COLLABORATION IN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER, MULTI-CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	Governments, private business, and academia have become increasingly aware of the importance of collaboration in multi-stakeholder, multicultural environments. This is due to the globalization and (developing) mutual relationships with other global partners, due to the often varying visions and goals between the respective organizations in managing projects that span those environments.
Background	This research conducts a survey of literature pertaining to organizational collaboration in multi-stakeholder, multicultural environments in government, private business, and academic sectors, conducting an analysis to identify the gaps in the basic questions thus far explored in the literature. The gap analysis will expose the opportunities for greater collaboration in these environments.
Methodology	The author conducted a literature review to identify existing research gaps to focus interviews that will develop multiple case studies in future research
Contribution/Findings	This literature review has determined gaps in understanding how contributing factors to cultural communication impact collaboration in multi-cultural, multi-stakeholder organizations, encouraging additional research in this area
Recommendations for Practitioners	Practitioners have the opportunity to develop their use of cultural communication contributing factors, potentially increasing their collaboration efficiency.
Recommendation for Researchers	Researchers have opportunity to gather empirical evidence that factors of cultural communication may influence collaboration in the multi-cultural, multi-stakeholder environment.
Impact on Society	Improved understanding of how cultural communication factors influence collaboration in multi-cultural, multi-stakeholder organizations can improve organizational efficiency.
Future Research	Gather empirical evidence that factors of cultural communication may influence collaboration in the multi-cultural, multi-stakeholder environment.

INTRODUCTION

Governments, private business, and academia have become increasingly aware of the importance of collaboration in multi-stakeholder, multicultural environments. This is due to the globalization and (developing) mutual relationships with other global partners, due to the often varying visions and goals between the respective organizations in managing projects that span those environments. It is often necessary to manage expectations amongst the various stakeholders that contribute, while at the same time, maximizing the outcomes in what can sometimes be confrontational relationships between the respective stakeholders in this environment (Ali & Abdelfettah, 2016).

There are a number of examples where cultural competence is paying dividends in organizational relationships (Elnashar, Abdelrahim, & Fetters, 2012; West-Olatunji, Henesy & Varney, 2015). It is apparent that with the globalization of private business markets, government relationships, and academic endeavors, that future focuses must orient towards a more proactive approach. Further literature review has indicated some necessary emerging terms. "Cultural intelligence" in the academic environment, based on studies of students and their interactions (Wang, Heppner, Wang & Zhu, 2015) appeared to influence their cultural competence outcomes. "Cultural humility" is another emerging term, which suggests "place-based community and cultural groups as partners or participants of environmental research interventions, in particular, require attention to place-based identities and geographical contexts" (Queen, 2015).

While the emerging aspects (cultural intelligence and humility) are important, stakeholder theory also offers a grounding influence to this research. There is a rich literature base to draw from (Aaltonen & Kajula, 2016; Brower & Mahajan, 2013; Eskerod, Huemann, & Ringhofer, 2015; Eskerod, Huemann, & Savage, 2015; Fombrun, Pnzi, & Newberry, 2015; Hansen, 2010; Kelly, 2010; Mainardes & Raposo, 2012; Mitchell, Van Buren, Greenwood, & Freeman). A study that offers significant empirical insights on stakeholder influence (Susiene & Purvinis, 2015) may also offer an opportunity to extend this research to further develop stakeholder influence in the multi-cultural, multi-stakeholder environment that is continuing to develop in this increasing global economy.

RESEARCH APPROACH

The goal of this research required the initial literature review to focus on reference material containing key search words including the following: stakeholder theory, cultural competence, cultural humility, cultural intelligence, cultural communication, international relations, and security cooperation. To gain a broad range of articles of academic interest, the researcher performed all searches online using the University of South Florida libraries, facilitated through Google Scholar. Initial searches of each term resulted in hundreds of thousands of results. Applying some refinements to the search criteria resulted in limiting the results to 20,000 to 40,000 articles. In a number of the cases, the articles that appeared to have the most bearing on the topics also included references to foundational or seminal works from authors who led research into stakeholder theory and cultural communications.

