory & Howard, 2009; Lecy & Searing, 2015; Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023).

Interestingly, a recent study indicates that adherence to the financial norms of the INGO sector is associated with reduced effectiveness in achieving organizational goals and objectives, often referred to as mission impact (Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023). The authors analyzed a panel of public charities from 1982 to 2019, using total spending as an indicator of mission impact. They found that adherence to commonly accepted fiscal norms among nonprofits led to a loss of approximately half of mission impact over a decade. This reduced mission impact is due primarily to what has been coined the ‘nonprofit starvation cycle’ (Gregory & Howard, 2009; Lecy & Searing, 2015).

The nonprofit starvation cycle refers to the trend where nonprofit organizations are pressured to keep their overhead costs very low, which can lead to underinvestment in essential infrastructure and hinder the nonprofit's ability to achieve its mission effectively (Gregory & Howard, 2009; Lecy & Searing, 2015). Donors often expect nonprofits to minimize overhead costs, pushing for a high percentage of funds to go directly to program expenses. As a result, INGOs constantly strive to report lower overhead than their peers in an effort to stay competitive. In this race to minimize overhead, spending benchmarks within the same peer

groups decrease, making them progressively unachievable (Altamimi & Liu, 2022). The competition to reduce overhead costs pushes INGOs to prioritize short-term programmatic goals at the expense of essential organizational capacity-building efforts, such as staff development, infrastructure improvement, and long-term planning (Mitchell & Calabrese, 2019). Consequently, INGOs can become trapped in a cycle of chronic underinvestment in their sustainability, impeding their capacity to achieve lasting impact and respond effectively to the complex and ever-changing external challenges (Gregory & Howard, 2009; Lecy & Searing, 2015; Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023).

There has been a notable trend toward greater professionalization and institutionalization within INGOs (Brass et al., 2018). INGOs have increasingly adopted technocratic and professional approaches in a more interconnected world characterized by the growing complexity of global challenges like poverty, climate change, and humanitarian crises (Banks et al., 2015). These approaches include adopting business practices in areas such as project management, financial management, and strategic planning (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). Accountability demands from donors, beneficiaries, and the general public require INGOs to demonstrate impact and effectiveness (Schmitz et al., 2012). These pressures have led INGOs to adopt more bureaucratic monitoring and evaluation practices and spawned the development of accountability frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative (Traxler et al., 2020). Professionalization can improve project management and enhance credibility with stakeholders, but it also can push INGOs to become more focused on meeting the demands of donors and other external stakeholders rather than on the needs of the communities they serve (Banks, 2021).

The professionalization of INGOs raises concerns about losing grassroots connections and shifting away from the values-driven origins of many INGOs (Banks, 2021). This tension within INGOs between their stated missions and values and the actual behavior within these organizations reflects a complex and evolving landscape in the international nonprofit sector. As

noted by Vijfeijken (2019), INGOs frequently grapple with diverse challenges that revolve around their capacity to effectively translate their missions into actionable initiatives while simultaneously conforming to established sector norms and responding to external pressures. This tension is often exacerbated by the coexistence of market-oriented and mission-oriented approaches, which can create competing institutional logics (Glazer et al., 2019). Tran and AbouAssi (2021) discuss the challenges faced by INGOs in navigating the balance between their ideals and the practical realities of operating in a dynamic and diverse global environment. They emphasize the importance of understanding the local context and building strong partnerships to address complex global challenges effectively. Understanding how INGOs manage this tension is essential for comprehending the complex interplay of factors that shape their organizational cultures, leadership dynamics, and their effectiveness in contributing to positive social change on a global scale.

Collaboration has become a fundamental norm in the realm of INGOs, as the sector acknowledges that addressing intricate global challenges requires unified efforts (Mitchell et al., 2020). As a result, INGOs actively engage in a variety of collaborative arrangements including partnerships, coalitions, and alliances (Mitchell et al., 2020). INGOs face numerous limitations and challenges in their work, making the creation of collaborative networks increasingly needed for their success (Brass et al., 2018; Elbers & Schulpen, 2010). Research has suggested that INGOs that actively collaborate with other entities are more likely to achieve more significant impact and effectiveness in their interventions (Costumato, 2021; Gazley & Guo, 2020; Vangen & Huxham, 2005).

Challenges in the INGO Sector

INGO leaders find themselves at a critical juncture as their organizations grapple with a growing dissonance between their historical identities and their evolving aspirations for global influence and transformative change (Mitchell et al., 2020). A 2022 survey of INGO leaders revealed the significant internal and external challenges their organizations face (Baiden &

Book, 2022). These challenges, set against the backdrop of global demographic shifts, escalating inequality, and environmental crises, underscore the pressing need for INGO leaders to navigate a complicated landscape as they chart the course for their organizations and the broader sector (Banks et al., 2015; Schofer & Longhofer, 2020).

External Challenges. INGOs operate in a rapidly changing global environment characterized by new and emerging threats such as climate change, pandemics, and political instability (Baiden & Book, 2022; Brass et al., 2018). The increasing complexity of their external environments poses significant challenges for these organizations. Mitchell et al. (2020) identified three key external trends shaping the sector and its future. First, geopolitics are shifting the global power dynamics and impacting the influence and role of INGOs. Second, there is a growing demand for accountability and results from both donors and local communities, placing additional pressure on INGOs to demonstrate their effectiveness and impact. Lastly, the emergence of alternative non-state actors and solutions, such as corporate social responsibility (CSR), social enterprises, benefit corporations, private contractors, and digital campaigning and funding platforms, has created new competition for INGOs. These trends have necessitated a reevaluation of the strategies and approaches employed by INGOs to remain relevant and effective in addressing global challenges.

The traditional dominance of Western powers in the international arena is being challenged by the rising influence of countries like China and other non-Western actors (Mitchell et al., 2020). The growing prominence of non-Western governments on the global stage forces INGOs to develop new skills and capabilities to operate effectively in diverse cultural contexts (Banks et al., 2015). Additionally, the international trend of rising nationalism and anti-globalist sentiment has raised concerns about increased pressure and criticism of INGOs in countries such as Russia, Hungary, and Vietnam (Schofer & Longhofer, 2020). The pushback may be due to the perception that INGOs promote globalism, which some see as a threat to national sovereignty. Authoritarian governments around the world have tightened their grip on

transnational influences and civil society, restricting INGO activities in an operational environment increasingly hostile to democracy and Western influence (Mitchell et al., 2020; Dupuy et al., 2016).

INGOs are also facing increased demands for accountability from the general public, donors, partners, and beneficiaries (Kaba, 2021). As INGOs have increased in prominence and influence their actions have been subject to greater scrutiny and a higher standard of transparency (AbouAssi & Trent, 2015; Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). High-profile scandals involving corruption and mismanagement have further eroded public trust, prompting calls for stronger accountability measures (Kaba, 2021; Pallas & Guidero, 2016). Furthermore, the growing number of INGOs competing for limited resources intensifies the pressure to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency (Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023; Mitchell et al., 2020). This has driven donors to demand greater accountability from the organizations they support.

The increased scrutiny is particularly noteworthy due to INGOs' strong emphasis on mission-driven work and commitment to doing good (Hermann et al., 2012). Historically, INGOs have enjoyed a reputation for being agents of positive change, but recently, these organizations have come under increased scrutiny. Consequently, many INGOs have responded to these demands by implementing more structured bureaucratic frameworks to fortify their perceived legitimacy (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). In INGOs, legitimacy is embedded in social relationships and hinges on the belief that their actions align with the established norms, values, beliefs, and definitions within a given social construct (Mitchell et al., 2020). Therefore, there is a widening credibility gap as INGOs struggle to provide substantial evidence of their effectiveness and distinct value-added in contributing to positive social change (Banks et al., 2015; Liket & Maas, 2015). Despite increased scrutiny, INGO leaders have expressed satisfaction with their organization's accountability practices and rarely take action to implement innovation in accountability strategies (Hermann et al., 2012).

Globalization and the emergence of alternative organizational forms competing with INGOs to address social and global issues have put significant pressure on the INGO sector as a whole (Mitchell et al., 2020). The increased interconnectivity brought about by globalization has opened the doors for new participants to enter the realm of international development and humanitarian aid. Notably, businesses are progressively involved in corporate social responsibility endeavors, and social impact investors are actively seeking opportunities to invest in projects that yield positive social or environmental benefits (Emmrich, 2017). This shift has propelled INGOs into a dynamic landscape where they not only contend with traditional peers but also grapple with the growing influence and resources of socially conscious businesses. As a result, INGOs must compete for funding with businesses that have substantial resources at their disposal, and INGOs also have to attract talent in a job market that includes socially conscious businesses (Mitchell et al., 2020). The increased competition has intensified the challenges faced by INGOs as they work to secure the resources needed to fulfill their missions effectively.

Internal Challenges. In addition to navigating challenges from their external environment, INGO leaders also face various issues and obstacles that arise from within the organization itself. INGO leaders have indicated that a primary challenge is funding constraints and a lack of other resources (Baiden & Book, 2022). INGOs rely heavily on donations, grants, and partnerships, making their financial stability precarious and subject to global economic fluctuations. Fiscal volatility forces INGO leaders to skillfully manage relationships with donors whose expectations can be unpredictable or misaligned with organizational goals (Banks et al., 2015). Additionally, INGOs contend with constraints in terms of personnel and expertise as they strive to attract and retain skilled professionals who are willing to work in challenging and foreign environments (Brass et al., 2018).

NGOs often attract employees and volunteers with a strong intrinsic commitment to social or humanitarian causes (Boyer et al., 2019). This passion for the cause, while valuable,

can create unique accountability pressures from within the organization (Kaba, 2021). Consequently, leaders must diligently convey the crucial connection between individual actions and collective objectives, emphasizing its significance in the organization's success (Boyer et al., 2019). Leaders can foster a culture of shared accountability where employees and volunteers feel empowered to hold themselves and others accountable for their actions and impact.

Another internal challenge faced by INGOs is bureaucratic structures that impede their effectiveness. INGOs grapple with the dual mandate of meeting regulatory demands while delivering aid and services efficiently (Brass et al., 2018). These demands encompass securing funding, complying with donor guidelines, and ensuring transparent financial practices. The bureaucratic complexity required by various stakeholders can divert resources from core activities and potentially hinder INGOs from responding rapidly to emergent crises (Banks et al., 2015). Dependence on government funding can lead INGOs to adopt excessively bureaucratic and formal approaches to comply with government programs and accounting requirements (Salamon & Toepler, 2015). Schmitz and Mitchell (2022) note that the bureaucratic nature of many INGOs can hinder innovation and responsiveness by slowing down decision-making, stifling creativity and innovation, and making INGOs less responsive to the needs of their beneficiaries. Additionally, the perception of excessively bureaucratic organizations has an adverse impact on their credibility. It discourages potential volunteers and supporters who prefer more direct and agile methods for addressing global challenges (Martin & Nolte, 2020). This managerial focus and project-based approach has led to a decline in INGOs' capacity for transformative impact (Banks, 2021).

One of the key challenges within INGOs is the need for more qualified leaders (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). The demanding nature of the work, limited resources, and lower salaries compared to other sectors make it difficult to attract and retain talented individuals (Do Adro & Leitão, 2020; Hailey & James, 2004). This shortage of leadership talent is exacerbated by the

chronic underinvestment in leadership development within INGOs (Hodges & Howieson, 2017) due to the pressures of maintaining low overhead costs (Mitchell et al., 2020). Poor or ineffective leadership is consistently mentioned as one of the primary constraints of INGO operations (Baiden & Book, 2022; Hodges & Howeison, 2017; Knox Clarke, 2013; Salem et al., 2019). There is also a sense among INGO leaders themselves that their existing leadership composition does not reflect the diverse staff of their organizations or the communities in which they work (Baiden & Book, 2022). Consequently, there is a pressing need to invest in leadership development to bridge this gap and equip INGOs with leaders who can navigate the intricate challenges of the sector.

Globalization

Globalization can be defined as the increasing interconnectedness and interdependence of the world's economies, cultures, and populations (Lee, 2010). This phenomenon manifests across three primary dimensions; political, economic, and cultural aspects. In the political realm, globalization involves the increased cooperation and coordination among governments and non-state actors on a global scale (D. Lewis, 2015). Economically, it pertains to the integration of national economies into a global network, often driven by trade, investment, and technological advancements (Nissanke & Thorbecke, 2006). Culturally, globalization encompasses the exchange and blending of ideas, values, and practices among diverse societies (Cacciatore et al., 2018).

Globalization forms the backdrop against which INGOs operate, and these organizations, in turn, significantly influence and shape the dynamics of the phenomenon (Mitchell et al., 2020; Schuller 2009). Some scholars have theorized that increased global connectivity has propelled the rise and proliferation of INGOs (Chimiak, 2014; Schuller, 2009). Lee (2010) identified a positive correlation between the number of INGOs operating within a country and its level of globalization. Lee’s findings indicate a symbiotic relationship between

globalization and INGOs, where each shapes and influences the other in a dynamic and evolving process.

Globalization has made cross-border operations easier for non-state actors, leading to an amplified role for INGOs and other entities in shaping development policy and practice (Chimiak, 2014). Banks (2021) highlights the pivotal role of INGOs as bridge-builders that connects and mediates between the global and the local. On the international stage, INGOs are positioned to significantly influence public discourse and narratives surrounding social, political, and economic issues (Brass et al., 2018; Kaloudis, 2017). As a result, INGOs play a crucial role in the dissemination and promotion of global norms, particularly in the areas of human rights, environmental protection, and social justice (Mitchell et al., 2020; Parthasarathy et al., 2021; Wong, 2012).

Globalization acts as a double-edged sword for INGOs, resulting in both positive and negative implications for the sector (D. Lewis, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2020; Schuller, 2009). While the growing interconnectedness of the world opens doors to a wider range of resources, it also heightens competition for those very resources (Mitchell et al., 2020). Global economic integration has contributed to economic growth that has resulted in prosperity for many. However, it has also led to economic inequalities that have exacerbated poverty for certain groups and regions (D. Lewis, 2015). The globalization of poverty and other social issues has resulted in unprecedented opportunities for INGOs, but has also significantly complicated their ability to make a meaningful difference (Urquhart et al., 2023; Mitchell et al., 2020). INGOs working in isolation often lack the resources, expertise, and reach to achieve lasting solutions due to the complexity of the issues they exist to address (Costumato, 2021; Head & Alford, 2015).

The complexity of globalized problems necessitates a globalized approach to solutions (Baiden & Book, 2022; Urquhart et al., 2023). The growing interdependence of countries and communities creates opportunities for INGOs to work with diverse stakeholders to address

global issues (Mitchell et al., 2020). Technological advancements in communication and travel have made it easier for INGOs to build collaborative networks and implement coordinated interventions (Saab et al., 2013). However, to be effective in the evolving global landscape, INGOs need to adopt new roles and organizational structures (Mitchell et al., 2020; Walton et al., 2016). Schmitz and Mitchell (2022) propose that INGOs could adopt new roles, such as transitioning from direct program implementation to mobilizing resources and strengthening the capacity of local organizations, embracing an iterative and experimental approach to development to foster innovation, and empowering marginalized groups by offering guidance and support to local communities to participate in shaping their own development.

Collaboration for Transformative Change

Driven by a multitude of systemic challenges within the INGO sector (Banks et al., 2015), transformative change is an emerging central concept in the context of INGOs. This type of change is characterized by profound and disruptive shifts that permeate various individual, organizational, community, or societal system dimensions (Brandt et al., 2019). The need for transformative change within the INGO sector is driven by the evolving nature of the challenges they face, changing stakeholder expectations, and the recognition of the limitations of traditional approaches in solving wicked problems (Banks, 2021). Recent academic critiques have emphasized the need for INGOs to adopt new roles and organizational structures to contribute effectively to social and political change in this new environment (Walton et al., 2016). While some suggest incremental changes (Mitlin et al., 2007), others advocate a radical departure from established INGO norms and structures (Banks & Hulme, 2012). One possibility is that NGOs assume the role of ‘bridge-building’ between various actors in society, such as government and business, to create a more inclusive and collaborative approach to development (Banks, 2021).

For transformative change to occur, INGOs must maintain a reputation of trust with many stakeholders (Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023). The INGO sector is under increasing scrutiny

for its perceived shortcomings in effectiveness, accountability, and legitimacy (Banks & Hulme, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2020). Critics have leveled accusations of perpetuating power imbalances, undermining local capacity, and failing to address the root causes of poverty and inequality (Banks et al., 2015; D. Lewis, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2020; Wright, 2012). The recent backlash against INGOs in countries across Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Dupuy et al., 2016; Mitchell et al., 2020; Walton et al., 2016) also indicates the compounding issues of trust that the sector is facing. These issues are closely linked to a longstanding concern that INGOs' values, structure, and accountability mechanisms have been gradually reshaped through prolonged donor engagement (Banks et al., 2015). INGOs do not always align their interests with the communities they serve, potentially leading to issues such as corruption or prioritizing personal gain over collective welfare (Schofer & Longhofer, 2020).

INGO leaders have acknowledged the imperative for change within their organizations and the sector and voiced their frustration regarding the challenges impeding this transformation (Baiden & Book, 2022). These challenges can arise from a complex interplay of internal and external stakeholders, presenting substantial barriers that can impede the adaptability of INGOs in response to changing environments (Mitchell et al., 2020). INGO stakeholders encompass a broad spectrum of actors, including beneficiaries, donors, local communities, governments, and the general public (Mercer, 2002). The imperative for transformative change within INGOs has become increasingly apparent due to the evolving expectations of these stakeholders (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). Donors increasingly demand that INGOs be more transparent and accountable for their use of funds (Watkins et al., 2012). Beneficiaries are demanding that INGOs be more responsive to their needs and that they involve them in the design and implementation of programs (Mitchell et al., 2020). Governments are demanding that INGOs be more aligned with their own development priorities and policies (Sumiyana et al., 2022; Dupuy et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the need for transformative change within the INGO sector is driven by the recognition of the limitations and criticisms of traditional approaches and systems, sometimes referred to as 'INGO architecture' (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). Often characterized as top-down, paternalistic, and unsustainable, these approaches have faced considerable criticism (Banks et al., 2015; Mercer, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2020; Wright, 2012) and underline the need for transformative change within the sector. These changes include being more responsive to the changing needs of stakeholders, building stronger relationships with local communities and other partners, and working in more integrated and collaborative ways to address the root causes of poverty and inequality (Baiden & Book, 2022).

INGOs are ideally positioned to play transformative roles in global governance by amplifying the voices of marginalized communities and advocating for policy changes at national and international levels (Martin & Nolte, 2019; Schmitz & Mitchell, 2016). However, the current operational architecture of TNGOs presents significant challenges for organizations striving to adopt more transformative roles (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). Without combining their historical foundations with modern strategies and innovative approaches, INGOs will struggle to address the root causes of poverty and inequality (Banks et al., 2015).

A noticeable disparity is emerging between the complex global challenges of today and the capabilities of INGOs (Mitchell et al., 2020). Often referred to as 'wicked problems,' these challenges are highly complex social or cultural issues that are exceptionally difficult to solve due to their intricate, interconnected nature, incomplete and often conflicting requirements, and a propensity to evolve over time (Costumato, 2021; Grint, 2008; Head, 2008; Head & Alford, 2015; Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Parthasarathy et al., 2021). Addressing these complex problems demands systemic transformation across economic, social, political, and technological systems involving numerous actors (Shrivastava, 2007). INGOs are well-positioned to address wicked problems due to their global reach, independence, mission orientation, and proximity to the disadvantaged (Parthasarathy et al., 2021). However, to realize their potential, they must

adapt and transform their strategies, structures, and processes, cultivating agility, innovation, and a collaborative ethos (Brandt et al., 2019).

The concept of transformative change is essential for tackling wicked problems because it is suited to address the complex and constantly evolving nature of these challenges (Grint, 2008). Global hunger, for example, is a multifaceted and persistent issue that demands more than incremental adjustments. As a wicked problem, it inherently resists resolution through isolated interventions, linear approaches, or singular solutions (Head, 2008; Head & Alford, 2015), therefore requiring a more dynamic approach. Transformative change in this context involves not only immediate efforts to provide food aid but also systemic shifts addressing the root causes of hunger, such as unequal distribution of resources, social inequalities, and unsustainable agricultural practices. Unlike isolated interventions or linear approaches, transformative change recognizes the interconnected nature of wicked problems (Costumato, 2021). It acknowledges that these issues are not isolated but manifestations of deeper systemic imbalances and inequities. Therefore, transformative change aims not only to alleviate the symptoms of wicked problems but to fundamentally alter the structures and dynamics giving rise to them (Shrivastava, 2007).

Collaboration has emerged as a key component of transformative change and an accepted strategy for addressing wicked problems (Costumato, 2021; Head & Alford, 2015). This is because no single organization or actor can achieve transformation on their own. Instead, transformation results from a two-way exchange between different actors, and the capacity and nature of these actors are shaped by the institutional terrain in which they operate (Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019). Through collaboration, INGOs can tap into collective expertise, resources, and perspectives from diverse stakeholders such as governments, corporations, local communities, and other NGOs (Gazley & Guo, 2020). Studies have indicated that a collaborative approach amplifies the potential for transformative change and ensures a more

inclusive and sustainable response to the multifaceted nature of global challenges (Costumato, 2021; Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019).

Organizations that are oriented towards collaboration are said to be structured in a way that prioritizes the realization and fulfillment of potential among their members (Eisler, 2007). In such organizations, relationships are built on mutual benefit, respect, caring, and accountability rather than competitive or fear-driven relationships where winners and losers must exist. Externally, interconnections between NGOs lead to the creation of a cooperative and mutually supportive environment (Henriques et al., 2021). This cooperation, in turn, enhances trust, legitimacy, and the overall strength of all actors within the network. Balboa (2014) notes that collaboration can be both a powerful tool for creating positive change and a potential source of tension and conflict. Leaders and organizations seeking to achieve transformative outcomes must recognize the importance of mediating between different actors, geographies, and approaches to social change in an increasingly integrated, complex, and diverse landscape (Banks et al., 2015).

Collaboration in INGOs

Collaboration has gained increased attention in INGOs, driven by the need to demonstrate impact, address wicked problems, and cater to the needs of diverse stakeholders (Chimiak, 2014; Macmillan & McLaren, 2012; Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019). Collaboration between INGOs and other actors is vital for international development, as it can leverage local understanding, promote local ownership, foster global solidarity, and enable access to resources and international networks (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). However, more research is needed to explore the dynamics, forms, and motivations of collaboration in the INGO sector (Boyer et al., 2019; Gazley & Guo, 2020; Zeimers et al., 2019).

Research has shown that INGOs who actively engage in collaboration with other entities are more likely to achieve greater impact and effectiveness in their interventions (Costumato, 2021; Gazley & Guo, 2020; Vangen & Huxham, 2005). Collaborative efforts enable INGOs to

leverage the diverse expertise, resources, and perspectives of partner organizations. This results in more innovative and comprehensive solutions to complex issues (Prakash & Gugerty, 2010). Through cooperative efforts, INGOs can maximize their collective impact, extend their reach to broader audiences, and foster sustainable change. INGOs are well-positioned to be connectors in social change ecosystems because they are able to bridge the gaps between different actors, perspectives, and levels of action (Banks et al., 2015). Collaborative partnerships involving INGOs, governments, and other stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of development interventions (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Ofem et al., 2018). However, the collaboration process is challenging. INGOs must adeptly navigate issues such as power dynamics, resource dependencies, and conflicting interests (Mitchell et al., 2020).

Levels of Collaboration. Collaboration refers to the process of working together, often across organizational or disciplinary boundaries, to achieve common goals or address shared challenges (Mitchell et al., 2015; Wood & Gray, 1991). It involves individuals or groups pooling their knowledge, expertise, resources, and efforts to achieve outcomes more significant than what could be accomplished individually (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Costumato, 2021; Mitchell, 2014). It often requires trust-building, open dialogue, and a willingness to share responsibilities and resources (Head, 2008). While research on intrasectoral and intersectoral collaboration is growing, there is a notable absence of standardized terminology for categorizing collaborative arrangements (Mitchell et al., 2020).

Some scholars have tried to introduce precise terminology to distinguish between different types of inter-organizational relationships and arrangements. For instance, Castañer and Oliveira (2020) propose a framework in which collaboration is conceptualized as the combination of coordination and cooperation. They define coordination as encompassing attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes related to the joint establishment of common goals; in contrast, cooperation pertains to attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes associated with the

execution of those jointly agreed-upon goals. Other scholars have focused on delineating the various forms of collaborative arrangements, which include partnerships, alliances, networks, coalitions, and mergers (Guo & Acar, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2020; Sapat et al., 2019; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021).

Collaborative arrangements can be categorized based on the degree of integration among participating organizations, which refers to the extent to which the participating organizations share resources, knowledge, and decision-making authority. (Mitchell et al., 2020). Guo and Acar (2005) described a spectrum of collaborative activities, with information sharing at the lowest level of integration and mergers at the highest. More integrated arrangements offer greater potential benefits, such as increased efficiency, reduced costs, and enhanced innovation (Macindoe & Sullivan, 2014). However, they also carry greater risks, such as conflict and the loss of autonomy (Mitchell et al., 2020).

Interorganizational collaboration involves partnerships between organizations to achieve common goals through shared resources and expertise (Salem et al., 2019; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). Collaborative arrangements between organizations can vary across a spectrum of forms and functions (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Keast et al., 2007; Mitchell et al., 2020). Keast et al. (2007) propose a continuum that describes different levels of collaboration, ranging from networking and coordination to cooperation and integration. This continuum highlights the varying degrees of interdependence and integration among individuals and organizations involved in collaboration. It delineates a spectrum of collaboration types, extending from fully fragmented to fully connected, to capture the varying degrees of integration and interconnectedness that INGOs establish with their partners. One of the gaps in the existing literature on nonprofit collaboration is the need for more attention to the forms and intensity of nonprofit collaboration (Gazley & Guo, 2020).

Collaboration intensity refers to the degree or level of collaboration between individuals or organizations. It measures the extent to which parties actively engage, cooperate, and work

together to achieve shared goals or outcomes (Wood & Gray, 1991). The degree of intensity is encompassed according to the frequency and depth of INGO interactions (Henriques et al., 2021). High collaboration intensity is often associated with increased information sharing, joint decision-making, and mutual support (Madon, 1999; McMahon, 2014). The degree of collaboration intensity is intricately linked to organizational structure and performance, making it a critical factor in assessing collaborative efforts (Mitchell, 2014).

Some scholars have noted the transformative potential of specific modes of collaboration. Banks et al. (2015) describe the transformative potential of INGOs if they assume a more collaborative role of bridge-building between diverse stakeholders. Transformative cooperation refers to a process that fosters an elevated level of cooperative ability, advances individuals to a superior stage of moral growth, and concurrently contributes to creating a more sustainable future for the world (Piderit et al., 2007). Cooperrider et al. (2007) emphasize that "new designs in transformative cooperation may represent the core human task and opportunity of the twenty-first century" (p. 421).

Intraorganizational Collaboration. Intraorganizational collaboration is the process by which different teams, departments, and individuals within the same organization work together (Salem et al., 2019). Collaboration within organizations primarily occurs at two levels: within the individual and across groups (Colbry et al., 2014). Interpersonal collaboration encompasses cooperative efforts and interactions among individuals within an organizational context. Colbry et al. (2014) have categorized interpersonal collaborative behavior into two broad dimensions: Individual First and Team First. Individual First behavior is characterized by a focus on individual goals and interests, while Team First behavior emphasizes the goals and interests of the team as a whole. The extent to which interpersonal collaboration occurs within an organization directly affects the organization's inclination to engage in collaboration beyond its borders (Heiss & Johnson, 2016).

Collaboration also occurs across distinct groups within the organization. Within organizations are subgroups that can develop distinct subgroup identities (Hogg et al., 2012; Salem et al., 2019). The greater the extent and significance of differences within these subgroups, the more likely individuals will align themselves with these subgroup identities (Hogg, 2015). This alignment, in turn, leads to heightened levels of tension and conflict between these subgroups. Hogg et al. (2012) stress the importance of cultivating a sense of subgroup identity that is defined by its relationships with other groups, which can help to facilitate collaboration. One study on collaboration between INGO subgroups found that cooperation between local and expatriate subgroups positively correlates with higher operational performance (Salem et al., 2019).

Interorganizational Collaboration. Extensive research has delved into nonprofit collaboration, spanning the spectrum from collaborations within the same sector to partnerships across multiple sectors (Gazley & Guo, 2015). Within INGOs, collaboration takes on diverse forms and operates at various levels, necessitating INGO leaders' astute awareness of both intraorganizational and inter-organizational dynamics. Intraorganizational collaboration entails cooperation among individuals or groups within the organization (Salem et al., 2019), while inter-organizational collaboration extends to collaborative efforts with external partners beyond the organization's boundaries (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021).

INGOs typically align with one of two primary collaborative orientations: the independent or interdependent collaboration styles (Mitchell, 2014). Independent INGOs tend to avoid collaborations with government actors and private businesses, often driven by their intent to maintain their outsider status and concerns regarding the integrity, efficiency, or competence of non-civil society organizations. Conversely, interdependent INGOs are more inclined to engage in collaborative endeavors with various actors, including governments, corporations, and international organizations, as a strategic approach to achieving their objectives more effectively. In contrast to INGOs that engage in broader intersectoral collaborations, those

primarily involved in intrasectoral collaborations tend to face fewer cultural barriers but are more prone to encountering challenges related to the operational competencies of their partners.

