

DISSERTATION

UNDERSTANDING COLLABORATION OF UNIVERSITY, GOVERNMENT, AND
INDUSTRY LEADERS TO ENHANCE LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING COLLABORATION OF UNIVERSITY, GOVERNMENT, AND INDUSTRY LEADERS TO ENHANCE LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

This qualitative dissertation explored the research question, “How do presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in their host communities to enhance economic development?” The data were collected from three presidents that had been a university president at a qualifying institution for at least three years and had experienced efforts to collaborate with local government and industry to enhance economic development. Data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Data Analysis and revealed that presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in four ways: (a) informally, (b) selectively, (c) without the experts, and (d) with mediocre leadership engagement. These findings aligned with three categories of the Wilder framework: environment, membership characteristics, and resources. Three key insights for presidents of small private universities come to light that provide insight into how to successfully collaborate with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development in their host communities: (a) succeed at being an exceptional leader, (b) foster a culture of adaptability to change, (c) be courageous and establish a history of tripartite collaboration with local government and industry leaders.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On January 9, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially announced the discovery of SARS-Cov2, a novel coronavirus responsible for an infectious respiratory disease commonly called COVID-19. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared a pandemic as COVID-19 quickly spread around the globe. This disease spread at an astonishing speed and has infected more than 770 million individuals worldwide as of September 5, 2023 (WHO, 2023). Sadly, the rapid rate of deaths is equally concerning, with nearly 7 million deaths worldwide as of the same date (WHO, 2023).

The toll this pandemic has taken on global health has been catastrophic, and many individuals continue to suffer disrupted livelihoods around the world. The lockdowns, travel restrictions, and school and business closures imposed worldwide to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 and ease the burden on healthcare systems have drastically decreased consumption, investment, labor supply, and production, factors that in turn have contributed to exceedingly volatile financial markets (Marinoni & Jensen, 2020). According to the *Global Economics Prospects Report, June 2020*, “This pandemic represents the largest economic shock the world economy has witnessed in decades, causing collapse in global activity” (The World Bank, 2020, p. 23). The International Monetary Fund (2023) warns that chronically high inflation, rising interest rates, banking woes, and uncertainties resulting from the collapse of some companies are all factors that could dim the outlook for the world economy in the short term.

Globally, as the pandemic has plunged many countries into recession, it also has taken an even deeper financial toll than expected on higher education. This impact became evident on April 1, 2020, as lockdowns and social-distancing measures were implemented to control the spread of COVID-19 (Marinoni et al., 2020). According to the IAU Global Survey Report, *The*

Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education Around the World, conducted by the International Association of Universities (Marinoni et al., 2020), by April 1, 2020, higher education institutions were closed in at least 185 countries, which in turn affected more than 1.5 million learners worldwide. The sources Marinoni et al. cited show that the pandemic had a significant impact on higher education, impacting every aspect of higher education institutions across the globe. Enrollment numbers reflect the most severe impact, with 20% of respondents reporting drops ranging from 10 percent to 50 percent, followed by declines in faculty and staff retention rates as well as levels of student engagement (IAU, 2021). This outcome is understandable, given that, in many cases, students and families shoulder the burden of the financial consequences of the crisis, and COVID-19 mitigation responses of social distancing and lockdowns present obstacles to entry testing for many students.

In the United States, university leaders have expressed concern about the financial stability of their institutions (Marinoni et al., 2020). For example, according to a letter the American Council on Education (ACE) sent to Congress on behalf of university leaders (ACE, 2020), universities requested \$120 billion in federal aid to assist them in bridging the financial gap COVID-19 created. According to the 2020 “Survey of College and University Business Officers” (Jaschik & Lederman, 2020), university leaders lack confidence in their institutions’ financial stability in the coming years. Unanticipated budget costs related to COVID-19 of at least \$2 million, with one in 10 institutions reporting at least \$10 million in budget cuts, contributed to the necessity for a quarter of responding institutions to furlough or reduce pay of employees. In addition, a third or more report that they anticipated cutting positions and programs altogether by year’s end, and 55 percent of respondents planned to slow or stop capital projects altogether (Jaschik et al., 2020). In fact, confidence in the 5-year outlook dropped a full 10 percentage points, from 62 percent in 2019 to 52 percent in 2020, with particularly steep

drops among chief financial officers at community colleges and private, nonprofit universities that offer master's and doctoral degree programs (Jaschik et al., 2020).

As is typical, different sectors of higher education have varying degrees of confidence in their financial stability over time. The sector that lacks the most confidence, and perhaps the hardest hit, is the private sector. University leaders at private universities that offer master's and doctoral degrees reported a 55 percent confidence level in the financial stability of their institutions in 2019. In 2020, the confidence level took the steepest decline of all institution types, down to 42 percent. For private baccalaureate universities, 24 percent disagreed that they were confident in their 5-year financial stability, which is three times more than the 8 percent reported in 2019 (Jaschik et al., 2020).

Small communities that are host to the hard-hit private universities have an equally concerning outlook as COVID-19 continues to bear down on the United States (Bartik et al., 2020). Under the CARES Act, the Coronavirus Relief Fund was set up to help states, local governments, and tribal governments pay for costs related to the COVID-19 pandemic. The total amount allocated for the fund was \$150 billion, with \$139 billion going to state governments and the rest to local governments. The CARES Act also paid for other programs and initiatives, such as the Paycheck Protection Program and the Economic Injury Disaster Loan Program, which helped businesses that lost money because of the pandemic. Since the passage of the CARES Act, additional rounds of government aid have been provided to states and municipalities, including through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (United States Department of Treasury, 2020; National Association of Counties, 2021). Although government aid is useful in fueling the economy, most of the rescue money went to cities with populations of more than 500,000, leaving small communities that are often host to the most vulnerable higher education institutions struggling to make ends meet (Bartik et al., 2020). Many of these communities have

had emergency funding applications denied, and they lack the resources to compete for significant dollars afforded to larger municipalities. Financial downturn because of the COVID-19 pandemic has left universities and small towns in the United States struggling to survive. This reality is especially notable for small towns that host small private universities (Bartik et al., 2020). A healthy relationship between a university and its host community may be mutually beneficial to both entities (Gavazzi et al., 2014), especially when both are amid economic stress. Consequently, collaborative efforts focused on enhancing economic development between the leadership of the university, local government, and local industry may be key to survival for small private universities and their host communities.

Significance of the Study

Strategic collaboration between university, government, and industry can drive economic development in vulnerable communities (Etzkowitz, 2008). Historically, a multilateral collaboration between university, government, and industry has been beneficial in improving the vitality of communities across the globe (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Gibbons et al., 1994; Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2013). So as leaders at small private universities collaborate with their local government and industry leaders, they should endeavor to shift from coordination and cooperation to collaboration to boost economic development in their communities (Costones, 2008). Because many of the most vulnerable communities have been negatively impacted financially by COVID-19, this collaborative economic development has become increasingly important.

This study provides two unique contributions to literature. A primary contribution of the proposed study is its focus on challenges specific to small private universities in small towns. According to a review of the literature by Smith and Johnson (2019), most empirical studies related to university collaboration have focused on town-gown relationships of large universities

in industrial or metropolitan communities. While town-gown relationships are important, recognizing the benefit of a multilateral collaboration between the university and its local government and industry leaders to enhance local economic development is pivotal, especially in the small financially stressed communities where this study is situated (Cotsones, 2013; Gavazzi et al., 2014; Haddon et al., 2015; Harasta, 2008; Mullin et al., 2012; Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Lichter & Brown, 2011).

A second important contribution of this study relates to the evidence in the literature that institutions of higher education have been key players in affecting the quality of life, both in some negative and some positive ways, in their communities (Bingle & Hatcher, 2002; Carnevale et al., 2013; Kuh et al., 2010; Glaeser & Resseger, 2019; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). This study provides useful information regarding elements of effective university-driven economic development through collaboration, which demonstrates the value of the university in the community and garners support from private- and public-sector stakeholders.

Purpose of the Study

The ultimate purpose of this research was to contribute to the expanding body of knowledge related to collaborative efforts between leaders of small private universities and local government and industry leaders in their host community on their efforts to enhance economic development. Understanding the ways in which institutions can act as catalysts for growth through initiatives such as civic engagement, research, and workforce development is essential to creating successful partnerships (Kuh et al., 2010). By examining how universities have previously collaborated with local government and industry, I sought to identify helpful insights for future collaborative efforts.

From the perspective of those presidents, I analyzed potential barriers to effective collaboration and opportunities for more effective collaboration between presidents of small private universities and local government and industry leaders. Identifying the potential obstacles to collaboration and opportunities for more effective collaboration may enable the development of strategies that foster effective partnerships among university, government, and industry leaders within a community.

Research Question

The focus of this study was to address collaboration from the perspective of university presidents as they collaborate with local government and industry leaders. Therefore, the primary research question was “How do presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in their host communities to enhance economic development?”

Definition of Terms

Following is a list of terms used in this study, including the definitions:

Collaboration. A mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and a sharing of resources and rewards (Mattesich et al., 2018).

Cooperation. An informal relationship that exists without any commonly defined mission, structure, or planning effort (Mattesich et al., 2018).

Coordination. A formal relationship that exists with an understanding of compatible missions (Mattesich et al., 2018).

Local Economic Development. An outcome based on collaborative efforts among three key actors—universities, industry, and government—to stimulate economic growth and improve the well-being of a specific geographic area (Etzkowitz et al., 2000).

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is the underlying structure of a research study. It serves as the perspective by which the researcher examines the phenomenon being studied and consists of concepts or theories that can be applied to the understanding of the phenomenon that one is researching (Anfara & Mertz, 2015; Maxwell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, after analyzing data, I sought to align my data with categories from the Wilder framework (Mattessich, Murray-Close et al., 2001). Published by the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, this framework was developed to provide a theoretical basis for understanding the factors associated with successful collaboration. The Wilder framework and an associated tool used to assess collaboration, *The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory*, have been applied to collaborative settings in many sectors, including education, government, and industry, to assess the health of a collaboration and to identify areas where improvement is needed (Mattessich et al., 2001; Howard, 2020).

According to Mattessich et al. (2001, 2018), the first series of the Wilder research was conducted in 1992 and examined 133 studies related to collaboration. This initial examination of the literature on collaboration then focused on 18 valid and relevant research studies that identified 19 factors reported to positively influence the success of collaboration. In 2000, another examination of 281 studies related to collaboration was conducted, identified additional elements that must be present for successful collaboration. In 2018, an additional review of empirical studies on collaboration confirmed the validity of the earlier research and added to the literature. The latest research also acknowledges the importance of collaborating across cultural differences as a crucial element that must be present for a successful collaboration (Mattessich et al., 2018).

In the Wilder framework, the 22 components of successful collaborative efforts are organized into six categories (Mattesich et al., 2018). For the *Environment* category, successful collaboration factors are history of collaboration in the community; collaborative group seen as a legitimate leader in the community; and favorable political and social climate. In the *Membership Characteristics* category, successful collaboration factors include mutual respect, understanding, and trust; appropriate cross section of members; members see collaboration as being in their self-interest; and the ability to compromise. In the *Process and Structure* category, successful collaboration factors include members share a stake in process and outcome; multiple layers of participation; flexibility; development of clear roles and policy guidelines; adaptability of changing conditions; appropriate pace of development; and evaluation and continuous learning. In the *Communication* category, successful collaboration factors include open and frequent communication and established informal relationships and communication links. In the *Purpose* category, successful collaboration factors include concrete, attainable goals and objectives; shared vision; and unique purpose. In the *Resources* category, successful collaboration factors include sufficient funds, staff, materials, and time; skilled leadership; and engaged stakeholders.

Previous research suggests that the Wilder framework may be relevant to collaborative efforts to enhance economic development. *The Wilder Collaboration Case Studies*, published in 2013 by the Wilder Research Center, presents examples of successful collaborations for economic development. This publication highlights how different organizations, including government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private-sector partners can work together to achieve common goals and enhance economic development. Reliability testing on earlier editions of the framework was conducted that validated the framework for assessing collaboration (Townsend & Shelley, 2008). The number of studies based on the revised and

updated 2018 edition of *Collaboration: What Makes it Work* is limited. However, the Wilder framework's long history of use focused on increasing our understanding of effective collaboration to enhance economic development suggests that this is an appropriate theoretical framework to use for this study (Howard, 2020; Townsend et al., 2008).

Summary

University leaders often face external influences beyond their control that may disrupt the financial stability of their institutions. This reality can disproportionately affect small private universities that exist in small towns in which the local government and industry experience similar external influences that negatively affect their financial stability. Collaboration between the university president with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development may give leaders in these sectors confidence in their financial outlook and improve the community as a whole in which they exist. The result of this study expands the body of knowledge from the perspective of small private university presidents related to collaboration for the purpose of economic development between those presidents and their local government and industry leaders.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

To frame the research question, how do presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in their host community to enhance economic development, I will discuss collaboration from two perspectives. First, I will discuss collaboration from a theoretical perspective. I will then consider the topic in a more practical way, as it pertains to universities enhancing economic development in the context of the challenges to university collaboration in general and to economic development in particular. In this context, I will consider how groups may move from coordination and cooperation to collaboration. I will examine examples of university collaboration with the host community that reflect the growing interest in the role collaboration has in enhancing economic development.

Figure 1 gives an outline of Chapter 2:

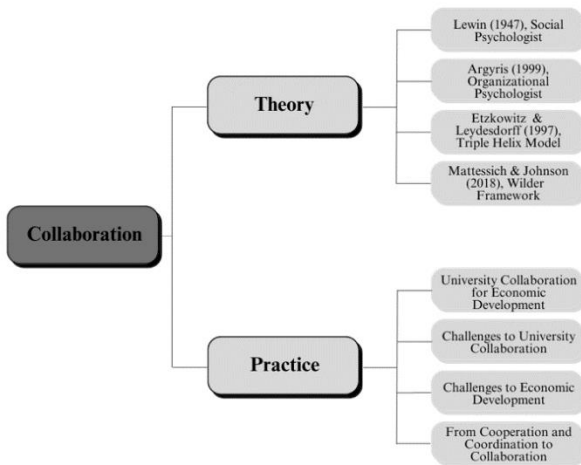


Figure 1

Literature Review Map

Collaboration in Theory

The emergence of collaboration theory in the 1970s was a reaction to the limitations of conventional organizational models at that time (Mattessich et al., 2001). Historically, models were hierarchical and frequently emphasized individual performance over collaboration. The objective of collaboration theory was to provide an alternative framework for comprehending how individuals and organizations can collaborate more effectively. The theory emphasized the significance of communication, trust, a shared vision, and mutual respect in fostering effective collaboration (Mattessich et al., 1997). By stressing these factors, collaboration theory sought to develop a more democratic and inclusive approach to organizational management (Huxham & Vangen, 2005).

Lewin, a renowned social psychologist, was instrumental in the development of collaboration theory (Lewin, 1947). Recognizing the limitations of traditional organizational models, Lewin pushed for a more collaborative, democratic, and participative management style (Burnes, 2004). His work laid a foundation for future research on collaboration and significantly influenced the development of other collaborative frameworks (Schein, 1996). Lewin asserted that effective collaboration required clear communication, mutual trust, and shared goals (Burnes, 2004); he believed that these elements were necessary for fostering an inclusive and democratic environment that encouraged individuals and organizations to collaborate in the pursuit of common objectives (Schein, 1996). Lewin's research challenged the hierarchical and individualistic nature of conventional organizational models by promoting these principles.