The author reviewed approximately 120 abstracts in this manner. Many of the abstracts discussed the importance of effective intercultural communication between organizations in the global context. Given the wide scope of the research that described outcomes, but not "how" effective intercultural communications (which tends to result in increased collaboration) may occur, the researcher also leaned towards abstracts that discussed stakeholder theory, in order to better understand inclusivity.

As a result, 49 articles have been reviewed in detail to date, dealing specifically with cultural competence, cultural communication, stakeholder theory, and Department of Defense Security Cooperation (which is the audience the author will query to fill gaps in the present literature later on). To develop a framework to analyze in the literature review, the author is developing a typology to describe the collaboration landscape in multi-cultural, multi-stakeholder environments.

CULTURAL/STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION TYPOLOGY AND RESEARCH GAPS

The topics that contribute to collaboration in the multi-cultural, multi-stakeholder environment are very diverse. Therefore, a method for categorization was not immediately evident. Much of the literature informed the past and current landscape or the operating environment, which in turn can influence collaboration. This review of 42 articles is represented across the rows of Table 1. Stakeholder theory literature, in particular, offered much insight in describing factors that appear to influence this collaboration, especially in describing landscapes (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016). A possible analogy for the term "landscape" is to compare it to the physical terrain that hikers might negotiate while hiking a trail. Hills, streams, and vegetation cause variation within the terrain, as well as even more dynamic weather factors (rain, intense heat/cold, dusty conditions) that might occur during the hiker's time on the trail. As the landscape becomes more diverse (extremely hilly, with deep streams to wade through, and inclement/severe weather present), the hiking becomes much more challenging for the hiker, similar to what individuals and organizations must accommodate as the landscape factors within stakeholder theory become more complex. Stakeholder theory literature also described respective stakeholders' inclusion in processes (Eskerod, Huemann, & Ringhofer,, 2015), definition, and development of mutual goals (Elnashar et al., 2012). Cultural competence literature also described inclusion (Leung, Ang & Tan, 2014), and developing/defining mutual goals (Fisher-Borne, Cain, & Martin, 2015).This indicated the dynamic interactions between respective stakeholders as they interact and work together and how this may influence outcomes in collaboration. Some literature described how the physical and geographical displacement of entities influences landscape (Quigley, 2016). As collaborations become more dispersed and distributed (especially in the geographically separated locations around the world), cultural differences become more pronounced. Finally, literature on cultural communication indicated that communication also appears to influence collaboration effectiveness (Arasaratnam, 2015).

Table 1: Typology of Cultural Collaboration –
Numbers in columns as a percentage of relative reference articles for the columns category

A Typology of Cultural Collaboration (42 Articles Reviewed)					
Level of Analysis	Landscape (Stakeholder Theory)	Building Inclusiveness	Develop/ Define Goals	Cross-Cultural Communication	Other
Organizational Collaboration	29% (12 articles)	12% (5)	7% (3)	43% (18)	9% (4)

Some observations from the typology table appear to emerge and warrant further discussion. A significant portion of the literature appears to focus on how the landscape influences collaboration (29%). Available literature also describes how building inclusiveness between respective stakeholders (12%) prior to developing and defining goals (7%) significantly contributes to collaboration, but bears some additional gathering of evidence. While cross-cultural communication and associated competencies articles appeared to be plentiful, (43%), they indicated opportunities for continuing research. Four articles (10%) did not fit into these categories, but provided additional framing to the landscape and more importantly, described actions that individuals within organizations should do in order to develop competencies to conduct effective cross-cultural communication.

A further summary of the key findings from literature on increasing cultural and stakeholder collaboration effectiveness is shown in Tables 2a through 2d. They are listed according to the order that they have been discussed in this literature review.