Interorganizational collaboration is increasingly common across for-profit and not-for-profit sectors (Kramer et al., 2019), driven by the recognition that complex challenges often necessitate collective efforts. Within INGOs, there is a notable preference for intrasectoral collaborations involving partnerships with other INGOs or civil society organizations operating within the same thematic area (Mitchell, 2014). INGOs prioritize intrasectoral collaborations due to shared missions, values, and contextual understanding. When INGOs engage in inter-organizational collaborations, they tend to select partners with similarities in attributes like organizational age, geographic region, North-South identity, and sources of legitimacy (Atouba & Shumate, 2015).

Studies have shown that INGOs tend to collaborate more frequently with other INGOs compared to collaborations with government or business entities (Atouba & Shumate, 2015; Brass et al., 2018; Gazley & Guo, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2015). This preference for INGO-INGO collaboration can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, INGOs often share similar goals, values, and missions, which makes collaboration with other INGOs more aligned and easier to achieve (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). Additionally, INGOs may face challenges collaborating with government agencies due to bureaucratic processes and differing priorities (Krueathep et al., 2010). Moreover, INGOs may find it more beneficial to collaborate with other INGOs as they possess specialized knowledge, expertise, and relevant resources (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). The literature also suggests that INGOs may have a stronger sense of trust and shared vision with other INGOs, which can facilitate collaboration (Glazer et al., 2019).

The literature on INGOs highlights a significant shift in their operational strategies, moving away from traditional direct project implementation towards collaborative approaches involving local non-governmental organizations or LNGOs (Brass et al., 2018; Elbers & Schulpen, 2010; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). Collaborating with LNGOs allows INGOs to tap into

local knowledge, expertise, and networks, which are crucial for effectively implementing development projects (Head, 2008; Smith, 2015; Tran, 2019). Secondly, empowering LNGOs is seen as vital for ensuring local ownership and the long-term sustainability of development initiatives (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). Collaborating with LNGOs not only enhances the legitimacy and credibility of INGOs through a commitment to local ownership and participation (Thomas et al., 2008) but also carries symbolic significance as expressions of global solidarity, further contributing to the legitimacy of INGOs (Elbers et al., 2014; Elbers & Schulpen, 2012). This shift underscores both a change in strategy and a heightened emphasis on fostering collaboration between INGOs and LNGOs in international development, reflecting a broader recognition of the value and importance of local actors in achieving sustainable development outcomes (Brass et al., 2018; Hogg et al., 2012; Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019).

Collaboration between INGOs and governmental entities has gained significant scholarly attention. Research highlights the evolution of local governments' perspectives, shifting from viewing partnerships with NGOs as optional to recognizing them as essential (Mitchell et al., 2015; Sumiyana et al., 2022). The literature underscores the positive impact of INGO-government collaborations, particularly in emerging economies, despite inherent challenges (Mitchell et al., 2015; Salamon & Toepler, 2015; Sumiyana et al., 2022). Additionally, the interplay between government funding and nonprofit partnerships reveals a dynamic relationship where government funding stimulates collaborative initiatives while nonprofit collaborations attract increased government support (Gazley & Guo, 2020). These collaborations, characterized by shifting perceptions and concerns among both NGOs and governments, remain persistently productive (Mitchell, 2014).

Collaborations between INGOs and businesses have become increasingly prominent, driven by a shifting corporate landscape emphasizing social responsibility (Mitchell et al., 2020). This shift has seen firms increasingly providing financial and other support to NGOs as a means to advance their social missions (Parthasarathy et al., 2021). Henriques et al. (2021) found that

NGOs with robust stakeholder interactions and trusting relationships are more likely to be seen as valuable partners by businesses aiming to bolster their corporate image within the community. They observed NGOs serving impoverished areas are more inclined to collaborate with businesses, while those operating in regions marked by higher levels of corruption are less likely to do so. Furthermore, as NGO size increases and attitudes toward business become more favorable, the odds of collaboration rise.

There has been a growing recognition of the need to strengthen collaboration between northern and southern NGOs (Davies, 2012; Elbers et al., 2014; D. Lewis, 2015; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021; Watkins et al., 2012). The terms northern NGOs and southern NGOs are used to distinguish between NGOs headquartered in developed countries and NGOs headquartered in developing countries, respectively (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). Historically, northern NGOs have more resources and visibility but are criticized for being paternalistic (Kaloudis, 2017; Walton et al., 2016), while southern NGOs are more locally rooted and accountable but face challenges in accessing funding and gaining visibility (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021).

According to Tran and AbouAssi (2021), Northern NGOs are shifting their strategies from direct implementation to collaboration with Southern LNGOs to leverage their complementary strengths for better development outcomes. Collaborative arrangements can involve Northern NGOs providing funding, technical assistance, and other resources and Southern NGOs leveraging their local knowledge, expertise, and community connections. However, these partnerships can involve power imbalances, with Northern NGOs sometimes dominating decision-making and setting the agenda for development work (Kalouids, 2017; Wright, 2012). Northern NGOs need to build partnerships with Southern NGOs based on equality and mutual respect to mitigate collaborative tensions (Tran & Abouassi, 2021).

Approaches to Collaboration

Collaboration is an increasingly important strategy for INGOs as they seek to innovate and address complex challenges (Chimiak, 2014; Macmillan & McLaren, 2012; Zapata Campos

& Hall, 2019). However, there is not one singular approach to collaboration. INGO leaders must carefully consider their organization's specific needs and goals when choosing a collaboration mode. Pisano and Verganti (2013) propose a framework for understanding and managing collaboration. They identify four fundamental collaboration modes, each distinguished by two key dimensions: openness and hierarchy. Openness refers to the extent to which participation in a collaboration is accessible or restricted, and hierarchy refers to the degree to which decision-making authority is centralized or distributed. Pisano and Verganti's four modes of collaboration include:

- Open, hierarchical: In this mode, the organization defines the problem and invites open participation to propose solutions. The organization ultimately selects the solution it believes is best.
- Open, flat: In this mode, anyone can define problems and propose solutions, and all participants have an equal say in decision-making.
- Closed, hierarchical: In this mode, a select group is invited to define problems and propose solutions, and a single participant or organization has the final say in decision-making.
- Closed, flat: In this mode, a select group works together to define problems and propose solutions, and all participants have an equal say in decision-making.

According to Pisano and Verganti (2013), each collaboration mode has its own set of trade-offs, and leaders must carefully consider which approach is best suited for the context of their collaboration.

Mitchell et al. (2020) propose another framework for understanding collaboration approaches, positing four primary types: reactive, speculative, opportunistic, and strategic. These approaches can be categorized based on two dimensions: the level of available information regarding the collaborative arrangement and the organization's time horizon, which represents the duration it considers when planning and deciding on collaborations. A reactive

approach is characterized by making quick decisions to address immediate needs without fully considering the long-term consequences. In this context, INGO leaders may find themselves compelled to engage in collaboration due to limited alternatives (Kaloudis, 2017). Transitioning from limited to extensive information can significantly enhance the likelihood of success of collaboration, enabling organizations to anticipate potential issues and be more opportunistic (Mitchell et al., 2020). A speculative approach to collaboration entails long-term consideration with limited information, such as working together to address a complex social issue without a clear solution. In contrast, a strategic collaboration is characterized by well-defined, long-term goals and extensive shared knowledge. Each approach requires different management strategies to achieve organizational goals.

Drivers of Collaboration

The INGO sector is experiencing increasing demands for enhanced collaboration due to several factors, including fragmentation, inefficiencies, and heightened competition (Mitchell et al., 2020). This fragmentation is characterized by numerous organizations working independently on similar or related problems, often resulting in duplicated efforts, inefficiencies, and limited collective impact. Consequently, many experts and stakeholders in the nonprofit sector argue that fostering collaboration is essential to address these challenges effectively (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). The organizational form is also a driver of collaboration. NGO size is a driver of collaboration, with larger NGOs being more likely to collaborate (Henriques et al., 2021).

One primary motivator for INGOs to collaborate is the desire to achieve better results or outcomes in their programs and projects (Mitchell & Schmitz, 2014). Leaders have indicated a positive perception of partnerships as a way to increase the scope and effectiveness of their efforts (Boyer et al., 2019). In other words, collaboration can help NGOs to achieve their goals more effectively and efficiently. Research has shown that INGOs with a higher propensity for collaboration tend to have a more significant impact on social and environmental issues

(Mitchell, 2013). Collaboration allows for sharing knowledge, best practices, and lessons learned, which can lead to improved program design, implementation, and evaluation (Madon, 1999). Through collaboration, INGOs can also enhance their capacity to respond to the diverse needs and contexts in which they operate (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). Collaboration enables INGOs to achieve greater scale and reach, as they can combine their efforts to have a broader and more significant impact on the communities they serve (Gazley & Guo, 2020; C. P. Lewis & Aldossari, 2022).

The literature suggests that resource access is also a significant driver for collaboration in INGOs (Guo & Acar, 2005; Henriques et al., 2021; Zeimers et al., 2019). The decision of nonprofit organizations to engage in collaboration with other entities is frequently attributed to resource inadequacy or instability (Guo & Acar, 2005). INGOs often collaborate with other organizations to gain access to resources such as funding, staff, and expertise (Zeimers et al., 2019). Additionally, Henriques et al. (2021) found that NGOs with more diversified funding sources are more likely to collaborate with businesses. Indicating that the type of resources INGOs have access to impacts what entities they are willing to collaborate with.

Obstacles to Collaboration

In a complex and challenging environment, INGOs increasingly recognize the imperative of forging collaborative networks to enhance their effectiveness (Brass et al., 2018; Elbers & Schulpen, 2010). Nevertheless, there are a multitude of challenges and hurdles that INGO leaders confront in their pursuit of collaboration. Saab et al. (2013) identified six barriers to effective inter-organizational coordination: “(1) bureaucratic barriers and turf-protection, (2) divergent goals and conflicting interests, (3) resource dependency, (4) competition for scarce resources, (5) information issues, and (6) assessing and planning joint activities” (p. 8). Similarly, Herman et al. (2012) shed light on the reservations expressed by INGO leaders regarding collaborative arrangements, including concerns about commitment, resource efficiency, power imbalances, and various forms of inequality in partnerships. Another study by

Mitchell (2014) revealed a broad spectrum of challenges faced by INGO leaders in collaboration, spanning divergent missions, complex management structures, potential funding reductions due to shared resources, transaction costs in terms of time and money, cultural disparities, apprehensions about loss of control, and a lack of confidence in prospective partners.

INGO leaders often cite mission incompatibility as a primary concern when discussing collaboration obstacles (Mitchell, 2014; Mitchell & Schmitz, 2014). INGO leaders are often hesitant to cultivate partnerships with entities that do not align with their mission, expressing reservations about potential organizational losses in terms of power, control, autonomy, credibility, reputation, or recognition (Mitchell et al., 2015). These concerns may stem from fears of mission drift or the perception that collaboration could imply the endorsement of practices or principles conflicting with their own. For example, an INGO with a strong Christian mission may be hesitant to collaborate with a secular government organization for fear that their religious donor base may perceive it as compromising their mission or values.

Leaders within INGOs often exhibit a strong commitment to preserving their organization's mission and principles (Mitchell & Schmitz, 2014). This unwavering dedication sometimes fosters a sense of exclusivity and reinforces an ‘us versus them’ mentality, which poses a considerable challenge during the decision-making process surrounding collaboration (Mitchell et al., 2020). This insular mindset is a challenge to the collaboration formation phase, the decision of organizations to collaborate. NGO leaders may question the worthiness of dedicating their valuable time to collaborative initiatives, harbor concerns about ceding control within a partnership, and grapple with doubts about the competencies of potential collaborators (Mitchell et al., 2015). These factors collectively contribute to the reluctance among INGO leaders to engage in collaborative endeavors.

Mitchell (2014) noted that collaborations with corporate and government entities, especially when driven by financial motives, risk undermining the perceived legitimacy of

INGOs. Effective collaboration between INGOs and government entities requires considerable effort and is a seriously resource-consuming activity (Head & Alford, 2015). One study of NGOs in Mexico found that receiving federal funding reduces the likelihood of collaboration with businesses (Henriques et al., 2021). The researchers suggest this may be because federal funding has more restrictions and regulations, making it more difficult for INGOs to collaborate with other entities, such as businesses. Martin and Nolte (2020) assert that INGOs that are more professionalized can be reluctant to collaborate with informal actors out of fear of harming their reputation or seeming less credible to their donors.

Theoretical Frameworks

Scholars have applied multiple theoretical perspectives to understand and explain INGO functions and collaboration (e.g., Guo & Acar, 2005; Heiss & Johnson, 2016; Henriques et al., 2021; Tran, 2020; Zeimers et al., 2019). Much of this research utilizes resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003), which focuses on how INGOs manage their external relationships and resource acquisition in a dynamic environment. Institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) offers valuable insights into how INGOs adapt to the normative and regulative pressures of their institutional environment, shedding light on issues of legitimacy and organizational isomorphism. Furthermore, stakeholder theory (Rowley, 1997) provides a lens through which to analyze how INGOs identify, engage with, and respond to the diverse stakeholders who influence or are affected by their operations. These theoretical perspectives collectively contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics that shape INGO collaborations, allowing researchers to delve into issues of resource allocation, organizational adaptation, and stakeholder engagement.

Institutional Theory

The influence of institutional theory on the study of INGOs and their collaborations is a prominent theme in the literature (see Atouba & Shumate, 2015; Guo & Acar, 2005; Mitchell, 2014; Ofem et al., 2018; Zeimers et al., 2019). This theory posits that organizations are shaped

by the norms, regulations, and values prevalent in their external environment (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). INGOs experience pressures to adhere to these norms and social expectations within the institutional environment in order to enhance their prospects for success (Guo & Acar, 2005). This theory suggests that external pressures drive organizations to conform to established rules, a process called isomorphism, fostering activities that enhance their legitimacy (Watkins et al., 2012; Zeimers et al., 2019). Institutional theory suggests that organizations are subject to three types of institutional pressures: coercive, normative, and mimetic (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

Coercive pressures occur when organizations are compelled to adopt specific structures or practices due to external pressures. For example, INGOs may collaborate to meet government regulations, legal requirements, or funding agencies that demand compliance with specific rules and standards (Guo & Acar, 2005). Organizations conform to these expectations to avoid penalties or maintain legitimacy. Normative isomorphism occurs when organizations adopt certain practices because they are considered the norm within their industry (Zeimers et al., 2019). Isomorphism can be seen in the collaboration between INGOs, where they may adopt similar practices and norms to work together effectively (Ofem et al., 2018; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). Mimetic isomorphism means that organizations imitate the practices of other successful organizations, particularly when they face uncertainty or lack clear guidance. They may mimic the strategies, structures, or behaviors of organizations they perceive as more successful or legitimate. This imitation is not always based on rational decision-making but can be driven by a desire to maintain legitimacy (Mitchell, 2014).

Resource Dependence Theory

Resource dependence theory describes how organizations depend on external resources to not only survive but also to achieve their objectives (Guo & Acar, 2005). According to this theory, INGOs are dependent on their environment for resources, such as funding, expertise, and legitimacy (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003). To acquire these resources, organizations

must adapt to the demands of their environment. The theory suggests that INGOs engage in strategic collaborations and partnerships to access these resources and reduce their dependence on any single source (Gazley & Guo, 2020). By forming alliances and networks, INGOs diversify their resource base, enhance their organizational capacity, and increase their effectiveness (Mitchell, 2014).

Within the literature, Guo and Acar (2005) highlight resource insufficiency as a driver for nonprofit organizations' inclination to collaborate. Yet, empirical findings by Gazley and Guo (2020) present a nuanced picture, revealing that greater resource sufficiency may lead to more formal types of collaborations. For example, one study found that financially vulnerable nonprofits are less prone to cross-sectoral collaborations, while reliance on government funding plays a significant role in nonprofit-government collaborations (MacIndoe & Sullivan, 2014). Mitchell (2014) notes the influence of resource dependence theory in exploring INGO collaborations, although it cautions against overemphasizing external factors and oversimplifying INGO collaborations.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory posits that organizations should take into account the concerns of all stakeholders, rather than solely focusing on shareholders (Rowley, 1997). In the context of INGOs, stakeholders may include the communities they serve, donors, volunteers, and other organizations (Brass et al., 2018; Guo & Acar, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2020). Stakeholder theory posits that by building trusting relationships with stakeholders, NGOs can also increase local capacity, encourage community involvement and trust, and broker information and credibility between different groups (Henriques et al., 2019). Mitchell and Calabrese (2023) highlight the importance of trust, collaboration, and transparency in INGO stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder theory emphasizes the need for INGOs to actively involve stakeholders in decision-making processes and to consider their perspectives and feedback (L. Lewis et al., 2010; Ofem et al., 2018).

Some studies have examined the dynamics of INGOs with various stakeholders. Tran & AbouAssi (2020) examined local organizational determinants of LNGO and INGO collaboration, highlighting the importance of stakeholder relationships in facilitating collaboration. They found that strong stakeholder relationships are crucial for successful collaboration in INGOs. An earlier study found that stakeholder collaboration significantly promotes effective network formation and collaboration among INGOs and government agencies (Krueathep et al., 2010). Mitchell et al. (2020) emphasize the importance of stakeholder engagement in times of change and uncertainty and highlight the need for leaders to have the skills to identify new issues and trends that may impact their stakeholders.

Leadership in INGOs

As discussed previously, the context in which INGO leadership is embedded is complex and multifaceted. INGOs are vulnerable to social, economic, and political fluctuations due to the dynamic and uncertain external environments in which they operate (Hopkins et al., 2014). Leaders are faced with the challenge of navigating external uncertainties while balancing internal challenges of effectively navigating their organizations' personnel, culture, and governance structures (Mitchell et al., 2020). A recent survey of INGO leaders revealed the mounting pressures they face, as well as the need for transformative change within the sector as a whole (Baiden & Book, 2022). The role of INGO leaders is pivotal in shaping the sector's response to these challenges and driving meaningful impact in an ever-evolving global landscape.

Hodges and Howieson (2017) found there is a lack of individuals with the necessary leadership abilities and expertise to lead and manage INGOs effectively. Additionally, Mitchell et al. (2020) suggest there is a shortage of guidance and information available in both academic and practical literature pertaining to INGO leadership, especially compared to the more established government and business sectors. Without sector-specific resources, INGOs often turn to the business sector for solutions. While there are some overlapping leadership qualities

across industries, such as adaptability and partnership management (Boyer et al., 2019), the distinctive context of INGOs necessitates unique skills and behaviors to ensure their effectiveness (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). Research by Hermann et al. (2012) underscores the multifaceted role of INGO leaders, requiring them to make strategic decisions, demonstrate adaptability, and foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders to fulfill their organizational missions. Mitchell et al. (2020) posit that INGO leaders must be able to continuously monitor the external landscape, pinpoint the most significant challenges, and convert them into practical tasks for the organization's members to act on.

INGO Leaders also must operate within a web of multiple stakeholder relationships, including beneficiaries, donors, volunteers, employees, government entities, partner organizations, and local communities (Boyer et al., 2019). Managing these diverse stakeholders is a critical aspect of leadership in INGOs, as it involves understanding and balancing the often conflicting expectations, needs, and interests of these various parties. Studies have shown that effective leadership in INGOs entails establishing collaborative relationships and meaningful interactions with followers and stakeholders (Hermann et al., 2012; Mufti et al., 2020). Moreover, leaders must be skilled in fostering collaboration and partnerships, as INGOs often rely on alliances with other organizations, both within and outside the sector, to achieve their missions (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Kearns et al., 2015).

Leadership Challenges

The challenges within INGO leadership are intimately tied to the challenges facing the broader INGO sector. INGO leaders must grapple with the tension between their sector's commitment to creating lasting, positive change and the constraints imposed by traditional ‘INGO architecture’ (Mitchell et al., 2020). This architecture includes the established norms, practices, and organizational structures that have long defined how INGOs operate (Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022). Consequently, INGO leaders often face the daunting task of balancing the sector's aspirational goals with the practical realities and constraints they must work within.

These constraints include the need to secure funding, meet donors' expectations, comply with regulations and risk management requirements, and navigate their organizations' internal governance structures (Baiden & Book, 2022).

One of the most pressing challenges facing INGO leaders is the underinvestment in leadership development, which has left a general deficit of relevant leadership skills (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). Leadership development is crucial for building the capacity of INGOs to attract and retain talented individuals, enhance organizational performance, and achieve long-term sustainability (Davies, 2012). Much of the sector has shown a reluctance to invest in leadership development, often perceiving such investments as conflicting with donor expectations for minimal overhead costs (Mitchell et al., 2020). Without adequate investment in leadership development, INGOs may struggle to develop a future talent pool of leaders to effectively guide organizations (Shiva & Suar, 2012).

INGO leaders also face the complex task of managing relationships with diverse stakeholders. They must cultivate donor relationships to secure funding, address the needs of marginalized beneficiaries, and manage internal staff dynamics (Knox Clarke, 2013). However, these different stakeholders often have different interests and priorities. For example, donors may be more interested in efficiency and accountability (Wright, 2012), while beneficiaries may be more interested in the quality of services and the impact on their lives (Banks et al., 2015). INGO leaders report that a major challenge is balancing the demands of different stakeholders (Baiden & Book, 2022). They also note the challenge of building trust and credibility with stakeholders, particularly when they may be seen as outsiders or have a history of mistrust. Mitchell and Calabrese (2023) suggest that INGOs that are more transparent and accountable to their stakeholders are more likely to manage their relationships with them successfully. Additionally, INGO leaders must manage partnerships with other organizations and entities (Banks, 2021; Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023). This intricate balancing act requires leaders to

prioritize and harmonize these often conflicting demands while preserving the organization's mission and values.

Despite the need to navigate various relationships in and outside their organizations, Mitchell et al. (2020) noted that INGO leaders often lack the political acumen to influence those in and outside their organizations. Leaders confront the demand to engage in collaborations within a deeply political landscape involving numerous diverse entities, which stands as a central leadership challenge in humanitarian contexts (Knox Clarke, 2013) and the broader sector. INGO leaders often exhibit noticeable gaps in the capacities needed to effectively navigate the external and internal politics of enhancing their organization's effectiveness and responsiveness (Mitchell et al., 2020). This entails comprehending and maneuvering through the political dynamics both within the organization and outside of its boundaries. INGO leaders are typically passionate about advancing their cause but may need more experience identifying sudden political opportunities, engaging with diverse audiences, and framing issues to resonate with skeptical stakeholders.

Leadership & Change

Currently, INGO leaders are actively seeking to redefine their purpose and adapt to the rapidly changing world (Baiden & Book, 2022). Adaptation requires INGOs to make fundamental changes to their internal culture and structures and adopt innovative approaches to address complex global challenges. To achieve such transformative measures, change leadership is a crucial skill for INGO leaders (Mitchell et al., 2020). Leaders within nonprofit organizations play a pivotal role in fostering, inspiring, and motivating employees to innovate and drive changes that contribute to the organization's growth and future success (Guo & Acar, 2005; Mufti et al., 2019).

One study of leadership in interorganizational collaboration found that change leadership behavior was dominant in the early stages of collaboration formation (Kramer et al., 2019). During these early phases, leaders focused on developing shared goals and a vision and

championing the changes needed for the organization to achieve its objectives. INGO leaders rely on a mixture of technical, interpersonal, and conceptual skills to guide the change process and effectively execute their leadership roles (Kearns et al., 2015). Interpersonal skills, such as communication and trust building, are particularly important for successful INGO leaders, especially in their formal roles and functions.

Collaboration & Leadership

INGOs increasingly embrace collaborative endeavors such as multi-stakeholder partnerships, participatory governance, inter-organizational networks, coalitions, and alliances as they seek to enhance their collective impact (Emerson et al., 2012; Gazley & Guo, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2015). Consequently, leaders within these organizations are confronted with the evolving task of managing more collaborative, egalitarian relationships among their members and affiliates (Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023; Mitchell et al., 2020). The growing need for collaboration has attracted scholarly attention, focusing on identifying effective leadership practices in these collaborative landscapes.

Empirical studies have underscored the significance of leadership in INGOs, emphasizing the establishment of constructive relationships and meaningful engagements with followers and stakeholders (Hermann et al., 2012; Mufti et al., 2020). Nevertheless, a notable gap exists in understanding the specific leadership approaches adopted within collaborative contexts with other organizations. Boyer et al. (2019) noted that empirical research concerning leadership in nonprofit collaborations remains limited. However, one study has identified several crucial leadership skills and attributes for effective collaboration, including communication, problem-solving, negotiation, flexibility, and trustworthiness (Costumato, 2021). In contrast, substantive and technical skills are gradually becoming less pivotal in collaborative settings (O'Leary et al., 2012).

Leadership Perspectives

The extensive body of literature on leadership generally falls into several major categories, including leadership traits, leadership styles, leadership tasks, and leadership skills (Northouse, 2022). Howieson and Hodges (2014) proposed a framework for understanding different leadership approaches by grouping them into three conceptual perspectives: leadership models, leadership philosophies, and leadership styles. Leadership models involve theories designed to clarify effective leadership, such as the concept of transformational leadership (Bass, 1990). Leadership philosophies, on the other hand, delve into the value-based ideals that underpin leadership, exemplified by concepts like servant leadership (see Greenleaf, 1977). Lastly, leadership styles serve to categorize the predominant behavioral patterns exhibited by real-world leaders, including approaches like collaborative leadership (Howieson & Hoges, 2014).

Macmillan and McLaren (2012) emphasize that the changing dynamics within the sector have made the question of leadership notably important and warrant examination. Scholarship and research specifically investigating leadership within INGOs is limited (Mitchell et al., 2020). As a result, there is a tendency to look at the business sector for leadership solutions. However, Hodges and Howieson (2017) assert that transplanting leadership ideas directly from the business world into nonprofit organizations is insufficient. Instead, these concepts must be thoughtfully adapted to align with the distinctive culture and values inherent to the nonprofit sector. While drawing on leadership theories from other sectors can offer insights, their effectiveness in nonprofit settings hinges on their customization to suit the unique context of nonprofits**.**

An important element of INGO leadership is the key responsibilities that define the roles of leaders in INGOs. Kearns et al. (2015) discerned seven core tasks for nonprofit leaders: aligning with the organization's mission, overseeing operations, cultivating resources, managing finances, nurturing board relationships, setting goals, and handling external relations. In a

survey within the sector, leaders articulated their primary duties as safeguarding the organization's reputation, upholding ethical standards, inspiring team members, and fostering a positive work environment (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). Kirchner (2007) delineated three fundamental responsibilities of nonprofit chief executives: overseeing governance, mobilizing resources, ensuring efficient organizational operations, and serving as representatives of their organizations.

INGO Leaders utilize a variety of skills to accomplish their tasks and mandates (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Kearns et al., 2015; Knox Clarke, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2020). Katz (1955), who created one of the earliest frameworks for managerial skills, identified three broad sets of leadership skills: technical skills, interpersonal skills, and conceptual skills. One study examining the application of these skills among nonprofit leaders reveals a distinctive emphasis on interpersonal skills, including effective communication with diverse audiences, trust-building, and consensus-building (Kearns et al., 2015). Hodges and Howieson (2017) identified self-awareness, self-regulation, and innovation as key skills utilized by nonprofit leaders. Within the humanitarian context, Knox Clarke (2013) notes that leadership involves providing a clear vision and objectives, building a consensus around that vision and objectives, and finding ways of collectively realizing the vision for the beneficiaries.

Another critical skill required of INGO leaders is the ability to collaborate with a diverse set of stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 2020; Zeimers et al., 2019). These skills include the ability to effectively communicate, persuade, mediate, and build trust in themselves and in the organization they represent (Kearns et al., 2015). Additionally, leaders must maintain a vigilant watch over the external landscape, identifying key issues and translating these insights into actionable directives for their organizations (Mitchell et al., 2020). Echoing these sentiments, Hopkins et al. (2014) assert that “[INGO leaders] now must be adept at connecting and weaving relationships within the agency and across boundaries in the community, engaging in continuous learning, experimenting, risk-taking, collaborating, integrating change, being creative

with limited resources, fostering an adaptive organizational culture, and inspiring, facilitating, and supporting agency and community members to do the same" (p. 421).

The literature examining leadership in INGOs reveals a spectrum of approaches (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Hogg et al., 2012; Knox Clarke, 2013; Mitchell, 2015). Hodges and Howieson (2017) propose that leadership is fundamentally an approach rooted in an organization's reputation, ethics, its people, and the surrounding environment. Knox Clarke (2013) contributes to the discourse by identifying three distinct approaches to leadership within humanitarian organizations, a subset of INGOs. These approaches include the 'exceptional-individual' approach, which emphasizes the personal qualities and abilities of the individual; the structured approach, which emphasizes clearly defined leadership roles and structures; and the shared leadership approach, which advocates for collective leadership and decision-making.

The 'exceptional-individual' form of leadership, often characterized as 'heroic leadership,' aligns with traditional leadership paradigms rooted in a conventional understanding of leadership dynamics (Knox Clarke, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2020). In such paradigms, leadership typically follows a "top-down" model, where leaders wield authority and influence to shape the vision and values of their followers in pursuit of predefined goals (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). Heroic leadership is epitomized by an exceptional individual who holds a prominent position within the organization or group (Apostu, 2013). In this context, leadership is centralized, and the individual serves as the driving force behind decision-making and strategy development, with their vision and values serving as guiding principles for the entire team (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). Research by Knox Clarke (2013) highlights the prevalence of heroic leadership, particularly within the humanitarian subsector of INGOs.