Lewin's work on collaboration also contributed to the development of *action research*, a collaborative approach to problem solving that involves practitioners and researchers working together to identify and address issues (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Action research emphasizes the importance of collaboration, communication, and shared

learning in driving organizational change and improvement (Coghlan et al., 2014; Greenwood et al., 2007).

In addition to his contributions regarding the principles of action research, Lewin had an impact on the development of *group-dynamics theory*. This theory, which examines the processes, structures, and behaviors that shape group interactions and performance, emphasizes the importance of collaboration in promoting group cohesion, innovation, and productivity (Burnes, 2004; Forsyth, 2018).

Lewin's seminal work on group decision-making and social influence has led to a greater understanding of the factors that contribute to effective group performance, as well as to the development of techniques for facilitating group decision-making and resolving conflicts (Lewin et al., 1939). Lewin's research on group dynamics has also contributed to the development of team-building exercises and leadership training programs that are widely used in organizations today (Burnes, 2004). Overall, Lewin's contributions to action research and group dynamics have significantly advanced our understanding of the complex interplay between individuals and their social environments. As the importance of collaboration continues to be recognized across various disciplines, Lewin's work remains a significant reference for understanding the principles and processes that underpin effective collaboration.

Argyris, a renowned organizational theorist, has also made substantial contributions to collaboration theory by examining the role of individual behavior in fostering effective collaboration (Argyris, 1999). To enhance collaboration within organizations, Argyris's work emphasized the significance of the following individual behaviors: Self-awareness, clear communication, and constructive conflict resolution (Argyris, 1999). Through his research, Argyris highlighted that recognizing and addressing personal biases and assumptions was critical for successful collaborations. In his work, he introduced the concept of Model I and Model II

behavior as differential approaches to collaboration, whereby Model I behavior is characterized by self-protection, defensiveness, and a reluctance to accept feedback, and Model II behavior prioritizes mutual trust, openness, and the willingness to learn from others (Argyris, 1999; Smith, 2001).

By valuing personal growth and self-awareness, Argyris's work advocates for the advancement of collaborative organizational environments that favor Model II behavior (Smith, 2001). Argyris (1999) emphasized the importance of open communication and peaceful conflict resolution for fostering effective collaboration. He promoted the use of "double-loop learning," which not only resolves immediate problems but also investigates underlying assumptions and beliefs that contribute to such problems. His work in promoting explicit communication and constructive conflict resolution has stimulated the development of more collaborative organizational cultures that value constant learning and improvement. As organizations increasingly recognize the importance of collaboration in addressing complex challenges and achieving common goals, Argyris's work remains a valuable resource for guiding collaborative efforts and fostering more inclusive and democratic organizational cultures (Gray, 2018; Kahane, 2017; Smith, 2001).

Another notable contribution to literature is the Triple Helix (TH) model of innovation. The TH model has attracted considerable attention as an integral policy-making tool to enhance innovation and promote economic development (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 1997). Specifically, it advocates the strengthening of the collaborative relationships between university, industry, and government to improve regional economic development. As Etzkowitz (2003) stated:

The entrepreneurial university takes a proactive stance in putting knowledge to use and in broadening the input into the creation of academic knowledge. Thus, it operates according to an interactive rather than a linear model of innovation. As firms raise their technological level, they move closer to an academic model, engaging in higher levels of training and in sharing of knowledge. Government acts as a public entrepreneur and venture capitalist in addition to its traditional regulatory role in setting the rules of the

game. Moving beyond product development, innovation then becomes an endogenous process of “taking the role of the other,” encouraging hybridization among the institutional spheres. (p. 127)

According to this view, universities generate knowledge, governments facilitate its application, and businesses apply it. The TH model asserts that collaboration between universities, governments, and industries can serve as a catalyst for generating new knowledge and bringing new technologies to the market (Etzkowitz, 2003, 2008). Therefore, this model highlights the importance of innovation as a driver of economic growth and social advancement. The TH model further indicates that, while innovation is usually linked with the private sector, partnering with other entities can also enhance it. Innovative transformation includes the establishment of new business models, social patterns, and organizational structures in addition to technological advancements.

The Wilder Foundation (2010) has also made significant strides in the development of collaboration theory with their publication, *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (2018), which not only serves as a comprehensive guide to effective collaboration, but also has made significant contributions to the advancement of collaboration theory. Based on the experiences of hundreds of collaborations across various sectors--such as education, government, industry, health care, social services, and community development--this research provides valuable insights into the practical application of collaboration as a method for achieving shared goals and improving outcomes by identifying common themes and best practices among diverse entities (Wilder Foundation, 2010). According to the Wilder Foundation’s research (2010), the following elements must be present for a productive collaborative partnership:

- Having a shared vision and sense of purpose;
- Effectively communicating with partners;
- Possessing mutual trust and respect;

- Having diverse and complementary skills; and
- Having strong leadership.

Emphasizing these essential components has assisted a broad cross-sector of organizations in gaining a deeper understanding of how to establish and maintain effective collaborative partnerships.

The initial Wilder framework that focused on collaboration was developed in 1915 with the work of the Central Registration Bureau (Jarchow, 1981; Mattessich et al., 2018). In the initial framework, distinct factors of collaboration were discovered within six categories for organizations to analyze their alliances in a meaningful manner: environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, communication, purpose, and resources. It was not until 1992 that researchers and practitioners were given a useful tool to assess collaborative efforts within their own groups: *The Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory* (Mattessich et al., 2018). The Inventory comprises a collection of statements that have been categorized into each of the 22 factors Mattessich et al. (2001) identified. By evaluating the alignment of these factors of collaboration with the statements on a five-point scale, participants generate data that, when analyzed within six general categories, reveals each factor's strengths and weaknesses. Through careful analysis of this data, practitioners may initiate conversations among collaborators regarding how to improve effectiveness.

The Wilder framework is useful for understanding collaboration, but it is not without limitations (Hall et al., 2012; Mattessich et al., 2001; Wilder Foundation, 2010). One significant limitation is that the framework hinges on parties having trust and mutual respect toward each other; hence, its applicability could falter if either element is absent or minimal. In such cases, addressing concerns regarding trust and mutual respect might become pivotal in fostering a productive collaborative partnership. Second, the Wilder framework may not be applicable to all

forms of collaboration. For instance, collaborations between organizations with distinct differences in cultures or values may necessitate additional considerations. Furthermore, this framework may fail to account for the existence of power imbalances between collaborating partners. When unequal distribution of resources and authority exists, it is vital to address such issues to establish an equitable and productive partnership. Finally, the Wilder framework does not consider the role technology plays in collaboration. As more collaborations occur across virtual platforms, it is essential to consider how technology can either facilitate or impede the effectiveness of that collaboration.

Although such limitations exist, the Wilder framework offers several benefits to organizations that wish to enhance their collaborative efforts. Mattessich et al. (2001, 2018) provide a comprehensive analysis of elements of collaboration that may influence the efficacy of efforts. This allows organizations to obtain a more accurate understanding of their strengths and weaknesses in terms of collaboration. Information gained from this analysis can be used to devise a strategy that can strengthen relationships with collaborating partners. Second, the Wilder framework promotes reflection and discussion among collaborative partners, encouraging them to consider the factors that may be contributing to their collaboration's success or difficulties (Wilder Foundation, 2010). Fostering a sense of joint accountability and dedication towards augmenting the efficiency of collaboration can be achieved through this approach.

Using Wilder Research as a Framework

For several reasons, the Wilder Foundation framework is valuable for researchers who are studying collaboration amongst leaders and seeking to enhance economic development. First, by providing a systematic and evidence-based method for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of collaborative efforts, this framework enables researchers to identify areas in which partnerships between university presidents and local government and industry leaders can be

improved, a combination that may ultimately lead to more effective and sustainable economic development initiatives (Mattessich et al., 2018). Additionally, the framework has been widely used and validated across various sectors, including public, private, and non-profit organizations, demonstrating its applicability and utility in diverse contexts (Mattessich et al., 2018; Wilder Research, 2010).

Another key strength of using the Wilder framework to study collaboration between university presidents and local government and industry leaders seeking to enhance economic development is its focus on six categories that encompass 22 distinct factors. Each category and the corresponding factors have been empirically shown to influence the success of collaborative efforts (Mattessich et al., 2018). Together, the categories and related factors encompass a wide range of issues, including communication, leadership, resources, and external support, providing researchers with a comprehensive understanding of the various elements that contribute to successful collaborations (Mattessich et al., 2018; Howard, 2020). By examining these factors, researchers can gain insights into the specific aspects of collaboration that are most critical for enhancing economic development. In addition, they can develop targeted strategies for strengthening collaborative efforts between university presidents and local government and industry leaders in the community.

Finally, because it recognizes the dynamic nature of collaborative relationships and the need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation, the Wilder framework's emphasis on continuous assessment and improvement makes it particularly well-suited for studying collaboration between university presidents and local government and industry leaders in the context of enhancing economic development (Mattessich et al., 2018). By using the framework for studying collaboration, researchers can not only identify the factors that contribute to successful collaborations, but also track changes in these factors over time—a combination that will provide

valuable information on the effectiveness of interventions and strategies aimed at enhancing collaboration (Mattessich et al., 2018; Wilder Research, 2010). In this way, the Wilder framework can serve as both a diagnostic tool and a roadmap for improving collaborative efforts between university presidents, local government, and industry leaders seeking to enhance economic development in their local communities.

Collaboration in Practice

Universities play an essential role in fostering collaboration among stakeholders to enhance economic development. As innovation- and knowledge-creation engines, university presidents can make significant contributions to regional economic development by collaborating with government and industry partners (Etzkowitz et al., 2000). These collaborative efforts support the academic mission of universities, and the synergy they create accelerates the application of research findings in ways that stimulate economic growth.

Small universities and their host cities can collaborate to enhance economic development by leveraging their unique strengths and resources. Universities, for example, can offer expertise in research and innovation, whereas local governments can facilitate access to funding and policy support (Drucker & Goldstein, 2007). Additionally, small universities can act as catalysts for attracting and retaining a skilled workforce, fostering entrepreneurial activities, and facilitating the transfer of technology to local businesses (Felsenstein & Bar-El, 2019).

Recent research studies have highlighted the benefits of university, government, and industry collaboration in promoting economic development. Guerrero et al. (2016) suggest that university-industry-government collaborations are positively correlated with the entrepreneurial activities that drive regional economic development. Similarly, Fernández-Delgado et al. (2019) suggest that collaborations between universities and regional industries can increase innovation and competitiveness. In addition, McMillan (2018) highlighted the role of small universities in

fostering regional economic development via partnerships with local government and industry. These studies support the idea that collaboration between universities, government, and industry may be beneficial for enhancing economic development.

University Collaboration for Economic Development

Successful economic development may be contingent upon effective collaborative efforts between individuals, organizations, and communities, as argued by Huggins and Johnston (2009). Sharing resources, knowledge bases, and expertise creates a synergistic relationship that leads toward common goals. An example of this can be seen in university partnerships with local communities whereby collaboration results in economic growth (Drucker et al., 2007). This type of collaboration cultivates new ideas while simultaneously boosting entrepreneurship opportunities, in turn leading to generations of more employment and contributing to overall economic progress.

As centers of knowledge and research, universities offer valuable resources and expertise to local businesses and other stakeholders. Conversely, host communities can provide universities with access to funding, industry partnerships, and local resources, thereby enhancing these institutions' capabilities for conducting research and implementing practical applications of their findings. Such collaborations frequently result in the development of innovative technologies, goods, and services that create job opportunities while also attracting investment. Moreover, these university-community alliances provide access to advanced educational opportunities that can heighten the skills and knowledge of the local workforce (Yusuf & Nabeshima, 2007).

Based on research studies, it is evident that collaboration plays a critical role in promoting economic development. For instance, the findings by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) highlight the importance of both knowledge and technology transfer between universities

and industry for driving innovation and growth. Effective collaboration helps facilitate this process. Participants in that study included university researchers, industry executives, government officials, nonprofit organizations, and policymakers. The participants were interviewed about their experiences with university-industry-government relations and their views on the changing nature of innovation. The interviews were conducted in several countries, including the United States, Europe, and Asia. The researchers found that participants had a variety of different views on the changing nature of innovation and on the role of universities in innovation. However, the study did highlight the growing trend of collaboration between universities, industry, and government in the innovation process, which may enhance economic development (Etzkowitz et al., 2000).

Additionally, Bercovitz and Feldman's (2006) study revealed that partnerships established between universities and their host communities brought about high levels of entrepreneurship and innovative idea generation, which eventually result in increased employment opportunities, sustainable economies, and larger-scale economic development. The study used a qualitative methodology, in which researchers conducted interviews of 20 participants such as university administrators, faculty members, industry representatives, government officials, and foundation representatives. The researchers also reviewed a variety of documents, including university strategic plans, technology-transfer agreements, and news articles to gain insight into how entrepreneurial universities contribute to knowledge-based economic development. The study found that entrepreneurial universities played a significant role in knowledge-based economic development in four ways: 1) Creating new knowledge, 2) transferring knowledge to industry, 3) educating students, and 4) attracting investment. Achieving innovation, economic expansion, and employment opportunities on a large scale requires fostering cooperative relationships among universities, industries, and local

communities. Collaboration enables these entities to tap into their respective strengths and resources to address obstacles to both collaboration and economic development (Bercovitz et al., 2006).

There are also examples of how joint ventures can play an instrumental role in steering economic development toward success. For example, by engaging with businesses from Silicon Valley through measures such as the Stanford Research Park project, Stanford University has aided in bolstering technology-driven ventures locally, which in turn has contributed immensely to the advancement of job prospects and overall growth (Hsu, 2017). Additionally, in the research study conducted by Hsu (2017), the researcher studied the impact university-industry collaboration had on innovation for economic development. Hsu collected data from 1,000 participants via a survey that pertained to a variety of factors, including the level of collaboration between universities and industry. The study found that such collaboration had a positive impact on innovation, as demonstrated by a p-value of 0.002. The study concluded that the results were statistically significant, and that they provided strong evidence that a collaboration between universities and industry had a positive impact on innovation, which may drive economic development in the community (Hsu, 2017).

Two examples of how universities have partnered with industry giants are exemplified by BMW's collaboration with Clemson University in creating an advanced, materials-focused research center and by Harvard University and MIT's partnership for edX (Smith, 2019; Smith et al., 2019). The former collaboration sought to promote innovation in automotive manufacturing, while the latter aimed at providing free, top-tier education worldwide. Although such partnerships can take many forms, the common denominator is that they involve the sharing of resources, expertise, and knowledge. By building beneficial collaborations such as these, educational institutions can benefit from increased access to resources, enhanced research

capabilities, improved student-learning outcomes, and greater opportunities for collaboration. These examples shed light on how collaborations between university presidents, government leaders, and industry leaders may contribute to overall economic growth while reducing disparities in their communities.

The FortZED (Zero Energy District) project in Fort Collins, Colorado, is another project that demonstrates the power of collaboration among diverse community stakeholders to accomplish a shared goal: the creation of a sustainable urban environment (Troxell, 2011). The initiative's success depended on effective partnership between Colorado State University, the City of Fort Collins, local businesses, research organizations, and regional utilities. Collaboration amongst the key leaders was instrumental in merging resources and expertise to create innovative energy solutions that benefited the entire community. Throughout the project, communication and continuous feedback among stakeholders enhanced progress and problem-solving. The FortZED project exemplifies how a strong collaborative effort between university, government, and industry entities can lead to impactful and sustainable innovations that benefit the entire community.