Table 2a. Increasing Cultural/Stakeholder Collaboration Effectiveness: Summary of Relevant Findings (Landscape)

Author, Year of Publication	Key Strategic Focus	Key Considerations
Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016	Landscape	Describes commonly recognized factors that contribute to the landscape using stakeholder theory terms of reference.
Eskerod, Hueman, & Savage, 2015	Landscape	Trends in stakeholder management landscapes over time, offering context to stakeholder theory evolution.
Gill, 2013	Landscape (Stakeholder perceptions, institutional context)	Culture, complexity and informing – how shared beliefs can improve organizational efficiency
Hansen, 2010	Landscape (Stakeholder perceptions)	Discusses stakeholder participation, ranging from non-participation to co-decision making; offers insights into stakeholder perceptions.
Kelly, 2010	Landscape (Institutional context)	Describes stakeholder landscape in the government political space.
Kumar, 2016	Landscape (Dynamism)	Describes relational factors that contribute to stakeholder landscape and how managers may have to make decisions that impact future stakeholder culture
Kovačić, 2005	Landscape (Institutional context)	Influence of national culture on government websites.
Mainardes & Raposo, 2012	Landscape (Dynamism, Institutional Context)	Stakeholder classification and relationships
Moriaty, 2012	Landscape (Stakeholder perceptions)	Discusses stakeholder theory from a democratic (rather than directive) organizational context
Brower & Mahajan, 2013	Landscape (Corporate social responsibility (CSR))	Introduces CSR as a factor within stakeholder landscape and discusses impacts
Erdiaw-Kwasie, Alam, & Shahiduzzamann, 2015	Landscape (CSR)	CSR factor, during transitional periods (when culture may be evolving)
Scime, 2015	Landscape (Dynamism)	Discussion on diversity and how it influences social environments.

**Table 2b. Increasing Cultural/Stakeholder Collaboration Effectiveness:
Summary of Relevant Findings (Building Inclusiveness)**

Author, Year of Publication	Key Strategic Focus	Key Considerations
Ali & Abdelfettah, 2016	Building inclusiveness	Discusses methods of building stakeholder inclusiveness, using the contributing factors discussed in proposed conceptual framework in this article.
Eskerod, Huemann, & Ringhofer, 2015	Building inclusiveness	Importance of building inclusiveness to project management outcomes, discussed within stakeholder theory framework.
Fombrun et al., 2015	Building inclusiveness (Credibility)	Introduces reptrak system as a method to apply metrics to corporate reputation/credibility.
Mitchell, Van Buren, Greenwood, & Freeman, 2015	Building inclusiveness (Trust, Openness, Empowerment)	Stakeholder inclusion and accounting, from a stakeholder risk-sharing lens.
Travica, 2005	Building inclusiveness (Trust, Openness, Empowerment)	Organizational politics – its (negative) influence on building inclusiveness between stakeholders

**Table 2c. Increasing Cultural/Stakeholder Collaboration Effectiveness:
Summary of Relevant Findings (Goals)**

Author, Year of Publication	Key Strategic Focus	Key Considerations
Kazadi, Lievens & Mahr, 2016	Goals	Stakeholders' contributions to knowledge creation during innovation processes.
Perthes, 2016	Goals	Discusses security cooperation in the Middle East; implies aligning goals between nations with divergent viewpoints.
Retolaza, Ruiz-Roqueni, & San-Jose, 2015	Goals	Spanish (Spain) regional perspective on goal alignment between respective stakeholders.

**Table 2d. Increasing Cultural/Stakeholder Collaboration Effectiveness:
Summary of Relevant Findings (Cultural Communication)**

Author, Year of Publication	Key Strategic Focus	Key Considerations
Elnashar et al., 2012	Cultural communication	How cultural challenges were overcome in establishing a Western-based health care facility in Qatar
Alas & Mousa, 2016	Cultural communication (identity)	Challenges in overcoming cultural diversity barriers within a conservative society.