Transformational leadership, another approach gaining traction within INGOs (Shiva & Suar, 2012), involves an exceptional form of influence that inspires followers to achieve beyond expectations (Bass, 1990). This leadership style is characterized by four key components: idealized influence (charisma and role modeling), inspirational motivation, intellectual

stimulation, and individualized consideration. Research suggests that transformational leadership in NGOs can positively affect employee work outcomes, such as increased work engagement and job satisfaction (Mufti et al., 2020). One study found that INGO leaders who exhibited transformational leadership qualities were effective in inspiring and motivating individuals within the organization to see that things could be improved or changed for the better (Kramer et al., 2019). Shiva and Suar (2012) suggest that employing a transformational leadership approach within INGOS can enhance their effectiveness, employee satisfaction, and service delivery.

Another leadership perspective, intergroup leadership, is particularly relevant in complex organizations with diverse subgroups (Hogg et al., 2012). INGOs are typically composed of a wide range of distinct subgroups, including local and international staff, multiple offices or departments, volunteers, partner organizations, and beneficiaries. Individuals are more likely to identify with their subgroup when the differences between subgroups are greater and more important (Hogg, 2015). When strong subgroup identities prevent the establishment of a shared group identity, successful intergroup relations depend on individuals defining themselves based on their subgroup's interactions with other related subgroups (Rast et al., 2018). In this context, effective leaders must help cultivate an intergroup relational identity that emphasizes collaboration and avoids the loss of any particular subgroup identity (Hogg, 2015). Intergroup relational identity is when a group member’s sense of self is defined by subgroup members' connections with other subgroups rather than their subgroup's qualities (Hogg et al., 2012). Through intergroup leadership, members of all subgroups see cooperative relations as a core part of their identity (Ernst & Yip, 2009). Salem et al. (2019) observed that leaders adopting an intergroup leadership style were linked to greater cooperation among local and expatriate subgroups, leading to improved operational performance.

Other literature highlights a shift from a traditional focus on individual leaders to a more collective and shared approach to organizational leadership (Hopkins et al., 2014; Knox Clarke,

2013; Kramer et al., 2019; Mumbi & Obembe, 2021). This evolving perspective on collective leadership encourages individuals to unite within their respective organizations and across organizational boundaries, fostering collaborative endeavors to address complex challenges and pioneer innovative solutions (Hopkins et al., 2014). Leadership in this context is seen as a collective responsibility, with interactions between leaders and followers taking precedence over individual actions (Hodges, 2016).

Shared leadership does not negate the role of individual leaders but demands a distinct skill set, emphasizing the importance of facilitation and collaboration (Knox Clarke, 2013). These findings signify a paradigm shift in leadership philosophy, emphasizing collaboration, diverse perspectives, consensus-building, and facilitation (Hermann & Pagé, 2016). While leaders may intellectually embrace shared leadership, there can be emotional ambivalence when attempting to implement it (Knox Clarke, 2013). Despite the challenges, shared leadership can lead to more creative and innovative solutions, better decision-making, and increased employee engagement (Hermann & Pagé, 2016; Knox Clarke, 2013).

Analysis of Literature

The existing literature on INGO collaboration reveals several emerging themes. Collaboration is increasingly recognized as essential for INGOs to achieve their goals and make a transformative impact (Chimiak, 2014; Gazley & Guo, 2020; Macmillan & McLaren, 2012; Zapata Campos & Hall, 2019). By working together, INGOs can pool resources, share expertise, and leverage their collective influence to achieve their missions and goals (Mitchell et al., 2015). However, collaboration can be challenging, particularly in complex and uncertain environments (Dykstra-Devette, 2022; Tran & Abouassi, 2021). INGO leaders play a critical role in fostering collaboration, both within and beyond organizational boundaries (Mitchell et al., 2020; Zeimers et al., 2019).

Despite strong interest in collaboration within the INGO sector, there is a need for a more comprehensive understanding of its nature and function, its complex processes, and how

to measure its performance, value, benefits, and costs (Gazley & Guo, 2020). Tran (2020) notes that studies of INGO collaboration have traditionally focused on their external interactions, with less attention paid to their internal characteristics (Tran, 2021). As a result, the literature often lacks specificity regarding the contextual factors that influence collaboration and leadership in different INGO settings. These organizations operate in a wide range of subsectors, from humanitarian aid to environmental conservation (Banks et al., 2020; Lee, 2010), and they engage with an array of stakeholders, including governments, corporations, local communities, and other NGOs (Brass et al., 2018). Minimal research has explored comparisons of collaborative activity under various conditions, across different sectors, and in diverse geographic contexts (Gazley & Guo, 2020). A more nuanced understanding of how collaboration and leadership strategies vary across sectors, regions, and organizational sizes is vital for developing tailored approaches to address the specific needs and challenges INGOs face.

Leaders are critical to the success of INGOs, yet there needs to be more research on how they understand and use the skills necessary for effective leadership in collaborative settings (Boyer et al., 2019; Hermann et al., 2012; Kearns et al., 2015). Additionally, Brandt et al. (2019) note the scarcity of studies on transformational change processes. Transformational change represents a fundamental goal for many INGOs striving to make a lasting impact in their areas of operation (Baiden & Book, 2022), highlighting the need for more research on the leadership approaches in INGOs that are most effective in collaborative settings to bring about transformative change.

Furthermore, the literature often emphasizes the positive aspects of collaboration without sufficiently addressing potential pitfalls, conflicts, and failures (Brass et al., 2018; Schofer & Longhofer, 2020). Collaborative efforts often fail, but understanding of these failures is limited due to the lack of research on the topic and the publication bias against null results (Brass et al., 2018; Gazley & Guo, 2020). Understanding why collaborations may falter or

encounter difficulties is vital for guiding INGO leaders in making informed decisions about when and how to engage in partnerships.

Given the importance of INGO collaboration and leadership, it is essential to address the gaps in research in this area. INGOs convene a diverse array of actors, including governments, businesses, and other nonprofit organizations, to work collaboratively towards common goals. Further research is needed to understand the leadership approaches that are most effective in collaborative settings, as well as the factors that contribute to successful and sustainable INGO collaborations. The research within this study can inform the development of leadership approaches, training programs, and other resources to support INGO leaders and their collaborative efforts.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the literature related to how leaders within International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) foster transformative collaboration. Leadership within INGOs operates within a distinct context marked by sector-specific norms and organizational cultures (Brass et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2020; Vijfeijken, 2019). These shared attributes, including mission-driven cultures (Mitchell et al., 2015; Shiva & Suar, 2012), the challenges of operating in uncertain environments (MacIndoe & Sullivan, 2014; Salem et al., 2019), and the intricate web of stakeholder relationships (Henriques et al., 2021; Tran & AbouAssi, 2020), significantly influence how leaders nurture collaboration both within and beyond their organizational boundaries. INGOs are under increasing pressure to bridge the gap between their stated objectives and practical actions, particularly in the face of mounting challenges and the imperative to address complex global issues (Mitchell et al., 2020; Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022).

Central to this discussion is the theme of collaboration for transformative change. The need for transformative change within the INGO sector is driven by the evolving nature of the challenges they face (Banks, 2021), changing stakeholder expectations (Schmitz & Mitchell,

2022), and the recognition of the limitations of traditional approaches in solving wicked problems (Martin & Nolte, 2020). Collaboration has emerged as an accepted strategy for addressing complex challenges and fostering transformative change (Costumato, 2021; Head & Alford, 2015). Collaboration is a dynamic process with varying forms and intensities (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2020). INGO leaders foster collaborative relationships on varying levels, including intraorganizational, intrasectoral, and intersectoral (Colbry et al., 2014; Salem et al., 2019; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). Leaders must navigate relationships with diverse stakeholders to access the transformative potential of collaboration (Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023; Urquhart et al., 2023).

Scholars have proposed several theoretical frameworks that provide a foundation for understanding the functioning and collaboration of INGOs (e.g., Guo & Acar, 2005; Heiss & Johnson, 2016; Henriques et al., 2021; Tran, 2020; Zeimers et al., 2019). Resource Dependence Theory, for instance, suggests that collaboration is employed as a strategic approach to secure essential resources vital for the organization's operations (Gazley & Guo, 2020). Institutional theory implies that INGOs engage in collaboration to adhere to established norms and conventions within the sector (Zeimers et al., 2019). In contrast, Stakeholder theory underscores the significance of considering all stakeholders' interests and concerns in the collaborative process (Henriques et al., 2019). These theories serve as foundational pillars in understanding the dynamics of INGOs, their collaborations, and the leadership required to navigate these complex environments.

Lastly, this chapter examines leadership INGOs, emphasizing the unique challenges and multifaceted context in which INGO leaders operate. There is a scarcity of sector-specific leadership guidance, a need to balance the interests of various stakeholders, and the importance of collaboration and adaptability (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2020). The literature explores different leadership approaches, including traditional (Hodges & Howieson, 2017), transformational (Mufti et al., 2020), intergroup (Salem et al., 2019), and

shared leadership (Hopkins et al., 2014), each tailored to INGOs' distinct requirements. Effective leadership in INGOs demands skills such as collaboration, political acumen, and the ability to address conflicting stakeholder interests while upholding the organization's mission and values (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Kearns et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2020; Zeimers et al., 2019). By weaving together these elements, the chapter offers a comprehensive understanding of how leaders in INGOs navigate the complex terrain of transformative collaboration, ultimately contributing to the fulfillment of their missions and the positive impact on global challenges.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology developed to explore best practices in INGO leadership for fostering collaboration and driving transformative change. It begins with a restatement of the research questions and an overview of the qualitative research methodology. A justification for the chosen phenomenological research approach is also provided. The subsequent section examines the study's design, which outlines the unit of analysis, target population, sample size, participant selection process, sampling frame, and inclusion/exclusion criteria. An overview of the steps taken to protect participants' rights according to Pepperdine's Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements. Additionally, it covers the methods used for data collection, including interview techniques and protocol. Finally, the chapter addresses potential researcher bias, planned data analysis strategies, and measures taken to ensure data reliability and validity.

Re-Statement of Research Questions

The following research questions (RQ) were used in this study.

- *RQ1*: What strategies and best practices are employed by organizational leaders in International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGO) to foster collaboration for transformative change?
- *RQ2:* What challenges do organizational leaders face in INGOs when implementing the strategies and practices employed to foster collaboration for transformative change?
- *RQ3:* How do organizational leaders in INGOs measure the success of collaboration for transformative change initiatives?
- *RQ4:* What recommendations would organizational leaders in INGOs have for future practitioners entering the field to foster collaboration for transformative change?

Nature of the Study

A qualitative research approach was used to address the established research questions. Qualitative inquiry is a distinct approach from quantitative research, which predominantly deals with numerical data and statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014). In contrast, Qualitative inquiry uses descriptive data, such as words, images, and observations to understand the subjective aspects of social or human phenomena (Creswell, 2013). This approach is commonly used to investigate complex phenomena that cannot be easily measured, such as people's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

There is a general agreement on the basic characteristics of qualitative research (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). These characteristics include:

- Qualitative research is often carried out in a natural setting, facilitating close interaction with the individuals and environments under examination.
- The researcher often functions as the primary instrument for data collection.
- Qualitative research often uses various methods to gather and analyze data, such as interviews, observations, and analyzing documents.
- Qualitative research involves inductive and deductive reasoning as the researcher alternates between the data and the research questions. This type of analysis requires complex reasoning skills throughout the process.
- Qualitative research is often focused on understanding the perspectives, meanings, and subjective experiences of the people involved in the research.
- Qualitative research frequently features a flexible and evolving research design rather than a strictly predefined one. The approach may change and adapt throughout each phase of the process.
- Qualitative research often involves reflection and interpretation and takes into account the researcher's own biographies and social identities.

- Qualitative research is often focused on constructing a comprehensive understanding of the research problem rather than reducing it to simple categories or variables.

Assumptions of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a dynamic field that includes a wide range of perspectives and methodologies. Researchers and scholars draw on their philosophical beliefs and worldviews to shape their approaches to qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2014). These philosophical underpinnings impact every aspect of the research process, from question formulation to data interpretation (Bleiker et al., 2019).

Creswell (2013) identifies four fundamental philosophical assumptions within qualitative inquiry. The first revolves around ontological beliefs, suggesting that reality is subjective and can be grasped by exploring the experiences and insights of those directly involved. The second, epistemological in nature, posits that knowledge is subjective and context-dependent, with researchers acquiring it through active engagement with their study subjects. The axiological assumption, the third pillar, underscores the integral role of the researcher's values and ethics in the research process, advocating transparency and ongoing reflection. Lastly, the methodological assumption highlights the need for flexible and context-driven methods and techniques tailored to the specific research questions and the unique research setting.

Weaknesses of Qualitative Research

Although qualitative research presents various advantages, it has limitations, as pointed out in the literature (Creswell, 2013; Rahman, 2016; Sale & Thielke, 2018; Silverman, 2010). Some critics contend that it lacks the rigor and objectivity typically associated with quantitative research (Sale & Thielke, 2018). Other limitations of qualitative research include its resource-intensive and time-consuming nature, involving extensive fieldwork, data collection, and analysis (Creswell, 2013). Silverman (2010) argues that qualitative research may emphasize meanings and experiences but could neglect contextual sensitivities, potentially leading to an incomplete understanding of the studied phenomenon. Additionally, qualitative research studies

often have smaller sample sizes, which can limit their generalizability to broader populations (Rahman, 2016).

Strengths of Qualitative Research

Despite its limitations, qualitative research remains a valuable approach for capturing the complex and nuanced experiences of human beings, particularly in the context of leadership in INGOs. Qualitative methodologies allow flexibility and adaptation throughout the research process, enabling the discovery of unexpected insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As Klenke et al. (2019) note, qualitative research is well-suited for answering "why" questions about leadership by exploring the underlying motivations, reasons, and contexts that drive leadership behaviors. Ultimately, qualitative research can offer a deeper and more authentic understanding of subjects or phenomena and provide relevant and practical findings rather than overly theoretical or abstract (Steiner, 2015).

Methodology

Qualitative inquiry encompasses a range of approaches that researchers can employ to investigate and interpret various social phenomena. This study specifically uses phenomenology in its examination of the shared experiences of INGO leaders related to collaboration. Phenomenology is a group of qualitative research methodologies as well as a philosophical ideology. It finds its roots in the works of Husserl (1977), regarded as the founding figure of phenomenology, and his student Heidegger, who substantially expanded the conceptual framework (Emiliussen et al., 2021). At its core, phenomenology delves into the study of phenomena, the appearances of things as they manifest in our lived experiences, and their meanings within those experiences (Sheets-Johnstone, 2017). A key aspect of the phenomenological approach is its emphasis on intentionality, wherein experiences are inherently directed through their content and meaning toward specific objects in the world (Van Manen, 2016).

Structured Process of Phenomenology

Phenomenological research adheres to a rigorous and systematic three-phase process: phenomenological reduction, description, and the search for essence (Giorgi, 2009). Phenomenological research begins with identifying a research problem suitable for this approach, which most often involves exploring the commonalities of experiences of a phenomenon (Cresswell, 2013). The researcher then identifies a relevant phenomenon, and outlines their core philosophical assumptions regarding that phenomenon. This step is known as *epoche* or *phenomenological reduction*, where the researcher sets aside preconceived ideas and biases (Klenke et al., 2016). This means temporarily downplaying prior knowledge through a process known as *bracketing*, which creates space for the phenomenon under study to reveal itself fully in its specific context (Giorgi, 2009).

In the next phase, data is gathered from individuals who have directly experienced the particular phenomenon being studied. This is often done through in-depth interviews (Bevan, 2014). The researcher then constructs a comprehensive description that captures both the *what* and the *how* of these shared experiences (Creswell, 2013). This description aims to convey not only what the participants went through but also how they went through it, providing a deeper insight into how these individuals perceive the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Following data collection, Moustakas (1994) developed a well-structured set of procedures for analyzing phenomenological data. Researchers identify all the significant statements participants made about the phenomenon of interest. These statements are categorized into themes, which are also referred to as horizons (Moustakas, 1994). The identified statements and themes are used to construct a depiction of participants' experiences and to describe the context that shaped their experience (Creswell, 2013).

In the final phase, the researcher combines the narrative descriptions to create a comprehensive account of the phenomenon, known as its essence (Creswell, 2013). This essence captures the commonalities in participants' experiences, revealing a fundamental

structure shared across them. This phase aims to provide the researcher with an in-depth understanding of what it is like to experience the phenomenon, encompassing shared elements and individual viewpoints.

Appropriateness of Phenomenology

Phenomenology is well-suited for uncovering the underlying motivations, reasons, and contexts that drive leadership behaviors, making it a valuable tool for understanding the 'why' behind their actions (Van Manen, 2016). This study's main goal is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of INGO leaders in fostering collaboration for transformative change. Phenomenology is a particularly useful research approach for this study because it allows for an exploration of the multifaceted, subjective perspectives of INGO leaders.

Phenomenology can help researchers to understand the subjective experiences of leaders and followers and to identify the factors that influence their perceptions and behaviors (Klenke et al., 2016). By using phenomenology to study the experiences of INGO leaders in fostering collaboration for transformative change, one can gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. This understanding can be used to develop new theories and frameworks for supporting this work, to design practical training and support programs for INGO leaders, and to advocate for the importance of this work to policymakers and other stakeholders.

Weaknesses of Phenomenology

While phenomenological research offers valuable insights into subjective experiences, it faces several limitations. The subjective nature of phenomenology, which focuses on individual experiences, could lead to biased interpretations and restrict the applicability of findings to larger populations (Creswell, 2014; Giorgi, 1997). Additionally, the open-ended nature of phenomenological research poses challenges in maintaining methodological integrity and transparency (Moustakas, 1994). Lastly, The lack of standardized procedures for collecting and analyzing data can contribute to inconsistencies and difficulties in replicating studies

(Emiliussen et al., 2021). As a result, it is important to implement measures such as triangulation, standardized procedures, and reflexivity to enhance trustworthiness, rigor, and transparency in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2013; Van Manen, 2016).

Research Design

Defining the study's context and design is vital for effectively addressing the research questions. This involves a comprehensive examination of key elements such as the analysis unit, population, and sample size. Furthermore, it is important to establish the sampling method and criteria for inclusion and exclusion. Each of these factors is addressed in the following section.

Unit of Analysis

This study's primary analysis unit is the individual participant, with each participant being carefully selected based on specific qualifications that make their experience relevant for investigation (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, the research focuses on a leader within an INGO holding a director level position or higher. The leader must work for an organization actively engaged in operations spanning at least two different countries to be included in the research.

Population

The population denotes the broader group of individuals who are the primary focus of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study's sample was drawn from this population. For this research, the population of interest encompassed country directors and other high-ranking leaders within INGOs headquartered in the United States and actively engaged in development operations or humanitarian assistance within developing countries or regions outside the US.

Sample Size

In a phenomenological study, establishing a sufficient sample size requires balancing the need for a large enough sample to grasp the phenomenon being studied while also ensuring in-depth accounts for data analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Unlike quantitative research,

where larger sample sizes are often preferred for generalizability, phenomenological research prioritizes depth over breadth, often resulting in smaller sample sizes (Creswell, 2014). Researchers must consider the complexity of the phenomenon and the desired depth of understanding when determining the sample size. An overly large sample can dilute the depth of analysis, while a tiny sample may limit the diversity of experiences and insights (Creswell, 2013). Ultimately, the sample size should align with the research objectives and the goal of data saturation.

While general guidelines suggest a sample size of around 30 to approximate a normal distribution (Guthrie, 2010), the unique nature of phenomenological research allows for flexibility. Bertaux (1981) proposed that a minimum of 15 participants is acceptable for qualitative research. However, Creswell (2013) has observed that sample sizes in phenomenological research can vary significantly, from as few as one to over 300 participants. There is a growing consensus, supported by Bernard (2013), that a relatively modest sample of 10-20 key research participants suffices for uncovering and comprehending the core issues within studies of lived experiences. Creswell (2013) suggests that suitable sample size for phenomenological research ranges from three to 25 participants, and Polkinghorne (1989) recommends a sample size ranging from five to 25, emphasizing the adaptability of sample sizes in phenomenological inquiries.

In this study, the researcher initially targeted a purposive sample of 20-25 participants, with the goal of conducting interviews with 15 participants. This sample size is consistent with standard practices in phenomenological research, where the goal is to reach data saturation, which occurs when no new information emerges from the data. The sample size is broad enough to identify a diverse range of experiences and perspectives, enabling a thorough exploration of INGO leaders' experiences in fostering collaboration.

Purposive Sampling

This study utilized purposive sampling, a nonprobability method common in qualitative research. Purposive sampling involves researchers selecting individuals they believe will provide valuable insights based on their knowledge of the population rather than striving for unbiased representation through random selection (Patten & Newhart, 2018). This approach is rooted in the premise that the researcher's goal is to uncover profound insights, requiring the selection of a sample from which the most valuable knowledge can be extracted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to optimize the application of the phenomenological approach, specific criteria for participant selection was established to ensure alignment with the typical characteristics of the phenomenon under investigation while avoiding extremes or outliers (Boeije, 2010).

Participant Selection

In conducting this phenomenological study, it is imperative to select participants who have directly experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2013). A systematic process was followed to arrive at the final list of INGO leaders participating in the study. The first step involved constructing a comprehensive master list of potential participants. Next, the master list was reviewed and eligible participants were identified based on specific criteria for inclusion and exclusion. The selection process also involved the application of criteria aimed at achieving maximum variation, ultimately resulting in an initial sample of 20-25 potential participants. The main goal was to conduct detailed interviews with 15 selected individuals who represent a range of perspectives and experiences.

Sampling Frame. A master list of participants was created using the Charity Navigator website. Charity Navigator provides information and evaluates charitable organizations' performance and financial health in the United States. Using the Charity Finder tool, a search was conducted of all 501c3 organizations labeled under “international development” with a four-star rating from Charity Navigator. From the initial list generated, the results were stratified

according to size (e.g., small-sized, medium-sized, large-sized, and super-sized). The top 15 rated organizations from each category were recorded. Each organization's website was reviewed to confirm it operates in at least two countries. A final list of qualifying organizations was created using an Excel spreadsheet. Next, a review of each organization's website was conducted to identify members of leadership who may qualify as potential participants. Where available, relevant biographical information was noted.

Criteria for Inclusion. The inclusion criteria for participation in the study are as follows:

- works for a US-based INGO operating in at least one other country
- occupies a position of Director or higher within the INGO
- engaged in collaborative activity (within or outside their organization)

Criteria for Exclusion. Participants from the master list who did not meet the above criteria were excluded from the study. Additional criteria for exclusion include:

- non-English speaker
- less than 5+ years of experience in INGO leadership
- not available during the data collection period (January-March 2024)
- unable to use video conferencing for an interview
- unwilling to agree to the informed consent document
- unwilling to be audio recorded during the interview

Maximum Variation. The selection of these participants aimed to capture a broad spectrum of experiences that reflect their roles within INGOs. In this process, careful consideration was given to factors such as geographical diversity, years of experience spanning different organizations of varying sizes, and diversity in ethnicity and gender. The criteria for maximum variation were as follows:

- include Male and Female participants
- include a variance of geographical location
- include participants from small, medium, and large organizations

Preference for inclusion was given to:

- individuals with 10+ years of experience in INGO leadership
- individuals with experience working in multiple countries
- individuals with experience in formal collaborative endeavors

Protection of Human Subjects

The study was conducted with a strong emphasis on ethical considerations and safeguarding participants' rights and well-being. Initially, participants received an email communication using the approved IRB recruitment script (see Appendix B). This correspondence served a dual purpose: to confirm their position as leaders within an INGO and to gauge their interest in and availability for study participation. The recruitment script outlined all expected risks and benefits of the research and associated procedures. Participants were exposed to minimal risk, which may have entailed experiencing negative emotions or unpleasant thoughts related to the subject matter. Informed consent was acquired from each participant, ensuring compliance with federal regulations and IRB policies.

In compliance with federal regulations and institutional review board policies, participants were provided with the Informed Consent form and asked to sign it indicating their willingness to participate in the study. Additionally, each participant was provided a copy of the interview protocol and notified about the audio recording of the interview sessions. Participant confidentiality was protected by using pseudonyms, such as "P1," "P2," and so on, in all documentation. The identities of the participants are only known to the researcher. All collected data was stored in a secure digital environment.

Data Collection

Data was collected from 16 recruited participants using semi-structured interviews. The researcher initiated contact with potential participants via email. Following the approved IRB recruitment script, each participant received an email message inviting them to participate in the study. The script introduced the researcher, outlined the study's purpose, and inquired about the

participant's interest in taking part. If the participant agreed to participate, a follow-up email was sent to confirm the interview's date and time, along with the Informed Consent Form. Participants were offered the choice to sign and return the form via email or confirmed signature.

Interviews were conducted using a reliable video conferencing platform (e.g., Zoom, accessible at https://zoom.us/). Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by OtterAI and expected to last 40 to 75 minutes. The transcripts were reviewed and edited to remove any references to the participants or their affiliations. Throughout the data collection process, participants were denoted as P1, P2, and so forth in Excel spreadsheets and coding sheets. This approach mitigated the potential risk of breaching confidentiality, ensuring that only the researcher retained knowledge of the actual identities of the participants. All data was stored on a secure network behind Pepperdine's firewall. All audio recordings will be intentionally erased and permanently discarded three years after the study's conclusion.

Interview Protocol

Researchers use interviews to understand participants' experiences in more depth and create meaning and interpretation through dialogue (Creswell, 2018; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). In a phenomenological approach, the interviewer guides the exploration of the participant's experience, situates it within a context, and reflects on its significance (Seidman, 2019). Interviews are the most widely used measure for collecting data for qualitative research and involve the researcher conversing with the participant to explore the chosen topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews vary in structure, the most common type being the semi-structured interview. This study employed semi-structured interviews, which involved a predetermined set of open-ended questions and follow-up questions to elicit further information (Klenke et al., 2016).

The established interview protocol served as a structured framework to ensure the research questions were systematically addressed during each interview. The protocol

consisted of open-ended questions and prompts aimed at investigating strategies, challenges, success metrics, and recommendations concerning collaboration for transformative change within INGOs. The questions were thoughtfully designed to give participants the chance to share their experiences, insights, and reflections, thereby offering a thorough and detailed understanding of the subject matter. The use of this semi-structured approach not only maintained consistency across interviews but also provided a flexible environment for participants to elaborate on their thoughts and offer unique perspectives. The researcher used follow-up questions to explore specific areas of interest as the conversation progressed. This approach ensured that the collected data aligned with the research goals and allowed for a thorough analysis of the research questions.

Interview Techniques

In qualitative research, interviewing aims to collect detailed data about individuals' experiences, insights, and behaviors (Klenke et al., 2016). As the data collection instrument, the interviewer must possess the appropriate skills to collect and interpret relevant qualitative data. Qualitative research interviewing requires a diverse range of physical, social, emotional, and communication skills (Klenke et al., 2016). These skills are essential for establishing rapport with participants, asking thoughtful questions, and probing for deeper insights

The success of the interview, in terms of rapport and candid responses, relies heavily on establishing mutual trust between the interviewer and interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). While conducting each interview for this study, the researcher strived to cultivate trust and rapport. This was achieved by conveying a sincere curiosity about the participants' experiences and perspectives, actively listening to their narratives, and conscientiously refraining from forming judgmental reactions to their responses. Furthermore, the researcher allowed time for participants to recollect and assured them that the recall process was normal (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

These rapport-building strategies aim to cultivate a sense of mutual trust between the researcher and the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This trust forms the foundation for an open and collaborative relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. It encourages participants to share their experiences with authenticity, knowing that their narratives will be received with respect and curiosity and without preconceived biases. This, in turn, promotes a rich and meaningful exchange of information during the interviews, contributing to the depth and quality of the research data.

Interview Questions

The following questions were used in the semi-structured interviews:

- Icebreaker: Tell me about your career working in an INGO?
- IQ 1: Think back to a time in your career as an INGO leader when you successfully fostered collaboration that led to a significant transformation within or outside of your organization.
    - Tell me about that experience.
    - How did you experience that transformation?
    - What specific practices made collaboration effective in this instance?
- IQ 2: What challenges did you encounter in fostering collaboration and achieving the desired outcome?
- IQ 3: Think back to other collaboration experiences that led to big changes or improvements. What specific practices or strategies made these collaborations successful?
- IQ 4: What challenges did you encounter using the practices and strategies you mentioned?
- IQ 5: Are you aware of any stories or examples of exceptional collaborations within INGOs that led to transformative changes? If so, what specific things did leadership do that made them so successful?

- IQ 6: Among fellow INGO leaders in your position, are you aware of specific instances where fostering collaboration for transformative change proved challenging? Can you describe the challenges they faced and how they tried to overcome them?
- IQ 7: As you reflect on your experiences, how would you describe your understanding of what constitutes successful collaboration?
- IQ 8: What specific aspects or indicators do you use to measure and evaluate the success of collaboration in achieving the desired outcomes?
- IQ 9: If you could go back and do one thing differently regarding fostering collaboration for transformative change, what would it be, and how would you have implemented it?
- IQ 10: What advice would you give future INGO leaders interested in using collaboration to bring about transformative change in their work?

Interview Questions' Relation to Research Objectives

Within qualitative research, the research questions should guide the development of interview questions, to ensure that the gathered data is relevant to the research objectives (Seidman, 2019). The interview questions in this study were designed to elicit in-depth descriptions of participants' experiences fostering collaboration within INGOs. These open-ended questions were based on a thorough literature review that highlighted the pivotal role of relationships, resources, and the mission of INGOs in shaping collaborative tendencies. Each question was tailored to correspond to one of the research questions, facilitating participants' ability to elaborate on their thoughts and share their experiences. Aligning interview questions closely with research questions enhanced the relevance and utility of the collected data for addressing the research objectives. The relationship between these questions and their respective research questions is presented in Table 1 for reference.