To drive socioeconomic growth within a local area, universities also can collaborate with community leaders by capitalizing on each other's strengths. For instance, the University of Pennsylvania's West Philadelphia Skills Initiative (WPSI) has successfully partnered with local businesses and community-centric organizations to provide employment training programs tailored toward residents living in West Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania, n.d.). As a result of this collaboration, there have been notable improvements regarding both inclusive educational access and robust workforce development. The partnership between the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) and the University of Massachusetts Boston through the creation of the UMass Boston–Boston Youth and Family (BCYF) resource center demonstrates

how interorganizational alliances can generate tangible benefits for society (Boston Redevelopment Authority, 2016). Services provided by this center include job-training opportunities and educational programs for all ages, including health and wellness resources. Through effective university-community partnerships, the community can experience increased economic growth while also addressing socioeconomic inequalities.

Challenges to University Collaboration

While collaborations between universities and their host communities can yield significant economic benefits, challenges may arise in the process (Etzkowitz et al., 2000). One of the most significant barriers to effective collaboration is the misalignment of objectives and goals between the university and local government and industry leaders. For example, a university may be interested in conducting research that will lead to new knowledge, while a business may be more interested in developing new products or services that can be commercialized (Arza & Benneworth, 2017). Differing objectives that are not aligned can lead to conflict and frustration. According to Drucker and Goldstein (2007), aligned goals between universities and their host communities are essential for successful collaboration and the realization of shared economic objectives.

To overcome the challenge of misaligned objectives and goals, it is wise for partners to involve all relevant stakeholders in the planning and decision-making process. Doing so ensures that all perspectives are considered, and that there is a shared vision for collaboration (Yusuf et al., 2007). Partners should also ensure that the objectives and goals are carefully defined at the outset so that all the partners have a clear understanding of what each other hopes to achieve (Azra et al., 2017; Mattessich et al., 2018). Regular communication and ongoing evaluation of the partnership's progress can also help ensure that all parties remain aligned and committed to achieving shared goals (Huggins & Johnston, 2009). These strategies will help to ensure that

individuals collaborating are on the same page, aware of each other's needs and concerns, and that there is a clear understanding of what each individual hopes to achieve.

The battle for financing and resources is another difficulty. Universities are frequently under pressure to get outside financing, which can foster a climate of competition that discourages cooperation (Philbin, 2008). Often, the solution for universities in this regard is to seek funding from government entities through grants, since government leaders are often interested in initiatives that support economic growth to improve the quality of life in a region (Link & Scott, 2005). Another way to overcome the challenge of inadequate financial resources is to partner with businesses. Businesses are often willing to invest in university-industry partnerships because these partnerships can help businesses access new markets, develop new technologies, and train a skilled workforce (Azra et al., 2017; Link et al., 2005). Philbin (2008) noted that institutions could be hesitant to share their resources, information, or skills out of concern that doing so might make it more difficult for them to get funding in the future (Philbin, 2008). Such hesitation can limit the potential for economic progress and hinder the success of collaborative initiatives.

Researchers and practitioners have suggested strategies to overcome the competition for financial resources. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) suggested that one way for partners to overcome this challenge is for them to pool their resources and leverage each other's assets in collaborative projects. By combining their financial, human, and infrastructural resources, the partners can achieve economies of scale, which may result in economic development outcomes with a greater impact. This method also permits universities to share the risks and benefits of collaborative initiatives, reducing the burden on individual institutions and fostering a cooperative spirit among partners. Universities may also engage in cooperative fundraising

efforts and submit collaborative grant applications to combat competition for financial resources (Huggins et al., 2009).

Universities can attract external funding and support by demonstrating the potential economic benefits of their collaborative initiatives to funding agencies, foundations, and other potential donors. As institutions collaborate to secure funding for shared initiatives, this strategy can also help reduce duplication of effort and competition for limited resources. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) also suggested that governments can play an essential part in fostering collaboration among universities and reducing competition for financial resources. Governments can encourage university collaboration and support regional economic-development initiatives through policy interventions such as targeted financing programs and incentives for collaborative projects (Smith, 2018). These policies can help foster an environment more conducive to collaboration and alleviate the pressures associated with competition for limited resources.

Collaborations at universities are also hampered by problems with communication and trust as the result of differences in workplace culture and business priorities (Azra et al., 2017). Adams et al. (2006) claimed that maintaining positive relationships and developing trust depend on effective communication. Leaders should seek to set up regular meetings and other opportunities for collaborating partners to share information and discuss issues. They should use clear and concise language and avoid jargon that may not be familiar to everyone involved. Individuals should strive to know each other on a personal level, to better understand each other's goals and priorities. However, there still may be hurdles to efficient communication because of variations in institutional culture, language, and communication styles, which can result in misunderstandings and even confrontations. Building trust across collaborating entities can take time, especially when those entities are sharing sensitive material or intellectual

property. However, such collaboration may be worth the effort when the entities consider the benefits of a successful collaboration (Adams et al., 2006).

Collaborations between universities are frequently complicated by difficulties with legal and intellectual property rights. Complex legal frameworks may be difficult for leaders and decision-makers of institutions to understand, which could prevent the exchange of research findings, technology, or knowledge (Ponds et al., 2007). While maintaining intellectual property rights is important for both individual researchers and institutions, doing so can also obstruct the free flow of information and resources that is necessary for promoting economic development (Ponds et al., 2007).

Similarly, confidentiality agreements that are designed to protect confidential information that is shared between parties can hinder collaboration (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017). These agreements can be complex, and it can be difficult for universities to ensure that they are properly drafted and executed. This can lead to misunderstandings and disputes, which can damage relationships between universities and their collaborators.

Liability issues can also complicate collaborations between universities (United States Government Accountability Office, 2016). For example, if a university researcher is injured while working with a collaborator, the university may be liable for the researcher's injuries. This kind of liability can be a significant risk for universities, and it can make them reluctant to collaborate with businesses or other organizations.

Finally, evaluating the influence and accomplishment of university collaborations can be difficult. Without reliable evaluation techniques, it is challenging to assess the performance of collaborative initiatives and pinpoint prospective improvement areas, which could ultimately impede the possibility of economic progress. More reliable evaluation frameworks are required,

according to Geoghegan-Quinn's (2013) argument, to determine how joint activities would affect the economy. However, given the wide range of possible outcomes and the lengthy duration of many collaborative projects, building these frameworks can be challenging (Geoghegan-Quinn, 2013).

Challenges to Economic Development

Universities and small towns alike may encounter distinct challenges as they work together to enhance economic development. Challenges may include, but are not limited to, lack of funding, economic diversity, qualified labor, transportation, effective leadership, and the failure to adapt to a changing environment. To overcome the challenges that small towns face in enhancing economic development, universities and their host communities should work together and collaborate.

One of the biggest challenges to economic development is often a lack of funding or limited financial resources. According to Partridge et al. (2008), small communities typically have fewer financial resources and a smaller tax base than larger cities, which makes it difficult for the smaller communities to invest in economic development initiatives. This lack of resources can hinder the ability of municipalities to collaborate and implement effective economic-development strategies (Partridge et al., 2008).

Like small towns, small universities are facing a growing number of financial pressures, including declining enrollment, reduced government funding, and increased competition for research grants and private donations (Katsinas, 2019). As a result, many small universities are struggling to maintain their financial stability and may be forced to cut back on collaborative initiatives to balance their budgets.

Economic diversity is also a challenge for small towns and small universities. According to Lichter and Brown (2011), small towns frequently rely on a small number of critical industries

or employers, which can make them susceptible to economic downturns and hinder their long-term growth. These economic constraints may slow down collaborative efforts as communities struggle to diversify their economies and attract new businesses or industries (Lichter et al., 2011). Like small towns, small universities may be reluctant to add new academic programs. These prohibitive costs of adding new programs can initially contribute to financial stress (Katsinas, 2019). This limitation can hinder the diversity of university offerings and contribute to stagnant growth in an already financially stressed environment.

Attracting and retaining a qualified labor pool is a challenge that should be addressed for effective collaboration. According to Green (2013), small towns frequently experience a “brain drain,” in which highly skilled individuals migrate to larger cities in search of employment. This migration can reduce the number of skilled workers available to support new industries, businesses, and higher education institutions, which in turn can impede effective collaboration between universities, government, and industries (Green, 2013).

Transportation networks that facilitate the movement of goods, services, and people between locations are essential for economic growth and may be constrained in small towns that are host to small universities (Goetz et al., 2010). However, small communities frequently have less developed transportation infrastructure than larger cities, limiting their access to markets and impeding collaborative efforts that enhance economic development (Goetz et al., 2010). One primary reason for this disparity in transportation infrastructure is the limited financial resources available to small communities, which makes it difficult for them to invest in large-scale infrastructure projects (Goetz et al., 2010). Additionally, small towns may lack the political influence and strategic importance required to attract funding and support for transportation projects from regional or national governments.

Good leadership is a key to success for effective collaboration (Mattesich et al., 2008) and may be difficult to foster in small towns and small universities (Costones, 2008). According to Schaeffer and Loveridge (2002), collaboration excels in the presence of effective leadership, but small communities may not have access to individuals with the necessary leadership skills and experience to navigate complex collaborative processes. Furthermore, fragmented governance structures can pose significant challenges for municipalities by hindering coordinated efforts aimed at achieving shared goals (Schaeffer & Loveridge, 2002). This fragmentation may also be true for small universities. Given limited resources, small universities may not be able to invest the necessary time or funds in leadership development programs. According to a study by Sparr et al. (2017), developing academic leaders through formal preparation and informal learning experiences can enhance their ability to lead and manage change, which in turn can positively impact the economic development of the university and surrounding community. In addition, Blom and Alvesson (2015) have argued that there is no one best way to do leadership development, and that a multifaceted approach is needed to make sense of the concept. Therefore, failing to take a comprehensive approach to leadership development could hinder economic development from a small university perspective.

Finally, economic development may be hindered if small universities and their host communities do not adapt to the changing circumstances brought about by catastrophic events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As highlighted in a report by the Southern Regional Center for Health Economics (2020), small communities may be more vulnerable to the economic impacts of such events as the result of their reliance on small businesses and industries that have been hardest hit. As Dumulescu and Muțiu (2021) noted, the pandemic has forced academics to adapt and move to online settings for teaching, mentoring, research, and support. Failure to adapt to

these changes could hinder the ability of a small university to provide quality education and research opportunities, which could in turn negatively impact economic development.

To overcome the challenges that small universities and their host communities face in enhancing economic development, collaboration may be key. By collaborating and addressing these challenges head-on, these groups may create vibrant economies that will benefit everyone in the community. Having an in-depth understanding of how small private universities have collaborated with local government and industry will assist those involved in identifying best practices for future collaborative efforts. Additionally, identifying the potential challenges to collaboration may enable them to develop strategies to overcome the challenges associated with collaboration. This approach can be useful as leaders move from cooperation and coordination to collaboration for the sake of enhancing economic development in their local communities.

Cooperation, Coordination, and Collaboration

The concepts of cooperation, coordination, and collaboration are often used interchangeably in the context of economic development. However, a closer look reveals that these concepts represent distinct modes of stakeholder interaction. The definitions provided in *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (Mattessich et al., 2001, p. 61) can help us distinguish between these concepts. *Cooperation* is defined as informal collaboration in the absence of a formal agreement or structure. *Coordination* entails working together in a more structured way, with roles and responsibilities often predefined. *Collaboration* is a more sophisticated form of interaction characterized by shared objectives, collaborative decision-making, and mutual accountability among stakeholders. Table 1 offers further explanation about the differences in these terms.

Table 1*Components of Cooperation, Coordination, and Collaboration*

| Essential Elements | Cooperation | Coordination | Collaboration |
|---|--|--|--|
| Vision and Relationships | Basis for cooperation is usually between individuals but may be mandated. Organizational mission & goals are not considered. Interaction is on an as needed basis/no time limit. | Individual relationships are supported by their organizations. Mission and goals of the organizations are reviewed for compatibility. Interaction usually around one specific project or task. | Commitment of the organization is fully behind the individual. Common, new mission and goals are created. One or more projects are undertaken for longer-term results. |
| Structure, Responsibilities, and Communication | Relationships are informal; each organization functions separately. No joint planning is required. Information is conveyed as needed. | Organizations assume needed roles but still function separately. Some project-specific planning is required. Communication roles are established and channels for interaction created. | New structure and/or formal division of labor are created. Comprehensive planning is required, including measures of success. Many levels of communication and channels for interaction are created. |
| Authority and Accountability | Authority rests solely with individual organizations. Leadership is unilateral and control is central. All authority and accountability rests with each organization. | Authority rests on each organization but there is coordination. Some sharing of leadership and control. There is some shared risk, but most authority and accountability rests with each organization. | Authority is determined by the collaboration to balance ownership. Leadership is dispersed, and control is shared and mutual. Equal risk is shared by all organizations. |
| Resources and Rewards | Resources are separate. | Resources are acknowledged and can be made available for a specific project. Rewards are mutually acknowledged. | Resources are pooled or jointly secured for a long-term effort. Organizations share in the products: more is accomplished together than individually. |

Note: Adapted from *Collaboration: What Makes It Work* (Mattessich et al., 2001, p. 61) and from works of M. Blank, S. Kagan, A. Melaville, and K. Ray.

Research studies related to economic development have highlighted the differences between cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. The following is a more detailed look at each of these processes.

Cooperation

Elola et al. (2016) examined the role of cooperation in the emergence of maritime clusters in the Basque Country. That study was designed as a qualitative case study whereby 20 participants who were key informants from the Basque maritime industry were interviewed. Findings suggest that cooperation among companies in the Basque automotive sector led to the sharing of resources and information but did not necessarily result in collaborative decision-making or shared objectives. The study also highlighted that while cooperation played a crucial role in fostering knowledge exchange and resource sharing, it was not sufficient to foster a truly collaborative environment. This indicates the need for further exploration of factors that can enhance collaboration and align objectives among companies in the Basque maritime industry.

Coordination

In contrast, Todeva and Rakhmatullin (2016) examined the Smart Specialization Strategy of the European Union, which emphasized the importance of coordination among regional stakeholders for the purpose of aligning their innovation efforts with larger policy objectives. The study design reflected the results of a review of theoretical, empirical, and policy contributions to the understanding of global value chains and regional specializations. The participants in the study represented a variety of authors—including academics, policy makers, and business leaders—who have written about this topic. The findings of the review show that global value chains can have a significant impact on regional specializations and can help promote regional specialization by providing access to new markets, technologies, and resources. Global value chains can also help participants to improve the competitiveness of regional

economies by increasing productivity and innovation. However, they can also have negative impacts on regional specializations. Global value chains can lead to the loss of jobs and the concentration of economic activity in a few regions and also make it difficult for regions to develop their own unique strengths and identities. Coordination alone is simply not enough.

Collaboration

Collaboration stands out as an advanced form of interaction that may boost economic development. Collaborative efforts eliminate barriers to innovation while promoting the proficient use of available resources, which will lead to new products or services that introduce multiple opportunities for individuals and organizations alike. This process leads to increased competition, which in turn translates into increased quality products or services that benefit all parties involved. Cross-functional teams' collaboration strengthens partnerships in that it promotes trust-based relationships built on insights gained from working toward common goals and thus establishes healthier long-term ties between collaborating partners such as universities, government, and industry.