Author, Year of Publication	Key Strategic Focus	Key Considerations
Aliane, Calza & Cannavale, 2013	Cultural communication (competence)	West meets East in business – the role of cultural competence in the relationships.
Arasaratnam, 2015	Cultural communication	Review of intercultural communication trends over the previous decade.
Armonienė, 2001	Cultural communication (differences)	Discusses how effective cultural communication can remove cultural borders/barriers in relationships.
Bahumaid, 2010	Cultural communication (differences)	Cultural communication, within the context of language training.
Block, 2013	Cultural communication (identity)	Explores how structure/agency influence identity in cultural communication
Braziel & Cummins, 2014	Cultural communication (dynamics)	International security cooperation in the Middle East and Central Asia, and the impacts of public opinion and messaging strategies.
Browning, Sætre, Sørnes, & Stephens, 2003	Cultural communication (differences)	Studies information and communication technologies in multicultural environment (Finnish/American)
Eshreteh, 2015	Cultural communication (identity, dynamics, competence)	Insistence on extending hospitality within the Palestinian community explored. Offers insight into accepting identity, understanding dynamic, and responding competently with diverse cultures.
Fisher-Borne et al., 2015	Cultural communication (competence)	Introduces cultural humility vs. cultural competence.
Ghaleb, 2010	Cultural communication (differences)	Compares/contrasts apologies in Arabic and English. Understanding key language differences can offer better understanding of cross cultural differences
Keränen, 2002	Cultural communication (differences)	Studies challenges in language equivalencies in the online environment (Finnish/American)
Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013	Cultural communication (differences)	Discusses how stereotypes and status influence cultural communications
Leung et al., 2014	Cultural communication	Seminal work.
Moaddel, 2002	Cultural communication (differences)	Study of Islamic culture and politics.
Wang et al., 2015	Cultural communication (competence)	Cultural intelligence and how it contributes to developing cultural competence
Xu, 2013	Cultural communication (differences)	"Difference-as-problem" approach vs. dialogic approach

STAKEHOLDER THEORY – HOW IT ESTABLISHES A FOUNDATION FOR A CULTURAL/STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION EFFECTIVENESS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Stakeholder theory is an apparent theoretical framework for this research. The basic idea of stakeholder theory is that an organization has relationships with many constituent groups and that it can engender and maintain the support of these groups by considering and balancing their relevant interests (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016; Susniene & Purvinis, 2015).