Table 1

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Questions	Corresponding Interview Questions
RQ1: What strategies and best practices are employed by organizational leaders in International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGO) to foster transformative cooperation?	IQ 1: Think back to a time in your career as an INGO leader when you successfully fostered collaboration that led to a significant transformation within or outside of your organization. - Tell me about that experience. - How did you experience that transformation? - What specific practices made collaboration effective in this instance? IQ 3: Think back to other similar collaboration experiences that led to big changes or improvements. What specific practices or strategies made these collaborations so successful? IQ 5: Are you aware of any stories or examples of exceptional collaborations within INGOs that led to transformative changes? If so, what specific things did leadership do that made them so successful?
RQ2: What challenges do organizational leaders face in INGOs when implementing the strategies and practices employed to foster transformative cooperation?	IQ 2: What challenges did you encounter in fostering collaboration and achieving the desired outcome? IQ 4: What challenges did you encounter using the practices and strategies you mentioned? IQ 6: Among fellow INGO leaders in your position, are you aware of specific instances where fostering collaboration for transformative change proved challenging? Can you describe the challenges they faced and how they tried to overcome them?
RQ3: How do organizational leaders in INGOs measure the success of transformative cooperation initiatives?	IQ 7: As you reflect on your experiences, how would you describe your understanding of what constitutes successful collaboration? IQ 8: What specific aspects or indicators do you use to measure and evaluate the success of collaboration in achieving the desired outcomes?
RQ4: What recommendations would organizational leaders in INGOs have for future practitioners entering the field to foster transformative cooperation?	IQ 9: If you could go back and do one thing differently regarding fostering collaboration for transformative change, what would it be, and how would you have implemented it? IQ 10: What advice would you give future INGO leaders interested in using collaboration to bring about transformative change in their work?

Reliability and Validity of the Study

In the realm of qualitative research, reliability, and validity take on a distinct perspective compared to quantitative research. Some qualitative researchers argue that traditional validity concepts may need to align better with their research paradigm, as these concepts rely on epistemological assumptions incongruent with the qualitative approach (Ely et al., 2003). Qualitative research is not concerned with quantifying an objective reality but rather with constructing and interpreting meaning (Creswell, 2013). Lincoln et al. (1985) introduced a set of four criteria for assessing the validity or trustworthiness of qualitative research findings.

1. Credibility: Evaluating the trustworthiness and believability of research findings.
2. Transferability: Assessing the generalizability of research findings to other contexts.
3. Dependability: Examining the consistency of research findings over time and among different researchers.
4. Confirmability: Examining the extent to which other researchers can corroborate research findings.

In phenomenology, it is important that the interpretations of the data are logically connected and that they align with the firsthand experiences of individuals who have gone through the same phenomenon (Klenke et al., 2016). This ensures that the research results are dependable and accurately reflect the essence of the studied experience. The validity of the interview questions were established through a three-step process using prima facie, peer review, and expert review validity.

Prima Facie Validity. In qualitative research, prima facie validity pertains to the suitability of a study's design and methods for addressing research questions and producing reliable and trustworthy findings (Patten & Newhart, 2018). The researcher formulated eight interview questions that corresponded to the research questions and were informed by the literature review. A review process was undertaken to ascertain that these interview questions resonated with the study's objectives and held the potential to yield credible and reliable

findings. Diligence in question formulation ensures the study's face validity and relevance to the research goals.

Peer Review Validity. Peer review validity entails a process where peer researchers evaluate the effectiveness of the interview questions in accordance with the research questions. Peer review serves two functions: to offer constructive feedback for revising the author's work and to act as a filter, determining what research is valuable and trustworthy. Two doctoral students from Pepperdine University participated in this process. The peer reviewers received an email with review instructions and a table listing the research and interview questions. Each peer reviewer was instructed to:

- Review how well each interview question addresses the research question.
- Evaluate the relevance of the interview questions to the research questions.
- Suggest modifications to align interview questions with research questions.
- Recommend additional interview questions if necessary.

Through the peer review validity process, modifications and enhancements were made to the interview questions, as detailed in Table 2.

Table 2

Suggested Revisions to Interview Questions

Research Questions	Proposed Interview Questions Validity Survey
RQ1: What strategies and best practices are employed by organizational leaders in International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGO) to foster collaboration for transformative change?	IQ 1: What does collaboration mean to you? ● Suggested Revision: Keep as is. IQ 2: Can you describe a personal experience where collaboration resulted in significant change within or outside your organization? ● Suggested Revision: Keep as is. IQ 3: Can you describe a specific example of a time when you used a particular strategy to foster collaboration in your role? ● Suggested Revision: Keep as is.
RQ2: What challenges do organizational leaders face in INGOs when implementing the strategies and practices	IQ 5: What is the most difficult challenge you have faced while fostering collaboration?

Research Questions	Proposed Interview Questions Validity Survey
employed to foster collaboration for transformative change?	● Suggested Revision: What has been the most challenging situation you encountered while cultivating collaboration?" IQ 6: What are some of the strategies that you have used to address these challenges? ● Suggested Revision: Please describe some of the strategies you have used to address the challenges mentioned before IQ 7: What other challenges are there to fostering collaboration in your role? ● Suggested Revision: What other challenges might come up in your role while trying to foster collaboration
RQ3: How do organizational leaders in INGOs measure the success of collaboration for transformative change initiatives?	IQ 4: How do you measure the success of collaboration? Are there specific metrics or key performance indicators you use? ● Suggested Revision: Keep as is.
RQ4: What recommendations would organizational leaders in INGOs have for future practitioners entering the field to foster collaboration for transformative change?	IQ 8: What advice would you give to future INGO leaders who are interested in fostering collaboration for transformative change in their work? ● Suggested Revision: Keep as is.

Expert review validity. An expert review process was established in order to address discrepancies and to refine the interview questions. The dissertation committee were designated as expert reviewers and evaluated the peer reviewer recommendations to determine their incorporation into the interview protocol. The dissertation committee also provided additional recommendations and revisions. The researcher integrated all suggestions received during the expert review process. The final revisions are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3

Research Questions & Corresponding Interview Questions (Final Revisions)

Research Questions	Proposed Interview Questions	Revised Interview Questions
RQ1: What strategies and best practices are employed by organizational leaders in International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGO) to foster collaboration for transformative change?	IQ 1: What does collaboration mean to you? IQ 2: Can you describe a personal experience where collaboration resulted in significant change within or outside your organization? IQ 3: Can you describe a specific example of a time when you used a particular strategy to foster collaboration in your role?	IQ 1: Think back to a time in your career as an INGO leader when you successfully fostered collaboration that led to a significant transformation within or outside of your organization. - Tell me about that experience. - How did you experience that transformation? - What specific practices made collaboration effective in this instance? IQ 3: Think back to other similar collaboration experiences that led to big changes or improvements. What specific practices or strategies made these collaborations so successful? IQ 5: Are you aware of any stories or examples of exceptional collaborations within INGOs that led to transformative changes? If so, what specific things did leadership do that made them so successful?
RQ2: What challenges do organizational leaders face in INGOs when implementing the strategies and practices employed to foster collaboration for transformative change?	IQ 5: What is the most difficult challenge you have faced while fostering collaboration? IQ 6: What are some of the strategies that you have used to address these challenges? IQ 7: What other challenges are there to fostering collaboration in your role?	IQ 2: What challenges did you encounter in fostering collaboration and achieving the desired outcome? IQ 4: What challenges did you encounter using the practices and strategies you mentioned? IQ 6: Among fellow INGO leaders in your position, are you aware of specific instances where fostering collaboration for transformative change proved challenging? Can you describe the challenges they faced and how they tried to overcome them?
RQ3: How do organizational leaders in INGOs measure the	IQ 4: How do you measure the success of collaboration? Are there	IQ 7: As you reflect on your experiences, how would you describe your understanding of what

Research Questions	Proposed Interview Questions	Revised Interview Questions
success of collaboration for transformative change initiatives?	specific metrics or key performance indicators you use?	constitutes successful collaboration? IQ 8: What specific aspects or indicators do you use to measure and evaluate the success of collaboration in achieving the desired outcomes?
RQ4: What recommendations would organizational leaders in INGOs have for future practitioners entering the field to foster collaboration for transformative change?	IQ 8: What advice would you give to future INGO leaders who are interested in fostering collaboration for transformative change in their work?	IQ 9: If you could go back and do one thing differently regarding fostering collaboration for transformative change, what would it be, and how would you have implemented it? IQ 10: What advice would you give future INGO leaders interested in using collaboration to bring about transformative change in their work?

Reliability Pilot Testing

A pilot testing phase was included involving three participants similar to the intended study population to increase the reliability of the study (Patten & Newhart, 2018). Each participant's interview was conducted using the established interview protocol to assess question clarity and ensure meaningful responses were elicited. After the interview, participants will provide feedback on the questions' understandability and suggest improvements. The researcher then collaborated with the dissertation committee, determined needed revisions, and finalized the interview questions. This pilot testing approach strengthens the study's methodological rigor by addressing potential ambiguities and refining the instrument before data collection begins (Patten & Newhart, 2018).

Statement of Limitations and Personal Bias

Every researcher has a unique perspective based on their personal experiences. This perspective can impact how they collect and interpret data in their research. Bracketing, also referred to as *epoche* or *phenomenological reduction*, constitutes a foundational practice in phenomenology. It entails suspending pre-existing beliefs, biases, and assumptions to approach

the studied phenomenon with a renewed and impartial viewpoint (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of bracketing is to minimize the influence of the researcher's preexisting knowledge and opinions, allowing them to better understand and interpret the experiences of the research participants in a more objective and unbiased manner (Klenke et al., 2016).

The process begins with researchers acknowledging their preconceived notions, beliefs, and assumptions about the phenomenon they are investigating. In this case, the researcher acknowledged that he:

- Possesses seven years of experience within the INGO sector.
- Has developed informed opinions about INGO leadership and collaboration due to their extensive personal knowledge and expertise.
- Associates collaboration with positive outcomes, reflecting their predispositions and expectations.
- Values transformative change as an essential component of nonprofit work.

In phenomenological research, bracketing is an ongoing and iterative practice (Klenke et al., 2016). It requires the researcher to consistently engage in self-reflection, continuously identifying and acknowledging their preconceived notions about the phenomena under study and making deliberate efforts to set these assumptions aside as the research progresses. The researcher continuously engaged in bracketing throughout this study's data collection and analysis.

Data Analysis

Following the data collection phase, data analysis is a critical next step in qualitative research. While there is a widely shared understanding that analyzing interview data does not adhere to rigid, pre-defined methodologies (Seidman, 2019), qualitative research studies often encompass a general process for analysis. Creswell (2013) provides an insightful framework known as the "data analysis spiral," comprising five major phases: organizing, reading and memoing, coding and themes, interpretation, and representation and visualization. Within

phenomenological research, Giorgi (1997) introduced a similar data analysis protocol involving the following phases:

1. Collect verbal data through the interview process.
2. Transcribe the collected data and analyze it to identify the key descriptive terms used by the interview participants.
3. Break the data down into themes based on the key descriptive words.
4. Organize and express the themes from a disciplinary viewpoint, incorporating the researcher's definitions, samples of keywords, and specific quotes from interviewees.
5. Synthesize and summarize the data visually and in writing to present the findings.

Considering the outlined qualitative processes, each interview was audio recorded using two separate devices. Once the interviews were conducted, the researcher had the audio recordings transcribed using OtterAI. The interview transcripts were proofread and edited to ensure accuracy.

In the next analysis stage, the researcher read each transcript, made memos and notes. Creswell (2013) suggests that “memos are short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occur to the reader” (p. 183). During this phase, the researcher highlighted key terms and concepts from the interview data. They also made analytical notes regarding the interview's essence, identified critical elements for further exploration, and addressed any important or challenging passages requiring clarification. Each transcript was read multiple times.

The next step was coding the data, which involved identifying and labeling key themes and patterns in the data. This is typically done by reading the interview transcripts and identifying words, phrases, or sentences relevant to the research questions (Creswell, 2013). In this phase, the researcher condensed the text into concise information categories, cross-referencing codes across multiple study transcripts, and assigning distinctive labels to each code (Creswell, 2013). The researcher looked for evidence that reflected diverse perspectives about each category. The identified codes were then grouped into broader themes. This

involved identifying the relationships between the codes and developing a conceptual understanding of each theme.

Interrater Reliability

In qualitative research, interrater reliability is frequently employed to evaluate the consistency of responses among different coders analyzing data sets (Creswell, 2013). A three-step process was used to establish interrater reliability.

1. The researcher coded the data from three interviews, grouping related concepts and identifying thematic categories.
2. The researcher enlisted two peer reviewers with a background in qualitative research to evaluate the coding conducted. The reviewers independently examined the interview transcripts and codes from Step 1, offering feedback on the themes and suggesting any necessary changes or adjustments.
3. After coding for all 15 interviews, the researcher shared the results with the co-raters for review. The peer reviewers provided further suggestions and adjustments.

Data Presentation

The research findings were presented in a compelling and informative manner, using both textual and visual representations. The study employed a combination of thematic analysis, bar charts, and excerpts from participant interviews to convey the results clearly, organized, and visually appealing.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research design and methodology developed to examine INGO leadership best practices in fostering collaboration for transformative change. Given the qualitative nature of this inquiry, a phenomenological research approach was selected and discussed in detail. The chapter covered aspects such as the definition of the analysis unit, the target population, sample size determination, participant selection criteria, sampling frame, and guidelines for participant inclusion and exclusion. Additionally, it provided an overview of

the steps taken to ensure compliance with IRB requirements and protect participant rights. The data collection process, including the interview protocol, was described in detail. The concluding section of the chapter outlined the data analysis plan and the process for establishing reliability and validity of the data.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

As humanitarian needs escalate due to complex and interconnected crises, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) face mounting pressure to prove their relevance and effectiveness in addressing the underlying causes of these challenges (Urquhart et al., 2023). However, the existing structures and traditional approaches of INGOs need significant transformation to achieve lasting change (Baiden & Book, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2020). Collaboration has emerged as an accepted strategy for addressing complex challenges and fostering transformative change (Costumato, 2021; Head & Alford, 2015). This study aimed to investigate how leaders in INGOs foster collaboration for transformative change. The following four research questions were established to guide the study:

- *RQ1*: What strategies and best practices are employed by organizational leaders in INGOs to foster collaboration for transformative change?
- *RQ2:* What challenges do organizational leaders face in INGOs when implementing the strategies and practices employed to foster collaboration for transformative change?
- *RQ3:* How do organizational leaders in INGOs measure the success of collaboration for transformative change initiatives?
- *RQ4:* What recommendations would organizational leaders in INGOs have for future practitioners entering the field to foster collaboration for transformative change?

An interview protocol consisting of 10 questions was created to examine the established research questions. A rigorous three-stage validity assessment was conducted to guarantee the interview questions' relevance and alignment with the research goals. This process involved initial screening, peer review, and expert evaluation. The finalized interview questions used in the study are presented below:

- Icebreaker: Tell me about how you initially started working in an INGO.

- IQ 1: Think back to a time in your career as an INGO leader when you successfully fostered collaboration that led to a significant transformation within or outside your organization. Tell me about that experience.
- IQ 2: What challenges did you encounter in fostering collaboration and achieving the desired outcome?
- IQ 3: Think back to similar collaboration experiences that led to big changes or improvements. What specific practices or strategies made these collaborations so successful?
- IQ 4: What challenges did you encounter using the practices and strategies you mentioned?
- IQ 5: Are you aware of any stories or examples of exceptional collaborations within INGOs that led to transformative changes? If so, what specific things did leadership do that made them so successful?
- IQ 6: Among fellow INGO leaders in your position, are you aware of specific instances where fostering collaboration for transformative change proved challenging? Can you describe the challenges they faced and how they tried to overcome them?
- IQ 7: As you reflect on your experiences, how would you describe your understanding of what constitutes successful collaboration?
- IQ 8: What specific aspects or indicators do you use to measure and evaluate the success of collaboration in achieving the desired outcomes?
- IQ 9: If you could go back and do one thing differently regarding fostering collaboration for transformative change, what would it be, and how would you have implemented it?
- IQ 10: What advice would you give future INGO leaders interested in using collaboration to bring about transformative change in their work?

During the interviews, a semi-structured interview approach was used to elicit relevant responses to the study while maintaining open and natural dialogue. Participants responded to

the interview questions by elaborating on their experiences of fostering collaboration as leaders of INGOs. Every interview was audio-recorded and then transcribed word-for-word to ensure the integrity of the data analysis. Subsequently, a thorough data analysis of the participants' responses was conducted. This analysis focused on identifying common themes related to the interview and research questions and their relevance to current literature regarding leadership and collaboration.

This chapter overviews the details of the participants involved, how the data was gathered, and the methods used for analysis. Each question posed during the interviews is explored through both visual representations and detailed explanations, concluding with a table summarizing the key themes identified for every research question. The chapter finishes with an overview of the research findings.

Participants

Participants were recruited through a purposeful sampling strategy typical of qualitative research. An initial sample of 50 participants was selected from the population of high-ranking leaders within US-based INGOs actively involved in development operations or humanitarian assistance in developing countries outside the US. The study initially aimed to include 15 participants; however, due to participant interest and the opportunity to capture a broader range of perspectives within the study's predefined criteria for maximum variation, a total of 16 participants were ultimately included.

The 16 participants represented medium-sized ($500k to $1.9M), large-sized ($2M-$50M), and super-sized ($50M+) INGOs with a US-based entity. The group consisted of eight female and eight male participants with leadership experience ranging from 8 to 30 years in INGOs. Most participants held executive leadership positions, except for one who was a former executive leader but currently served as a senior advisor. The group represented diverse geographical backgrounds, with individuals based across the US as well as in Nicaragua and Ghana. See Table 4 for a summary of the 16 participants.

Table 4

Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Org. Size	Position	Years of Exp.	Interview Date
P1	Male	Medium	President & CEO	30+	Jan 29
P2	Male	Super-size	VP of Global Operations	30+	Feb 2
P3	Female	Large	VP of International Partnerships	10-19	Feb 2
P4	Female	Large	Director Of Strategic Partnerships	10-19	Feb 2
P5	Male	Large	President & CEO	5-9	Feb 5
P6	Female	Large	CEO	10-19	Feb 6
P7	Female	Large	Executive Director	10-19	Feb 7
P8	Male	Super-size	COO	5-9	Feb 7
P9	Male	Super-size	CEO	20-29	Feb 9
P10	Male	Super-size	VP of Operations	10-19	Feb 9
P11	Male	Large	Senior Advisor	20-29	Feb 12
P12	Female	Medium	President & CEO	10-19	Feb 15
P13	Female	Large	CEO	20-29	Feb 15
P14	Female	Medium	Executive Director	20-29	Feb 22
P15	Male	Large	Executive Director	10-19	Feb 23
P16	Female	Large	CEO	20-29	Mar 4

Data Collection

Data collection began on January 22, 2024, after receiving IRB approval. A master list of qualifying organizations was compiled using the Charity Finder tool within the Charity Navigator database. A review of each organization's website was conducted to identify members of leadership who qualify as potential study participants. Contact information for potential participants was gathered from publicly available sources, including organizational or personal websites and public searches. An initial sample of 50 participants was identified, and criteria for maximum variation were used to select the initial batch of 30 participants to be emailed on January 23, 2024. Recruitment of participants was conducted exclusively via email, utilizing the

IRB approved script. In the first week, only four participants responded. As a result, a recruitment email was sent to the remaining 20 participants of the initial sample on January 30, 2024. Due to continued low response rates, an additional 35 potential participants were identified and contacted using the same approved script. Ultimately, the recruitment process yielded 23 responses, with four declining participation, one referring to another leader, and 17 agreeing to participate.

Participants who agreed to take part in the study were asked to schedule an interview time and were given copies of the informed consent form and interview protocol. One participant who agreed to participate was not interviewed due to a scheduling conflict. Participants were provided with the informed consent form for review and signature before their scheduled interviews. This form outlined the study procedures, including the audio recording of their responses, which they consented to by signing the document. All interviews were conducted via Zoom. While 60 minutes were allotted per interview, the actual lengths ranged from 37 to 87 minutes, with an average length of 51 minutes. All sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed using the OtterAI platform. Consistent with the semi-structured format, the interviewer primarily responded by affirming, repeating, or clarifying the participants' insights. Table 4 summarizes the interview dates.

Data Analysis

Following the interviews, the researcher engaged in critical self-reflection consistent with bracketing, a technique described by Creswell (2013) and Klenke et al. (2016) in phenomenological research. This reflection involved revisiting documented personal biases relevant to the study and attempting to suspend these preconceived assumptions. This process aimed to minimize the potential influence of these biases on data analysis, acknowledging the researcher's role as the primary data collection instrument within the chosen approach.

Each audio-recorded interview was transcribed using OtterAI, and the transcriptions were pasted into a word processing document. Each transcription was verified against the audio

recordings to ensure accuracy. The researcher engaged in an iterative process of reading and analyzing the interview transcripts following Creswell's (2013) guidance. This involved identifying and labeling key themes and patterns through coding. The coding process included condensing the text into relevant categories, cross-referencing codes for coherence, and assigning distinct labels. Subsequently, the analysis employed thematic analysis, where codes were organized into broader thematic categories to create a nuanced understanding of each overall theme.

Inter-Rater Review Process

To ensure intercoder reliability, two doctoral students from Pepperdine University's EDOL program, with expertise in qualitative research, were recruited to review the initial coding of the qualitative interviews. After conducting independent reviews, the researcher collaborated with the students to discuss their feedback and refine the coding process. Based on the reviewer's feedback, the researcher carefully reviewed and adjusted the descriptions of themes identified in the study. This process involved consolidating similar codes and refining the thematic structure to ensure clarity and coherence in presenting the findings. Changes were made to include references to "listening" under the broader theme of "facilitating effective communication." The theme "Vetting partners" was integrated into the broader theme of "building trust and relationships." The labels of the leadership action (IQ5) themes were changed to the active tense, and the retrospective change (IQ9) themes were changed to the past tense.

Data Display

The research findings are presented based on research questions and corresponding interview questions. Themes were identified by grouping keywords and phrases from the interview responses. The key themes of this study only included responses from at least three participants, ensuring a level of prevalence within the data. A description of each theme was provided and accompanied by illustrative excerpts from participant responses. The included

excerpts were quoted exactly as they were spoken. It is important to note that some quotes may contain incomplete sentences. However, every effort was made to ensure that the intended meaning of the participants was accurately represented in these quotes. Participant references were coded as "P" followed by their assigned number (e.g., P1, P2, etc.). Charts summarizing the frequency of responses within each theme are included for visual representation.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 (RQ1) states, “What strategies and best practices are employed by organizational leaders in INGOs to foster collaboration for transformative change?” Participants responded to three interview questions designed to address RQ1. The three interview questions are as follows:

- IQ 1: Think back to a time in your career as an INGO leader when you successfully fostered collaboration that led to a significant transformation within or outside of your organization. Tell me about that experience.
- IQ 3: Think back to other similar collaboration experiences that led to big changes or improvements. What specific practices or strategies made these collaborations so successful?
- IQ 5: Are you aware of any stories or examples of exceptional collaborations within INGOs that led to transformative changes? If so, what specific things did leadership do that made them so successful?

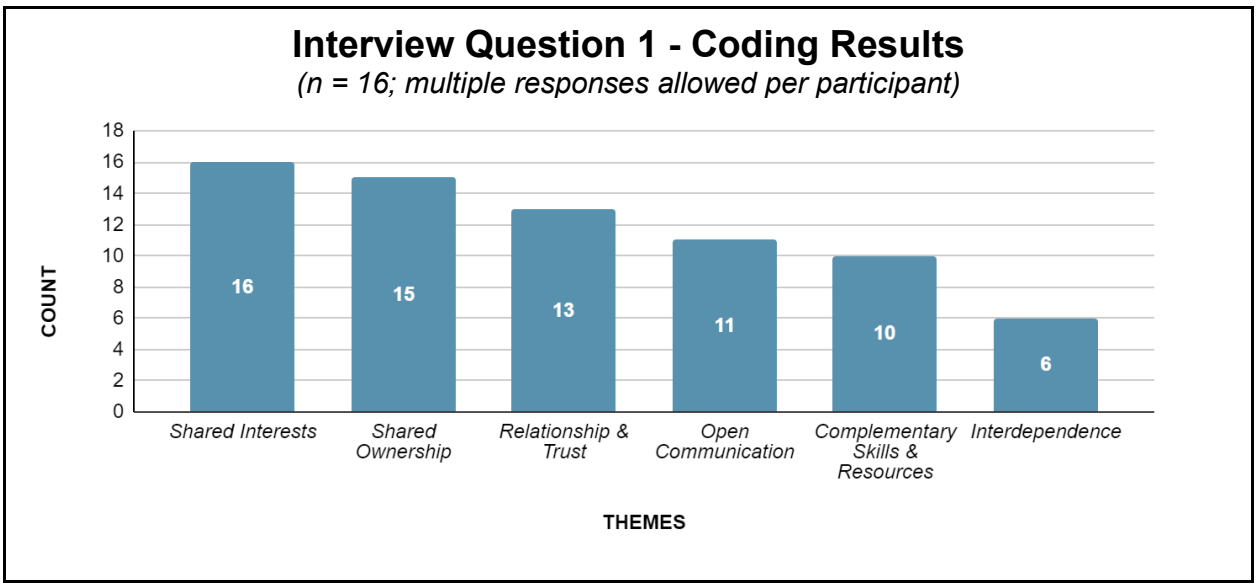
Thematic analysis of participants' responses across the three interview questions yielded overarching themes related to common strategies and best practices INGO leaders employ to foster collaboration for transformative change.

Interview question 1. IQ1 asked, “Think back to a time in your career as an INGO leader when you successfully fostered collaboration that led to a significant transformation within or outside of your organization. Tell me about that experience.” Participant responses were coded into keywords which were analyzed and grouped into six themes related to

components of collaboration. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) shared interests, (b) shared ownership, (c) relationship & trust, (d) open communication, (e) complementary skills & resources, and (f) interdependence (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

IQ1 Coding Results: Components of Collaboration



Note. Each bar in the figure represents a theme from responses to IQ1, with the number showing how many participants contributed to each theme. *'n'* indicates the total number of participants

Shared Interests. All 16 participants (100%) emphasized the importance of shared interests as a component of collaboration, using terms such as common goals, common agenda, shared purpose, shared challenges, or references to a shared mission. Successful collaboration thrives on complementary focuses, shared values, and aligned goals (Mitchell, 2014). P11 stated that collaboration requires “a common sense of identity and common sense of purpose.” P13 described the collaboration process as needing to “figure out where there's an intersection between your interests and the other organization's interests and then get alignment around the goals.” P4 provided a specific example of a shared mission, “The mission or purpose of the joint initiative is… how do we reduce our negative impact on the environment?”

Shared Ownership. Fifteen participants (93%) indicated the significance of shared ownership as a key component of collaboration. This theme included keywords such as commitment to collaboration, mutual contribution, and local ownership. Shared ownership can inspire collaborators to prioritize the success of the endeavor over self-interest, fostering a sense of responsibility for the collaboration (Mendel & Brudney, 2018). P2 described the importance of “commitment at all levels throughout the organization.” P10 emphasized demonstrating commitment, stating, “we're going to offer this up, and we know that there's maybe a risk in offering this particular resource. But it demonstrates that [we] are committed.” According to P15, collaboration strengthens when there is “an acknowledgment that proximate leaders know how to solve their issues best.” Similarly, P14 highlighted the value of local ownership, stating, “we've always had that perspective of bringing as many people within the community together, but letting the Haitian leadership define the direction we go.” This aligns with the broader development principle of local ownership (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021).

Relationship & Trust. Thirteen participants (81%) highlighted the significance of relationships and trust in collaboration. This included keywords such as trust, established relationship, and friendship. Trust is regarded by nonprofit leaders as fundamental to their effectiveness and credibility (Kearns et al., 2015). P11 explained that collaboration is “individual relationships and building on those relationships, and keeping an open mind, listening more than speaking.” P15 said, “in order for the relationship to work, there's got to be a level of trust, and honesty, dedication that goes back and forth.” P9 described trust as “this whole concept is they know we've got their back.” P5 emphasized the act of trusting, asking, "will you stick your neck out and do what's needed to build that trust?" P1 suggested, “collaboration requires a friend and a champion somewhere else to help you along.”

Open Communication. Eleven participants (68%) noted open communication as a key component of collaboration, mirroring Brass et al.’s (2018) findings that open information sharing is a key factor in effective NGO collaboration. This theme encompassed aspects such

as good communication, active listening, transparency, information sharing, and soliciting input. P14 said that within collaboration, “good communication is going to be first and foremost.” P8 stressed the value of diverse perspectives, believing that "a multitude of voices can lead to richer or better outcomes." P4 said, “everyone had a voice and could feel heard.” P6 emphasized the importance of “communications systems, good ways to have like repositories for contact information and meeting notes into next steps and those things.”

***Complementary Skills & Resources*.** Ten participants (62%) emphasized the importance of having complementary skills and resources in collaboration. Research indicates that reciprocal contributions from collaborative partners positively influence collaborative success (Mitchell et al., 2015; Ofem et al., 2018). P5 explained this concept, stating that "Collaboration is when we both bring something to the table, and we recognize what we have." P10 explained, “as organizations are attempting to collaborate with each other, they need to clearly identify what it is that they are bringing to the collaboration.” P13 emphasized the importance of leveraging individual strengths, noting that "you have to lean into people's individual strengths." P11 noted collaboration across disciplines, stating that "we have to work at a systems level and collaborate with other disciplines."

