DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 277 089 EA 018 943

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TITLE Collaborating with the Schools: A Strategy for School Improvement.
PUB DATE 18 Apr 86
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (67th, San Francisco, CA, April 16-20, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College School Cooperation; *Cooperative Programs; Elementary Secondary Education; Models; Organizational Development; Organizational Effectiveness; *Organizational Theories; Participative Decision Making; *Planning; Program Design; Research Utilization; *School Business Relationship; School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Collaboratives; *Interorganizational Relationships; Partnerships

ABSTRACT

This paper posits guidelines for planners forming interorganizational arrangements--or collaboratives--among universities, businesses, community organizations, and schools. The paper hypothesizes that schools can benefit from collaboratives and that these partnerships' success is attendant upon mutual understanding of a collaborative focus. Principles of collaboration were originally identified through a longitudinal study of a doctoral program arrangement between five county school systems and the University of Maryland. Additional research results were incorporated into the emerging model. Interorganizational relationships are newly created, single organizations formed voluntarily to achieve an interdependency of formal collaboration. This model features relationships among four characteristics: (1) Environmental, (2) Relational, (3) Procedural, and (4) Structural. Environmental characteristics involve organizations entering the arrangement and the external influences upon operations. Relational characteristics include properties that describe relationships, for example, involvement by member organizations' representatives. Shared decisionmaking defines the collaborative focus. Procedural characteristics concern formality, exchange process, and administrative processes. Organizations' equitable exchange of goods and services is central to collaboration. Structural characteristics are features of member organizations, collaborative demography, resources, and coordination mechanisms. Implementation of sponsored programs is the least developed aspect of the model at this time. Public organizations are favoring collaborative management principles because organizational settings now approximate settings of the interorganizational arrangements. (CJH)

COLLABORATING WITH THE SCHOOLS: A STRATEGY FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

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A Paper Presented At The Annual Meeting Of
The American Educational Research Association

San Francisco, California
April 18, 1986

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Context of The Problem

Forming partnerships with the schools has been a recurring theme in the many recent reports on the condition of public education, beginning with the Nation At Risk and High School. It is hypothesized that the business and university communities have the potential to become important resources to the public schools as improvement activities are undertaken. The thesis of this paper is that the potential of such a partnership strategy to be successful is integrally connected to the ability and willingness of each partner to form am inter-organizational arrangement that has a collaborative focus.

While schools and their potential partners seem to agree to the general notion --that is, that it is a good idea to get together in the interests of strengthening the schools, there is still much confusion about how to proceed and how to structure the relationship. This paper will use the findings from research on interorganizational relationships to posit a set of guidelines that should assist planners who are forming partnerships between and among universities, businesses, community organizations and public schools.

Development of The Research

For the past eight years, I have had a continuing interest in identifying factors that contribute to the development of successful collaborative arrangements between and among single organizations. I call these arrangements IORs, an acronyn that stands for Interorganizational Relationships. You will also find them referred to as consortia, collaboratives, or collectives. In essence, IORs are new organizational entities created by a set of single organizations that have decided to work together collectively to accomplish certain goals or programs.

My initial interests were in learning about how and why organizations decide to collaborate; in isolating procedures that they follow to create an IOR that would work, and in identifying factors that would contribute to the IOR's successfully accomplishing its defined goals and purposes.

As I began to develop a conceptual framework for the study, I became increasingly more frustrated. The existing literature on what made single organizations effective was simply not applicable to IORs; that is, factors that explained single organization operations did not seem to also explain multiple organizational behavior. This hypothesis was echoed in the relatively few interorganizational studies that had been reported in the literature at that time. Thus, the task expanded to the development of an appropriate conceptual framework that would undergird research on IORs.

Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory provided the methodological direction for my early studies. However, by training I approach the study of organizations from a social systems perspective that is heavily influenced by social psychological understandings. It is therefore unlikely that I was not influenced by these disciplines in the initial quest for a substantive theory, to use Glaser and Strauss' terminology, of interorganizational collaboration. The IOR Model is the culmination of a series of studies and refinements of that initial substantive theory of collaboration.

Single organizations may decide to collaborate voluntarily, or as is the case in public organizations, they may enter into such arrangements in response to external mandates to offer cooperative services to a particular population. In either case, there are certain principles of interorganizational collaboration that we have identified in our research that by their presence or absence determine the success of a cooperative effort.

Data for this paper came from a series of studies, designed to surface principles of effective collaboration and/or to test and refine the IOR model. A 1978 study of voluntary educational collaboratives provided the initial conceptual framework for the model and the first iteration of the two instruments that have been developed and refined over the course of the work --an open-ended interview protocol and the IOR Matrix. A longitudinal study of the Maryland Field-Based Doctoral Program followed: The focus of this work was a six year old collaboration between five

county school systems and the University of Maryland; data collection occurred in 1981 and in 1985 and was concerned with the identification of principles of effective collaboration during the different development stages of the inter-organizational arrangement (Intriligator, 1982; 1985). These studies of the Maryland Program were sequential and allowed for the expansion of the IOR conceptual model as well as the beginning of a theory verification process. In addition, data from an in-depth case study of an interorganizational arrangement between a local government agency, a community college and a hospital that had the education of health personnel as its primary purpose were incorporated into the model (Lilley, 1985), as were data from a study of local education foundations --IORs formed as partnerships between the public schools and business and community organizations (Newby, 1985). Each of these studies was informed by the IOR model and contributed to the verification process.

At the present time, there are two additional studies in progress (both of which are at the data analysis stage) that focus on other kinds of voluntary interorganizational arrangements: (1) an in-depth case study of a major consortium of colleges and universities in the Washington, D.C. area; and (2) a study of multi-hospital systems --IORs that have formally connected different health care providers to a central administrative structure. Each of these studies has also been designed to further verify the principles of collaboration

articulated in the IOR model. One important finding from this series of studies is that there are certain principles of collaboration that apply in a variety of public organizational settings, including school systems, universities and government agencies.

The Model

IORs are newly created organizations that are formed voluntarily by single organizations that have a common goal to achieve or a defined interdependency that leads to formal collaboration. The model includes four sets of interorganizational properties that all contribute to the development and operation of these collective entities: Environmental Characteristics; Relational Characteristics: Procedural Characteristics; and Structural Characteristics. I will address each of them in some detail.

Environmental Characteristics

Environmental characteristics of IORs relate both to the decision by single organizations to enter into a collaborative arrangement, and to external influences that affect IOR operations. Typically, there are a number of factors in a single organization's environment that influence its decision to collaborate. Sometimes there are public policies that encourage local level collaboration and even provide some seed money to single organizations who agree to join an IOR. In Massachusetts local school districts have formed educational collaboratives, many of which have been in existence for as long as twenty five

years. Membership in these IORs was encouraged by the State when it enacted legislation that provided seed monies to school districts that could be used as member contributions to an educational collaborative.

In some organizations collaboration is an organizational norm and individuals who take a leadership role in forming IORs are suitably rewarded. In situations where neither of these is so --and this is probably the case for most public organizations -- IOR planners will need to take specific steps to institute such positive organizational responses. A significant reported barrier to university faculty working collaboratively with school systems is the nature of university reward systems. At present, such faculty activity, which we call service, is the least valued professional activity in the academy and contributes only minimally to promotion of faculty and to decisions about merit pay increases.

These are both factors in the general cooperative environment of organizations that decide to form an IOR. In addition, organizations are often subjected to pressures from regulatory agencies, public policy dictates and special interest groups that result in decisions to enter into a formal interorganizational arrangement. Voluntary decisions to join an IOR tend to be made after an environmental scanning process is completed and a single organization believes that it can better respond to such external pressures through collective action. The vast majority of the organizations studied by the IOR group

reported that these kinds of environmental factors caused them to make a decision to join a formal IOR.