Agranoff and McGuire (2003) studied how local governments collaborate with other organizations to achieve economic development. This qualitative case study included data from 237 cities in five states over a 2-year period. Participants—who provided data through interviews and focus groups—included city managers, mayors, and economic-development directors. The study found that local governments are increasingly collaborating with other organizations, such as universities, to enhance economic development.

However, although collaborations may be effective, they can also be challenging to manage. Challenges that hinder collaboration include lack of trust and respect, poor communication, lack of resources, and short-term thinking. To move into collaboration from coordination or cooperation, it's important for the collaborative group to share a clear vision for

economic development, maintain trust and respect amongst partners, have open communication and coordination of efforts, maintain a willingness to share resources and expertise, and possess a commitment to long-term success (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003).

A study by Scholz (2009) aimed to answer the research question, “What are the institutional logics (or ‘rules of the game’ that govern how individuals and organizations interact with each other) of collaborative governance?” and how does this logic affect the outcomes of collaborative efforts? Scholz used a qualitative research design and included case studies of various collaborative governance arrangements in the United States to analyze the underlying institutional logics that drive collaborative efforts and their consequences for governance outcomes. The participants in the study were not individuals, but rather the collaborative governance arrangements themselves, which included a diverse range of public, private, and nonprofit organizations involved in collaborative efforts to address complex public problems. The study identified factors that may influence the role of institutional logics in collaborative governance, including the type of collaborative initiative, the participants in the collaborative initiative, and the context in which the collaborative initiative takes place. The study concluded that institutional logics are a key factor to consider when one is studying collaborative governance. We can use the study’s findings to better understand how different institutional logics can shape collaborative governance, and to develop strategies for managing the challenges that can arise from different institutional logics when university presidents are collaborating with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development (Scholz, 2009).

In their recent study focused on scrutinizing how university-industry collaboration facilitates regional economic advancement, Lee and Lee (2022) analyzed data from the United States Census Bureau, National Science Foundation (NSF), and American Association of Universities (AAU). The aim of the researchers was to discern how joint efforts intended for

improving economies could positively influence overall growth across all 50 states in America over a period spanning 17 years. Utilizing a panel data-analysis method, they validated their hypothesis that these sorts of partnerships contribute favorably toward cultivating better economies among communities. With higher levels of research and development expenditures, coupled with more knowledgeable individuals living within those areas, data indicated that communities across the United States benefited from collaborative efforts. The results of Lee and Lee's (2022) research present evidence that reinforces the importance and relevance of university–industry collaboration in the enhancement of economic development.

In essence, collaboration, as Mattessich and Johnson (2018) defined it, is “a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve a common goal” (p. 77). The referenced studies support the significance and benefits of collaboration, in contrast to cooperation and coordination, for enhancing economic development (Arganoff et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2022; Scholz, 2009). Collaboration enables stakeholders to work more effectively together by leveraging their collective resources and expertise to overcome complex challenges and achieve shared goals. Collaboration includes a commitment to mutual relationships, a jointly developed structure with shared responsibility, mutual authority and accountability for success, and sharing of resources and rewards (Mattessich et al., 2018). Although collaboration is a more complex and demanding process than cooperation or coordination, it may also be more enriching.

Literature Review Overview

Collaboration theory was developed in the 1970s as a reaction to the limitations of conventional organizational models. Lewin, a renowned social psychologist, was instrumental in the development of collaboration theory (he also contributed to the development of other collaborative frameworks, such as action research and group dynamics theory). Lewin

emphasized the importance of communication, trust, shared vision, and mutual respect in fostering effective collaboration and emphasized the importance of collaboration, communication, and shared learning in driving organizational change and improvement. Argyris, organizational theorist, emphasized the significance of self-awareness, clear communication, and constructive conflict resolution as individuals collaborate. The Triple Helix (TH) model of innovation (Etzkowitz et al., 1997) has been used as an integral policy-making tool to enhance innovation and promote economic development (Ranga, 2013; Razak & White, 2015). This model suggests that collaboration between universities, governments, and industries can lead to the generation of new knowledge. This process in turn brings new technologies to the market and drives economic growth and social advancement while also emphasizing the importance of innovation as a driver of economic growth and encouraging hybridization among institutional spheres.

The Wilder Foundation (2010) has made significant contributions to the development of collaboration theory. Published by the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, the Wilder framework provides a theoretical basis for understanding the factors associated with successful collaboration. This body of work has been applied to collaborative settings in many sectors to enable participants to assess the health of a collaboration and to identify areas in which improvement is needed (Mattessich et al., 2001; Howard, 2020). The Wilder framework guided this research study in understanding collaboration of university presidents with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development.

Collaboration between universities, government, and industry may be essential for fostering economic development. Recent research studies suggest that university, government, and industry collaborations are positively correlated with entrepreneurial activities that drive regional economic development, and that collaborations between universities and regional

industries can increase innovation and competitiveness. Furthermore, university partnerships with local communities can result in significant economic growth. As leaders of small universities partner with their local government and industry leaders, another important goal for them is to strive to move from coordination and cooperation to collaboration to enhance economic development in their communities (Costones, 2008).

In today's interconnected world, university leaders are constantly faced with challenges that can best be addressed through effective collaboration. Huxham (1996) aptly captured this reality when he stated that

...the really important problem issues facing society cannot be tackled by any single organization acting alone. These issues have ramifications for so many aspects of society that they are inherently multi-organizational. Collaboration is thus essential if there is to be any hope of alleviating these problems. (p.12)

Huxham's quote emphasizes the importance of collaboration as a vital tool in addressing pressing issues such as how to enhance economic development in the most vulnerable communities. The literature reveals that entities which collaborate can successfully address multifaceted challenges comprehensively and position themselves for a bright future. As our world becomes increasingly interconnected, collaboration will continue to be an essential tool in our collective efforts to enhance economic development for the most vulnerable universities and their host communities.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore collaboration between university presidents and the leaders of their local governments and industries to enhance economic development. More specifically, the primary research question of this study was, “How do presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in their host community to enhance economic development?” In this chapter, I provide a detailed description of the research design and rationale, the methods employed to examine such collaboration, and my positionality as a researcher.

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this research is to enable me and other interested readers to gain an in-depth understanding of collaboration as a phenomenon. Therefore, I selected a qualitative phenomenological methodological approach. Patton (2015) described phenomenology as a qualitative research method that seeks to reveal the essence and significance of human experiences. Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher of the early 20th century, developed phenomenology as a research method, and it has since gained widespread acceptance in a variety of fields, including psychology, education, and the health sciences (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology emphasizes the importance of understanding the subjective experiences of individuals and how they make sense of the world around them.

At the core of phenomenology research methodology is the belief that understanding human experiences requires delving into the subjective world of the individual (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is grounded in the epistemological stance of *interpretivism*, which posits that knowledge is constructed through the interpretation of lived experiences (Finlay, 2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), phenomenology also accepts the ontological tenet of *relativism*, which holds that various realities exist and are shaped by the perspective and interpretation of the

individual. Phenomenology allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of individuals and how they perceive the world around them. Its effectiveness is particularly notable when one is studying multifaceted social phenomena, such as collaboration as an approach to enhancing economic development.

This study was designed as an emergent design research study. Emergent design is a useful method for researchers in social science who wish to investigate complex social phenomena, experiences, and processes. This flexible and adaptable research strategy permits the research design to adapt to new insights, data, and discoveries throughout the course of the research project (Creswell, 2013). Particularly suited to qualitative research, emergent design enables researchers to delve deeper into specific aspects of the phenomenon or investigate new, unanticipated avenues of inquiry. As the study progresses, researchers employing emergent design can modify their research questions, methods, or data collection techniques to ensure a more nuanced and contextually pertinent understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Mertens, 2014).

Emergent design is distinguished by its iterative process, in which data collection, analysis, and interpretation occur simultaneously (Patton, 2015). This methodology permits researchers to continually reflect on the data, themes, and patterns that arise, and to use these insights to inform subsequent data collection and analysis. In addition, emergent design research frequently entails collaboration between researchers, participants, and other stakeholders, such as community members or organizations, fostering a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and establishing trust and rapport with participants (Creswell, 2013). By adopting an emergent design, I was able to be more responsive to the social, cultural, and historical information my participants shared that may have influenced collaboration, resulting in a deeper and more comprehensive understanding.

Methods

I used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis to explore in detail how participants were making sense of their personal experiences regarding collaboration to enhance economic development (Smith & Osborn, 2003). In the following section, I outline the steps and processes followed during this study, including participant and site selection, data collection, data analysis, maintaining trustworthiness, and the limitations and delimitations of the study.

Participants and Site

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) relies on purposive sampling, choosing only participants who have directly experienced the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2015; Smith et al., 2003), such that the participants find the research questions particularly relevant to them and can offer in-depth insights into their own experiences (Palinkas et al., 2015; Englander, 2012). It is essential for capturing the rich, complex nature of human experiences (Creswell et al., 2018). In order to select participants, I first established precise inclusion and exclusion criteria (Englander, 2012) based on the research question and goals of the study, ensuring that the chosen participants could provide insightful contributions into the phenomenon of interest, which in this study was the collaboration of presidents at private universities and government and industry leaders in their host communities (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007).

A distinctive feature of IPA is its commitment to the painstaking detailed analysis of each participant's account of reality; therefore, researchers recognize that a very small sample size is most realistic (Smith et al., 2003). To allow sufficient in-depth engagement with each participant and the data collected, a reasonable sample size is one to six participants and data collection continues until data saturation occurs (Smith et al., 2003). Data saturation is considered achieved when no new information or themes are observed in the data, meaning that additional participant interviews do not provide new insights (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Guest et al., 2006; Lawrence,

2015). Given the in-depth, rich nature of the data gathered from the participants and the iterative process of IPA, data saturation can be achieved with a small sample size. For this study, data saturation was reached at three participants.

The three participants were recruited using snowball technique for recruiting participants (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). I identified the first participant, and that participant connected me with two other participants in their professional network. Once participants were identified, I sent them the Pre-Interview Email (Appendix A). To protect the identity of the participants, I describe below the details of the participants and their sites in aggregate instead of linking Presidents to Universities and Host Communities directly.

Presidents

I interviewed three participants that have been President of a qualifying institution for at least three years and have experienced efforts to collaborate with government and industry in their host community to enhance economic development. Prior to presidency, the participants were in the role of Provost or Advancement. Regarding their professional experience, the participants have experience working in three geographic regions of the United States. Two participants had leadership experience working at state institutions, one of them as President. None of the participants previously worked in city government or industry settings prior to presidency.

Universities

A qualifying institution of higher education was defined by the Carnegie Classification System (2022). The list of qualifying institutions was obtained applying fourteen filters (see Figure 2) from the Carnegie Classification website: .

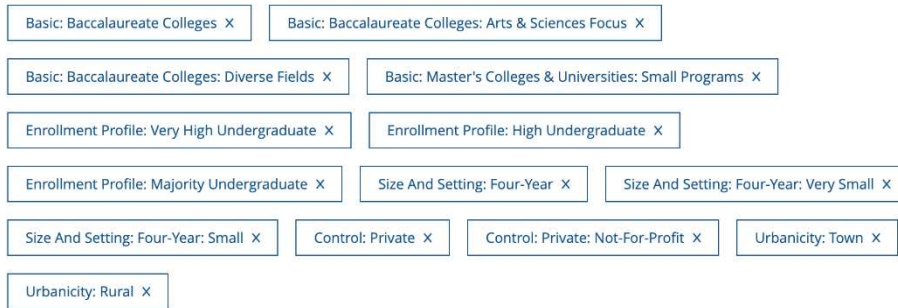


Figure 2

Carnegie Classification filters used to identify qualifying institutions.

The universities where the participants were President at the time of the interview were in either the Southern or Midwestern region of the United States. Each institution had an enrollment profile that consisted of predominantly undergraduate students described in more detail as four-year, full-time, primarily residential students. The institutions' total student enrollment was reported to be less than 2,000 in Fall 2020 and was limited in the number of graduate programs offered.

Host Communities

The host communities of the universities where the participants were President were located in the Southern and Midwestern regions of the United States. Each community had a population of less than 10,000. The median age of the communities started at 20 years of age. The median household income was at least \$36,000 and the median property value was at least \$134,000. The population of employed individuals that live in each community was less than 5,000, and the average unemployment rate was 13.5%. The host communities offer a somewhat diverse economy with educational services, manufacturing, and healthcare being the most prominent industries. The existing form of government for all host communities at the time of this study was a Council-Manager form of government.

Data Collection

In-depth interviews, the cornerstone of data collection in this research paradigm, provide researchers with a unique opportunity to gain insights into the subjective experiences of participants; the interviews also uncover the meanings participants derive from these experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Once participants were selected and had agreed to participate in the study, I emailed the informed-consent document (Appendix B) to the participants. I asked participants to sign the document with Adobe Signature to ensure authenticity and confidentiality. Once I received the signed document, I scheduled an interview with each participant.

For the interviews, I used a semi-structured interview technique with open-ended questions (Fontana & Frey, 1994; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This allowed me to modify the questions as needed depending on the participant's answers. It also allowed me to consider probing questions when interesting or important topics arose (Smith et al., 2003). The interview guide (Appendix C), coupled with the skillful use of probing, elicited substantive information to enable me to understand the phenomenon of collaboration of university presidents with local government and industry leaders. With the participants' permission, I video-recorded interviews and transcribed them for record-keeping and review purposes with Zoom recording and transcription services. Video recording the interview is essential to IPA to capture the details during the interview and not miss important nuances that may appear (Smith et al., 2003). It also assisted in helping the interview run smoothly and establishing rapport with the participants. Transcriptions captured all details, including brief pauses, emotion, and false starts, in order to provide for the detailed analysis required of IPA (Smith et al., 2003). Once interviews were complete and transcriptions verified (Appendix D), I considered each participant's transcript a *Case* with a corresponding number. For example, participant one's transcript was labeled *Case One*, participant two's transcript was labeled *Case Two*, and so on. I sent a final thank-you email (Appendix E) at the conclusion of this process.

Data Analysis

When analyzing the data, I was first drawn to the participant's direct experience with collaboration to enhance economic development. Through the use of IPA, I was able to understand the content and complexity of the meaning behind the participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2003). Therefore, I engaged in an interpretative relationship with the data. Once the participant verified a transcript, I took an idiographic approach to the analysis, reviewing each interview before moving on to the next participant (Smith et al., 2003). Figure 3 shows the IPA process.