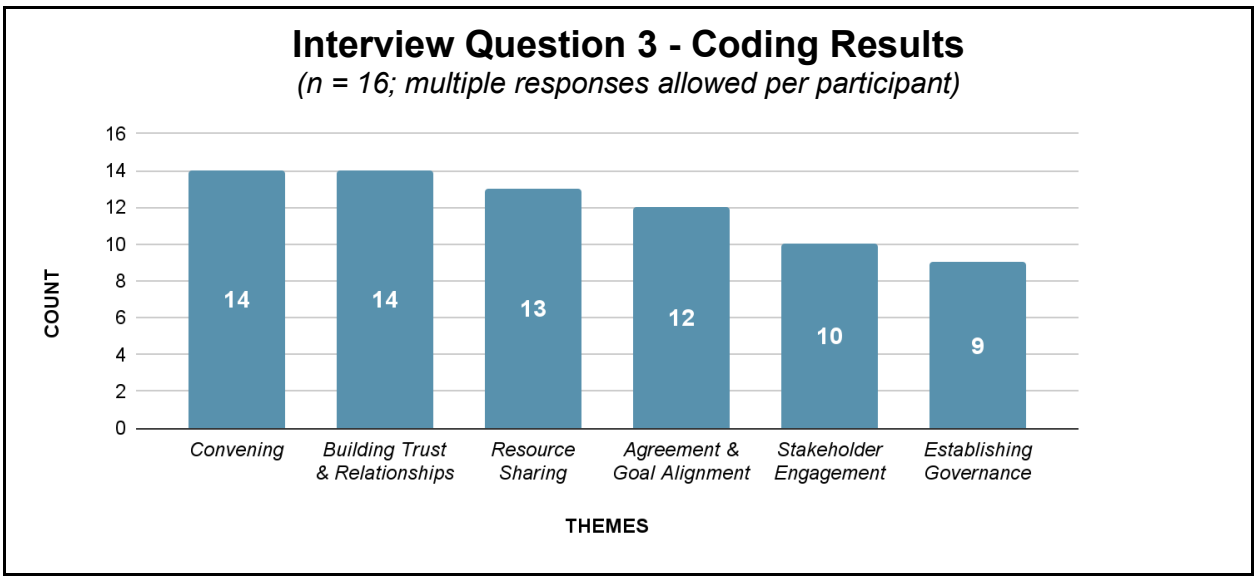
Interdependence. Six participants (37%) highlighted interdependence as a key aspect of collaboration. This included references to mutual needs, reliance, and shared risks. Collaboration is often described according to the level of integration between the collaborators (Keast et al., 2007; Nolte, 2018). P12 described collaboration as a scenario where "You can't do without me. I can't do without you. We need each other." P5 emphasized this by stating, "It is a recognition that I cannot do this alone." P10 stated, “that's what happens in collaboration…you are reliant on somebody else to do their part… it is a vulnerability… You have to risk something for the collaboration to work.”

Interview question 3. IQ3 asked, “Think back to other similar collaboration experiences that led to big changes or improvements. What specific practices or strategies made these

collaborations so successful?" Participant responses were coded into keywords which were analyzed and grouped into six themes related to strategies and practices used to foster collaboration. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) convening, (b) building trust & relationships, (c) agreement & goal alignment, (d) resource sharing, (e) stakeholder engagement, and (f) establishing governance (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

IQ3 Coding Results: Strategies Used to Foster Collaboration



Note. Strategies used to foster collaboration. Each bar in the figure represents a theme from responses to IQ3, with the number showing how many participants contributed to each theme. *'n'* indicates the total number of participants.

Convening. Fourteen participants (87%) highlighted convening as a key strategy for fostering collaboration. This encompassed any reference to meetings, gatherings, face-to-face interactions, and bringing individuals together. The process of facilitating interactions between stakeholders is foundational to collaborative relationships (Guo & Acar, 2005; O'leary et al., 2012). P11 elaborated on this approach, stating, "convening, bringing people together, helping them to get out of their cubby holes… And interacting with the people around an agenda where they listen to others." Some participants noted the practice of regular meetings, with P7 illustrating, "Another thing that we are doing to increase collaboration is to do at least two joint

board meetings a year." P3 explained, "We facilitate and bring them together, helping them recognize the value in collaboration."

Building Trust & Relationships. Fourteen participants (87%) emphasized the importance of building trust and relationships as a primary strategy for fostering collaboration. This theme included keywords such as partner selection, vetting partners, building trust, and cultivating relationships. NGOs that cultivate trusting relationships are more likely to be perceived as valuable partners (Henriques et al., 2021). P15 illustrated the significance of choosing relationships, stating, "We take our partner selection process very seriously." P10 noted, "In a collaboration, just like in a personal relationship… organizational relationships also have to be cultivated." P5 noted the time invested in relationships, stating, "take enough time to build a relationship where you're confident that the other party actually sees themselves as an equal." P15 echoed this, indicating, "it takes about two years to build up enough trust and equity with these organizations."

Resource Sharing. Thirteen participants (81%) highlighted the importance of sharing resources as a strategy for fostering collaboration. This encompassed various forms of sharing, such as information sharing, time investment, financial collaboration, and utilizing shared resources. Collaboration entails pooling resources, expertise, and efforts to achieve greater outcomes collectively (Costumato, 2021; Salem et al., 2019). P1 stated succinctly, "Collaboration requires really the willingness to share information." P6 provided an example, explaining, "we took that curriculum that was very collectively developed and shared it with the Ministry of Health." P4 highlighted the importance of mutual sharing, saying, "Let's analyze and share with each other what we're doing and also our solutions. And what this has resulted in is great cross-collaborations." P12 noted the interdependence created by resource sharing, saying, "you do all the work. I bring the resources… We need each other."

Agreement & Goal Alignment. Twelve participants (75%) highlighted the importance of cultivating agreement and aligning goals as a key strategy for fostering collaboration. This

involved finding shared interests, creating common goals, focusing on commonalities, and aligning objectives. Goal alignment has been used as a key indicator in defining collaboration (Mitchell 2014). P13 described their approach as “figuring out where there's an intersection between your interests and the other organization's interests and then get alignment around the goals.” P2 said, “I think first is to define what is your common ground.” P11 noted, “You have different organizations that have different mandates, different ways of working, but you can forge a common agenda.” P3 said, “they realize how much more they can do together by focusing on their similarities and the things because they do have common goals.”

Stakeholder Engagement. Ten participants (62%) highlighted stakeholder engagement as a key collaboration strategy. This encompassed various forms of engagement, including partner, funder, local, and beneficiary engagement. Henriques et al. (2021) noted that higher stakeholder intensity increases the likelihood of collaboration. P1 illustrated this strategy as “designing any activity with multiple person stakeholders or beneficiaries’ inputs so that they're heard in that mix.” P11 noted, “we can more easily change local government by involving people, the counselors and the mayors and so on in a more decentralized state.” P14 said, “We've always looked at the Haitian leadership… [as] the ones that can identify the problems. We could work with them on the solutions.” P9 stressed the significance of local involvement, stating, “Locals [need] to be part of the solution. They have insights that we don't have, and we want to kind of go with their insights and their gut feeling.”

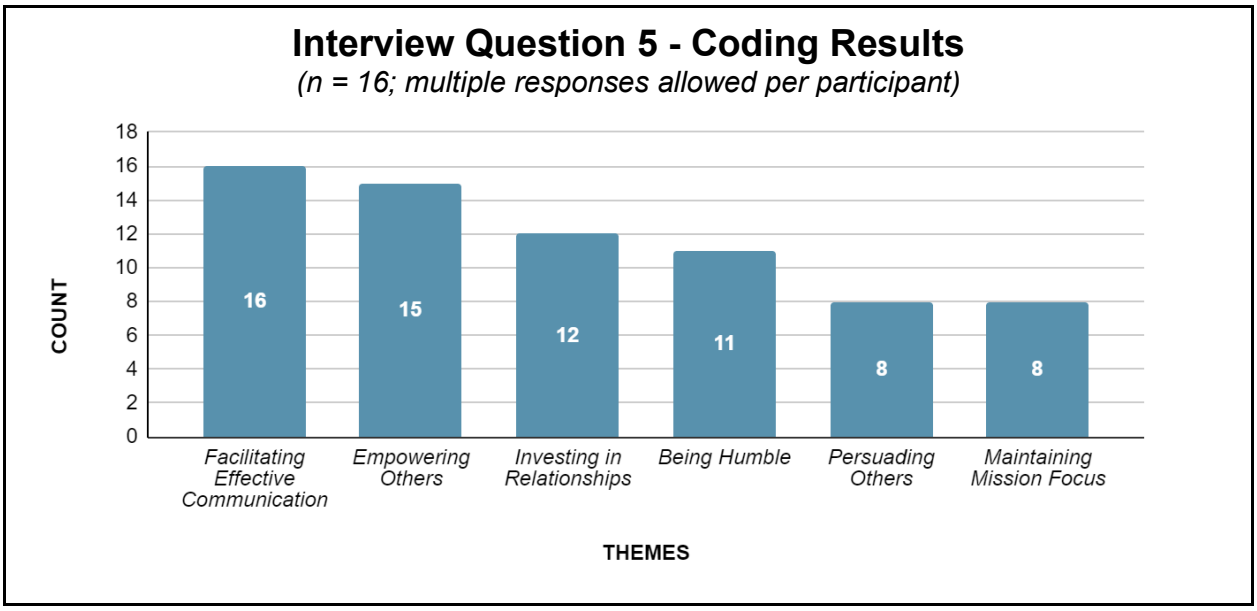
Establishing Governance. Nine participants (56%) highlighted the establishment of governance as a crucial strategy for fostering collaboration. This involved implementing formal agreements, establishing memorandums of understanding (MOUs), documenting processes, creating formal structures, and defining clear procedures. P6 described the formation of a formal entity, stating, “We created a secretariat. So there's like funded staff who run it… [it] is really helpful because, at least in theory, they're like a neutral body that's working on behalf of all members.” P8 said, “we need to put together a committee that has everybody in it.” P1

explained, “So how do you collaborate with them? So in this case, there's another mechanism that is just a formal mechanism.” Gazley and Guo (2020) literature gap in understanding how organizations decide whether to implement formal rules and binding agreements in collaborations.

Interview question 5. Interview question 5 asked, “Are you aware of any stories or examples of exceptional collaborations within INGOs that led to transformative changes? If so, what specific things did leadership do that made them so successful?” Participant responses were coded into keywords which were analyzed and grouped into six themes related to leadership actions for fostering collaboration. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) facilitating effective communication, (b) empowering others, (c) investing in relationships, (d) being humble, (e) persuading others, and (f) maintaining mission focus (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

IQ5 Coding Results: Leadership Actions for Fostering Collaboration



Note. Each bar in the figure represents a theme from responses to IQ5, with the number showing how many participants contributed to each theme. *'n'* indicates the total number of participants.

Facilitating Effective Communication. Sixteen participants (100%) mentioned leadership actions related to facilitating effective communication. Their responses emphasized

various aspects such as clear communication, continuous learning, soliciting feedback, gathering input, and seeking mutual understanding. Leadership in collaborative settings often relies heavily on communication skills over authoritative tactics (Kramer et al., 2019; Salamon & Toepler, 2015). P13 described leadership action as “trying to be a good listener, providing sort of active listening feedback, so that you're sure you're understanding, and somebody feels seen and heard.” P3 echoed this, stating, “I think sitting down and listening and really coming together to hear each other.” P8 said leadership needs to practice “being honest with yourself and ourselves as leaders that we don't have all the answers and that it's a richer process and a better outcome when we get feedback from others.”

Empowering Others. Fifteen participants (93%) emphasized the importance of leadership empowering others and leveraging their expertise. This involved placing people in leadership positions, recognizing individual strengths, valuing diverse perspectives, and striving for more equitable collaboration. Empowerment can arise from the mutual recognition of rights and responsibilities between partners (Mendel & Brudney, 2018). P7 highlighted this by stating, “a big part of leadership is really being able to find those people and then let them go, let them do their thing.” P15 said, “how are we really listening to the people that we are serving? And you're probably going to do that if you've gotten them if you put them in leadership, really high leader positions once you get on the staff or at a board level.” P4 emphasized equality, stating, “I don't care if you're the director or you are the assistant. You have an equal say in what's going to happen in the process of this, and your thoughts and perspective are just as important.”

Investing in Relationships. Twelve participants (75%) highlighted leadership actions related to investing in and cultivating relationships. This included actions related to developing and maintaining relationships, facilitating relationship-building for others, practicing trust, and actively working on trust-building. Boyer et al (2019) found that leaders engaged in collaborative partnerships prioritize interpersonal aspects such as motivational leadership and relationship-building. P10 emphasized leaders need to be “intentional about developing relationships and

maintaining relationships with colleagues and other organizations.” P2 highlighted the need to “build relations which go a little bit outside of what they call it a professional relationship, you know, build that personal relation with people.” P7 said, “I would say again that you need to lead with trust. You need to develop and build trust.” P5 highlighted the transformative power of trust, noting that "whoever decides to trust, takes the risk… can lead to transformative change."

Being Humble. Eleven participants (68%) referenced practicing humility as a key leadership action for fostering collaboration. Keywords in this theme included acknowledging weaknesses, asking for help, having a low ego, being open to learning, and owning mistakes. Humility entails an acknowledgement of weaknesses and mistakes and actively seek to learn from others (Zhou et al., 2022). P15 emphasized the importance of checking one's ego, stating, “it's not about you, and you can really hold your ego very loosely… that's where you get true collaboration.” P10 noted the necessity of humility, saying, “you're going to need to be humble because you can always learn more, even if you feel like you're an expert in an area.” P10 also emphasized the importance of recognizing others' expertise, stating, “realizing that someone else has more expertise in an area than you do and being willing to ask for help.” P3 said, “It's about owning up to your mistakes and being humble, and that's part of collaboration.”

Persuading Others. Eight participants (50%) highlighted the need for leaders to persuade others as a crucial aspect of fostering collaboration. Keywords in this theme included references to convincing others, gaining buy-in, influencing decisions, and advocating for ideas. Leaders tend to rely on negotiation and persuasion skills within collaborative environments (Kramer et al., 2019; Salamon & Toepler, 2015). P2 said, “You don't have formal authority over other organizations. So you really need to lead by motivating people, convincing them of the things you want.” P11 explained, “you have to reach out and persuade those that are persuadable.”

Maintaining Mission Focus. Eight participants (50%) emphasized leadership actions related to maintaining focus on the purpose of collaboration. This included repeatedly

communicating the shared vision, setting clear goals, and reminding participants of the common objectives. Boyer et al (2019) suggested that the internal dynamics of INGOs favor mission-oriented leadership styles. P8 emphasized the need for leaders to “reframe and remind people… what is our common objective and goal here as a group.” P2 stressed the importance of “keeping your focus on what the scope is.” P4 explained, “I try to set expectations. What is the goal and purpose that we're trying to achieve?”

Summary of RQ1. The aim of RQ1 was to identify the strategies and best practices employed by organizational leaders in INGOs to foster collaboration. Through analysis of participants' responses to the three interview questions, 18 themes were identified based on keywords and phrases. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) shared interests, (b) shared ownership, (c) relationship & trust, (d) complementary skills & resources, (e) open communication, (f) interdependence, (g) convening, (h) building trust & relationships, (i) agreement & goal alignment, (j) resource sharing, (k) stakeholder engagement, (l) establishing governance, (m) facilitating effective communication, (n) empowering others, (o) investing in relationships, (p) being humble, (q) persuading others, and (r) maintaining mission focus.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 (RQ2) states, “What challenges do organizational leaders face in INGOs when implementing the strategies and practices employed to foster collaboration for transformative change?” Participants responded to three interview questions designed to address RQ2. The three interview questions are as follows:

- IQ 2: What challenges did you encounter in fostering collaboration and achieving the desired outcome?
- IQ 4: What challenges did you encounter using the practices and strategies you mentioned?

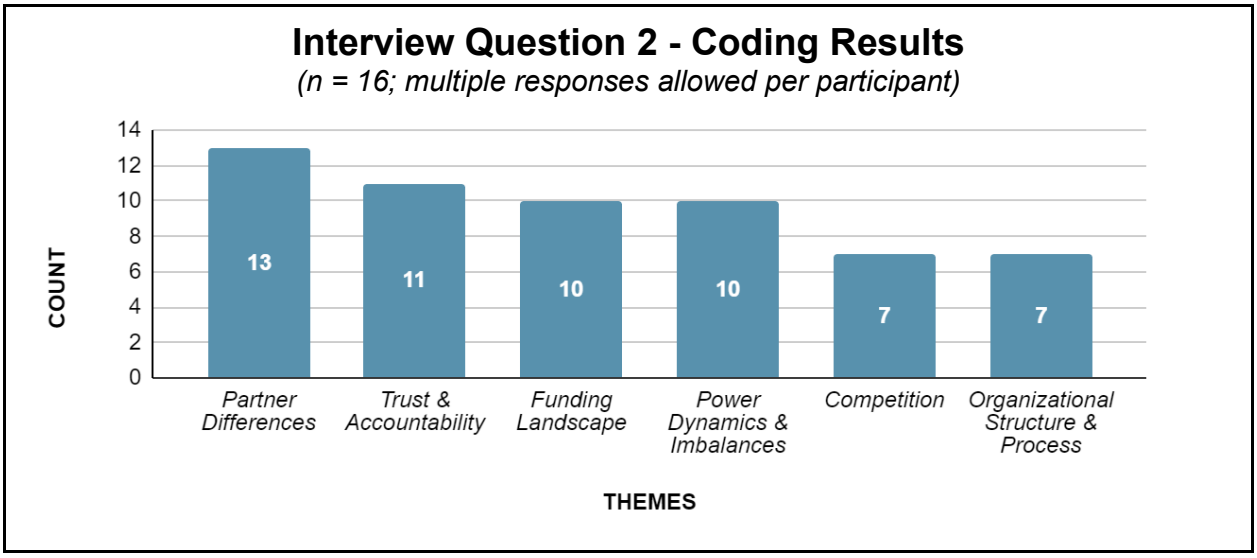
- IQ 6: Among fellow INGO leaders in your position, are you aware of specific instances where fostering collaboration for transformative change proved challenging? Can you describe the challenges they faced and how they tried to overcome them?

Thematic analysis of participants' responses across the three interview questions yielded overarching themes related to the challenges INGO leaders face in fostering collaboration for transformative change.

Interview question 2. Interview question 2 asked, “What challenges did you encounter in fostering collaboration and achieving the desired outcome?” Participant responses were coded into keywords which were analyzed and grouped into six themes related to general challenges to collaboration. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) partner differences, (b) trust & accountability, (c) funding landscape, (d) power dynamics & imbalances, (e) competition, and (f) organizational structure & process (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

IQ2 Coding Results: General Challenges to Collaboration



Note. Each bar in the figure represents a theme from responses to IQ2, with the number showing how many participants contributed to each theme. *'n*' indicates the total number of participants.

Partner Differences. Thirteen participants (81%) noted differences with partners as a primary challenge to collaboration. This included differences in culture, faith, missions, practices, and approaches. Cultural differences were mentioned more than any other category. P14 said, “there's all the cultural aspects of collaboration. There's often a wide divide in what a Haitian’s leadership expectations are compared to what our expectations are.” P11 echoed the challenge of cultural difference, explaining, “Sometimes… [our partners] say, ‘Well, that's our culture, and we can’t change that, we don't want to.’ It's very culturally sensitive.” P10 emphasized differences in individuals as well as organizations, stating, “I think that that can be a challenge because you got different personalities and you've got individual personalities, but organizations also have personalities.“ P3 noted the challenge of “different beliefs” referring to faith traditions, while P4 noted differences “can be ethnic, it could be socio-economic, just be working in a different office with a different culture.” Wood and Gray (1991) describe the task of collaboration in part as the overcoming of differences to find solutions.

Trust & Accountability. Eleven participants (68%) identified challenges related to trust, accountability, and reciprocity within collaboration. This aligns with existing research highlighting trust-building and managing stakeholder demands as key challenges for INGO leadership (Baiden & Book, 2022; Saab et al., 2013). P10 said, “it may be impossible to collaborate with an organization that doesn't bring anything to the table.” P9 shared a cautionary tale, saying, “We've learned lessons through the hard way of picking the wrong partner and have him in the end realize that they're not really that into charity work. They were just wanting our equipment.” P8 also recalled, “it was an Achilles heel that we had to be able to do better in terms of our accountability to our donors, to our staff, to our beneficiaries.”

Funding Landscape. Ten participants (66%) identified challenges related to funding and funder incentives as obstacles to successful collaboration. These challenges stem from factors such as competition for limited resources, funders imposing agendas, and anti-collaborative incentives. P8 described competition as inevitable, explaining, “there's competition

among NGOs. There has to be. It's natural. We're all chasing funding, and there's only a limited amount of funding." Participants noted the challenge funding incentives create, with P15 stating "I think we've just created a system that rewards control over the work because we want to sell the output side of it." The fear of losing a competitive advantage can restrict collaboration, as organizations may be reluctant to share knowledge or resources freely (Saab et al., 2013). P13 said, "So yes, there's a desire to collaborate. But not to the extent that maybe I shared too much where I'm at a competitive disadvantage." P5 described the funding landscape, stating, "it tends more toward paternalism, right? Like I got a bag full of money, and I have these best practices, and I want you to do these things. Well, that's not really collaboration."

Power Dynamics & Imbalances. Ten participants (62%) indicated power dynamics and imbalances as challenges to collaboration. Responses in this theme pertained to how power and influence are distributed, perceived, and navigated among participants. Participants noted power dynamics between organizations of different sizes. P6 explained, "the larger organization… there's a lot of oxygen that they take up and often they have bigger platforms, it's easier for them to claim the successes of the collective work." P1 also noted that "If you're small like us, you don't have a lot of leverage, which that kind of size matters." P13 cautioned, "money… it does give you power, but it can also give you arrogance, where you're not listening as much." This finding aligns with research by Hermann et al. (2013) who identified unequal power relations as a key challenge in partnerships.

Competition. Seven participants (46%) indicated competition as a key challenge to collaboration. This theme encompassed responses highlighting competitive mindsets, territorial behaviors, and zero-sum thinking. Saab et al. (2013) identified competition for resources as a primary barrier to interorganizational coordination. P6 simply stated, "competition is the opposite force that you need to solve collective issues." P13 described the competitive mindset, saying, "it feels like you know, if I share a little bit too much, you might take some of what I got." P14 echoed that sentiment, saying, "there are people who just don't want to collaborate… they got

their little piece of the pie over here." P6 said, "some organization… come in with a mindset that they need to out compete, outperform others."

Organizational Structure & Process. Seven participants (43%) highlighted organizational structure and processes as significant challenges hindering collaboration. This encompassed issues such as siloed departments, unclear communication channels, and lack of support from leadership. INGOs often operate in ways that constrain their ability to adapt (Mitchell & Schmitz, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2020). P15 pointed out challenges stemming from "the way we set up structurally our departments." P2 explained, "the different ways organizations are internally organized sometimes create difficulties in moving forward." P8 recalled communication challenges, stating, "decisions were made top-down and barely communicated, causing confusion." P11 noted, "most of our partners have to survive within project modes, making it difficult to engage in broader movements or learning activities."

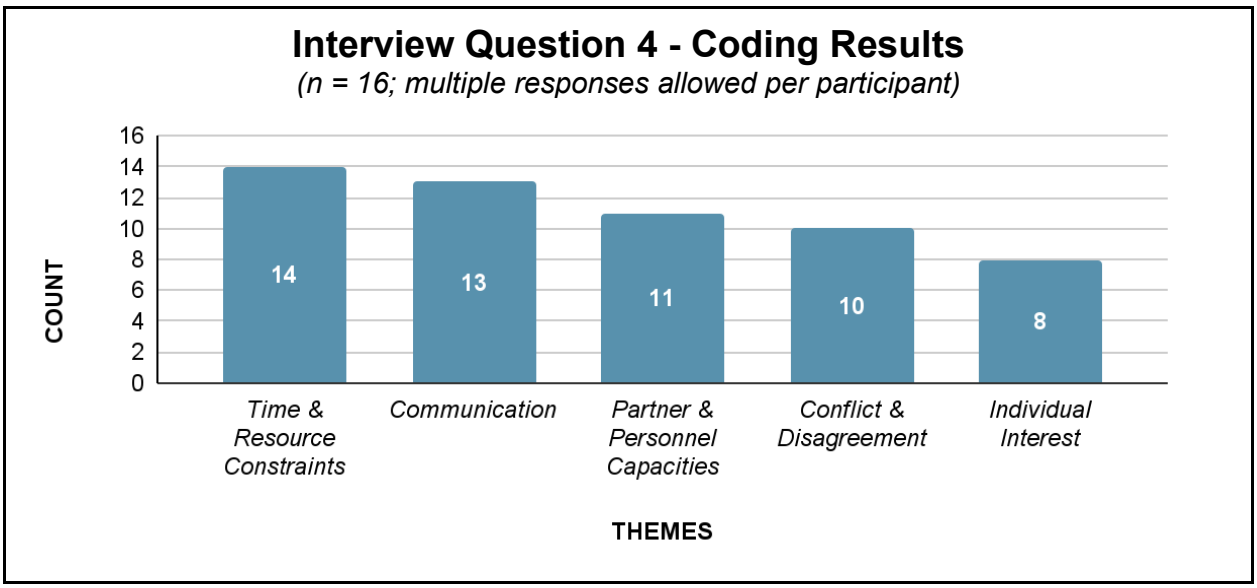
Interview question 4. Interview question 4 asked, "What challenges did you encounter using the practices and strategies you mentioned?" Participant responses were coded into keywords which were analyzed and grouped into six themes related to challenges to collaboration strategies and practices. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) time & resource constraints, (b) communication, (c) partner & personnel capacities, (d) conflict & disagreements, and (e) individual interest (see Figure 5).

Time & Resource Constraints. Fourteen participants (87%) noted constraints to resources as a primary challenge to collaboration strategies. Time was emphasized, highlighting the challenges of coordinating schedules, managing workloads, and ensuring adequate time for collaboration activities. Achieving sustainable and effective collaboration between organizations is resource-intensive (Head & Alford, 2015). P12 noted collaboration "takes money and time and people and nobody has that in our world." P6 echoed, "There's a cost to it. Someone's got to put time into it and things." P11 said, "[For] people to collaborate, it takes resources… time. Sometimes it takes new staff. And that draws away from your sort of core mandate and what

you're doing yourself.“ P16 explained, “NGOs traditionally are very under-resourced and overworked and people have a lot of different jobs, and the best people are the ones that have the most work.”

Figure 5

IQ4 Coding Results: Challenges to Collaboration Strategies



Note. Each bar in the figure represents a theme from responses to IQ4, with the number showing how many participants contributed to each theme. *'n'* indicates the total number of participants.

Communication. Thirteen participants (81%) identified communication as a challenge to collaboration practices. This includes navigating cross-cultural communication, maintaining consistent communication, ensuring transparency, and facilitating effective communication channels. Saab et al. (2013) attribute communication issues to inherent differences in stakeholders' perspectives and needs. P12 highlighted language barriers, noting, “they don't all speak English as a first language. So sometimes the communications are not as great.” Speaking of intraorganizational collaboration, P8 said, “there's so many times we've fallen short because we just don't focus on the communication.” P3 noted the difficulty of facilitating communication, stating “it's hard to get people to sit down together and have conversations and

realize the things they have in common versus the things versus this focus on the differences." P10 expressed,

> I think the challenge is to continue communication throughout the entire process. Not just at the beginning, where everything is sort of exciting and you're desperate for help and you want to get things going, that's a little bit easier to collaborate at that stage.

Partner & Personnel Capacities. Eleven participants (68%) noted personnel capacities as a challenge to implementing collaboration. This includes partner capacities, such as when P9 stated, "it's hard lots of times at the first try to get [local partners] to know how to run a business and know how important it is." Inadequate expertise of partners can impede progress, create frustrations, and hinder the achievement of shared goals (Glazer et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2015). P4 described uneven capacities between collaborating parties, stating, "Sometimes it's the speed at which [our partners] can move or we can move." P2 mentioned the difficulty of turnover of staff involved in the collaboration, saying, "if you have a lot of turnover in a short period of time that can be challenging." P8 pointed to insufficient internal capacity, stating, "I couldn't make this vision happen by myself. I had hired people and other people that hired other people that were making it impossible to make this vision a reality."

Conflict & Disagreement. Ten participants (62%) highlighted conflict and disagreement as challenges to collaboration strategies. These challenges included instances of unwillingness to compromise, avoidance of discussion, and misaligned visions. These findings resonate with Mitchell's (2014) study, which identified conflicting interests and organizational cultures as significant barriers to collaboration among INGOs. P14 explained, "when you have a collaborator that is just dead set on something. It's like pulling teeth." P2 recounted a challenging situation where "there was never an agreement among the CEOs of what the [collaboration] was all about." P8 cautioned against having "so many voices that you don't actually ever get anywhere because no one comes to agreement."