Once the IOR has been formed, however, factors in the external environment continue to influence the success of IOR operations. Thus, effective IORs deliberately attempt to manage their political environments by developing appropriate strategies to deal with external pressures. As is the case in single organizations, IORs continually need to maintain their economic viability. Administration of an IOR, then, requires the development of ways to cope with both market-initiated and politically-initiated changes in resource availability both to the IOR and to its member organizations.

In sum, successful IORs have instituted procedures to monitor and respond to pressures from and changes in their external environments.

Relational Characteristics

Relational characteristics of IORs include the extent to which the Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of member organizations are committed to the IOR; the nature of the involvement of individual representatives of member organizations; the extent to which multiple and complex ties are formed among member organizations, and between the IOR and member organizations; and the nature of the leadership exercised by the IOR director. They are interorganizational properties that describe relationships in the IOR.

There are several key actors in an IOR who play important roles in both the planning and operations of the inter-organizational arrangement. It is critical that the Chief Executive Officer in each member organization --or a top level administrator who has the "ear" of the CEO-- be involved in all IOR policy decisions. In addition to using their authority to speak for their respective organizations, in successful IORs, these individuals also demonstrate a willingness to commit organizational resources to the collective effort. Finally, such personal involvement in the IOR by member organization CEOs serves as a symbolic incentive to other personnel in their organizations to also become involved in IOR activities.

In addition, CEOs of member organizations, or their appointed representatives, often constitute the IOR policy board. The ways in which policy board members relate to each other and to the IOR importantly influence the effectiveness of an IOR. In practice, the interactions that occur among these individuals are very complex. IORs are designed by people who carry with them to the interaction a set of personal agenda. Moreover, the same individuals will function at some times in a personal role and at other times in an organization representational role. In fact, these individuals typically use their participation in the IOR as a means to accomplish personal goals in their home organizations.

At the same time, when these individuals serve in an organizational role, they function in the IOR interaction as

supporters of the IOR, as advocates for their own organizations' needs, and as protectors of their organizations' domains. Thus, they bring to the IOR two sets of expectations: the first relates to their own independent organizational goals; and the second relates to their interest in sustaining the interorganizational arrangement. Importantly, there are instances when these two sets of competing role expectations are not congruent and do not allow them to make decisions that are in the best interests of the collective effort. Such dissonance in the individual organization representatives interferes with successful collaboration, and therefore with IOR effectiveness.

Another indicator of dysfunction in the IOR is an over-reliance on personal relationships between and among policy board members to sustain interorganizational ties. In addition, collaboration will become disrupted when the role incumbents (current representatives) from some or all of the participating organizations change. Successful collaborative efforts circumvent these unanticipated consequences of dependence on particular individuals to insure member commitment to the IOR in two ways. First, they decide to form a new IOR unit as the mechanism to coordinate collective interactions.

Second, they develop complex and multiple ties at various levels in the participating organizations; such ties reduce this over-reliance on specific individuals to foster collabortion in the interorganizational relationship. Several IOR studies have demonstrated that interorganizational arrangements contain both

single level and multiple level linkages among individuals in different positions in each organization. The greater the number of linkages among IOR member organizations, the more that participants view the IOR effort as successful --mostly because more benefits accrue to the individual organizations that they attribute directly to their involvement in the IOR.

In sum, creating a variety of formal and informal ties with each member organization in the IOR facilitates the development of a shared decision-making process in the IOR. It is this shared decision-making process that defines the collaborative focus of an IOR. All of these relational characteristics of IORs contribute significantly to the ultimate success of the collective effort.