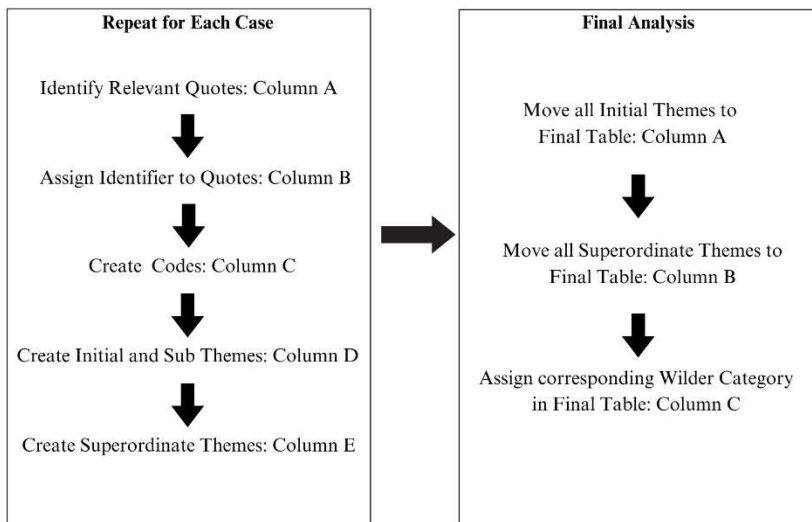


Figure 3

IPA Process

To begin, I reviewed Case One in its entirety, seeking to attain a general understanding and familiarity with the data (Smith et al., 2003). During this initial review, I pulled out interesting content and pasted it into Column A of the data analysis spreadsheet. In Column B of the data analysis spreadsheet, I added an identifier indicating where in the transcript the data occurred. The identifier is the case number and page number of the transcript. For example, 1.4 represents that the instance of the superordinate theme in the transcript can be found in Case One on page four. I then began coding the data in Column C of the same spreadsheet. As Smith and

Osborn state, the codes were “attempts at summarizing and paraphrasing, some will be associations or connections that come to mind, and other may be preliminary interpretations” (p. 67). Figure 4 shows an excerpt from the data analysis spreadsheet.

| Quote from Data | Identifier | Initial Code | Initial Theme | Superordinate Theme |
|--|------------|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| What is shocking to me is how much we're still allowing whether you're a Republican or a Democrat to mar the ability to work together. And I don't know if it's because I'm seen as neutral or I'm not from here, but people talk about other people's politics clearly in a way that restricts them from collaborating with them because they don't like their politics. Again, BMW doesn't care who is a Republican or as a Democrat, but whatever. We're holding ourselves back. | 3.66 | Division over politics informally | Political and Social Climate | Informal Collaboration |
| ...we have been invited to the table, but it's mostly to listen and not to participate. | 3.59 | University isn't able to give input even when asked to be present. | Operates in Silos | Selective Collaboration |
| You know, in the hiring process, I sought out conversations about where this university was, because in my previous experience we were all over the economic development piece. However, the hiring committee didn't initiate the conversation and I didn't leave feeling like there was an expectation to support economic development explicitly. | 3.45 | Board not aware of community economic development | Lack of Economic Development Experience | Non-Expert Collaboration |
| To change the way we think about economic development, we have to have leaders and people who have been to other places and are willing to put aside the old arguments. How much money is going to this versus our city? It doesn't matter, you know. A company from India or BMW is not interested in whether our town or your town is getting more earmarks... It is unbelievable that we are still so small-minded about economic development. And this whole small-minded piece about whether this county gets more money or this town gets more money. It's just my, I mean, it's operating in the seventies. | 3.52 | Small-Minded Leadership | No Vision | Mediocre Collaborative Leadership |

Figure 4

Data analysis spreadsheet excerpt.

Still focusing on Case One, I began to connect the codes in Column C with initial themes, noting the initial themes in Column D of the same spreadsheet. After all data had been coded and initial themes created, I reviewed the transcript to ensure the connections accurately reflected the experiences of the participant. From this review, one initial theme was broken down into three sub themes. I reordered the data to cluster similar initial themes together and determined a superordinate theme that accurately described similar initial themes. I noted the superordinate themes in Column E of the spreadsheet. The superordinate themes that ultimately emerged captured most strongly the participant’s thoughts regarding their collaborative experiences.

During this process, certain themes were dropped if the evidence in the transcript lacked richness (Smith et al. 2003). This process was repeated in its entirety before moving on to the next case. Once all cases were analyzed, I copied all sub themes, initial themes, and superordinate themes into a separate spreadsheet and assigned a Wilder category to each

superordinate theme that most accurately described how presidents and small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, trustworthiness refers to the extent to which a study's findings are credible, transferable, reliable, and confirmable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Researchers can increase the credibility and dependability of their findings and the transferability of their findings to other contexts by utilizing multiple data sources (Shenton, 2004). I collected data from multiple sources for this study until data saturation was reached. Also, once I obtained a transcription of each interview, I asked each participant to verify the accuracy of the transcription via email (Appendix D). The use of reflexivity is another crucial aspect of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Reflexivity requires the researcher to consider how their own biases, assumptions, and values may have influenced the research process (Finlay, 2002). Throughout the research process, I kept a journal of notes. For example, the notes included thoughts that I pondered during the data collection and analysis phase of the research study or notes about my own experiences as a leader and how my experiences may be similar or different from what the participants described. These notes informed the discussion in Chapter Five to a great extent. In qualitative research, establishing credibility requires transparency and explicit documentation of the research procedure. This includes detailing the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures (Creswell, 2013). By being transparent about the research process, I enhanced the credibility and transferability of the findings, which allows others to replicate the study.

Delimitations and Limitations

There are two delimitations that should be noted for this study. First, this study does not include data from public or for-profit universities because those institutions and their host

communities are not as vulnerable as small private universities and their host communities. Additionally, the study is from the perspective of presidents at small private universities. I did not collect data from individuals that provides a perspective of citizens living in the community, government leaders, or industry leaders.

As a limitation, this study considers only the perspectives of the university presidents at small private universities as those perspectives relate to collaboration to enhance economic development. As such, the findings are descriptive in nature and not generalizable to all types of universities.

Researcher Positionality

I am an experienced higher education professional who has spent most of my career serving a small private institution in a small rural community. I have direct experience leading teams of individuals in distinct functions of the institution, including managing the town-gown relationship. As a former administrator at a small private university in a small town, I have witnessed firsthand the desire between the university and city government to collaborate for the mutual benefit of the university and the surrounding community. However, desire alone is not enough. In times of economic stress, collaboration amongst key leaders may be essential for both entities to thrive financially. Recent downturns in economic conditions have made it more evident that successful collaboration between university presidents and government and industry leaders in their host communities can drive economic development. Such collaboration may be the key to a viable future for vulnerable institutions of higher education and their host communities.

Given my professional experiences in higher education and personal connections to living in a small town, I likely brought biases and assumptions to the study, despite efforts to remain open to data collected through interviews. As a former higher education professional,

researcher, and interviewer, I sought to set aside my assumptions and biases related to collaboration, allowing participants to bring their own voices to the study.

Methodology Overview

I designed this phenomenological study using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to leverage semi structured interviews as the primary instrument to elicit the life experiences of university presidents at small private universities as they describe their collaboration with local government and industry leaders in their host communities to enhance economic development. Participants had been a university president for at least three years at a qualifying institution and experienced efforts to collaborate to enhance economic development. Qualifying institutions were defined by very specific filters (see Figure 2) using the Carnegie Classification System (2022). Trustworthiness of this research study was enhanced by using multiple sources of data, reflexivity, and transparent documentation. I also provided rich contextual descriptions of the participants and their sites so that readers can determine transferability to other contexts. As a researcher with leadership experience in higher education and experience working closely with government and industry leaders, I sought to set aside my biases and assumptions related to collaboration to enhance local economic development in order to let the participant's experience come to light.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter examines the findings of an empirical study that investigated the ways in which presidents of small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development in their host communities. Guided by the research question, “How do presidents of small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in their host community to enhance economic development?”, this chapter discusses the insights, based on the perspectives of three university presidents, into the complex interplay between these key stakeholders.

As data was analyzed, codes developed into eight initial themes: historical relationships, political and social climate, operates in silos, path of least resistance, lack of experience, lack of understanding, no vision, and okay with status quo. One of the initial themes, lack of understanding, was further broken down into three sub themes: financial, cultural, and mission. From these initial themes and sub themes, four superordinate themes emerged during data analysis. That is, presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders (a) informally, (b) selectively, (c) without the experts, and (d) with mediocre leadership engagement. Superordinate themes, initial themes, and sub themes are shown in Table 2.

Table 2*Table of Themes*

| Superordinate Themes | Initial Themes | Sub Themes |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Informal Collaboration | Historical Relationships | |
| | Politicital and Social Climate | |
| Selective Collaboration | Operates in Silos | |
| | Path of Least Resistance | |
| Non-Expert Collaboration | Lack of Experience | Financial Cultural Mission |
| | Lack of Understanding | |
| | | |
| Mediocre Collaborative Leadership | No Vision | |
| | Okay with Status Quo | |

Superordinate Theme 1: Informal Collaboration

The data for this study indicated that presidents at small private universities collaborate informally with local government and industry leaders when enhancing economic development. In fact, the participants indicated that they prefer informal collaborative relationships with local leaders. This type of collaboration is a less structured, flexible form of collaboration involving various stakeholders working towards a common goal. In lieu of formal agreements, informal collaboration is frequently dependent on social interactions, mutual trust, shared values, and the voluntary participation of individuals committed to enhancing economic development in the local community. This type of collaboration may be especially important in rural areas, where resources may be scarce and community members are frequently interconnected. As rural community leaders identify successful informal partnerships, they may decide to formalize these relationships and establish more structured meetings concerning economic development in the local community, thus informal collaboration serving as a steppingstone to more formal collaboration. Two initial themes that indicate university presidents collaborate informally with local government and industry leaders are the history of the relationship and the political and social climate in which the collaborative partnership takes place.

Initial Theme: Historical Relationships

If there is a history of collaboration amongst the university and local government and industry leaders, there may be an adequate understanding of the roles and expectations required of each entity, which helps build trust within the collaborative process. For presidents at small private universities and leaders in their host communities, there was no historical relationship to lean into. All participants stated that since the beginning of their presidency there was no formal collaborative relationship with government or industry leaders to enhance economic development since the beginning of their presidency. In fact, it seemed that the participants preferred the informal nature of the relationship as opposed to a formal relationship. Participant One stated:

Well, the college was a member of the Chamber of Commerce, of course, the Chamber of Commerce played some role in economic development. There's an economic development operation within city government and somebody from the college always served on the Economic Development Commission, but the kind of formal relationship, in general, we tried to avoid. It was viewed by both sides, both the college and the city government, that it was best to avoid having the college, I don't know what you would call it, having any ex officio kind of position on real decision-making bodies. And that was to minimize the sense that the college was calling the shots, because there was always that undercurrent in town. I mean, most people in town were really happy with the college and what it did. But there was 20 to 30 percent of the taxpayers, of the voters, who just thought the college is too liberal. The college brings in all these strange-looking students. The college is just a drain on our resources. The college is a source of traffic and problems, and you know, to the extent that we could do things informally, casually,

with a handshake, we thought that was better than say, you know, a member of the college administration having an official seat at the city council or something like that.

Participant Two stated, “It is typical for a lot of these [relationships] to be very informal. They’re not formal economic development meetings. Never have been.” Furthermore, the same participant shared that although there were collaborative efforts to enhance economic development that were informal, there were organizations of a formal nature that helped the university connect with other leaders by stating, “I would say that our relationship with local government and industry is probably less formal when collaborating for economic development. But there are some formal organizations that sort of help us connect.”

Participant One discussed how representatives from the university may participate in local government, but it is by happenstance and not formal:

Now, as it happened, a lot of our people ran for public office, and so there was often a faculty member on the City Council, but he ran just simply in an election and just won the election. There was often a member of the college administration on the board at the local utility but that, too, happened just by, you know, just the natural event. They were doing that as an individual, not as an official representative of the college. Same with the board of the city on healthcare in the community. For a long time, one of our [health and human sciences] faculty members was on that board, but she won the election year after year. So it happens, but it was always important to us to downplay and to minimize any sense that the college officially was playing a role in decision-making.

Establishing a history of collaboration with local government and industry leaders may need to be a priority of university presidents at small private institutions.

Initial Theme: Political and Social Climate

Collaborations may be most productive when political leaders, opinion-makers, and those that control the resources support the efforts of the collaborative group. Little can be accomplished if public support opposes the initiative to enhance local economic development, especially in these tight-knit small communities. There was a sense of frustration with the political and social climate in which the universities operated. Participant Three stated:

What is shocking to me is how much we're still allowing whether you're a Republican or a Democrat to mar the ability to work together. And I don't know if it's because I'm seen as neutral or I'm not from here, but people talk about other people's politics clearly in a way that restricts them from collaborating with them because they don't like their politics. Again, BMW doesn't care who is a Republican or as a Democrat, but whatever. We're holding ourselves back.

Participant One described an experience collaborating with the mayor of the host community to build a joint facility for the university and local citizens to utilize. Although the building eventually became a show piece for the community, the president stated, “[Obtaining funds for the project] created quite a bit of political backlash for both the city and the college.” The university president expressed that local citizens resented the university for quite some time over the perception that the university drained the coffers of the city to pay for a facility that is primarily used by the university. The president spent much time trying to improve the reputation of the university for several years after the project was complete. Understanding the political and social climate in which the collaboration exists and successfully navigating those nuances may be difficult for presidents at small private universities.

Superordinate Theme 2: Selective Collaboration

During the course of data analysis, the theme of selective collaboration emerged. Participants described experiences where they may collaborate with industry for workforce

development initiatives or with the city government to improve infrastructure. However, it seemed that the collaboration was selective based on the particular economic development initiative. None of the participants described experiences where all three entities were brought together for the purpose of enhancing economic development. Furthermore, university presidents selected initiatives to enhance economic development with consideration to the adaptability of faculty and curriculum to change. Participants indicated that they operate in silos and often take the path of least resistance, which became initial themes through data analysis, when trying to determine which initiatives should be started when enhancing economic development with local government and industry leaders.

Initial Theme: Operates in Silos

Although there is a complex interplay between leaders of the university, government, and industry, it was rare for all three to be at the table with equal say for a shared purpose. As stated by Participant One, “We always work closely with the city administrator, and we have a very good relationship with them. We only collaborate with industry on workforce needs or special events. I don’t recall a time where we have all been in the room together with shared goals on economic development.” Sometimes the university leadership desired to collaborate, but as stated by Participant Three, “...we have been invited to the table, but it’s mostly to listen and not to participate.”

All the participants describe experiences collaborating with local industries, but there was no mention of ongoing strategic collaboration with local government to enhance economic development, even though all participants proclaimed to have a good relationship with city officials. Participant Two did describe the following as a step in the right direction:

I have had several meetings, I would say at least four meetings, in the past year with the department that does the county strategic planning. That’s where they’re trying to decide

on the zoning and how much money they're going to put into this and what the demographics look like over the next 20 to 30 years. And I have the ability to feed into that process and help them understand how our university can help them achieve the kind of quality of life that they want in their county and for us.

Participant Two went on to explain how collaboration is beginning at more of a state level instead of local, but it is still without all three key entities at the table:

I had an opportunity to engage with a number of Federal Legislators, Congresspersons, and Senators and very often it was an education to tell them about small colleges and our impact in rural communities where we predominantly exist. And you know, when you talk about economic development and the essentials of economic life in a small town, a small college can be extremely helpful. It's a lifeline very often for good-paying jobs, not great pay, but good paying jobs, stable jobs, jobs with benefits and cultural access to things that you would not normally have in a rural environment. It would be helpful to have industry leaders and local government leaders with me to advocate and educate.

According to the participants, despite their efforts, often all collaborative partners are not at the table at the same time. If all partners are at the table, they do not have an equal voice around the table.