Stakeholder perceptions, complexity, uncertainty, dynamism, and institutional context are all inherent within the landscape described in stakeholder relationships (Aaltonen & Kujala, 2016) (Figure 1). Complexity refers to how many, the variety of, and the relationships between respective stakeholders. Uncertainty refers to lack or ambiguity of information and experience of project management in comparison with other stakeholders. Dynamism roughly equates to applied changes, whether they be changes in position between respective stakeholders, their attributes, their influences or engagement strategies between the stakeholders. Institutional context describes legitimized structures, processes, and environments the stakeholders operate within (to include multiplicity of environments, which may be common in relationships where stakeholder organizations originate from diverse global locations). Finally, Corporate Social Responsibility refers to how organizations (and individuals within those organizations) recognize the need to be accountable to the larger public society.
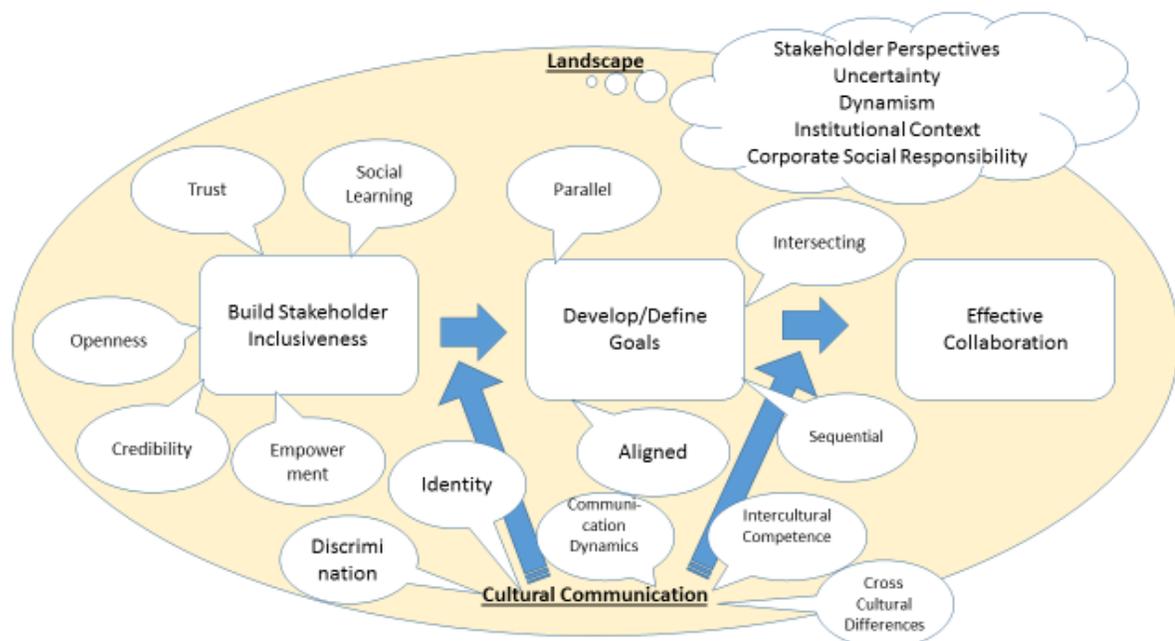
Figure 1. Cultural/Stakeholder Collaboration Effectiveness Framework – Expanded Model
(Adopted from concepts discussed in Altonen & Kujala, 2016; Arasaratnam, 2015; Erdiaw-Kwasie et al., 2015)

Given the challenging environment that (sometimes) divergent stakeholders participate in and that sometimes create additional challenges for the environment, it may be important for the stakeholders to place emphasis on building inclusiveness between their peer stakeholder organizations. Reviewed

literature supported this, revealing that trust, social learning, openness, shared values, and credibility between stakeholders all seem to be factors that positively contribute to stakeholders' feeling their inclusion in projects (Erdiaw-Kwasie et al., 2015).

Once respective stakeholders develop the key inclusiveness with the organizations they are pairing up with, they can move on to developing and defining goals, realizing that not all stakeholders are equal (Mainardes & Raposo, 2012). While establishing goals, the respective stakeholders might find them to show results in a number of ways (Figure 2). They may be parallel, where stakeholders are working toward similar endstates, along similar paths, but may not bring them into exact alignment. They may be intersecting, where they are working from divergence, to an intersecting point, and then back to divergence. An ideal scenario is when stakeholders can bring their respective goals into exact alignment. Yet another situation is that of sequential performance/goals – where one stakeholder performs earlier, and another following.

When the challenges presented by the landscape, building stakeholder inclusiveness, and resolving differences in goals can be overcome, the conceptual framework suggests an improvement in effective collaboration. The author proposes that cultural communication is an area that can influence the processes throughout.
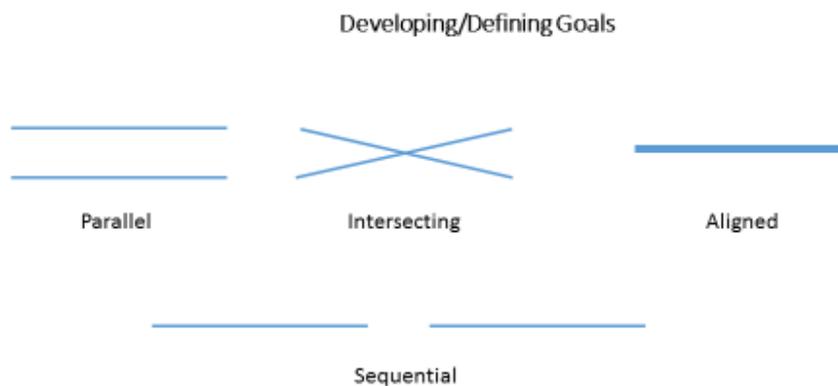
Figure 2. Developing/Defining Goals
(Adopted from concepts discussed in Mainardes & Raposo, 2012)