The nature of the relationships between member organizations and the IOR and among the member organizations themselves must be addressed both in the formation stage of an IOR and in its operations. IOR directors constitute the last group of critical actors in an interorganizational relationship. Our research has indicated that in successful IORs, IOR directors devote considerable energy to monitoring these relationships and to developing strategies to cope with any deterioration in them. Individuals who hold these positions need to have a variety of coordinative and integrative skills, including (1) the ability to manage pressures from the member organizations; (2) the ability to influence sustained member organization commitment to the IOR; (3) the ability to facilitate expansion of IOR goals and

activities; and (4) the ability to influence member organizations to allocate necessary resources to the IOR. In addition, IOR directors need to be given the authority necessary to make administrative decisions that keep IOR operations and programs running smoothly and efficiently.

This set of relational properties of IORs is particularly significant in situations where businesses, community organizations and/or universities wish to form partnerships with the public schools. Because the partnership is not viewed by any of the parties, at least initially, as central to their primary concerns and activities, the roles and abilities of the individuals who become involved in the IOR help to increase the importance of the partnership in the home organizations and as a consequence the degree of commitment that each organization has to the interorganizational arrangement.

Procedural Characteristics

The ways in which member organizations delineate procedures to be followed in the IOR are addressed in this section of the model. Procedural characteristics of the IOR include the degree of formality in the IOR; the nature of the exchange process; patterns of influence in the IOR; and administrative processes used by the IOR. In essence, IOR procedures need to be delineated in the planning process and revised when necessary during operations. Using a shared decision-making model in this process contributes significantly to the development of a collaborative focus in the IOR.

Prior to the actual formation of an IOR, it is important that each member organization officially sanction its participation in the collective effort. Establishing this legitimacy for the IOR in each organization contributes to the development of commitment to the joint effort. Furthermore, it signals permission to personnel in the home organization to become involved in IOR programs and activities. In addition, once IOR operations begin, member organizations report a need to formally coordinate IOR activities with their internal operations.

Taking these two actions has additional benefits: first, individuals and units within each organization understand the ways in which the work that they do with the IOR connects to their work in their home organizations. Second, representatives of organizations that have formally sanctioned IOR membership tend to have stronger bargaining positions when negotiating an interorganizational agreement. That is, they speak with the strength of their home organization's support. Third, the formality of IOR membership aids individual representatives when they serve as advocates of IOR activities in their home organizations. That is, they speak with IOR consensus. In sum, my research has indicated that successful IORs are composed of organizations that have each formalized their participation in the IOR.

A second procedural characteristic of IORs is the nature of the exchange process. Central to the success of an IOR is an

exchange of goods and services by member organizations that are then used to accomplish IOR goals. There are several features of this exchange process that influence the extent to which member organizations believe that the exchange is fair. It should be noted that perceptions of fairness are not related to each member contributing equally to the IOR. Contributions to the IOR may vary as long as this difference is agreed to "up front."

There are several things that can be done so that members believe that the exchange is fair. First, both the units of exchange and the procedures for making the exchange need to be clearly delineated. Members need to agree on what is to be exchanged, on how that will happen, and on how confident they can be that it will continue to happen. Second, the terms of the exchange need to be reached through consensus; thus, communication must remain open so that member organizations are reassured that their contributions are equitable. Third, goods and/or services must accrue to member organizations in exchange for their continuing investment in the IOR. While benefits must exceed the costs of participation in the collective effort, they are not limited to goods and services. Identification of procedures, for example, that efficiently and effectively allow businesses to enter into partnerships with school systems was a highly valued outcome for participants in the local education foundation study (Newby, 1985).

In essence, establishing such an exchange process in the IOR contributes in a major way to the development of trust among

member organizations and between member organizations and the IOR. The use of power and authority by member organizations and by the IOR also contributes importantly to the building of trust relationships in an IOR. Patterns of influence can be agreed upon. When members agree on what is each member's "private business," or domain, and on what is "public business," or of legitimate concern to the IOR, domain consensus has been reached. The achievement of domain consensus, or agreement about the appropriate role and scope of each member organization's authority, is difficult to accomplish. Organizations often bring to the IOR hidden agenda which must be surfaced and addressed. Thus, during the planning, each member's domain must be established and consensus must be reached about appropriate patterns of participation by each organization.