Initial Theme: Path of Least Resistance

It was evident throughout the data that university presidents know what is necessary to accomplish an initiative and they select partners based on what is least difficult at the time. For example, if the faculty of the nursing program are perceived to be easier to work with, the president may choose a healthcare initiative over another initiative where the faculty may have more complicated curriculum. All three university presidents admitted that it is difficult for higher education to adjust at the appropriate pace to keep up with industry needs. Therefore, they

were selective on who and what to collaborate on to enhance economic development. Participant Two stated:

It's very difficult for higher education to design its curriculum for a very specific industry. That's technical education. That's what the technical college does. And within a couple of years, that technical skill-based [curriculum will be] obsolete. It changes so fast that it's hard to keep up with. You know, I don't think that you can build a curriculum that is going to align with industry always, because industry is always going to be driven by change and driven by technological innovation.

It seemed that university presidents recognized the challenge of curriculum adapting to change that may dictate how they collaborate to enhance economic development. Participant Two stated:

So, as you know, curriculum is in the hands of the faculty. So that already creates a bureaucratic process that is not easy to change. Right? And faculty are very much like industry people. They're in their tunnels and they're operating in their little caves. The thing that the psychology professor is doing within the context of that cave is truly building skills and knowledge and capacity, thinking capacity, which I think of as adaptability to uncertainty. You know your ability to think through problems and uncertainty and deal with all of that. I think that's what the curriculum primarily does, but it is hard and time-consuming to change curriculum like industry would want. I know which faculty members are willing and which ones are difficult to work with. I will likely choose initiatives that involve the departments that can adapt to change more readily.

Presidents at small private universities may miss opportunities to collaborate to enhance economic development in their host community based on the perceived resistance to initiatives or the lack of ability to adapt to change from internal stakeholders.

Superordinate Theme 3: Non-Expert Collaboration

Data indicated that there is a lack of economic development expertise within the collaborative partnership between the university, local government, and local industry. Economic development professionals are politically astute strategists who build networks of individuals and generate resources to meet the needs of industry with the goal of increasing economic activity in a community. None of the participants mentioned economic experts at the table when collaborating, although one of the university presidents did seem to have a more expert view of economic development given their professional background. In fact, two of the participants admittedly never worked with economic development endeavors prior to the presidency role. When hired, economic development was not an explicit responsibility of the presidency role; some participants perceived that the Board Members for the university did not think of economic development of the host community as a priority. Furthermore, the participants expressed frustration with educating external stakeholders on the financial challenges, unique aspects of the culture, and the specificity of the small private universities mission statement. These collaborative partnerships may suffer from lack of economic development experience and a lack of understanding from external constituents regarding the financials, culture, and mission of small private universities.

Initial Theme: Lack of Economic Development Experience

Not having expert help as a part of the collaborative group may hinder collaborative success from the perspective of the university president. The participants admitted that their experience, or lack thereof, related to economic development endeavors was not a consideration in the hiring process. From the perspective of the university president, it was not an explicit prerequisite to have knowledge of how to enhance economic development in the community. There was no emphasis on performance metrics in this area and little to no resources allocated to

bring experts to the table to solve issues of economic development. Participant Three shared about the hiring process:

You know, in the hiring process, I sought out conversations about where this university was, because in my previous experience we were all over the economic development piece. However, the hiring committee didn't initiate the conversation and I didn't leave feeling like there was an expectation to support economic development explicitly.

Participant Two had similar experiences with the Board of Trustees' expectations of the presidency role regarding economic development in the host community. This participant stated, "It's something that is on the minds of our board members. They want to see us thrive. They think the economic development and development of our community is the way to do that. We're the only city that is behind. I mean, we're just so far behind. But there are no metrics to measure success from my perspective."

Participant One questioned if it was really the responsibility of the university to seek out such an individual to assist in collaborative efforts by saying, "It seems to me that the people with this expertise are the ones working for the city. They are responsible in large part for the development of this town. It seems that the college could assist, but I'm not sure we have the capacity, financial or otherwise, to bring experts to the table for economic development." No matter whose responsibility it is to bring the experts to the table, collaborative partners should prioritize expert advice to enhance economic development.

Initial Theme: Lack of Understanding Higher Education

A recurring theme during interviews was the difficulty the university president has in educating stakeholders about their university, especially when it comes to financial resources, the culture of the university, and the mission of the university. Often these components caused a clash with citizens, industry leaders, and government leaders. It seemed that presidents spent a

lot of time interacting with constituents to get them to understand the realities of small private higher education in order to set expectations of how the university can play a role in economic development.

Sub Theme: Financial

Participants expressed frustration with the perception others had of the university's financial resources. There was a sense that the university was flush with cash; however, the presidents knew otherwise. Participant One stated:

Well, it might look like a private institution has a budget of, I don't know, \$25 million or \$50 million a year. Yeah, that's true. But that money is very much focused on students, right? So, the money off of the revenue... there are only a few sources of revenue. There's all the student tuition fees, room and board, gifts from donors and endowment income. I mean, it's a pretty narrow band usually. Your money is focused on students. Every once in a while, at an institution, you'll get a donor who really wants to support financially some sort of a relationship between a small college and a business, a small college and the local council of Economic Development, or something like that. That's great. That's super. But usually what we're doing is reallocating money that's really supposed to be going to students.

Sub Theme: Cultural

Occasionally, cultural differences between the university, industry, and government impeded collaboration for economic development. The participants felt that the culture of small private universities vastly differed from that of corporate America. Participant One told of an experience related to workforce development:

The cultural differences are so different [between the university and industry]. So many of our efforts to do kind of the mutually beneficial relationships with businesses that

would really help our students and really help economic development ran aground because our cultures here in the United States just don't mesh very well. Particularly [the culture of the] private institution and the culture of the businesses. So, like a business would say, boy, we'd love to have one of your math majors or 3 of your math majors work with us on this project for 3 months. Well, we can't give them to you for 3 months. I mean, they have to do their courses right? Can they work for you for 20 hours a week, for 3 months? Well, no, that won't work for business. Business wants them for the whole time, you know. And so many of the discussions kind of ran aground right there on that where you know, faculty members would say, well, no, I don't want my best math students to take a semester off to go work on some big statistical project for the insurance company down the road. I mean that there is just going to put them behind, and that's not going to benefit them in the long term. And then you'd have businesses saying, well, golly, they can't really get anything done if they're just here 3 days a week for 4 hours at a time. I mean it seems to me that there's these huge cultural barriers to the kind of collaboration that might be most productive.

Sub Theme: Mission

The university presidents lamented that people often did not understand that the mission of the university drives funding. For a private university, enhancing economic development in the local community is not explicitly stated in the mission. Therefore, it is difficult to push resources towards these initiatives. Participant Two relayed:

The state institutions are primary drivers for workforce development and economic development right within the regions, and they're usually pretty well-defined. As you know, this state college serves this area. The other state college serves these people and

these counties. It's very explicit in their missions. For small privates, our missions are not driven by that.

Participant One agreed by saying:

When you're a private institution, the mission is different. And so usually the mission of a private is all about students, right? Student development, student education, preparing students for the future, preparing students for a lot, you know, fulfilling lives in, you know, the workplace or whatever.

Superordinate Theme 4: Mediocre Collaborative Leadership

Mediocre collaborative leadership was evident throughout the data. All participants expressed frustration with mediocre collaborative leadership on the part of leaders within government and industry. Mediocre leadership often lacks the vision and creativity to inspire and drive transformative change, settling instead for less ambitious or status quo preserving goals. As explained by the participants, this has resulted in missed opportunities for innovative solutions or impactful strategies that could have been achieved under more dynamic and visionary leadership from all entities. The data revealed that, from the perspective of the university president, collaborative partners have no vision and are often satisfied with the status quo.

Initial Theme: No Vision

The lack of vision for enhancing economic development in the local community was glaring. Small communities often struggle to attract individuals into leadership positions who possess diverse perspectives and a vision for the future. Participant Two described their experience collaborating with local government leaders as frustrating at times: "As you might imagine, working with that mayor and the city council can be challenging because their world is very small. Getting them to think about 20 years down the line is very, very difficult."

Participant Two expressed frustration with the lack of vision from other leaders by saying explaining:

You have to have the leadership to have that vision to move it forward when talking about economic development initiatives within the local community... If you don't have the people who are sitting in the seats that are saying, you know, we can do something different, we can do something better, and asking those questions and going through the detailed process of doing it.

It seems that having individuals in leadership roles with experiences beyond their own community may be of benefit when having a vision to enhance economic development.

Participant Three discussed frustration with collaborating partners lacking a vision for the future by saying:

To change the way we think about economic development, we have to have leaders and people who have been to other places and are willing to put aside the old arguments. How much money is going to this versus our city? It doesn't matter, you know. A company from India or BMW is not interested in whether our town or your town is getting more earmarks... It is unbelievable that we are still so small-minded about economic development. And this whole small-minded piece about whether this county gets more money or this town gets more money. It's just my, I mean, it's operating in the seventies.

Leaders that lack vision may be a weak link in the collaborative partnership and hold back the community from reaching their economic development potential.

Initial Theme: Okay with Status Quo

In addition to lacking vision, university presidents talked about being okay with the status quo as a challenge to enhancing local economic development with collaborating partners.

Participant Two said, "You know, the persistence and the tenacity that it takes to get it done,

which is years and years and years, it's not going to get done. If your leadership is okay with status quo, it's just going to stay exactly the way it is." Although stakeholders seemed interested in what the university was doing to enhance the community, Participant Two described the difficulty of conversations about moving forward by saying:

It's very difficult to have those conversations. Not with your board necessarily, but with the city, and the mayor does sit on my President's Advisory Council and they will not miss a meeting, because she wants to know what I'm talking about. You know, I say things about growth, and she says things that we want to keep them exactly the way they are, you know that's the way it is.

Similar to lacking vision, if the collaborative partners are satisfied with the status quo, there will likely be no change in the community. Efforts to enhance economic development locally will be stalled, and the small private universities and their host communities suffer.

Research Question Revisited

The primary research question of this study is "How do presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in their host communities to enhance economic development?" To answer that question, I engaged in Interpretative Phenomenological data analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between university presidents and local government and industry leaders as they work together to enhance economic development in the local community.

As the presidents talked about their experiences, it became clear that these collaborative efforts are informal in nature. Furthermore, the informal nature of the collaboration was preferred over a formal relationship due to perceived efficiencies. For collaborative efforts to enhance local economic development, all collaborative partners need to be at the table at the same time. However, if all the collaborative partners are at the table, they may not have an equal

voice. The participants also shared that they will also choose the initiative based on the partners that will resist the initiative the least. Mostly, these collaborative efforts are executed without economic development expertise and without all stakeholders having an understanding of the nuances of small private higher education. That is, local government and industry leaders often do not grasp the financial difficulties small private universities face, the cultural differences on a small private university campus, or the mission of a small private institution of higher education. Lastly, these collaborative efforts are undertaken by collaborative partners that lack vision for economic development in the community and are often satisfied with the way things are at current. In conclusion, and according to the findings of this study, presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in their host communities informally, selectively, without the experts, and with mediocre leadership engagement to enhance economic development in the local community.

In Conclusion

Four superordinate themes emerged that further our understanding of the experiences of presidents at small private universities as they collaborate with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development in their host communities: (a) informal collaboration, (b) selective collaboration, (c) non-expert collaboration, and (d) mediocre collaborative leadership. Superordinate theme one, informal collaboration, highlighted how historical relationships and the political and social climate may influence collaboration to enhance economic development. Superordinate theme two, selective collaboration, highlighted how the key stakeholders operated in silos and typically chose the path of least resistance when making changes to enhance economic development. Superordinate theme three, non-expert collaboration, demonstrated the lack of economic development expertise at small private universities and their host communities. There is also a gap in expectations the stakeholders have of the university

given the universities' financial constraints, culture, and mission statement. The final superordinate theme, mediocre collaborative leadership, speaks to the perceived lack of vision amongst collaborating partners and the notion that many local leaders are satisfied with the status quo, impeding collaborative efforts to enhance economic development. The findings of this study contribute to the expanding body of literature on collaboration as it relates to presidents at small private universities collaborating with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development their host communities. It also sheds light on best practices for presidents of small private universities and sets the stage for future research on the topic.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The ultimate purpose of this phenomenological study was to contribute to the overall literature regarding the collaboration of leaders in higher education, government, and industry. More specifically, this research study begins a conversation that includes small private universities as they collaborate with local government and industry leaders in their host communities. The data, from the perspective of the university president, answered the research question “How do presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in their host communities to enhance economic development?” In this chapter, I discuss the current findings as they relate to previous literature, discuss implications for practice, propose future areas of inquiry, and provide a personal reflection on the current research study.

Comparing Current Findings to Previous Literature

This research study aims to examine collaborative efforts to enhance local economic development from the perspective of presidents at small private universities. To better understand how university presidents collaborate with local government and industry leaders, I will discuss where the current findings intersect with or diverge from categories of the Wilder framework, elements of the Triple Helix Model of Innovation, and literature relating to the practice of collaboration previously discussed in Chapter Two.

Relationship to Wilder Collaboration Framework

The Wilder framework was developed to provide a theoretical basis for understanding the factors associated with successful collaboration. Of the six Wilder categories influencing successful collaboration, three of the categories aligned with the superordinate themes of this study (See Table 3): environment, membership characteristics, and resources.

Table 3

Superordinate Themes and Wilder Category Alignment

| Wilder Categories | Superordinate Themes |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Environment | Informal Collaboration |
| Membership Characteristics | Selective Collaboration |
| Resources | Non-Expert Collaboration |
| Resources | Mediocre Collaborative Leadership |

Three of the Wilder categories were not represented in the superordinate themes of this study: process and structure, communication, and purpose. The following is a discussion of the data alignment with three Wilder categories and the divergence of the data from three Wilder categories.

Environment

According to Mattessich, et al. (2018), environmental characteristics “consist of features of the geographic location and social context within which a collaborative group exists” (p. 10). Although members of the collaborative group may be able to influence aspects of the environment, the group itself does not have control over the environmental characteristics. From the perspective of the presidents at small private universities, collaborative efforts were typically informal in nature. In fact, it seemed that the university presidents preferred this to be the case. This may be influenced by the environment in which collaboration exists.

According to the Wilder framework, ideally, there would be a history of collaboration amongst the university and local government and industry leaders where an understanding of the roles and expectations required to collaborate is evident (Mattessich at al., 2018). This may be a challenge for enhancing economic development since there was not much history of collaboration evident in the small communities. Another critical factor influencing the success of

a collaboration in relation to the environment is the support the collaborative group has from political leaders, opinion-makers, those who control resources, and the general public (Mattessich et al., 2018). The university presidents witnessed divisiveness around politics when it came to enhancing economic development.

Membership Characteristics

In the Wilder framework, the phrase “membership characteristics” is defined as consisting of “the skills, attitudes, and opinions of the individuals in a collaborative group, as well as the culture and capacity of the organizations that form the collaborative group” (Mattessich, et al., 2018, p. 10). The data provided evidence of selective collaboration related to membership characteristics of university presidents, government, and industry as collaborating partners. Specifically, if the goal is to enhance economic development in the community, the collaborative partners should strive to include members of the community that will be affected by the related initiatives of the group.