Individual Interest. Eight participants (50%) noted individual interest as a challenge to collaborative strategies. P2 highlighted the issue of conflicting agendas, stating, "everybody

comes with their own agenda to the table and says, ‘Oh, I can use this group for this or that.’ And people from the outside do the same thing." P3 cautioned against individual action, saying, “You can't just go do things on your own.” P6 noted the challenge of a mindset that resists sharing, saying “We do our own curriculum, we're not going to share our curriculum. It's our intellectual property.” A sense of individual interest can undermine trust in a partner and threaten the collaborative relationship (Mitchell, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2020). P6 critiqued the notion of individual interest within collaborations, arguing,

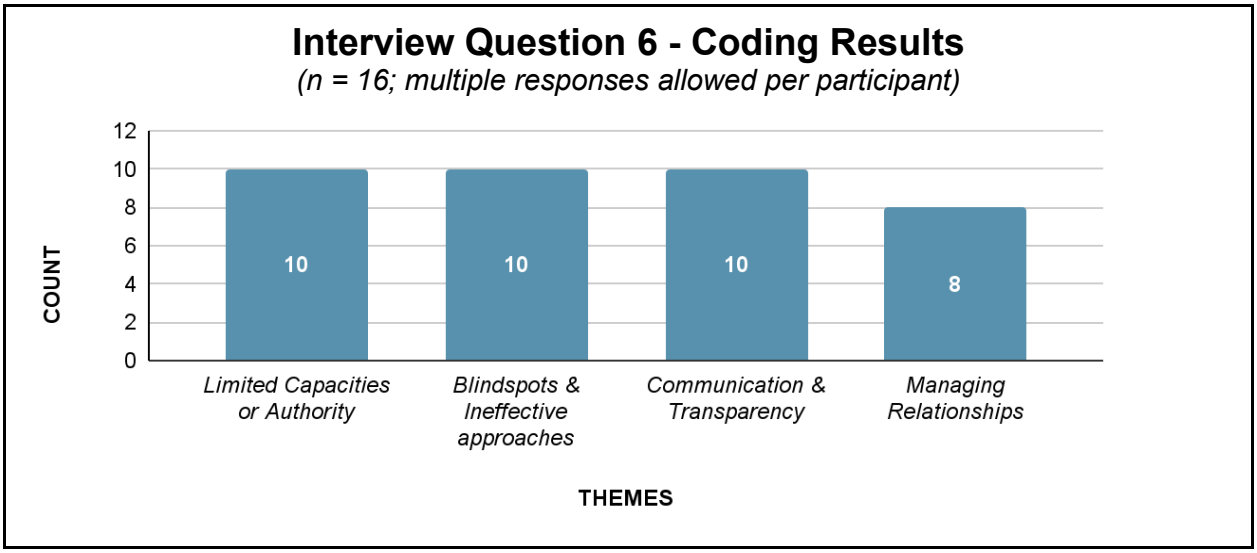
> In my opinion, there is no need to compete, we get competition from private sector capitalism, and I think some mindsets are that competition is so great for some reason, you know, that it gets people to be better. And I think it's really disruptive to social good.

Interview question 6. Interview question 6 asked, “Among fellow INGO leaders in your position, are you aware of specific instances where fostering collaboration for transformative change proved challenging? Can you describe the challenges they faced and how they tried to overcome them?” Participant responses were coded into keywords which were analyzed and grouped into four themes related to leadership challenges to fostering collaboration. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) limited capacities or authority, (b) blindspots & ineffective approaches, (c) communication & transparency, and (d) managing relationships (see Figure 6).

Limited Capacities or Authority. Ten participants (62%) referred to limits to leadership skills, capacities, or authority as challenges to leading collaboration. This aligns with Mitchell et al.'s (2020) findings on skill gaps among INGO leaders. P8 stated “I went to a crash course in learning how to do this job. You know, I didn't wasn't trained for it. I didn't have any experience doing it. So I've made a lot of mistakes.” P2 mentioned authority as a challenge, stating, "I don't think I had the full institutional backing to do that." P8 stated the difficulty of "not being based in Haiti," implying geographical limitations hindered their ability to effectively lead the collaboration. P1 emphasized the difficulty of managing change, stating, "the problem is you're trying to manage the change. That's the issue. And that's the hard part."

Figure 6

IQ6 Coding Results: Leadership Challenges to Fostering Collaboration



Note. Each bar in the figure represents a theme from responses to IQ6, with the number showing how many participants contributed to each theme. *'n'* indicates the total number of participants.

***Blind Spots & Ineffective Approaches*.** Ten participants (62%) provided responses related to leaders being unaware of their limitations or weaknesses in their leadership style and the methods they use. According to Knox Clarke (2013), ineffective leadership is the primary constraint to effective INGO operations. P15 pointed to the prevalence of ego in the non-profit sector, stating, "It can be a lot of egos in the nonprofit world...people that feel like they have the answer for someone else's problems." P5 described a tendency for leaders to develop "little blinders... losing sight of what that actual potential is." P7 provided an example of a collaboration failing due to a leader's "complete control over everything happening in the field." P1 questioned the motivations of some leaders, asking, "you know how much of this is just 'I like doing this. I want to do this' versus understanding what the beneficiary really needs and wants, and why?"

Communication & Transparency. Ten participants (62%) identified communication as a significant challenge in leading collaboration. This encompassed issues such as the

willingness to share information, language barriers, persuasion, and overall effectiveness in conveying messages. Effective communication helps align everyone towards common goals, ensures clarity in roles and expectations, and builds trust and rapport among collaborators (Hermann & Pagé, 2016; Knox Clarke, 2013). P14 said, “good communication… it's so hard.” P5 reflected, “are we able to communicate with the world around us... that's the thing that makes it really hard.” P8 noted, “I'd say the more challenging part, which was getting the entire kind of Haitian staff to understand what we were doing and why.” P1 explained, “leadership… is willingness to be open and share. So there's a lot of unwillingness.” P9 described the particular challenge of leading internationally, stating,

> We found that when you have a conversation with somebody and you know, they speak Swahili and you speak English and you think you communicate that yeah, the conversation is okay, what did you hear me say? So, what's our plan? And they'll repeat back something so different. And so that's obviously an issue that everyone has to deal with internationally is the language barriers.

Managing Relationships. Eight participants (50%) noted the challenge of managing relationships while leading collaboration. This includes navigating diverse personalities, expectations, and potential conflict. The ability to manage relationships with a diverse set of stakeholders is an important skill for INGO leaders (Mitchell et al., 2020; Zeimers et al., 2019). P8 explained managing relationships “required a lot of my personal time to massage everyone's egos.” Others described challenges in navigating diverse personalities and expectations. P7 recounted a situation where conflicting roles led to tension, stating, “she was constantly asking me like, why hasn't this been done and why hasn't this been done? And it's not my job… So I would keep trying to push it back and it kind of didn't end well.” Additionally, P4 highlighted the financial impact of strained relationships, stating, “He has blocked me in the past, and the organization has lost millions of dollars because of it.” P3 underscored the difficulty of overcoming obstacles, stating, “you're going to bump into a lot of things, but if you don't have that relationship, it's hard to overcome those things.”

Summary of RQ2. RQ2 aimed to identify the challenges INGO leaders face in fostering collaboration for transformative change. Through analysis of participants' responses to the three interview questions, 15 themes were identified based on keywords and phrases. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) partner differences, (b) funding landscape, (c) trust & accountability, (d) power dynamics & imbalances, (e) competition, (f) organizational structure & process, (g) time & resource constraints, (h) communication, (i) partner & personnel capacities, (j) conflict & disagreements, (k) individual interest, (l) limited capacities or authority, (m) blind spots & ineffective approaches, (n) communication & transparency, and (o) managing relationships.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 (RQ3) states “How do organizational leaders in INGOs measure the success of transformative cooperation initiatives?” Participants responded to two interview questions designed to address RQ3. The two interview questions are as follows:

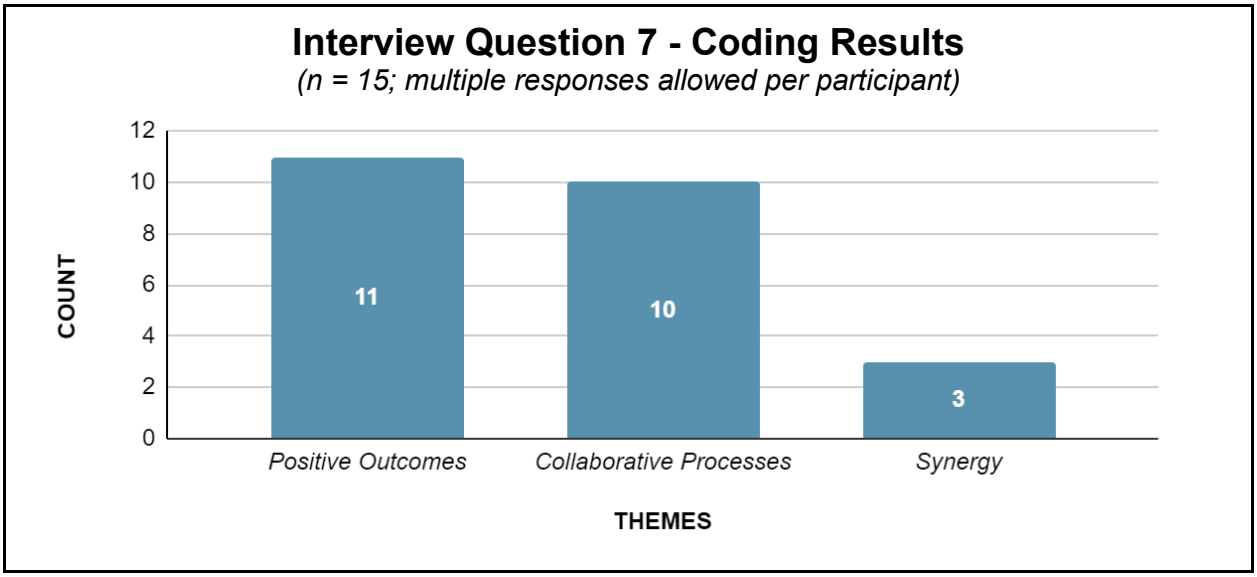
- IQ 7: As you reflect on your experiences, how would you describe your understanding of what constitutes successful collaboration?
- IQ 8: What specific aspects or indicators do you use to measure and evaluate the success of collaboration in achieving the desired outcomes?

Thematic analysis of participants' responses across the two interview questions yielded overarching themes related to how INGO leaders measure success in fostering collaboration for transformative change initiatives.

Interview question 7. Interview question 7 asked, “As you reflect on your experiences, how would you describe your understanding of what constitutes successful collaboration?” Participant responses were coded into keywords which were analyzed and grouped into three themes related to participants' understanding of what constitutes successful collaboration. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) positive outcomes, (b) collaborative processes, and (c) synergy (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

IQ7 Coding Results: What Constitutes Successful Collaboration



Note. Each bar in the figure represents a theme from responses to IQ7, with the number showing how many participants contributed to each theme. *'n'* indicates the total number of participants.

Positive Outcomes. Eleven participants (73%) defined successful collaboration in terms of positive outcomes, highlighting achievements that benefit both the individual and the collective. These outcomes included shared purpose, sustainability, and mutual benefit. Provan and Milward (2001) categorized collaboration outcomes into three key dimensions: partnership, community, and single-organization impacts. Attaining clearly defined goals emerged as a key indicator of success for several participants. P14 explained, “if you've got a project and you have good goals laid out, and they're measurable goals, you come to the end, and you can measure an outcome. That's a good collaboration.” P10 reiterated this perspective, noting, “you end up accomplishing your objective that you came together in collaboration for in the first place.” Mutual benefit was another key aspect of successful collaboration, as expressed by P6, “reciprocity that it has to for to continue it has to pay off for all the parties.” P5 highlighted the importance of broader impact, stating, “I think the other is that it is impactful beyond those of us that are you know, at the table, right, can we see impact outside of ourselves?”

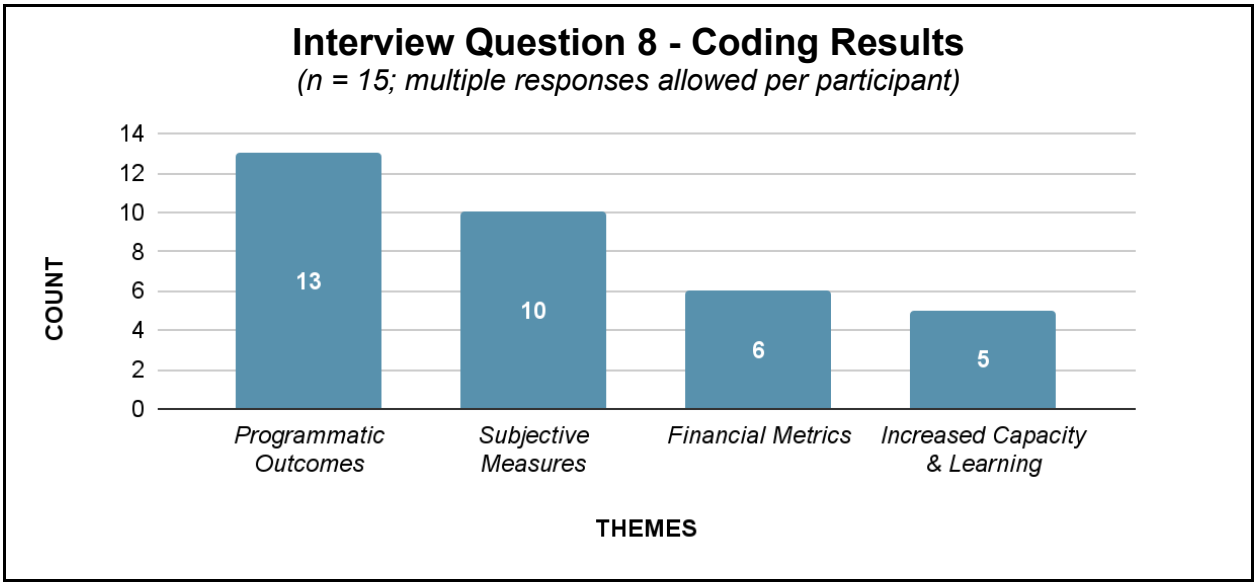
Collaborative Processes. Ten participants (66%) outlined successful collaboration in terms of effective processes and active participation, emphasizing elements such as clear communication, a commitment to mutual benefit, and the reciprocity of partners. The literature highlights the strength of the partnership as a key indicator of successful collaboration (Mendel & Brudney, 2018; Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023; Provan & Milward, 2001). P1 characterized success as a sense of "collegiality." P7 described success as "when everyone has a voice right when everybody and when everybody can contribute," and P9 emphasized "mutual goals, mutual respect, and trust where we both understand each other." P3 noted that successful collaboration was "open communication where everyone was heard, where everyone understood the goal that was made in the collaboration and what we're trying to do and understand their role and everyone else's role going forward." P4 described it as "people that are willing to share ideas and work together."

Synergy. Three participants (18%) expressed success in collaboration in terms of synergy or achieving a greater impact together than they could have achieved individually. Effective collaboration allows teams to achieve results that surpass the capabilities of individual members (Costumato, 2021; Gazley & Guo, 2020). P2 succinctly captured this concept, stating, "it creates the synergy… the sum is bigger than the total of the parts." Similarly, P5 emphasized the collaborative advantage, asking, "Are we able to do more together than what either one of us would have been able to do on our own?" P10 echoed this sentiment, defining success as "achieving things together which you wouldn't be able to achieve alone."

Interview question 8. Interview question 8 asked, "What specific aspects or indicators do you use to measure and evaluate the success of collaboration in achieving the desired outcomes?" Participant responses were coded into keywords which were analyzed and grouped into four themes relating to indicators or measures used to evaluate collaboration. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) programmatic outcomes, (b) subjective measures, (c) financial metrics, and (d) increased capacity & learning (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

IQ8 Coding Results: Measures to Evaluate Collaboration



Note. Each bar in the figure represents a theme from responses to IQ8, with the number showing how many participants contributed to each theme. *'n'* indicates the total number of participants.

Programmatic Outcomes. Thirteen participants (86%) highlighted the use of program and project outcomes as metrics for measuring the success of collaboration. Their responses included references to project goals and indicators. For instance, P13 explained, "I think the metrics by which you would judge success would be dependent on what your goals were." Similarly, P3 mentioned, "we do have indicators of success for individual programs... and objectives." P2 provided examples of programmatic indicators, such as "awareness of children and parents around child rights... reduction of corporal punishment." P12 highlighted the ability to track the impact of funding, stating, "we can track exactly how many people our dollars have been and how many women in the projects have been affected and what the effect has been." P6 noted, "We have KPIs for program delivery within projects, but none to measure how effectively we work together." Provan and Milward (2001) highlighted the importance of evaluating outcomes by categorizing them into three key dimensions: partnership, community, and single-organization impacts.

Subjective Measures. Ten participants (66%) noted the use of subjective measures such as the sense of enjoyment, feelings of contentment, and happiness within the collaborative relationship. P10 stated simply, “it's subjective obviously.” This aligns with Ofem et al. (2018) who define collaboration success as a subjective partner assessment based on satisfaction and smooth operation. P5 described indicators of success as “my perception of... It's impactful. It's life-giving. I'm thankful for it and I want to keep showing up for it.“ P3 suggested an assessment criterion focused on satisfaction, asking “Do we like what's happening?” P9 said, “it should be fun. It should be enjoyable. This should be the most fun work and they should enjoy it, we should enjoy it, and we should enjoy each other's company and work together.” P1 listed indicators of successful collaboration,

> So it's recognition of the value you're bringing, you know, a big one and are you being listened to? Do they respect your thoughts? Are they able to help you refine your thinking? Does that change the way the dynamics and the way you're approaching whatever that is you're trying to collaborate on?

Financial Metrics. Six participants (40%) indicated using financial metrics as an indicator of successful collaboration. These included joint fundraising success, achieving project goals through cost-effectiveness, and efficient delivery of services. INGOs often rely on donors for funding and as a result need to track financial metrics to ensure accountability and access to future funds (Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023; Mitchell et al., 2020). P11 stated one measure to be “if you could raise more money jointly than you can individually.” P13 noted measures specifically for fundraising, saying, “so you're collaborating to raise money specifically, did you both meet your funding target, you know, fundraising goals.” P10 explained, “you could look at finances to see if that I think you can look at, did we accomplish the ultimate objective if it was to deliver aid to this particular place?” P9 provided specific financial indicators, stating, “we're looking at cost per surgery, cost per person. So you know, outreaches you know the cost of what it costs them to deliver a pair of glasses. So there's financial metrics there.”

Increased Capacity & Learning. Five participants (33%) noted the use of learning and capacity improvement as key indicators of successful collaboration. This aligns with Proven and Milward's (2001) concept of single-organization impact as a collaboration outcome indicator. P5 said "Do I have more to offer others today than I did three years ago when we first started working together. And is that true of all of us?" P10 echoed this sentiment, stating, "we learned a lot. We built a relationship. And the next time around, we're better positioned to respond to whatever hurricane or earthquake… that comes along." P1 added a point on reciprocal learning, stating, "What they're saying I agree with and vice versa is I've learned something back and forth on it. So I mean, that's one way of indirect measuring" P11 indicated a broad range of capability improvements as success indicators, saying, "I think that would be for me, the most realistic indicator is strengthened internal and externally oriented capacities, leadership, fundraising, knowing how to do advocacy, awareness about issues, linkages."

Summary of RQ3. The aim of RQ3 was to identify how INGO leaders measure success in fostering collaboration for transformative change initiatives. Through analysis of participants' responses to the two interview questions, 7 themes were identified based on keywords and phrases. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) positive outcomes, (b) collaborative processes, (c) synergy, (d) programmatic outcomes, (e) subjective measures, (f) financial metrics, and (g) increased capacity & learning.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 (RQ4) states "What recommendations would organizational leaders in INGOs have for future practitioners entering the field to foster transformative cooperation?" Participants responded to two interview questions designed to address RQ4. The two interview questions are as follows:

- IQ 9: If you could go back and do one thing differently regarding fostering collaboration for transformative change, what would it be, and how would you have implemented it?

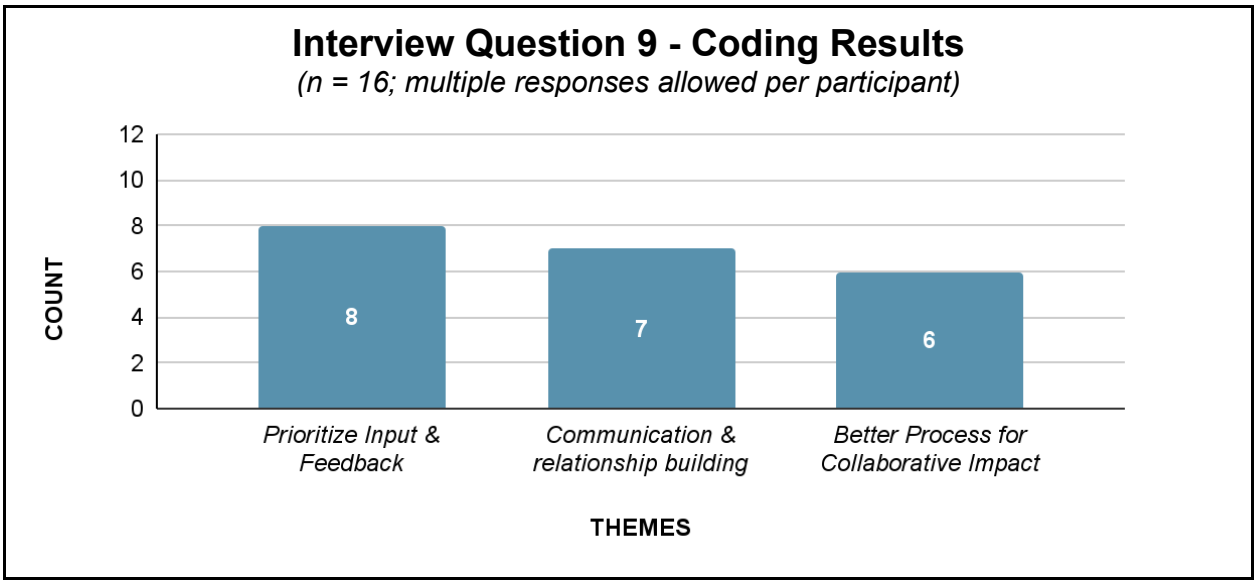
- IQ 10: What advice would you give future INGO leaders interested in using collaboration to bring about transformative change in their work?

Thematic analysis of participants' responses across the two interview questions yielded overarching themes related to recommendations INGO leaders have for emerging leaders who wish to foster collaboration for transformative change.

Interview question 9. IQ9 asked, “If you could go back and do one thing differently regarding fostering collaboration for transformative change, what would it be, and how would you have implemented it?” Participant responses were coded into keywords which were analyzed and grouped into four themes relating to retrospective changes to foster collaboration. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) prioritized feedback & learning, (b) communication & relationship building, and (c) better process for collaborative impact (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

IQ9 Coding Results: Retrospective Changes to Foster Collaboration



Note. Each bar in the figure represents a theme from responses to IQ9, with the number showing how many participants contributed to each theme. *'n'* indicates the total number of participants.

Prioritize Input & Feedback. Eight participants (50%) emphasized the importance of learning from others and actively seeking feedback and input. Responses within this theme

included retrospective actions related to listening, mentorship, feedback, and acquiring more knowledge. Interpersonal skills are a critical element of successful nonprofit leadership (Kearns et al., 2015). P4 expressed, "I would have really loved to have had a mentor at a younger age." Others emphasized the importance of actively seeking feedback, with P5 suggesting they would have built "feedback loops... and surround myself more with voices that I could hear, that could look critically at my attitudes and kind of look at my blind spots and assumptions that were totally off." P3 reflected, "I would listen more is what I would do." P14 recognized the “need to listen to the culture when you first go in and listen to the leadership.”

Communication & relationship building. Seven participants (43%) in total highlighted the importance of relationship-building and open communication. This theme grouped responses related to participants' desire to have fostered stronger relationships and communication. Established relationships is an important condition for successful collaboration (Brass et al., 2018). P12 suggested, "Just go and meet the people" while P9 stated the importance of “going there in person.” P10 wished they had been "more intentional about developing relationships and maintaining relationships with colleagues and other organizations." P2 stated, "I think what I didn't do at the time was go to each of the agencies that were involved with this program and ask what they wanted to get out of it."

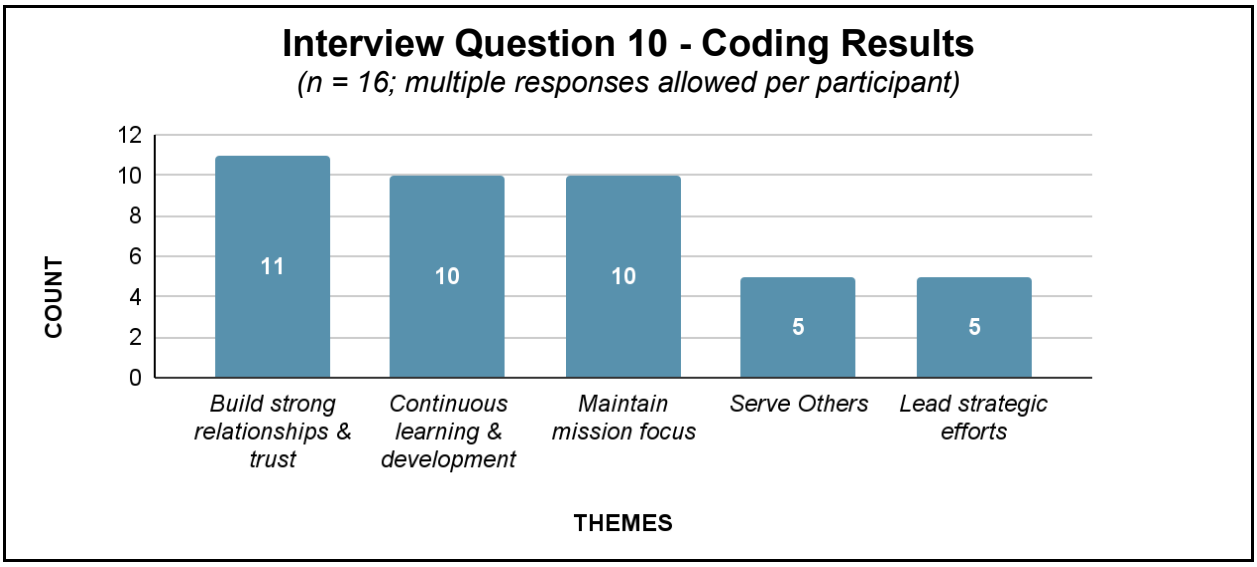
***Better Process for Collaborative Impact*.** This theme grouped responses related to process changes that participants identified when reflecting on retrospective changes they would make to enhance collaboration. Six participants (37%) in total mentioned altering processes to improve collaboration and its impact. Several participants reflected on formal process changes, including P11's suggestion for "being more intentional in terms of tracking [the impact] better" and the need for "more documentation" to facilitate information sharing with partners. Noting their initial lack of accountability, P9 emphasized the importance of implementing "accountability, transparency, and those kinds of things" from the outset. Lewis et

al (2010) suggest that establishing boundaries within collaborations is essential to prevent inefficiencies. P6 described how they “should've removed the barriers to collaboration.”

Interview question 10. IQ10 asked, “What advice would you give future INGO leaders interested in using collaboration to bring about transformative change in their work?” Participant responses were coded into keywords which were analyzed and grouped into six themes relating to advice to future INGO leaders for fostering collaboration. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) build strong relationships & trust, (b) continuous learning & development, (c) maintain mission focus, (d) serve others, and (e) lead strategic efforts (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

IQ10 Coding Results: Advice to Future Leaders for Fostering Collaboration



Note. Each bar in the figure represents a theme from responses to IQ10, with the number showing how many participants contributed to each theme. *'n'* indicates the total number of participants.

Build strong relationships & trust. Eleven participants (68%) offered insights and advice related to the importance of establishing trust and building relationships. This theme included references to listening, trust, respect, and networking in relation to relationship formation. P9 emphasized that successful collaboration must be “based on trust and relationships.” Similarly, P7 stated, “you need to develop and build trust. I think that's really

important and that you need to listen more.” P3 noted the importance of “sitting down and listening and really coming together to hear each other.” Additionally, multiple participants highlighted the benefits of attending conferences. P6 pointed out that such gatherings provide crucial opportunities to “build those friendships,” while P10 suggested that relationships formed at conferences can "benefit your organization and then ultimately benefit the world. Because you made that investment many years ago to build these relationships." Hodges and Howieson (2017) noted networking as a primary characteristic of successful leadership.

Continuous learning and development. Ten participants (62%) mentioned advice related to learning, seeking understanding, and gathering input from diverse perspectives. Learning enables leaders to become better at partnership engagements as they gain experience over time (Mendel & Brudney, 2018). P2 advised future leaders to "try to understand, put yourself in the feet of the other”. Similarly, P3 stated, "Realize that you're not always right, that you really need to listen to your partners," underscoring the value of listening to others' viewpoints. P15 emphasized input from beneficiaries, asking, "how are we really listening to the people that we are serving?" P3 recommended seeking out “opposition views… because we can learn something from those as well." P10 suggested,

> Pick up the phone and call somebody… ‘Hey, my team is struggling with this concept. With this particular issue. I'm questioning my point of view about this. Have you experienced something similar? What kind of advice do you have?’

Maintain mission focus. Ten participants (62%) offered advice centered on maintaining focus on the mission, vision, or goal of collaboration, whether in general or in specific arrangements. P12 advised to “keep the mission” and warned, “It's so easy to go away from the mission, to do mission drift to get money.” Similarly, P8 cautioned, “there are going to be moments where you're gonna want to hijack the process… short circuit it and cut to the chase, but you got to commit to it.“ P2 said, “more than to the organization, you need to be loyal to the vision and mission, and I think that is where for me where it all starts.” P6 noted the benefits of

“articulating a bigger vision… when you shoot for a bigger idea, you get more money for it.” This focus on purpose can foster alignment and direction among all stakeholders (Mitchell, 2015).