Lines of authority must also be delineated. Member organizations need to agree on the legitimacy of each participant's role in the problem-solving activities of the IOR. The extent to which they believe that they have an equitable role in the IOR decision-making processes reflects their acceptance of established lines of authority in IOR interactions. In addition, IOR effectiveness is dependent upon the ways in which power is used by its member organizations. Essentially, each member expects that its own autonomy will be minimally reduced. In order to protect the collaborative focus in the arrangement, IOR managers must be alert to possible attempts by single organizations to establish relationships that are dependent upon

status and power differentials, and/or possible attempts to pursue additional authority for their own organizations. Our research shows that each of these influence attempts seriously interferes with the IOR's capacity to sustain cooperative interaction in the arrangement.

Finally, the extent to which IOR daily operations run smoothly and efficiently also predicts the degree of member satisfaction with the arrangement. Bottom-line, member organizations expect that IOR operations will be as trouble-free as possible. Thus, administrative procedures used to conduct the business of the IOR need to be carefully delineated. The critical role and responsibilities of the IOR director in this process were discussed under relational characteristics. In addition, staffing patterns in the IOR unit are important, open channels of communication need to be established and cost-effective budget procedures nust be instituted. Finally, the IOR director must skillfully manage interactions with the policy board and with other representatives of member organizations in a manner that does not interfere with the IOR's shared decision-making process. All of these administrative procedures contribute to the ability of the IOR to conduct its programs and activities effectively.

In brief, when IOR members interact in order to develop joint activities, resources will be exchanged. Participating organizations will both contribute and receive resources from the IOR. Each member organization must believe that the exchange is

equitable. In order for the exchange to be perceived as equitable, members will also have to agree on their respective spheres of influence. Shared decision-making defines the collaboration. The manner in which participating organizations share the IOR authority will also predict the degree of cooperation present in the relationship. Furthermore, a base level of agreement can be reached only when members' organizational prerogatives have been factored into the relationship. At this point, more intensive interactions and more complex linkages can be developed. Our research has indicated that attention to procedural characteristics is a constant throughout all stages of an IOR and contributes significantly to the stability of the interorganizational arrangement.

Structural Characteristics

To this point, the model has addressed environmental concerns, the complexity of relationships in the IOR and the need to establish procedures that contribute to a shared decision-making process. The final group of IOR properties in the model relate to the design of the interorganizational arrangement. Structural characteristics of IORs include features of the organizations who are members of the organization set; demographic characteristics of the IOR; issues pertaining to resource availability; the nature of the IOR coordinating mechanism; the ways in which IOR goals are established and articulated; and IOR sponsored programs.

This process begins with an analysis of the member configuration in the IOR, which includes an assessment of the current viability of member organizations and a mapping of demographics of member organizations. Often organizations whose constituencies change, or who experience reductions in resources or clients, turn to IORs as one means of revitalizing their internal operations. Thus, IORs may be composed of some organizations that are in trouble, causing other members to assume the role of benevolent benefactors. These conditions will influence the ways in which such organzations use power in the IOR as well as the extent to which they can establish and maintain a collaborative focus. The extent to which member organizations have similar or complementary missions also defines their potential to collaborate. Further, the authority relationships between member organizations and their respective governing or policy boards often determine the freedom that individual organizations have to enter into a collaborative relationship. Finally, organizations that have an history of collaborative activity usually have infused into their respective cultures a valuing of collective activity that facilitates IOR development. These properties of single organizations --that is, organizational health, similarity of missions, governing or policy board influence, and history of collaboration-- importantly define the compatability of organizations that are considering a nterorganizational arrangement.