The data shed light on the fact that collaborations to enhance economic development in the local community often do not include all stakeholders at the same table. The three entities are not working together to solve the problems and are instead working in silos. Side conversations may impede progress towards economic development. Also, from the perspective of the university president, initiatives to enhance economic development are chosen based on the path of least resistance. That is, the people that are willing and able to adapt to the fast pace of change are often the ones invited to the table. This may not include industry and government leaders working together simultaneously to move forward.

Resources

Resources related to influencing successful collaboration are defined as “financial and human input necessary to develop and sustain a collaborative group” (Mattessich et al., 2018, p.

12). In the Wilder framework, these components are critical in fostering successful collaborations yet are often obstacles to enhancing economic development in resource constrained communities. Small private universities often face challenges of having adequate resources, while often external constituents do not perceive these to be challenges.

From the university president's perspective, two challenges related to resources are having non-experts collaborating to solve the complex issue of economic development and having mediocre collaborative leadership as the collaborative partners. Small private universities often face financial and staffing challenges, while often external constituents do not perceive these to be challenges. The incongruity of expectations is frustrating, as reported by the participants in the study. Also, it is perceived by the university president that key stakeholders lack vision and are satisfied with the status quo. This lack of skilled leadership impedes progress for the community, frequently, in the small towns that are host to small private universities.

Process and Structure, Communication, and Purpose

There were three Wilder categories not represented in the superordinate themes of this study. Process and structure emphasizes the operational aspects of collaboration, including management, roles, decision-making processes, and conflict resolution; communication provides greater understanding of how partners exchange information; and purpose provides insight into the shared vision and goals of the collaboration, which could determine its success (Mattessich, et al., 2018). My sense is that these categories were not represented because there were more immediate challenges in getting momentum for collaborative efforts that related to the environment in which the collaboration took place, stakeholders involved in the collaboration, and challenges with leadership in general. Perhaps once there is a history of collaboration established between university presidents and local government and industry leaders, the focus

on improving the collaborative partnerships will turn to process and structure, communication, and purpose.

Relationship to Triple Helix Model of Innovation

The research findings of this study indicate that presidents at small private universities navigate collaboration with local government and industry leaders in four ways: informally, selectively, without the involvement of experts, and with mediocre leadership engagement. The findings of this study do not align with the Triple Helix Model of Innovation (TH model). While the collaboration methods observed at small private universities might lead to some innovation, they may not be fully leveraging the advantages implied by the TH model. Adopting a more formal, inclusive, expert-informed, and leadership-driven approach could enhance the effectiveness of these collaborations and contribute to a more vibrant host community (Carayannis & Campbell et al., 2009; Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Leydesdorff, 2012; Ranga et al., 2013).

According to the study's participants, informal collaboration may open possibilities for more adaptable and impromptu interactions, allowing collaborative partnerships to address the changing nature of economic development in financially vulnerable communities. However, the TH model emphasizes structured, systematic interactions among university, government, and industry leaders, as such interactions are more likely to consistently yield innovative outcomes for enhancing economic development (Etzkowitz et al., 2000). These structured interactions provide a foundation for long-term planning and strategic decision-making, ensuring that collaborative efforts align with the overall goals of community-wide economic development initiatives. As suggested by the TH model, a more formal approach to collaborative partnerships between university presidents and their local government and industry leaders may lead to more robust knowledge exchange between the collaborative partners, fostering a culture of innovation

and continuous learning in financially vulnerable communities (Etzkowitz et al., 2000). This can ultimately result in greater economic growth and an improved quality of life for residents.

Selective collaboration implies that presidents at small private universities are discerning when choosing partners and initiatives to enhance economic development. This approach has its merits, as it helps focus on high-potential opportunities. However, in the TH model, all entities engage in an interactive and dynamic manner, but the context and priorities can influence the extent of collaboration in specific instances (Leydesdorff, 2012). While selective collaboration may be effective for small private universities, it is important to recognize that a more inclusive approach can lead to greater synergies and a broader impact on the economy. Therefore, it is important for presidents at small private universities to carefully consider the context and priorities of each collaborative opportunity to find the appropriate compromise between selectivity and inclusivity.

From the perspective of the small private university president, collaborations often occur without expert involvement. This suggests that decision-making processes may be concentrated more among a limited group of stakeholders with limited knowledge of economic development. Although inexperienced networks can facilitate innovation, the absence of expert knowledge may limit its potential (Ranga et al., 2013). The TH model relies on pooling knowledge and resources from all three sectors to promote a comprehensive understanding of innovative challenges and solutions (Etzkowitz et al., 2000). By incorporating expertise from all collaborative partners, the TH model ensures a diverse range of perspectives and insights are considered in collaborative decision-making. This not only enhances the quality of innovative solutions, but also promotes a more inclusive and sustainable approach to economic development.

Effective leadership plays a vital role in fostering productive collaborations, based on the research findings of this study. When leadership engagement is mediocre, the potential for cross-sector collaboration and innovation may be undermined. The TH model highlights the importance of visionary, proactive leadership in driving innovation and maximizing positive outcomes for all participants (Carayannis et al., 2009). Effective leadership is crucial for successful cross-sector collaborations and innovation to enhance economic development (Carayannis et al., 2009; Etzkowitz et al., 2000). Without effective leadership engagement, the potential for achieving positive economic outcomes for the community may be hindered. Therefore, universities should prioritize visionary and proactive leaders who can drive innovation and foster productive collaborations with local government and industry leaders in their host communities.

Intersection With and Divergence From the Research

There are aspects of the research findings that intersect with the literature on practical applications of collaboration discussed in Chapter Two. For example, one of the most significant barriers to effective collaboration is the misalignment of objectives and goals between the university and local government and industry leaders (Arza et al., 2017; Drucker et al., 2007; Mattessich et al., 2018). The participants recognized misaligned objectives and goals as an obstacle to effective collaboration and often found it difficult to educate collaborating partners and other stakeholders on what can be expected of a small private institution.

Limited financial resources also presented significant challenges for the participants when collaborating to enhance economic development (Azra et al., 2017; Link et al., 2005; Philbin, 2008). Local leaders typically had the impression that the university was flush with cash, which was not the case according to the participants. Participants found it difficult to explain why money from the budget could not easily be funneled to economic development initiatives.

There were often competing interests between the university and local government and industry further complicating the financial challenge.

The informal nature of relationships can present challenges when enhancing economic development. Collaborations at universities may be hampered by problems with communication and trust (Adams et al., 2006; Azra et al., 2017). The participants described that they preferred informal relationships; however, there was a lack of formality necessary to establish clear objectives and agreed upon expectations. The nature of informal communication may make it more difficult to hold collaborative partners accountable and establish a history of collaboration to enhance economic development in the local community.

Lastly, effective leadership is a key to success for effective collaboration and may be difficult to foster in small towns and small universities (Costones, 2008; Mattesich et al., 2008; Schaeffer et al., 2002). Leadership that lacks vision and is satisfied with the status quo can hinder effective collaboration, according to the university presidents that were interviewed. This proved to be a significant challenge and aligned with research presented in Chapter Two.

In several respects, the findings of this study diverged from the research discussed in Chapter Two, as the topics discussed in the literature did not appear in the data from this research study. Collaborations between universities are frequently complicated by difficulties with legal and intellectual property rights (Ponds et al., 2007). Legal and intellectual property rights were not present in the data for this research study. This may be because small private universities do not have robust research programs that lend themselves to legal complexities. Also, according to the literature, transportation networks that facilitate the movement of goods, services, and people between locations are essential for economic growth and may be constrained in small towns that are host to small universities (Goetz et al., 2010). Issues of transportation did not come up in interviews with the participants. This may be because it seems that collaborative efforts are in

their infancy and obstacles like transportation may not have had time to present themselves as such. Lastly, there is evidence in the literature to suggest that when universities align academic programs with industry needs, enhancing the local economy is a benefit (Smith, 2019). This was not indicated in the data and warrants further investigation.

Summary

This study reveals that presidents of small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in four ways: informally, selectively, without expert involvement, and with mediocre leadership engagement. The alignment of three categories in the Wilder framework supports these findings: environment, membership characteristics, and resources. The environment category suggests that collaborations like those in this study may be hindered by the entities' lack of prior collaborative experience. The political and social climate in the host communities is also tense and a factor in successful collaboration. The Wilder framework's membership characteristics category suggests that collaborating partners should strive to eliminate silos when collaborating and include key stakeholders to accomplish the goals of the collaborative group. The resources category of the Wilder framework indicates that economic experts should be brought to the table, and leaders should strive to challenge the status quo to improve the local economy. It should also be noted that three categories of the Wilder framework were not represented in the findings of the study: process and structure, communication, and purpose. This may be due to more pressing challenges experienced by the presidents, like gaining momentum to get the collaboration started.

In contrast, the ways in which presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders may not fully leverage the advantages of the Triple Helix model. A more formal, inclusive, expert-informed, and leadership-driven approach could enhance the effectiveness of these collaborations and contribute to a more financially sustainable

host community. Selective collaboration may be effective for small private universities initially, but a more inclusive approach can lead to greater synergies and a broader impact on the economy. Effective leadership is crucial for successful cross-sector collaborations, and small private university decision-makers should prioritize visionary and proactive leaders who can drive innovation and foster productive collaborations with local government and industry in their host community.

Data collected for this study supported the findings of some of the studies discussed in Chapter Two regarding the practice of collaboration in several ways. Participants experienced challenges with the misalignment of objectives and goals, limited financial resources, the informal nature of the relationship, and ineffective leadership that lacked vision. There were areas of the literature that were not present in the data collected from participants, hence a divergence from the literature surrounding the practice of collaboration. This includes legal and intellectual property issues, transportation issues, and academic program alignment with industry needs. These areas of interest may warrant more investigation as they relate to small private universities and their host communities.

Future Areas of Inquiry

The design and scope of this study imposed certain limitations. Based on the literature and the results that were drawn from this research project, there are three recommendations for further research: (a) interview leaders of government and industry, (b) explore categories of the Wilder Framework not represented in the findings of this study, (c) and investigate in-depth specific academic programs as they relate to industry.

Perspectives From Other Key Leaders

Research on the collaboration between university, government, and industry leaders as a key strategy for enhancing economic development is increasing. My research has primarily

focused on the perspective of the university president and did not include an analysis of variables such as gender and ethnicity. However, a holistic understanding of this tripartite collaboration requires exploring the perspectives of the government and industry leaders and should include analysis related to variables such as gender and ethnicity.

The importance of studying variables such as gender and ethnicity as it relates to collaborating to enhance economic development is crucial. Considering the diverse environment in which the universities operate, it is critical to understand various aspects of the collaborative process, specifically in relation to how various groups of individuals bring forth distinct perspectives and experiences. Incorporating gender and ethnicity into collaboration studies offers a broader and more inclusive view, enabling us to better understand the dynamics at play and devise more effective collaborative strategies. By identifying potential barriers or biases that may arise due to cultural or social differences, researchers can also help key university, government, and industry leaders create a more inclusive environment that promotes healthy and effective collaboration. Ultimately, acknowledging and understanding the interplay of these variables will lead to more productive and equitable collaborative practices that harness the potential of various viewpoints and talents.

It is also important to understand the perspectives of the other collaborative partners. Each entity has diverse goals and motivations, brings unique expertise to the collaborative partnership, and possesses resources that can be optimized to foster future innovation. University, government, and industry all have different primary goals and motivations for collaborating. University presidents often prioritize academic freedom, research integrity, and student education, government and industry leaders may have different focuses. Government leaders are often driven by public service objectives and policies, while industry leaders are motivated by market needs and profit-making. Industry leaders may be most concerned with the

bottom line, legal challenges, or perception in the media. Exploring these varied perspectives helps to build a comprehensive view of economic development challenges and opportunities that may exist for the host communities.

Understanding these different lenses can enrich collaboration and maximize its impact for the local community. Studying the perspectives of all three collaborators— university, government, and industry leaders—and unique aspects of each leader, like gender and ethnicity, is crucial for enhancing economic activity in an area. It not only leads to more effective collaboration, but also fosters mutual understanding, which can drive collective success overall.

Wilder Categories Not Represented

The Wilder Collaboration Framework is a comprehensive tool that presents factors known to influence the success of a collaboration. My study's findings highlight the importance of the following Wilder categories: (a) environment, (b) membership characteristics, and (c) resources. To fully understand and leverage the potential of university, government, and industry collaboration for local economic development, future research should concentrate on the remaining Wilder categories not evident in this study's answer to the research question.

As a Wilder category, Process and Structure emphasize the operational aspects of collaboration, including management, roles, decision-making processes, and conflict resolution. This analysis can provide a deeper understanding of how collaborations are managed efficiently and how they can be optimized. Communication as a Wilder category provides greater understanding of how partners exchange information. This can be analyzed to gain insight into how communication between collaborative partners can contribute to a more effective collaborative partnership. Exploring Purpose as a Wilder category can provide insight into the shared vision and goals of the collaboration, which could determine its success. A well-defined purpose can strengthen the commitment of all parties involved in a collaboration.

Expanding the scope of the investigation would result in an in-depth understanding of the mechanics of effective collaboration in a myriad of ways. Probing into these additional factors could provide a holistic understanding of the mechanics of successful collaboration. It can enrich research findings by illuminating additional facets of the collaboration in a nuanced manner, thereby disclosing factors that might have been overlooked otherwise. Insights gleaned from these categories could inform effective leadership strategies, better communication practices, and more aligned goal setting in a tripartite partnership scenario. Expanding investigations to include all categories of the Wilder collaboration framework enhances knowledge, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent to such collaborations.

Academic Programs and Industry Needs

A future area of inquiry related to presidents at small private universities collaborating with local government and industry leaders relates to understanding industry needs in the local community to better align academic offerings to enhance economic development. Understanding industry requirements is essential when determining what academic programs universities should offer to stimulate local economic growth. This understanding can be of great benefit to universities and their students, as well as to industries and the local economy as a whole. Addressing industry needs in academic programs ensures that the skills and competencies developed in students are directly applicable to the labor market. This alignment can increase the employability of students upon graduation, reduce underemployment and unemployment rates, fill skill deficits in the labor market, and foster innovation and growth to stimulate economic activity. When a university is aware of industry challenges, it can promote research and development initiatives aimed at addressing these issues, facilitate the process of turning innovative ideas into marketable products or services, while strengthening the university's position and reputation with community members. Understanding industry requirements when

determining academic programs is not an option; it is an imperative for any university seeking to stimulate economic growth in its host community.

Practical Implications

As a scholar-practitioner, it is important to connect the research findings with action items for university presidents at small private universities endeavoring to enhance economic development in their host communities. Three key insights for presidents of small private universities become known based on the findings: (a) succeed at being an exceptional leader, (b) foster a culture of adaptability to change, (c) be courageous and establish a history of tripartite collaboration with local government and industry leaders.

Be The Exceptional Leadership

Leadership, especially exceptional leadership, is essential to the success of collaborative efforts in higher education (Kezar, 2014). This type of leadership extends beyond task management. Exceptional leadership requires a strategic vision, the ability to inspire and motivate others, and a steady hand to navigate the frequently complex and dynamic process of collaboration to enhance economic development (Kezar, 2014; Maalouf, 2019). Exceptional leaders can think strategically about where they want their community to be in the years to come. They recognize the potential in collaborations that others may overlook and can align these collaborations with their organization's overall goals (Maalouf, 2019).