Serve Others. Five participants (31%) recommended that future leaders prioritize others, emphasizing service, sacrifice, and selflessness, echoing the characteristics of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977). P3 simply stated, “put yourself and your own thoughts and ideas in the back.” P15 cautioned, “it's not about you… check your ego and hold it very loosely. I think when you do that. I think that's where you get, like actual collaboration.” P5 said “It's this completely different perspective on leadership. It starts with service and there's a cost to it.” P11 suggested leaders reflect,

> How can we invest some part of our resources into working with others, where we can hopefully accomplish more working together, at least on common agendas, than we can by working separately? I think that is taking the time to do that and not be so absorbed, be self-absorbed in your projects in your own growing up for the sake of growing which is the mentality you know, getting credit for yourself… we have to overcome those.

Lead strategic efforts. Five participants (31%) emphasized the need for strategic focus, intentional leadership, and building effective teams and infrastructure to support collaboration. Effective leadership and collaboration are influenced by both organizational structure and individual skills (Knox Clarke, 2013). In reference to successful strategies for collaboration, P2 stated, “it’s very context-specific.” P6 suggested, “I think you have to build organizations, like your own internal organization, to set up those goals [for collaboration].” P8 emphasized the importance of “having the right people, like making good hiring decisions, that’s probably the number one thing.” Similarly, P15 said “I think it is really important that if you are doing work in specific countries, you have strong leadership voices, both within the organization and at a board level of the people that you are serving.” P11 advised future leaders to

> identify more strategically and systematically about what is really required for systemic change. It requires changing mindsets… We have to change the narrative, you know, it's not the neoliberal paradigm of the market.. That system is not sufficient to deal with the sort of issues, the poli-crisis.

Summary of RQ4. The aim of RQ4 was to identify recommendations INGO leaders have for emerging leaders who wish to foster collaboration for transformative change. Through analysis of participants' responses to the two interview questions, 8 themes were identified based on keywords and phrases. The themes that emerged are as follows: (a) prioritized feedback & learning, (b) better process for collaborative impact, (c) communication & relationship building, (d) build strong relationships & trust, (e) continuous learning & development, (f) maintain mission focus, (g) serve others, and (h) lead strategic efforts.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to identify best practices and strategies employed by INGO leaders to foster collaboration for transformative change. Fifteen leaders from various US-based INGOs were recruited to participate in interviews. The participants answered 10 semi-structured interview questions designed to inform the following four research questions:

- *RQ1*: What strategies and best practices are employed by organizational leaders in International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGO) to foster collaboration for transformative change?
- *RQ2:* What challenges do organizational leaders face in INGOs when implementing the strategies and practices employed to foster collaboration for transformative change?
- *RQ3:* How do organizational leaders in INGOs measure the success of collaboration for transformative change initiatives?
- *RQ4:* What recommendations would organizational leaders in INGOs have for future practitioners entering the field to foster collaboration for transformative change?

Sixteen semi-structured interviews in total were conducted to gather data for the study. After coding the data and validating the results with a panel of doctoral candidates from Pepperdine University, the researcher employed a phenomenological approach to data analysis, as detailed in Chapter 3. This analysis yielded a total of 49 themes. A comprehensive

summary of all identified themes is provided in Table 5. Chapter 5 will delve into a discussion of the study's findings, their implications, conclusions, and potential recommendations.

Table 5

Summary of Themes for Four Research Questions

RQ1. Leadership Best Practices	RQ2. Challenges to Collaboration	RQ3. Success Measures	RQ4. Recommendations
Shared Interests	*Partner Differences*	*Positive Outcomes,*	*Prioritize Feedback & Learning,*
Shared Ownership	*Funding Landscape*	*Collaborative Processes*	*Better Process for Collaborative Impact*
Relationship & Trust	*Trust & Accountability*	*Synergy*	*Communication & Relationship Building*
Complementary Skills & Resources	*Power Dynamics & Imbalances*	*Programmatic Outcomes*	*Build Strong Relationships & Trust*
Open Communication	*Competition*	*Subjective Measures*	*Continuous Learning & Development*
Interdependence	*Organizational Structure & Process*	*Financial Metrics*	*Maintain Mission Focus*
Convening	*Time & Resource Constraints*	*Increased Capacity & Learning*	*Serve Others*
Building Trust & Relationships	*Communication*		*Lead Strategic Efforts*
Agreement & Goal Alignment	*Partner & Personnel Capacities*		
Resource Sharing	*Conflict & Disagreements*		
Stakeholder Engagement	*Individual Interest*		
Establishing Governance	*Limited Capacities or Authority*		
Facilitating Effective Communication	*Blind Spots & Ineffective Approaches*		
Empowering Others	*Communication & Transparency*		
Investing In Relationships	*Managing Relationships*		
Being Humble			
Persuading Others			
Maintaining Mission Focus			

Chapter 5: Findings

Introduction

International Non-Governmental Organization (INGO) leaders are tasked with navigating uncertainties, responding to emerging needs, and ensuring both stability and strategic direction (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). There is a growing need for INGOs to join forces and collaborate to address complex challenges and drive transformative change within and beyond their organizations. However, the dynamics of collaboration within INGOs and their capacity to effectively engage with other stakeholders requires deeper examination. While collaboration is widely recognized as a viable approach to tackling wicked problems (Costumato, 2021; Head & Alford, 2015), there remains a gap in understanding the strategies INGO leaders use to foster effective collaboration. This research bridges that gap by identifying best practices for fostering collaboration within and beyond their organizations.

This chapter begins with an overview of the study, including its purpose, research questions, and methodology. Subsequently, it provides a comprehensive discussion of the findings pertaining to each research question. This discussion is followed by an exploration of potential applications, including the proposal of a leadership framework for fostering collaboration. The chapter finishes by summarizing the study's conclusions, highlighting its implications, and offering recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate how leaders in INGOs foster collaboration for transformative change. The following four research questions were established to guide the study:

- RQ1: What strategies and best practices are employed by organizational leaders in INGOs to foster collaboration for transformative change?
- RQ2: What challenges do organizational leaders face in INGOs when implementing the strategies and practices employed to foster collaboration for transformative change?

- RQ3: How do organizational leaders in INGOs measure the success of collaboration for transformative change initiatives?
- RQ4: What recommendations would organizational leaders in INGOs have for future practitioners entering the field to foster collaboration for transformative change?

This study utilized phenomenology, a qualitative research approach, to investigate the established research questions. Phenomenology allows for a comprehensive understanding of INGO leader perceptions and behaviors by focusing on the subjective experiences (Klenke et al., 2016). The study aimed to identify the commonalities in INGO leaders' lived experiences related to collaboration and provide insights that could contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of fostering collaboration for transformative change.

Participants in the study were identified using the Charity Navigator database to locate their organizations, followed by internet searches to identify the leaders of those organizations. The final sample comprised 16 individuals holding leadership positions within an INGO. These participants represented a range of organization sizes, including medium-sized ($500k-$1.9M), large-sized ($2M-$50M), and super-sized ($50M+) organizations. They possessed 8-30 years of experience and came from diverse geographical backgrounds, with individuals based across the U.S. as well as in Nicaragua and Ghana.

This study collected data using a semi-structured interview format, where participants responded to 10 open-ended questions. To ensure reliability and validity, a rigorous question validation process was implemented. This process involved initial evaluation, peer review, and expert review. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The transcripts were then systematically coded to identify keywords, phrases, and recurring viewpoints, which were organized into common themes. An inter-rater review process was used to refine and validate these themes. Following modifications based on the review, the key themes and findings were visually summarized in 10 bar graphs, which provided a clear representation of

the participants' coded responses. Finally, the identified themes were directly examined to address the study's research questions.

Discussion of Key Findings

A summary of key findings for each research question is presented in Table 5, highlighting themes related to strategies, practices, challenges, and recommendations identified by INGO leaders for fostering collaboration. The subsequent sections provide a comprehensive discussion of these findings.

Conceptualization of Collaboration & Change

The aim of this study was to investigate how INGO leaders foster collaboration for transformative change. While the interview protocol did not explicitly ask participants to define collaboration, their responses offered insights into how they conceptualized the phenomenon. In the literature, collaboration is often characterized as a more intensive or integrated process of working together (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Keast et al., 2007; Mitchell, 2015; Nolte, 2018; Wood & Gray, 1991). Participants' understanding of collaboration aligned with this idea, indicating that collaboration generally involves more formal arrangements with a higher degree of mutual planning and management.

It is important to note that, unlike the literature (see Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Saab et al., 2013), participants did not exhibit a nuanced vocabulary when describing different interorganizational arrangements often using terms such as "collaboration," "partnership," and "cooperation" interchangeably. This is consistent with Mitchell et al.'s (2020) observation that within INGOs there is a lack of standardized terminology for categorizing collaborative arrangements. However, participants descriptions of the forms of collaborative arrangements, such as alliances, networks, coalitions, and consortiums, were consistent with existing literature (Guo & Acar, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2020; Sapat et al., 2019; Tran & AbouAssi, 2020).

In several cases, participants made a clear distinction between collaboration and other interorganizational arrangements, emphasizing that collaboration involves more than

transactional exchanges. This distinction is important. Unlike transactional relationships, which typically revolve around a single exchange of goods or services, collaboration involves a deeper level of engagement (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Mitchell, 2015; Nolte, 2018). However, venturing beyond transactional relationships inherently involves a degree of risk. Collaboration requires sharing information and resources openly, potentially exposing an organization's weaknesses or strategies. This vulnerability underscores the critical role of trust in collaboration.

The study results also revealed a variety of perspectives on transformative change and its impact. Participants discussed a wide range of changes, from general concepts to specific instances, often without clearly distinguishing between collaboration and transformative collaboration. Interestingly, the INGO leaders' understanding of transformative change differed from the literature. Brandt et al. (2019) define it as profound, disruptive shifts across individual, organizational, community, or societal systems. However, participants described it in more incremental terms, focusing on improvements within their organizations or operations, not broader systemic change. This discrepancy suggests a potential gap between academic and practitioner perspectives on transformative change. Understanding these variations is crucial for developing effective strategies to foster genuine transformative change.

Results for RQ1

RQ1 stated, “What strategies and best practices are employed by organizational leaders in International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGO) to foster collaboration for transformative change?” Analysis of participant responses revealed 18 key themes pertinent to RQ1. The themes can be further synthesized into core areas where INGO leaders concentrate their efforts to foster transformative collaboration. These core areas include:

- Building Shared Vision and Alignment: Leaders establish common ground, shared goals, and a clear sense of purpose for the collaborative initiative.
- Cultivating Relationships and Trust: Leaders invest in building strong, trusting relationships with collaborators.

- Effective Communication and Engagement: Leaders foster open communication, active listening, and engagement with all stakeholders.
- Leveraging Resources and Partnerships: Leaders strategically utilize individual and collective resources, expertise, and partnerships to achieve goals.
- Structural Support: Leaders establish clear governance structures and frameworks to guide and support collaboration.
- Stakeholder Empowerment: Leaders empower collaborators to contribute their strengths and take ownership of their roles.

Collectively, these elements form a comprehensive strategy for INGO leaders to foster collaboration for transformative change. These strategies encompass both internal dispositions and external actions. The following section further explores the implications and discussions arising from these findings.

Discussion of RQ1

The aim of RQ1 was to determine common strategies and best practices INGO leaders employ to foster collaboration for transformative change. The analysis revealed that the most prominent strategies and practices can be categorized into three key areas: (a) collaborative postures, (b) collaborative practices, and (c) collaborative processes.

Collaborative Postures. The growing emphasis on embracing a collective and collaborative leadership model within INGOs (Boyer et al., 2019; Brass et al., 2018) is echoed by the findings of this study. Participants highlighted the critical role of leaders adopting a collaborative posture, which extends beyond simply managing collaborative projects. A collaborative posture encompasses the leader's mindset, attitudes, and behaviors aimed at fostering and supporting successful collaboration. It emphasizes prioritizing shared goals, building mutual trust, and cultivating a sense of collective ownership. This aligns with the broader shift in the nonprofit sector, where leadership is increasingly defined by a particular approach or way of thinking rather than a specific skill set (Apostu, 2013; Hopkins et al., 2014).

Leaders with a collaborative posture actively cultivate shared interests with partners, foster open communication, and emphasize shared responsibility for success. These leaders prioritize understanding the needs and motivations of others and leverage this knowledge to create a sense of shared values and purpose. Shared values can drive each member to take responsibility for the collaboration and prioritize the success and well-being of all collaborators as a whole over self interest (Mendel & Brudney, 2018). Participants highlighted that such an "others-oriented" approach fosters trust and reciprocity within collaborations, echoing principles of shared leadership (Hermann & Pagé, 2016; Knox Clarke, 2013; Mumbi & Obembe, 2021).

Trust is regarded by nonprofit leaders as fundamental to their effectiveness and credibility within the sector (Kearns et al., 2015). Given the inherent uncertainties and risks in collaboration, cultivating trust is essential for organizational success (Costumato, 2021; Mitchell et al., 2020). This study reinforces this idea, emphasizing the importance of INGO leaders being trustworthy and willing to trust others. The findings suggest that trust allows collaborators to shift focus from individual interests to shared goals, fostering a more collective and successful approach.

Humility also emerged as a prominent leadership posture for fostering successful collaboration. In this context, humility refers to an attitude of self awareness and openness to learning from others (Owens et al., 2013). This humility goes beyond simply acknowledging resource limitations, which is often the initial driver of collaboration (Zeimers et al., 2019). Instead, participants described humility as an openness to learning and genuine appreciation for diverse perspectives. Leaders who embrace humility create space for open communication and constructive feedback. Humility entails an acknowledgement of weaknesses and mistakes and actively seek to learn from others (Zhou et al., 2022). This approach fosters an engaged and productive collaborative environment where everyone feels valued and empowered to contribute their expertise towards shared goals.

Collaborative Practices. INGO leaders rely on a mixture of leadership skills, including communication, problem-solving, persuasion, flexibility, and trust building (Costumato, 2021; Kearns et al, 2015). The study findings indicate there are common actions or practices that INGO leaders use to foster collaboration. These practices include facilitating effective communication, empowering others, and investing in relationships.

Participants unanimously identified effective communication as critical for successful collaboration, echoing existing research on the importance of clear communication in achieving shared goals (Colbry et al., 2014; Kearns et al., 2015). These communication practices include articulating goals and expectations, engaging stakeholders through active listening and soliciting feedback, and establishing streamlined information-sharing processes. Interestingly, persuasion emerged as a key communication strategy. Participants described the need to garner support for their ideas and secure buy-in from collaborators, even without formal authority. This aligns with existing research suggesting that leadership in collaborative settings relies more on communication and negotiation skills rather than on command-and-control tactics (Kramer et al., 2019; Salamon & Toepler, 2015).

This study also highlighted empowering others as a prominent leadership practice for fostering collaboration. This involves recognizing individual strengths, valuing diverse perspectives, and strategically placing people in leadership positions. The notion of equality in participation was also highlighted, signifying that regardless of one's position, everyone should feel empowered to contribute ideas and shape decisions (Mendel & Brudney, 2018). This principle was reflected in practices such as deferring decisions to local leaders, building their capacity, and valuing their knowledge and experience. This aligns with the broader development principle of local ownership, where empowering local partners is key to ensuring the long-term sustainability of initiatives (Tran & AbouAssi, 2021).

Another important skill for INGO leaders is the ability to manage relationships with a diverse set of stakeholders (Mitchell et al., 2020; Zeimers et al., 2019). While collaboration

appears to take place at the organizational level, its foundation lies in personal interactions. The findings indicate that the personal relationships of INGO leaders and their ability to manage them play a central role in the success of collaboration. The INGO leaders who were interviewed highlighted the importance of intentional and ongoing investment in cultivating relationships with colleagues, partners, local leaders, and beneficiaries. This goes beyond professional connections, extending to cultivating personal rapport and establishing trust. Vetting partners also emerged as a primary theme among participants. The emphasis on carefully selecting partners may stem from the tendency for INGOs to collaborate with partners who share similar characteristics (Atouba & Shumate, 2015).

Collaborative Processes. The final grouping of leadership best practices for fostering collaboration emphasizes establishing clear processes and governance structures. Governance refers to the formal framework outlining the rules, structures, and processes that guide collaboration efforts. This involves creating a formal framework through elements like agreements, memorandums of understanding (MOUs), documented processes, and clearly defined procedures. These structures provide a neutral platform for collaboration and ensure everyone is on the same page, defining clear roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes within the collaboration.

Participants in the study highlighted various types of collaboration, such as partnerships, networks, consortiums, and alliances, aligning with many of the classification of collaborative arrangements found in the literature review (Guo & Acar, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2020; Sapat et al., 2019; Tran & AbouAssi, 2020). These forms of collaborations can be distinguished based on the degree of integration among participating organizations, which relates to how much they share resources, knowledge, and decision-making authority (Mitchell et al., 2020). While this study did not specifically focus on types of collaboration, it did indicate that establishing formal agreements or collaborative arrangements is beneficial for successful collaboration.

In terms of collaborative process, convening was highlighted by a majority of participants. Convening within collaboration refers to the act of bringing together individuals, organizations, or stakeholders to discuss, plan, or work towards a common goal or objective. It involves organizing meetings, events, or gatherings where participants can share ideas, exchange information, and coordinate efforts to achieve a shared purpose. When convening, INGO leaders should carefully consider the composition of participants, the frequency of meetings, and the established norms governing these interactions.

Collaboration, whether among individuals or organizations, involves combining resources, expertise, and efforts to achieve greater outcomes together (Castañer & Oliveira, 2020; Costumato, 2021; Mitchell, 2014; Salem et al., 2019; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). The findings suggest that establishing processes for sharing resources is a critical component of fostering collaboration. This sharing goes beyond financial or physical resources and includes a mutually beneficial exchange of information, expertise, and capabilities. Such exchanges foster synergy among collaborators, enabling them to leverage each other's strengths and address weaknesses more effectively.

Successful collaboration thrives on complementary focuses, shared values, and aligned goals, visions, and interests (Mitchell, 2014). This study reinforces this notion, emphasizing the importance of establishing a process to articulate a shared mission and goals. Participants emphasized the need for accountability mechanisms to ensure all parties remain focused on achieving these jointly agreed-upon aims. Leaders can further solidify this mission focus by integrating it into routine procedures like meetings and other established processes (Mitchell et al., 2020). Regular evaluation protocols are also crucial for measuring progress towards collaborative goals (Nolte, 2018).

Results for RQ2

RQ2 stated, “What challenges do organizational leaders face in INGOs when implementing the strategies and practices employed to foster collaboration for transformative

change?" Analysis of participant responses and the 15 identified themes indicated the following four categories of primary challenges INGO leaders face in fostering collaboration for transformative change:

Relational Challenges. These challenges arise from difficulties in building and maintaining positive relationships within the collaborative effort. They include struggles with trust-building, communication breakdowns such as lack of transparency and information silos, conflict management issues, and navigating existing power dynamics to ensure equitable participation.

Resource Challenges. These challenges encompass inadequate, mismanaged, or inequitably distributed resources. This involves difficulties in securing funding, mismanagement of time and personnel, and partners lacking the capacity and resources to contribute effectively.

Capacity Challenges. These challenges encompass limitations in the skills, knowledge, and authority of individuals and teams involved in the collaboration. This includes struggling to align individual goals with the broader purpose, addressing skill and capacity gaps, empowering stakeholders, and recognizing leadership limitations in knowledge, skills, and approach.

Process Challenges. These challenges involve the inefficiencies and hurdles in establishing and streamlining the systems used for planning, executing, and monitoring the collaboration. This includes struggles with defining clear roles and responsibilities, adapting to different organizational structures, and ensuring clear and transparent communication throughout the entire process.

The challenges identified in RQ2 reveal the complex landscape that INGO leaders navigate when implementing strategies for collaboration. These challenges span relational, resource, capacity, and process dimensions, highlighting the multifaceted nature of collaboration in the INGO sector. The following section provides a detailed discussion of the obstacles faced by INGO leaders in fostering collaboration for transformative change.

Discussion of RQ2

RQ2 aimed to identify challenges faced by INGO leaders in fostering collaboration. The emergent themes regarding these challenges paralleled many of those identified in past literature (Mitchell, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2015; Saab et al., 2013). INGO leaders are tasked with managing relationships with diverse stakeholders while navigating organizational constraints (Baiden & Book, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2020). Interestingly, while mission incompatibility is a prominent theme in existing literature (Mitchell, 2014; Mitchell et al., 2020; Mitchell & Schmitz, 2014), few participants in this study cited it as a challenge. Instead, four key categories of challenges hindering successful collaboration were identified: relational, resource, process, and capacity challenges.

Relational Challenges. The findings indicate that for many INGO leaders the most significant challenges to fostering collaboration primarily revolve around difficulties in building, maintaining, and facilitating positive relationships with a variety of stakeholders. This aligns with existing research highlighting trust-building and managing stakeholder demands as key challenges for INGO leadership (Baiden & Book, 2022; Saab et al., 2013). Leaders often act as intermediaries between stakeholders with varying personalities, opinions, and approaches. Building trust becomes especially challenging in such contexts, where effective communication and information sharing are crucial (Gazley & Guo, 2020). Mitchell et al. (2020) noted that INGO leaders often lack the political acumen to influence stakeholders within and outside their organizations. This deficiency of interpersonal skills can hinder collaboration, as positive relationships are essential for its success.

Communication emerged as a significant challenge in managing stakeholder relationships. INGO leaders encounter difficulties in facilitating communication among diverse stakeholders and effectively conveying messages. Participants highlighted challenges such as navigating cross-cultural communication, maintaining consistent and open communication, and establishing effective communication channels to ensure transparency. Saab et al. (2013)

suggest these communication issues likely arise from inherent differences in stakeholders' perceptions, cognition, values, interests, and needs. L. Lewis et al. (2010) noted that while formal leadership roles are common in managing communication challenges in collaborations, a single leader may struggle to fully represent the diverse voices and perspectives within the collaborative effort.

INGO leaders also struggle to navigate power dynamics and imbalances effectively to build strong collaborative relationships. This finding aligns with research by Hermann et al. (2013) who identified unequal power relations as a key challenge in partnerships. These challenges arise from how power and influence are distributed, perceived, and navigated within collaborative efforts. Some participants lamented how larger organizations can dominate collaborative efforts. This dynamic can leave smaller partners feeling unheard and lacking the leverage to influence decision-making. Participants also observed a tendency for local partners to exhibit passivity or withhold their input during collaborations, a behavior that may be attributed to the historical power dynamics that influence their relationships with foreign NGOs (Mitchell et al., 2020).

Resource Challenges. Another challenge category highlighted by INGO leaders pertains to resources. Achieving sustainable and effective collaboration between organizations is resource-intensive (Head & Alford, 2015). Participants emphasized the scarcity of resources across various sectors, making it difficult to allocate them towards collaborative efforts without potentially neglecting core functionalities of organizations. This is consistent with prior research, which identifies funding constraints and resource scarcity as primary challenges faced by INGO leaders (Baiden & Book, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2020). Additionally, participants noted instances of partners being reluctant to share resources, including information, intellectual property, and expertise.

Time emerged as a particularly critical resource in fostering collaboration, with participants highlighting challenges in coordinating schedules, managing workloads, and

dedicating sufficient time for collaborative activities. This finding aligns with a similar study conducted by Mitchell (2014) who also identified time as a primary barrier within collaborations. This scarcity of time is further compounded by the demands placed on leaders, who often lack the time to engage in the often time-intensive practices necessary for successful collaboration.

According to the findings, the funding landscape was also a primary challenge related to resources. Participants noted that resource scarcity fosters a competitive environment among organizations, hindering collaboration as organizations prioritize securing individual funding over fostering partnerships. This aligns with Macindoe and Sullivan's (2014) findings that financially constrained nonprofits are less likely to participate in collaborative efforts both within and across different sectors. Participants also expressed concerns about how funder incentives can impede collaboration. They described how traditional INGO funding approaches often discourage the open exchange of ideas and collaborative problem-solving. Moreover, the fear of losing a competitive advantage can restrict collaboration, as organizations may be reluctant to share knowledge or resources freely (Saab et al., 2013). The misalignment between funding structures and the goals of collaboration emerges as a key challenge, highlighting the need for funding models that incentivize and support collaborative efforts.

Capacity Challenges. The findings also identified a group of challenges related to personnel capacity as significant barriers to fostering collaboration. Uneven capacities between collaborating parties can create challenges (Hermann et al., 2012). Internally, frequent staff turnover can disrupt collaboration and require additional resources for training new personnel. Externally, it can be challenging to find partners with the right expertise and capabilities, leading to imbalanced collaborations.

Participants noted the limitations to their own capacities for fostering collaboration. This echoes existing research by Mitchell et al. (2020) which highlights potential skill gaps hindering INGO leaders in effectively enhancing their organization's effectiveness. This challenge is

exacerbated by time constraints, as leaders must balance multiple demands, often lacking the time needed for the intensive practices vital to successful collaboration.

The study also identified limitations to partner capacities as significant challenges hindering collaboration. Participants noted some partners lacked the necessary skills or resources to fully engage in collaborative efforts. Inadequate expertise of partners can impede progress, create frustrations, and hinder the achievement of shared goals (Glazer et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2015). In the same vein, participants noted limited capacities for their own organizations members also poses challenges to fostering successful collaboration.

Process Challenges. Collaborative processes also emerged as a source of challenge, with participants highlighting issues related to structure and governance. These included a lack of formal processes to support collaboration, difficulty defining clear roles and responsibilities for collaborative efforts, and the challenge of adapting to different organizational structures. These findings resonate with Mitchell's (2014) study, which identified muddled management and conflicting organizational cultures as significant barriers to collaboration among INGOs. Participants pointed to siloed groups and unclear communication channels as major roadblocks hindering collaboration.

The findings also revealed limitations in the project-based models incentivized by traditional INGO funding. Donors typically prefer funding specific projects over providing long-term support for NGOs' operational needs (Krause, 2014; Wright, 2012). This emphasis on short-term projects can discourage organizations from investing in long-term relationship building and collaborative planning, which are crucial for successful initiatives. Leaders face challenges in balancing donor demands with the need for agile and collaborative practices. Participants lamented the incentive structures of funders that foster isolated and self-interested transactions (Mendel & Brudney, 2018). The competitive nature of the NGO funding landscape was noted as often undermining collaboration efforts. The findings underscore the need for a

paradigm shift in INGO funding models to align incentives with the collaborative and long-term nature of impactful initiatives.

Additionally, lack of support from leadership was identified as a challenge to effective collaboration. Leadership support is crucial for the success of change initiatives in INGOs (Do Adro & Leitão, 2020). Participants emphasized the need for leaders to dedicate their time to the collaboration and support their subordinates' involvement. Without support, collaboration participants often lack the necessary time and resources to dedicate to collaborative initiatives. Ensuring leadership support prior to engaging in collaboration could enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the initiative.

Results for RQ3

RQ3 stated, “How do organizational leaders in INGOs measure the success of collaboration for transformative change initiatives?” Analysis of participant responses and the seven identified themes revealed that INGO leaders gauge the success of collaboration through the following means:

- Tracking the direct results and impact of the collaborative project, such as changes in behavior, awareness, or service delivery.
- Gathering qualitative data to understand perceptions, satisfaction, and enjoyment among participants and assess the strength of the collaboration.
- Analyzing financial efficiency and effectiveness, including joint fundraising success, cost-effectiveness, and efficient service delivery.
- Assessing whether participants gained knowledge, skills, and capabilities through the collaboration.

The findings of RQ3 indicate that leaders utilize various metrics, including tracking direct results and impact, gathering qualitative data on participant perceptions, assessing financial efficiency, and evaluating the acquisition of knowledge and skills. In the following section these

metrics are further examined to provide a comprehensive understanding of how INGO leaders measure the success of collaborative efforts.

Discussion of RQ3

RQ3 aimed to identify how INGO leaders measure success in fostering collaboration for transformative change initiatives. The findings indicate that these leaders assess collaboration success based on both outcomes and processes. Outcome-based measures focus on achieving pre-defined goals and objectives established at the outset of the collaboration. Provan and Milward (2001) categorized collaboration outcomes into three key dimensions: partnership, community, and single-organization impacts. Participants noted metrics related to all three categories including project completion rates, improved efficiencies, or enhanced quality of service. Leaders track progress towards these goals using pre-defined indicators and analyze the impact of collaboration on specific target groups. The findings focus on outcomes contrasts existing literature that has suggested INGOs prioritize inputs and processes over measurable outcomes (Banks et al., 2015; Mitchell et al., 2020; Schmitz & Mitchell, 2022).

Mutual benefit is indicated by the INGO leaders as a key metric for successful collaboration. This extends beyond simply achieving project goals and emphasizes the growth and development of participating organizations and individuals. Participants highlighted the importance of individual and collective learning as a marker of success. This learning manifests in capacity building, evidenced by strengthened internal and external capabilities across leadership, fundraising, and advocacy. This focus on mutual benefit aligns with Mendel and Brudney's (2018) concept of "balance and equity in the partnership" as a measure of strong partnerships.

The literature highlights the strength of the partnership as a key indicator of successful collaboration (Mendel & Brudney, 2018; Mitchell & Calabrese, 2023; Provan & Milward, 2001). Participants echoed this and noted various ways of evaluating the process of collaboration. This includes assessing the effectiveness of communication, the level of active participation from all

members, and the overall team dynamics fostered during the collaboration. A key indicator of a successful process is collegiality, a sense of camaraderie among participants. Leaders evaluate whether there was a sense of mutual respect, trust, and collaboration within the team, and how effectively challenges and conflicts were addressed. Reciprocity, or fairness in distributing contributions and workload, is another measure considered by leaders. This aligns with Mitchell's (2014) suggestion that the intensity of collaboration can be a significant factor in assessing collaborative efforts.