In addition to these single organization characteristics, there are also properties of the organization set --the group of organizations that constitute the IOR-- that must be analyzed prior to designing the IOR. The research indicates that the size of the IOR as well as the proximity of geographic location of member organizations help to determine the capacity of the IOR to conduct its business effectively. Several studies have confirmed the importance of geographic location in designing effective IORs. Member organizations that are located in the same geographic region interact more efficiently than those that are located at a distance. Moreover, ease of access of organizational members to each other facilitates the expansion of functions of the IOR and increases the opportunity for multiple linkages to be formed among participants.

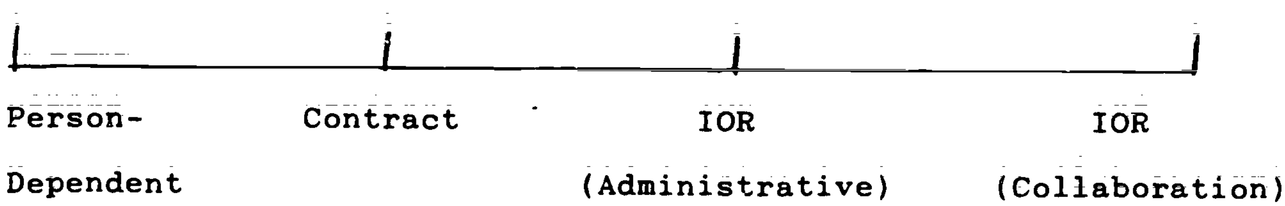
IOR size is also an important structural characteristic. The number of member organizations that hold initial membership in the IOR, and the possibility of adding others later, both contribute to potential longevity of the IOR. In general, it would appear that the appropriate size of an IOR is dependent upon the amount of resources available to support IOR functions, as well as upon creating a manageable beginning group that will allow for the development of a shared decision-mnaking process. Once charter organizations have developed the capacity to make cooperative decisions while implementing IOR programs and activities, an IOR can make expansion decisions.

An IOR composed of member organizations with similar structures is able to develop multiple linkages throughout all levels of each organization. This happens because individuals who wish to form interorganizational ties with their counterparts in other IOR member organizations know which sub-units in the partner organizations have similar functions to the one proposed In addition, when personnel functions are similar in member organizations, the IOR can learn more readily about each member's goals, services and resources, because IOR participants will speak "similar organizational language." In contrast, IORs composed of different types of organizations need additional time for members to learn about each other's cultures and structures, prior to trying to define possible IOR goals and activities. All of these characteristics of the organization set have been identified in our research as key structural factors in an interorganizational arrangement.

Resource availability is another critical structural dimension of IORs. Successful IORs explore many potential avenues to garner resources. Often, there are external resources available to single organizations that decide to enter into a collaborative arrangement. In addition, members decide that internal contributions may legitimately include time, personnel and programs in addition to monies. Expanding the kinds of resources that are acceptable contributions to IOR operations provides the IOR with greater flexibility in implementing sponsored programs. In essence, the changing resource

environments of public organizations have caused a re-evaluation of what constitutes a significant contribution to an IOR, and broadened the definition to include more than financial contributions as powerful indicators of commitment. Finally, as the IOR matures, it must be able to provide additional resources to its member organizations. When such benefits are so small that members do not believe that there is any exchange to be derived from their investment in the joint effort, they will withdraw from the IOR.

There are a number of possible coordinating mechanisms that may be used in actually designing an IOR. They may be conceptualized along a continuum that ranges from a very loose arrangement to the creation of a new interorganizational unit.



IOR members may decide to establish a loosely coupled, person-dependent relationship. Member organizations may chose to formalize the joint effort by the development of a contract that clarifies each member's role, responsibilities and organizational domain. On the other side of the continuum, participating organizations may decide to create a new organizational entity,

responsible for the administration of IOR activities and the coordination of cooperative interactions. Finally, member organizations may opt to conduct all IOR functions and activities collaboratively, with all parties assuming mutual, and equitable responsibility for IOR planning and operations. In this instance, a new interorganizational unit is formed, but member organizations continue to play major roles in IOR activities using a carefully delineated shared decision-making process. Selection of this last option allows the greatest opportunity for IOR growth and expansion, but requires a large initial investment of member time and energy.