Contrary to what some may believe, collaborations are neither simple nor automatic; rather, exceptional leaders serve as the glue that holds these endeavors together. Even when confronted with obstacles and challenges, their tenacity and resilience propel the group forward and upward. They foster a sense of unity, impart a collaborative spirit, and cultivate an atmosphere in which every team member feels valued and heard. Exceptional leaders do not only inspire their own teams; they inspire all collaborative partners, which is necessary to maintain

everyone's commitment and enthusiasm for pursuing shared goals. They can articulate a compelling vision and rally others to support it. Exceptional leaders are capable of galvanizing disparate teams and channeling their collective abilities toward achieving common goals.

Exceptional leadership is a necessity, not a luxury, for successful collaborations. It is the vital force that sustains collaborative initiatives, infuses them with vitality, and guides them toward their goals. This is especially important for the most vulnerable institutions of higher education and their host communities. If leaders of the university, government, and industry all possessed exceptional leadership qualities, the local community's drive to enhance economic development would be unstoppable.

Change is Inevitable for Survival

In the current economic environment, the rate of change is rapid and unrelenting, making adaptability an absolute necessity (Bartell & Ghosh, 2022; Smollen, 2018). Whether it is the introduction of new technologies that determine the next academic program or adjustments in demographic trends that alter market demands, change is everywhere (Ardichvili & Johnson, 2021; Smollan, 2018). This rapid evolution necessitates constant learning, adaptation, and innovation to maintain our resilience and relevance. This constant change can be intimidating for many. It is human nature to desire the security of routines and strategies that are well-established. But in a world where "business as usual" is no longer applicable, we must replace fear and hesitation with acceptance and adaptability. To foster a thriving community, university, government, and industry leaders must encourage not only the acceptance of change, but also the pursuit of innovation. As leaders, we must be proactive in identifying trends, receptive to novel ideas, and committed to nurturing a culture that views change as an opportunity rather than a threat. Adaptability to change will be one of the most important weapons in the arsenal of

university presidents and their collaborating partners as they navigate collaborative efforts to enhance economic development in their local communities.

Establish a History of Collaboration

Building a history of productive collaboration is not just a reflection of past accomplishments; it is also a catalyst for future accomplishments (Crisp & Sauer, 2022; Nielsen & Frank, 2021). Collaboration is a continuous process that evolves over time, not a one-time event. By consistently engaging in effective collaborative initiatives, leaders not only enhance their immediate impact, but also build a foundation of trust, learning, and mutual understanding that can be leveraged for future success (Mattessich et al., 2018). A history of collaboration paves the way for future partnerships that are more effective and contributes to a culture of openness, understanding, and mutual respect. It enables collaborative partners to leverage their combined resources more effectively, fosters collective creativity, and promotes efficient problem-solving. Therefore, consistent collaborative efforts should not be viewed as optional extras, but as essential fundamental activities for university presidents, local government leaders, and industry leaders.

University presidents should lead the way! Be the pioneer who creates a history of collaboration between your local government and industry leaders. To enhance economic development in your host community, take the initiative to cultivate a culture of collaboration across the university and beyond. A history of productive collaboration paves the way for future achievements in advancing economic development in the local community. As you navigate collaborative efforts, remember the power of a collective history and the inherent potential it holds for a prosperous future.

Moving on to Recovery

The devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges to the global economy. Related to higher education, there is no doubt that it has exacerbated existing economic challenges faced by small private universities in small rural towns. These most vulnerable institutions and their host communities have found themselves dealing with the fall out of diminishing revenue, while expenses continue to increase. Of course, effective leadership is vital to navigate financial uncertainty requiring vision, strategic foresight, and the ability to adapt to change. The successful university president will draw not only from the strength of their internal stakeholders, but also from the wider community, engaging local leaders in collaborative partnerships and rallying support to ensure a viable future for everyone.

Presidents at small private universities are uniquely positioned to drive change in their host communities. By leveraging their roles as collaborators, economic drivers, education advocates, and policy influencers, they can make profound contributions to the economic and social fabric of the small rural towns in which they exist. In this era of increasing economic uncertainty, it is more critical than ever that the presidents at small private universities act with a keen sense of urgency to facilitate collaborative partnerships with their local government and industry leaders to enhance economic activity in their host communities. This not only leads to a more vibrant economy but may also give leaders more confidence in the financial stability of their institution as they recover from economic downturn.

Researcher's Reflection

As I was in the midst of narrowing my focus for this research study, I reflected on why collaboration was important to me. I thought about examples of when collaborative efforts went awry and when they were successful, all the way back to my days in middle school. No matter my academic endeavors, work activities, or life events, it was the people collaborating with me that made all the difference. It was leadership, the openness to change, and the attitude to “just

start” towards a common goal. In college, as a psychology undergraduate student, my favorite class was Group Dynamics taught by Dr. Jill Banks. She was an influential professor and introduced me to the study of collaboration. I have always used what I learned in that class to guide my efforts in bringing people together for the greater good. Throughout my career, I am convinced that it was the collaborative relationships that I built through trust and kindness that propelled ideas into action and action into results.

Weaving together several complex threads, this study underscores a deeper understanding of the critical role collaboration plays in enhancing economic development in the host communities of small private universities. My hope is that leaders will see the importance of being adaptable to change. I hope leaders will have the courage to start a history of collaboration in these communities that so desperately need a boost to their economy. Without a doubt, it’s clear that it will take exceptional leadership, leaders with vision who do not settle for status quo, collaborating to have a positive impact on the financial sustainability of small private universities and their host communities well into the future.

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APPENDIX A: PRE-INTERVIEW EMAIL

Dear [Insert Name]:

My name is Brianna Douglas. I am a doctoral student at Colorado State University, and I am conducting dissertation research on collaboration to enhance economic development, which explores how university presidents collaborate with local government and industry to enhance economic development in their host communities. I will be conducting a study with supervision and guidance from Dr. Sharon Anderson, a member of the university's faculty, my doctoral advisor, and the principal investigator (PI).

The proposed title of my research is "Understanding Collaboration of University, Government, and Industry Leaders to Enhance Local Economic Development: A Phenomenological Study."

I am seeking volunteers to participate in a qualitative study, which is a component of a doctoral program. Specifically, I am in search of participants who meet the following criteria:

- University President at a qualifying institution of higher education as defined by the Carnegie Classification System (2022).
- Participants will have been a President for at least 3 years and will have experienced efforts to collaborate with government and industry in its host community to enhance economic development.

Each participant will spend approximately 90 minutes in a one-on-one interview setting, ideally via Zoom, responding to questions about collaboration experiences. With their advance permission, the interview will be recorded. Following the interview, participants will be asked to review their interview transcript for accuracy and will have the opportunity to make any changes they consider necessary. The full interviews will be kept confidential; the transcript will be seen only by the student researcher and the principal researcher.

If directly quoted content is used in the dissertation, no identifying information will be included. Participating in this study is voluntary. If at any point they experience unforeseen discomfort, participants may decline to answer a specific question or withdraw from the study entirely.

If you continue to be interested in participating, please contact me at brianna.douglas@colostate.edu so that we can confirm your eligibility to participate, set a time and day for the interview, and discuss the informed-consent process.

Sincerely,
Brianna Douglas

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

School: Colorado State University

Name of Investigator(s): Dr. Sharon Anderson (Principal Investigator), Brianna Douglas (Doctoral Student Researcher)

Title of Project: “Understanding Collaboration of University, Government, and Industry Leaders to Enhance Local Economic Development: A Phenomenological Study”

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

We are inviting you to take part in a research study. This form will tell you about the study, but the researcher will explain it to you first. You may ask this person any questions that you have. When you are ready to make a decision, you may tell the researcher if you want to participate or not. You do not have to participate if you do not want to. If you decide to participate, the researcher will ask you to sign this statement and will give you a copy to keep.

Key Information

- Your consent is being sought for participation in a research project and your participation is voluntary.
- The purpose of the research is to better understand how university presidents collaborate with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development.
- The anticipated amount of time that your participation will take is 2.5 hours. This includes a 90-minute interview and 1 hour to read and review the transcript of the interview.
- You are being asked to participate in a virtual, one-on-one oral interview. There is a predetermined series of questions, with follow-up questions.
- The known foreseeable risks could be accidental disclosure of business practices (good as well as bad practices). This risk is minimized through the use of pseudonyms.
- There are no direct benefits to the participants, though some may be interested in reading the results to gain a better understanding of their collaboration and how their practices compare with those of other university presidents.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?

We are inviting you to be in this study because you are a university president for a small private university located in a small town, with experience collaborating to enhance economic development in your local community.

Why is this research study being done?

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of how people like you collaborate with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development and the actions that lead to effective collaboration.

What will I be asked to do?

If you decide to take part in this study, you will participate in a 90-minute virtual interview. After the interview, you will have an opportunity to read, review, and correct the transcript of the interview.

Where will this take place and how much of my time will it take?

The virtual interview is expected to take around 90 minutes and will be scheduled at your convenience. Following the interview, you will review the transcript for clarity; this is likely to take an additional hour. If the researcher has follow-up questions for further clarity and if you are willing to answer them, follow-up questions may be asked via phone or videoconferencing.

Will there be any risk or discomfort for me?

There is no foreseeable risk for taking part in this study. There may be discomfort as you reflect on your experiences, such as experiences that were unsuccessful. You may decline any question that causes discomfort.

Will I benefit by participating in this research?

There is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study.

Who will see the information about me?

Your part in this study will be confidential. Only the researchers on this study will see the information about you. No reports or publications will use information that can identify you in any way or any individual as being of this project. The recordings, transcripts, and other materials will be stored in a secure manner, only accessible to the student researcher.

Because a student investigator is conducting research, the advisor and readers of the study providing oversight and monitoring may request to review the background data, such as the recordings or transcripts. This is rare and would be done only to ensure that the research is done properly. We would only permit people who are duly authorized by organizations such as Colorado State University Institutional Review Board to see this information.

Permission to videotape interviews or interventions

I, Brianna Douglas, would like your permission to video record your interview to be sure that your comments are accurately recorded. Once transcribed, only the PI and Co-PI will have access to the recording; the recording will be erased and destroyed 3 years after the research project is finished. Do you give the researchers permission to video-record your interview? Please initial next to your choice below.

Yes, I agree that my interview can be video recorded. _____ (initials)

Permission to use direct quotes

I, Brianna Douglas, would like to use direct quotes when presenting findings of the research in order to provide rich details of your experience collaborating to enhance economic development. All identifiable information will be removed from the data and only the PI and Co-PI will have

access to identifiable data. Do you give permission for the researcher to use direct quotes without identifiable data associated?

You can use my data for research and publishing, but do not associate identifiable information with direct quotes. _____ (initials)

Questions?

If you have any questions about this research, please feel free to contact me at 843-861-6446 or at brianna.douglas@colostate.edu. You may also contact Dr. Sharon Anderson at sharon.anderson@colostate.edu

If you have any questions about your rights or treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the Colorado State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at: 970-491-1553, or e-mail RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign and date below. You will be sent via email a copy of this consent form to keep for your own records.

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Study Title: Understanding Collaboration of University, Government, and Industry Leaders to Enhance Local Economic Development: A Phenomenological Study.

| |
|----------------------------|
| DATE: |
| INTERVIEWER'S NAME: |
| PARTICIPANT'S NAME: |
| LOCATION: |
| TIME OF INTERVIEW: |

Research Study Summary:

This study seeks to understand collaboration between small private university presidents and local government and industry leaders collaborating to enhance economic development in their local community. The goal of the study is to document experiences as told directly by the participants of the study.

With your permission, I will record each interview. Zoom provides a transcription option that will allow me to download a transcript of our interview, which I will share with you. The recording is to accurately capture the interview content and will be used for transcription purposes only. If you feel uncomfortable or change your mind for any reason during the interview, I can turn off the recording at your request. If you find yourself not wanting to continue, you can stop the interview at any time. A follow-up interview may be needed for added clarification. If so, I will contact you after the interview by email.

Interview Questions:

I will ask you questions related to six categories related to successful collaborations. Answer each question as it relates to collaborating with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development. Data collected will be used to answer the research question: How do presidents at small private universities collaborate with local government and industry leaders in their host communities to enhance economic development?

General: I'd like to start by getting to know you better. Please tell me about your professional background in higher education and your experience collaborating with local government and industry to enhance economic development.

Environment: Tell me about the environment that surrounds the collaboration. Describe the geographic features and social context that may influence your collaborative efforts.

Possible probing questions:

- Describe your existing relationship with local government and industry leaders.
- What is the community's perception of this group's reliability and competency related to enhancing economic development?
- Describe the political and social climate related to enhancing economic development in your community.

Membership Characteristics: Describe the skills, attitudes, and opinions of the individuals in the collaborative group.

Possible probing questions:

- Describe how members of the group show mutual respect, understanding, and trust amongst one another.
- Describe a time when group members had to compromise to move forward. How did this affect collaborative efforts to enhance economic development?

Process and Structure: Describe the management, decision-making, and operation systems of the collaborative effort.

Possible probing questions:

- How did members of the group set roles, responsibilities, and expectations for enhancing economic development?
- Describe a time when the group had to adapt to changing conditions beyond their control. How did this affect collaborative efforts to enhance economic development?
- What is the group's process for measuring its activities and effectiveness?
- Describe a time when group members had to compromise to move forward. How did this affect collaborative efforts to enhance economic development?

Communication: Describe how individuals in the collaborative group send and receive information, keep each other informed, and convey opinions to influence the groups' actions.

Possible probing questions:

- Describe the informal communication channels that exist in the group.
- Describe the formal communication channels that exist in the group.

Purpose: Describe the result or vision the collaborative partners hope to accomplish.

Possible probing questions:

- Describe the process of goal setting for the group.
- To what degree do members of the group share the same vision for enhancing economic development?
- How does the purpose of the group differ from the purpose of the university and your perceived purpose of local government and industry?

Resources: Describe the resources necessary to develop and sustain the collaborative partnership effectively.

Possible probing questions:

- What resources does the group have to enhance economic development? Are these resources adequate?
- Describe the skills the ideal leader would possess to be effective in this collaboration? How does this compare to the current members of the collaboration?
- How does the collaborative group maintain sufficient communication between itself and external stakeholders?

Other: Is there anything else you would like for me to know about how the university collaborates with local government and industry to enhance economic development?

APPENDIX D: TRANSCRIPT REVIEW EMAIL

Dear (Name),

Thank you again for your interest in my doctoral research which explores how university presidents collaborate with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development.

As we discussed, I would be grateful if you could review the transcript of my interview with “a pseudonym.”

I made a few small changes to the transcript to better disguise Pseudonym's identity, such as removing references to countries, regions, or employers. If you are aware of any corrections, changes or modifications, I'd be grateful for feedback, ideally within the next week.

In the transcript you may see the phrase [inaudible]. This is due to technical issues with the recording device. I have not tried to recreate the transcript in those places. Any assistance that you can provide to fill in the missing word or phrase would be appreciated.

Thank you again for your participation.

Regards,

Brianna

APPENDIX E: FINAL THANK YOU EMAIL

Dear (Name),

Thank you again for your interest in my doctoral research, which explores how university presidents collaborate with local government and industry leaders to enhance economic development.

I have received your comments and corrections, and in the near future I will begin the textual analysis of the interviews that I am conducting this fall.

If you expressed interest in the results, I will reach out to you again when the research is complete so that you can see the outcome.

If at any time you have concerns or additional comments, please contact me via email at brianna.douglas@colostate.edu.

Sincerely,

Brianna