The study also revealed that leaders consider subjective measures beyond just achieving goals to evaluate a collaboration's success. These subjective indicators include a sense of enjoyment, contentment, and happiness within collaborative relationships. This aligns with Ofem et al. (2018) who define collaboration success as a subjective partner assessment based on satisfaction and smooth operation. Participants acknowledged that while these factors may not be formally tracked, they can be valuable gauges of stakeholder sentiment and the overall health of the collaboration. Maintaining stakeholder satisfaction throughout the entire process, not just with the final outcome, is crucial for sustaining collaborations. This aligns with a growing trend in the nonprofit sector, where stakeholder satisfaction is increasingly recognized as a key metric for organizational effectiveness (Mitchell, 2013; Tran, 2020).

Results for RQ4

RQ4 stated, “What recommendations would organizational leaders in INGOs have for future practitioners entering the field to foster transformative cooperation?” Analysis of participant responses and the eight identified themes revealed that INGO leaders recommend the following:

- Build strong relationships and trust with collaborators through active listening, respect, and networking.
- Engage in continuous learning and development by seeking diverse perspectives, understanding different viewpoints, and gathering input from beneficiaries.

- Maintain a clear focus on the mission and resist distractions or deviations from the core goal of collaboration.
- Prioritize serving others by putting personal agendas aside and focusing on selflessness and collective good.
- Lead strategically by making strategic choices, building effective teams, and creating the necessary infrastructure to support successful collaboration.

The analysis of RQ4 provides valuable insights into the recommendations of organizational leaders in INGOs for future practitioners entering the field to foster transformative cooperation. The findings highlight the importance of building strong relationships and trust, engaging in continuous learning, maintaining a clear focus on the mission, prioritizing serving others, and leading strategically. These recommendations are discussed in detail in the subsequent section to offer practical guidance for future practitioners seeking to enhance collaboration in the INGO sector.

Discussion of RQ4

The aim of RQ4 was to identify recommendations INGO leaders have for emerging leaders who wish to foster collaboration for transformative change. By analyzing participants' reflections on past collaborative efforts and their advice for the future, the research identified three key overarching recommendations for fostering successful collaboration.

Build Relationships & Trust. Most participants referenced the overarching importance of building strong relationships and trust as the foundation for successful collaboration. Trust is seen as crucial for their effectiveness and credibility as leaders within the nonprofit sector (Kearns et al., 2015). Failure to establish trust often occurs when leaders are unable to broaden their perspectives to consider the interests and needs of both organizations (Cooperrider et al., 2007). Participants noted the importance of building strong relationships with colleagues, partners, and other stakeholders for successful collaboration. This involves proactive engagement, fostering open and transparent communication, and actively seeking to

understand the needs and perspectives of others. The participant recommendations are consistent with the concept of shared leadership, where the leader's role is primarily facilitating communication and collaboration among team members (Hermann & Pagé, 2016; Knox Clarke, 2013).

Several participants also emphasized the value of networking at conferences and similar events to cultivate friendships and connections that can facilitate future collaborations. They advised aspiring leaders to invest in relationships early in their careers, as these connections can yield significant benefits once they assume leadership roles. This finding, which highlights the value of investing in relationships for future collaboration, appears to be unique to this study and is not explicitly referenced in the existing literature.

Prioritize Learning & Feedback. Another theme within the findings is the suggestion that future leaders interested in collaboration should embrace continuous learning by actively seeking feedback and input from others. This includes developing a strong listening habit, seeking mentorship from experienced individuals, and being open to diverse perspectives. Participants emphasized the critical role of empowering local voices and centering their experience, knowledge, and perspectives in collaborative efforts. Which echoes a broader movement of the sector to be locally oriented (Martin & Nolte, 2020; Mitchell et al., 2020; Mitchell & Schmitz, 2013). Participants also stressed the importance of leaders adopting a posture of humility, which enables them to remain open to learning and feedback.

Build Better Processes. Participants also highlighted the importance of establishing clear and well-defined processes for effective collaboration. The findings indicate that INGO leaders perceive increased formality in collaborative arrangements as beneficial for enhancing predictability and sustainability. This aligns with L. Lewis et al.'s (2010) findings, which suggest that establishing boundaries within collaborations is essential to prevent inefficiencies. Leaders should monitor the impact of collaborative efforts and implement clear documentation to facilitate information sharing among all participants, which is an important condition for

successful collaboration (Brass et al., 2018). Additionally, establishing accountability processes and transparency from the outset fosters trust and ensures alignment towards common goals. Removing unnecessary barriers that hinder collaboration further streamlines the process and encourages active participation.

Collaboration processes need to be tailored to the specific context of the collaboration. Keast et al. (2007) continuum of collaboration levels, helps determine the appropriate level of collaboration based on the specific circumstances and desired outcomes. Furthermore, Henriques et al. (2021) distinguish the intensity of collaboration based on the frequency and depth of interaction between INGOs. Ultimately, leaders play a vital role in establishing the necessary infrastructure, assembling effective teams, and selecting individuals with the right skills to ensure successful collaboration at the chosen level.

Surprising Findings

The data analysis revealed several surprising findings, as well as some findings that are consistent with prior research. All INGO leaders interviewed underscored the importance of collaboration within their organizations, with many emphasizing the need for increased collaboration across the sector. Every participant also referenced the importance of shared interests between collaborators and the need for effective communication practices and processes.

Interestingly, the study revealed a previously underexamined aspect of interorganizational collaboration in INGOs, which is the critical role of interpersonal dynamics. The interviewed INGO leaders highlighted the importance of interpersonal factors within collaboration such as investing in personal relationships, active listening, cultivating trust, and persuasive skills. This highlights a gap in existing collaboration literature, which predominantly concentrates on organizational-level dynamics.

The emphasis on humility as a crucial element for fostering collaboration also stands out in this study. While Cormack and Stanton (2003) identified personal humility as a core trait of

third-sector leaders, and the broader organizational management literature has examined the role of humility in effective leadership (Frostenson, 2016; Nielsen et al., 2010; Owens, 2009; Owens et al., 2013), there exists a notable gap in literature specifically addressing humility in the context of collaboration. The INGO leaders in this study discussed the importance of acknowledging weaknesses, seeking help, maintaining a low ego, being open to learning, and taking ownership of mistakes. This finding suggests that humility may play a more significant role in collaborative endeavors than previously recognized, highlighting the need for further exploration of its implications for collaborative leadership and practice.

Predictably, all the leaders interviewed identified effective communication as an integral practice for fostering collaboration. However, the prominence of persuasion as a necessary skill was unexpected. Participants described the need to garner support for their ideas and secure buy-in from collaborators. This finding suggests a shift in leadership dynamics within collaborative environments, where influence and persuasion play a more significant role than traditional hierarchical power structures. It aligns with existing research suggesting that leadership in collaborative settings relies heavily on communication and negotiation skills, rather than on command-and-control tactics (Kramer et al., 2019; Salamon & Toepler, 2015).

Another surprising finding was the absence of mission incompatibility as a prominent challenge in fostering collaboration. INGOs are typically known for their strong mission orientation (Dromi, 2016; Shiva & Suar, 2010), which has been suggested in the literature to potentially hinder effective collaboration with other entities that do not share the same mission (Mitchell et al., 2015; Tran & AbouAssi, 2021). However, conflict between missions was not emphasized as a challenge. This may be due to the focus of this study on collaborations that were already established, possibly excluding instances where mission differences might have prevented collaboration from initiating. This suggests that in ongoing INGO collaborations, factors like organizational culture or interpersonal dynamics may play a more prominent role than mission orientation in driving collaborative efforts.

Consistent with resource dependency theory (Guo & Acar, 2005; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003), the study found that INGO leaders viewed access to resources as important to their organizational function. However, unlike the theory's emphasis on collaboration as a means for organizational survival, these leaders emphasized the benefits of collaboration in accessing resources and expertise to enhance their organizational functions and achieve their goals. This nuanced perspective suggests that collaboration is not about survival but about maximizing impact through strategic resource sharing. The INGO leaders also highlighted the resource challenge of effective collaboration, acknowledging its resource-intensive nature, as noted by Head and Alford (2015). This finding reveals a potential tension between the need for collaboration and the resources required to sustain it within INGOs.

Most leaders in the study mentioned using programmatic outcomes or achievement of shared goals to assess the success of their collaborations. However, they did not have specific indicators for evaluating the collaborations themselves. This suggests that while INGO leaders are attentive to the outcomes of their collaborative efforts, they may not have established specific metrics or criteria for assessing the effectiveness of the collaborative process. This finding indicates a potential gap in evaluation practices within INGOs, where more attention is needed to assess the effectiveness of collaboration efforts beyond just programmatic outcomes.

Application

This study examined how leaders in INGOs foster collaboration to achieve transformative change. In consideration of the findings, the researcher created a leadership framework (see Figure 11) that highlights three essential components for fostering collaboration: posture, practice, and process.

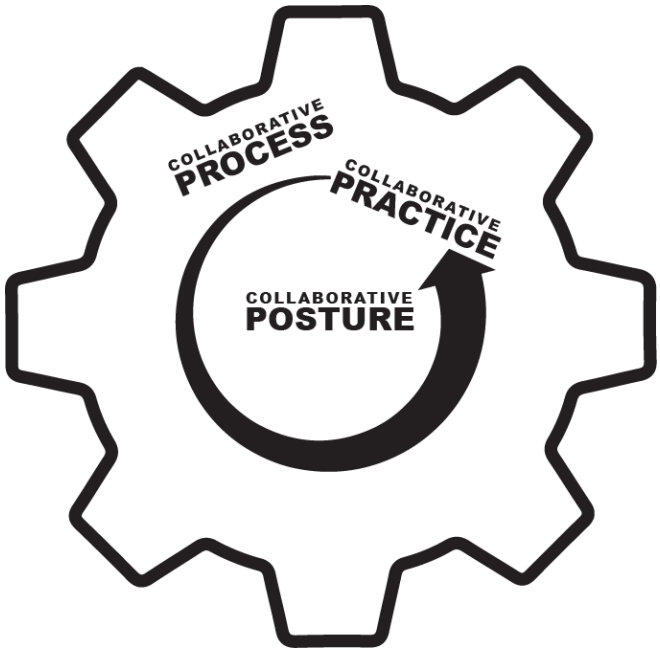
Components of the Framework

The Manley Leadership Framework for Fostering Collaboration includes three components: Collaborative Posture, Collaborative Practice, and Collaborative Process. These

components are interconnected, much like the parts of a gear. When all three components work together, they create a synergy that enhances collaboration exponentially.

Figure 11

Manley Leadership Framework for Fostering Collaboration



The leader's Collaborative Posture acts as the central bearing of the gear. It provides the initial thrust and sets the direction for collaboration. This posture reflects the leader's mindset and values, promoting a culture of shared goals, mutual respect, and collective action. Collaborative Practice represents the arms of the gear. These are the specific actions and behaviors that leaders implement to cultivate a collaborative environment and encourage teamwork. They translate collaborative posture into tangible actions that directly impact how team members interact and collaborate. Collaborative Process, on the other hand, are the teeth of the gear. They ensure smooth and efficient movement towards achieving collaborative goals. These processes are the formal structures and systems implemented to facilitate and support collaboration, including governance mechanisms and decision-making protocols.

When all three components work together, the leader's Collaborative Posture provides the initial energy, which is then amplified by the Collaborative Practice and guided by the

Collaborative Process. This creates a powerful synergy that drives collaboration forward, enabling collaborative initiatives to achieve their goals more effectively.

Collaborative Posture

Within this framework, collaborative posture refers to the underlying mindset and values exhibited by leaders that promote a collaborative environment, both within and outside their organization. Collaborative posture reflects a commitment to shared goals, mutual respect, and a belief in the power of collective wisdom and action. Leaders with a strong collaborative posture prioritize open communication, empathy, and inclusivity with all stakeholders within the collaboration, behaviors aligned with practices highlighted in the literature (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Kearns et al., 2015; Zeimers et al., 2019). They foster a culture where diverse perspectives are valued, and decisions are made through consensus-building rather than top-down directives. This posture encourages trust, transparency, and a sense of belonging among stakeholders, which lays a strong foundation for effective collaboration across organizational boundaries (Colbry et al., 2014; Henriques et al., 2021; McMahon, 2014). Key elements of this collaborative posture include:

Shared Mindset. Leaders with a shared mindset believe in the transformative power of collaboration and its capacity to generate significant impact. They prioritize the overall well-being and success of the collaborative endeavor, not just their own individual or organizational agendas. Leaders exhibiting these traits are dedicated to nurturing a shared understanding and alignment among all partners concerning goals, values, and approaches. This mindset encourages participants to transcend their individual concerns and champion the collective good, fostering a culture of collaboration and shared success (Kramer et al., 2019).

Humility. It is important for leaders to recognize their own limitations and embrace a willingness to learn from others. Humility refers to a genuine understanding of one's own strengths and limitations (Owens et al., 2013). Leaders with humility are open to receiving feedback, seeing it as an opportunity for personal and collective growth (Zhou et al., 2022). A

humble posture seeks to learn from diverse perspectives and experiences within the collaboration. This willingness to learn and adapt is crucial for navigating challenges and uncertainties. Humility enables leaders to acknowledge mistakes, adjust approaches, and learn alongside the team, fostering a growth mindset within the collaboration (Frostenson 2016; Nielsen et al., 2010; Owens et al., 2013).

Trust. Trust is another crucial aspect of collaborative posture, reflecting belief in the reliability, integrity, and competence of oneself and others. Leaders who prioritize trust create an environment where stakeholders feel safe to be vulnerable, share ideas, and take risks (Kearns et al., 2015; Saab et al., 2013). Trust involves not only being trustworthy but also being trusting, with leaders demonstrating transparency in their communication by openly and honestly sharing information. An environment of trust fosters thriving collaboration, as team members feel valued, respected, and confident in their ability to work together towards shared goals (Costumato, 2021).

Purpose-oriented. Another key aspect of a collaborative posture lies in being purpose-oriented, referring to a leader's clear understanding and commitment to the shared goals of the collaboration. This focus on purpose serves as a guiding principle for their actions, fostering alignment and direction among all stakeholders (Mitchell, 2015). Leaders prioritizing purpose ensure that every decision aligns with the collaboration's goals and values, inspiring others by articulating a compelling vision and linking individual efforts to the broader mission.

Collaborative Practice

Collaborative practices refer to the specific actions and behaviors leaders implement to cultivate a collaborative environment and encourage teamwork. These practices translate the collaborative posture into tangible actions that directly impact how team members interact and collaborate. Given the dynamic nature of collaboration, leaders must be adaptable in their strategies. Key practices for fostering effective collaboration include:

Building Relationships. Building relationships is a key aspect of collaborative practice. Establishing and maintaining positive relationships involves leaders developing trust, rapport, and mutual respect through consistent and meaningful interactions (Costumato, 2021; Henriques et al., 2017). Leaders who prioritize relationship-building take the time to understand the perspectives, strengths, and needs of others, fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration (Salem et al., 2019). Leadership actions for building relationships include:

- Regularly engaging with stakeholders through meetings, forums, or informal gatherings
- Actively listening to stakeholders' concerns, ideas, and feedback
- Acknowledging and appreciating the contributions of others
- Seeking opportunities to build shared experiences with others
- Sending personnel to conferences or other gatherings

Empowering Others. Empowering others involves enabling collaborative stakeholders to take ownership of their roles and contribute effectively to the collective effort (Hopkins et al., 2014; Kramer et al., 2019). This means providing partners with the autonomy and support they need to make decisions and implement initiatives that align with the collaborative goals. Leaders fostering collaboration release control and trust their partners to deliver results, fostering a sense of ownership and accountability (Boyer et al., 2019). Leadership actions for empowering others include:

- Advocating for local partners to take on leadership roles within the collaboration
- Providing training and development opportunities to build partners' skills and confidence
- Recognizing and celebrating achievements to boost morale and motivation
- Creating an environment where partners feel empowered to voice their ideas and opinions

Open Communication. Open communication is a fundamental aspect of collaborative practice. Effective leadership practices ongoing transparent and honest communication among stakeholders (Colbry et al., 2014; Kearns et al., 2015). This involves sharing information, ideas,

and feedback openly and effectively to ensure that everyone involved is informed and aligned. Leaders who prioritize open communication create a culture where questions and concerns are welcomed, and where feedback is seen as an opportunity for growth and improvement (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). Leadership actions for open communication include:

- Holding regular meetings to discuss progress, challenges, and next steps
- Encouraging stakeholders to ask questions and share their perspectives
- Using multiple communication channels (e.g., email, video conferencing, messaging apps) to ensure everyone stays connected
- Providing regular updates and progress reports to keep stakeholders informed
- Crafting clear and concise messages that are tailored to the audience

Sharing Resources. Sharing resources is a key aspect of collaborative practices, involving the sharing of assets, expertise, and capabilities among stakeholders to achieve common goals. This can include sharing physical resources such as equipment, facilities, or funding, as well as intellectual resources such as knowledge, skills, and best practices. Sharing resources can foster a sense of partnership and mutual support among stakeholders, strengthening relationships and enhancing collaboration (Hopkins et al., 2014; MacIndoe & Sullivan, 2014). Leadership actions for sharing resources include:

- Providing partners access to specialized equipment or facilities
- Sharing funding or access to funding sources
- Offering training or mentorship programs
- Sharing best practices or lessons learned
- Providing access to networks or contacts
- Sharing staff or human resources

Collaborative Process

Effective collaboration requires a balance between flexibility and structure. Collaborative processes refer to the formal structures and systems implemented to facilitate and support

collaboration within a collaborative arrangement, including governance mechanisms. These processes reinforce collaborative actions, making them more sustainable and requiring less resource expenditure in the long term. Leaders establish these processes to help stakeholders work together effectively and efficiently. This ensures that communication, decision-making, and joint efforts are streamlined and successful.

Clear Communication Channels. A supportive process in effective collaboration is establishing clear communication channels. This involves creating multiple avenues for interaction, such as face-to-face meetings, video conferences, and online platforms. Leaders can help define communication protocols for timely and efficient information sharing among all participants. Additionally, leveraging collaboration tools like shared documents, task boards, and real-time communication channels can further streamline collaboration by enhancing accessibility, transparency, and accountability (Saab et al., 2013).

Clear Roles & Responsibilities. It is important for leaders to establish clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of individuals and teams involved in the collaboration. This involves outlining specific tasks, duties, and expectations for each participant. Role clarity reduces redundancy and confusion, allowing everyone to contribute effectively and maximize their individual and collective contributions towards achieving the collaboration's shared goals (Mitchell et al., 2015; Sapat et al., 2019). It also helps ensure equity within the process and mitigates frustrations due to unspoken expectations.

Collaborative Decision-Making. Successful collaborative processes require transparent decision-making protocols that ensure fairness, efficiency, and accountability within the collaboration (Gazley & Guo, 2020; Saab et al., 2013). Leaders play a crucial role as facilitators, guiding discussions respectfully to ensure everyone feels comfortable contributing and addressing conflicts constructively (Hopkins et al., 2014; Knox Clarke, 2013). This involves encouraging open dialogue and providing clear decision-making frameworks. Power dynamics

must be carefully managed to ensure that all voices are heard and valued, which may include employing inclusive methods like brainstorming, voting, and consensus-building.

Joint Goal Setting & Planning. Another important process for leaders to establish is joint goal setting and planning. This collaborative process involves finding shared interests, creating common goals, focusing on commonalities, and aligning objectives. Leaders should facilitate this process and actively engage stakeholders in creating a shared vision and goals. Formal agreements can be valuable tools to guide collaboration by establishing clear expectations, roles, and responsibilities (Guo & Acar, 2005; Martin & Nolte, 2020). Additionally, co-creating action plans is crucial for transforming goals into actionable steps. These plans typically break down goals into manageable tasks, assign ownership, and establish realistic deadlines, fostering accountability and facilitating progress tracking.

Monitoring & Evaluation. Effective collaboration requires ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure success (Nolte, 2018). Leaders should identify success indicators relevant to the specific collaboration and implement processes for regularly tracking progress towards those goals. Regularly gathering feedback from team members through surveys, discussions, or other methods allows for comprehensive evaluation of the collaboration process itself. This feedback, along with data gathered through established metrics, helps identify areas for improvement, celebrate achievements, and inform any necessary adjustments along the way. Leaders should evaluate the impact or outcomes of the collaboration, the strength of the collaborative relationship, and the benefit to each participating organization or stakeholder (Nolte 2018; Provan & Milward, 2001).

Study Conclusion

This research examines the context of INGO leadership and how leaders initiate, foster, and enhance the effectiveness of collaborations both within and beyond organizational boundaries. The findings indicate that INGO leaders utilize a range of strategies to foster collaboration, such as building trust and relationships, facilitating effective communication,

empowering others, and practicing humility. Additionally, the findings indicate these leaders face challenges within four categories: relational challenges, resource challenges, process challenges, and capacity challenges.

Furthermore, the research highlights that INGO leaders define successful collaboration based on both tangible outcomes and the quality of collaborative processes. Success is measured by programmatic achievements, financial metrics, enhanced organizational capacity and learning, as well as subjective measures like partner satisfaction. In light of these findings, INGO leaders recommend fostering humility, embracing diverse perspectives, and committing to sustained collaborative efforts as pivotal strategies for fostering collaboration.

Implications of the Study

These findings offer valuable insights for stakeholders within INGOs and the broader field of organizational leadership. As INGOs seek to increase their collaboration with this study provides valuable insights for preparation and implementation. By understanding the key challenges associated with successful collaboration, as well as the essential strategies for overcoming them, INGOs can be better equipped to prepare for and navigate collaborative partnerships. The findings provide INGOs with insights into the structural and procedural adjustments needed to foster successful collaboration, such as implementing structures that promote communication, trust-building, and joint decision-making.

One of the most urgent challenges for INGO leaders is the lack of investment in leadership development and a general deficit in relevant leadership skills (Baiden & Book, 2022; Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2020). This study offers valuable insights for INGO leaders seeking to enhance their skills in fostering collaboration. The research and its accompanying leadership framework provide a practical guide for developing leadership abilities, helping leaders to plan and prepare for collaboration more effectively, strengthen existing collaborative relationships, and foster a culture of collaboration within their organizations.

There is a need for more qualified leaders in the INGO sector (Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2020). This study provides aspiring leaders with valuable insights, emphasizing the diverse skills and capacities essential for fostering collaboration. Future leaders can utilize these findings to improve their ability to cultivate collaborative relationships, address global challenges, and drive transformative change. Additionally, training programs could be developed to specifically address the skills and capacities identified in this research.

This research also contributes to the field of organizational leadership by offering valuable insights into effective leadership practices within collaborative environments. Insights from this study can be used to inform the development and refinement of leadership theories and practices, such as shared leadership, intergroup leadership, or collective leadership (see Hermann & Pagé, 2016; Hogg, 2015; Knox Clarke, 2014; Kramer et al., 2019; Mumbi & Obembe, 2021). Its relevance extends beyond INGOs to other organizations engaged in collaboration such as businesses, local nonprofit-organizations, and government agencies.

Recommendations for Future Research

Following the findings of this study on leadership best practices for fostering collaboration in INGOs, there are various recommendations for future research. While this study identified a variety of strategies for fostering collaboration, further research is needed to pinpoint the contexts in which these strategies are most effective. This could involve exploring how specific leader behaviors influence the collaborative process and its transformative potential. Additionally, future research could explore the specific leadership styles that are most effective in fostering collaboration for transformative change. This could involve comparing and contrasting different leadership styles and their impact on collaboration outcomes.

Participants in this study mentioned various forms of collaboration including partnership, networks, alliances, and consortiums. Additionally, they noted collaboration with a variety of stakeholders including other INGO, local NGOs, local communities, local and national government, and funders. Future research could explore the effectiveness and challenges of

different forms of collaboration INGOs engage in. Additionally, studying the roles and impacts of various partners could provide valuable insights for enhancing collaborative strategies and effectiveness.

This study examined the experience of INGO leaders in fostering collaboration, but further research is needed to determine the actual transformative change outcomes of collaboration. More research is needed to examine the impact of collaboration on specific transformative outcomes, such as local community empowerment, systemic change, and wicked problem mitigation. Conducting a longitudinal study to track the outcomes of collaborative efforts over time could provide a deeper understanding of the factors contributing to sustained collaboration success and the challenges that arise. This approach would allow researchers to capture the evolution of relationships, strategies, and outcomes, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of collaborative processes within INGOs.

Final Thoughts

For nearly a century, INGOs have been at the forefront of alleviating suffering throughout the world (Davies, 2014). However, the world's challenges are evolving and becoming deeply interwoven issues that do not have any singular solutions (Head & Alford, 2015; Hodges & Howieson, 2017; Parthasarathy et al., 2021). At the same time, INGOs are facing mounting constraints that limit their capacity to address these wicked problems (Baiden & Book, 2022; Mitchell et al., 2020). The disparity between the scale of challenges and the capacity of INGOs demands changes that transform the traditional models of operations and address the root causes of global issues.

As an INGO practitioner I have seen this stark reality acutely illustrated in the spiraling crisis in Haiti. Gang violence has overrun the capital, there is no functioning government, and a looming famine threatens millions of lives (Schuller, 2023). Despite its moniker as the "Republic of NGOs," the multitude of aid organizations in Haiti have been ineffective in preventing this crisis (McMahon, 2014; Schofer & Longhofer, 2020). Traditional approaches have proven

inadequate in addressing the root causes of the country's problems and have even exacerbated them at times. Something I have experienced firsthand living in Haiti. The failure of aid in the country underscores the critical need for a new approach and a paradigm shift in how INGOs operate and collaborate. The crisis in Haiti serves as a poignant reminder that no single organization, no matter how well-intentioned or resourced, can tackle such multifaceted challenges alone.

I believe the path forward for INGOs is through collaborative efforts that transcend traditional boundaries and organizational silos. Effective collaboration requires more than transactional exchanges. It involves building relationships based on trust, mutual understanding, and shared objectives. As highlighted in this study, I found that successful collaboration is rooted in strong interpersonal relationships. Organizational leaders, in particular, play a pivotal role in fostering these essential relationships and cultivating a collaborative ecosystem. Their actions and behaviors have a direct impact on the quality of relationships within and between organizations, ultimately influencing the success of collaborative efforts.

The study findings underscored the critical roles of internal mindsets, external actions, and organizational processes in fostering collaboration, which resonated deeply with me. The findings highlight that collaboration is fundamentally a human endeavor, occurring on the individual level rather than an organizational level. While organizational processes can create an environment conducive to collaboration (Mitchell, 2014), the essence of collaboration lies in the relationships between individuals. This understanding was foundational to the leadership framework I developed through this research.

Leaders who adopt a collaborative posture, actively engage in collaborative practices, and implement collaborative processes can foster a culture of collaboration that goes beyond organizational boundaries and effectively tackles global challenges. This study demonstrates that the impact of INGO leaders goes beyond merely leading their organizations; it lies in their ability to inspire collaboration across borders and sectors. Key leadership behaviors identified

include prioritizing clear communication, empowering team members, investing in relationship building, practicing humility, and maintaining a strong focus on shared interests. From my experience in the INGO sector, I've seen firsthand the transformative power of leaders who embrace best practices in fostering collaboration. This research indicates that collaboration creates a ripple effect, better equipping INGOs to address complex global issues more effectively and cultivate transformative change.

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APPENDIX A

IRB CITI Certification

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 12-Apr-2022
Expiration Date 11-Apr-2027
Record ID 48254645

This is to certify that:

Colton Manley

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

GSEP Education Division
(Curriculum Group)
GSEP Education Division - Social-Behavioral-Educational (SBE)
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Pepperdine University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w492296b8-f85e-4e4f-b24b-e3df2a045a75-48254645

APPENDIX B

Participant Recruitment Script

Dear [Name],

My name is Colton Manley, and I am a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education and Psychology at Pepperdine University. I am conducting a qualitative research study examining how leaders in international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) foster collaboration for transformative change, and you are invited to participate in the study.

If you agree, you are invited to participate in a Zoom interview to discuss your experiences as a leader of an INGO related to fostering collaboration, including strategies you have used and challenges you have faced. The interview is anticipated to take no more than an hour. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential during and after the study. Confidentiality will be maintained using a series of security measures, including password-protected email communication using university firewall protections, a password-protected Zoom meeting, deidentification of data using pseudonyms, as well as compartmentalization of the various data elements, and keeping all information separate. If you have questions or would like to participate, please contact me at [redacted].

Thank you for your participation,
Colton Manley
Pepperdine University| Graduate School of Education and Psychology
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C

Peer Reviewer Form Request

Dear reviewer:
Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. The table below is designed to ensure that may research questions for the study are properly addressed with corresponding interview questions.

In the table below, please review each research question and the corresponding interview questions. For each interview question, consider how well the interview question addresses the research question. If the interview question is directly relevant to the research question, please mark “Keep as stated.” If the interview question is irrelevant to the research question, please mark “Delete it.” Finally, if the interview question can be modified to best fit with the research question, please suggest your modifications in the space provided. You may also recommend additional interview questions you deem necessary.

Once you have completed your analysis, please return the completed form to me via email to xxxx@pepperdine.edu. Thank you again for your participation.

APPENDIX D

Notice Of Approval For Human Research

Date: January 22, 2024

Protocol Investigator Name: Colton Manley

Protocol #: 23-09-2245

Project Title: Leadership Best Practices in Fostering Collaboration for Transformative Change in International Nongovernmental Organizations: A Phenomenological Study

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Colton Manley:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual at community.pepperdine.edu/irb.

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chair

cc: Mrs. Katy Carr, Assistant Provost for Research