There are still other factors that need to be considered in the complex process of selecting an IOR coordinating mechanism. For example, in an IOR composed of units from universities and local school systems, the selection of a particular coordinating mechanism is mediated by a number or cultural and organizational factors: however, it is most influenced by the strength of the University's belief in the professional value of school system input into its educational decision-making. Similarly, school systems must indicate respect for university involvement in their local educational decision-making processes. Selection of an appropriate coordinating mechanism is dependent upon first identifying differences in member organizations' value systems and developing consensus about them. Finally, it may be that as functions of the IOR increase, and the interactions become more complex, a different coordinating mechanism may need to be

adopted so that the interorganizational relationship remains effective.

The ways in which IOR goals are articulated also influence the effectiveness of the IOR. Our research indicates that IOR goals must be compatible with the goals and missions of its member organizations. The more congruent these sets of goals are, the more likely that the IOR will be able to identify and develop a superordinate goal to which member organizations can become committed. Also, IOR goals tend to reflect mutual needs and common problems of member organizations. By extension, member organizations often use the IOR to meet particular goals of their own. Thus, the ability of the IOR to facilitate member organizations' meeting their individual goals emerges as a critical factor in assessing IOR effectiveness. In sum, selection of IOR goals is a complex process that is directly linked to member organizations' needs and purposes.

The final structural characteristic of IORs is the ability to successfully implement sponsored programs. This is the part of my model that is least well developed; however, upon completion of two more ongoing studies --one of multi-hospital systems and the other of university consortia-- we will be able to delineate these factors in greater detail. The factors that are under study include planning and development issues, program implementation issues, program evaluation issues and IOR expansion issues. My expectation is that selected procedural and relational characteristics will be importantly linked to the

ability of the IOR to successfully implement sponsored programs.

Conclusion

The IOR model is descriptive. We have identified specific relationships between and among the four sets of characteristics: environmental, relational, procedural and structural. We are in the process of aggregating the data in such a way that we can discuss with some degree of confidence issues related to the relative importance of different variables both within and between categories. It is the most comprehensive treatment of IORs currently available.

Not only are the dimensions of the model being confirmed in the research, but efforts to apply these principles also support the model. Montgomery County used the IOR principles to develop a plan for a comprehensive system of services for students with disabilities who are making the transition from school to work. In addition, the model has been used to develop a preventative health planning system in the District of Columbia. Also, many planning efforts of parents of persons with disabilities and various service providers have been importantly informed by the dictates of the model. There is much to be learned from the wisdom of practice, and I have found that such opportunities to apply the IOR model to real problems confronting public organizations has provided us with important information that has helped to refine our conceptual understandings.

One final caveat. When I described the development of my research agenda earlier in this presentation, I indicated that I

began with a basic assumption that principles that govern single organizational effectiveness are not transferable to interorganizational settings. Over the last eight years, I have taken a 180 degree turn around in that position. In fact, public organizations are undergoing major transformations; many of the conditions under which they operated eight years ago have changed. They are constantly subjected to formal and informal pressures from their environments that require important adaptations in their internal operations. External governing boards are demanding accountability, regulatory public policies proliferate, consumer groups have become more informed about ways to influence public organizations, operations continue and expand with fewer available resources, and evidence of entropy and organizational decline abounds. It is my hypothesis that many of the principles that have worked in managing interorganizational arrangements are now being used by effective leaders in public organizations --mostly because single organizational settings and cultures now closely approximate the settings and cultures of IORs. Therefore, the next step in my research agenda will be to explore the extent to which this hypothesis is verifiable.