CULTURAL COMMUNICATION – ITS INFLUENCE IN THE CULTURAL/ STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION EFFECTIVENESS CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Effective communication seems to be a key contributing factor that develops positive outcomes in most internal and cross-organizational collaborations. Within the Multi-cultural/multi-stakeholder environment, this becomes more complex, due to the factors previously described and supported by the literature. Additional literature review suggested that identity, communications dynamics, intercultural competence, cross cultural differences, and discrimination all seem to influence cultural communications effectiveness (Arasaratnam, 2015). Identity is thought of in terms of personal/relational identity, cultural identity, ethnic identity, and national identity. Communications dynamics encompass a variety of topics such as deception, conflict management, intercultural friendships, facework, self-disclosure, and diversity in workplaces. Intercultural competence is one of the most under-researched areas and presents a great opportunity for additional research. When looking at

cross cultural differences, one often assumes homogeneity within national populations, but this increasingly changing as societies diversify. Organizations that develop strong and balanced cultural communications competencies within their employee formations which operate within the multi-cultural, multi-stakeholder environment may then be able to positively influence collaboration outcomes.

INCREASING CULTURAL/STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION – HOW?

By focusing on how to increase the efficiency of cultural communication on collaboration, practitioners that operate within multi-cultural, multi-stakeholder environments may increase their collaboration effectiveness. Previous research has identified stakeholder identity, communication dynamics, intercultural competence, cross-cultural difference, and discrimination of stakeholders as contributors to effective cultural communication. This author would propose that when effective cultural communication increases, stakeholders' feelings of inclusiveness and goals alignment improve, which may then result in more effective collaboration. Given the complicated conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 with many possible variable interactions, the author has chosen to narrow his scope.

A CLOSER LOOK AT BUILDING STAKEHOLDER INCLUSIVENESS AND CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Figure 3 shows a simplified conceptual framework with directionality of variable influences and interactions to better focus the research path. Additionally, building stakeholder inclusiveness and cultural communication are the two areas the research will focus upon, given there were apparent interactions between the variables that contributed to inclusiveness and cultural communication. In particular, greater social learning, trust, openness, credibility, and empowerment (building stakeholder inclusiveness – independent variable) appear to increase intercultural competence (cultural communication – independent variable). Conversely, if organizations and individuals within those organizations demonstrate increased intercultural competence, then increased social learning, trust, openness, credibility, and empowerment may result (Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013). Within the building stakeholder inclusiveness domain itself, increases in social learning, trust, openness, credibility and, empowerment all appear to increase stakeholder inclusiveness.

Cultural communication is the primary area of interest for this research. Previous research indicates organizations that effectively communicate tend to experience increases in productivity and effectiveness, especially in intercultural relationships (Arasaratnam, 2015). Figure 3 proposes that the independent variable cultural communication may have a positive influence throughout all processes that occur within the multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural landscape, from developing stakeholder relationships, to forming goals to effective collaboration (the desired endstate). Arasaratnam (2015) also indicated five additional variables that influence cultural communication. Most of these moderating variables tend to positively influence cultural communication. Discrimination, when it is present, will likely have a negative influence. (Cultural) identity can offer a positive or negative influence. If stakeholders acknowledge one another's identity, it may trend towards positive. However, when stakeholders insist on promoting their own identities while marginalizing others, the resulting trend is a negative one (Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma, 2013). Recognizing others' respective identities can then improve the cross-cultural differences aspect, as all parties may tend to compromise more. Conversely, if those barriers are not removed, differences may offer a very negative effect (Armonienė, 2001). Communication dynamics and intercultural competences are the final two moderating variables that may influence cultural communication and both tend to have positive effects as they increase.
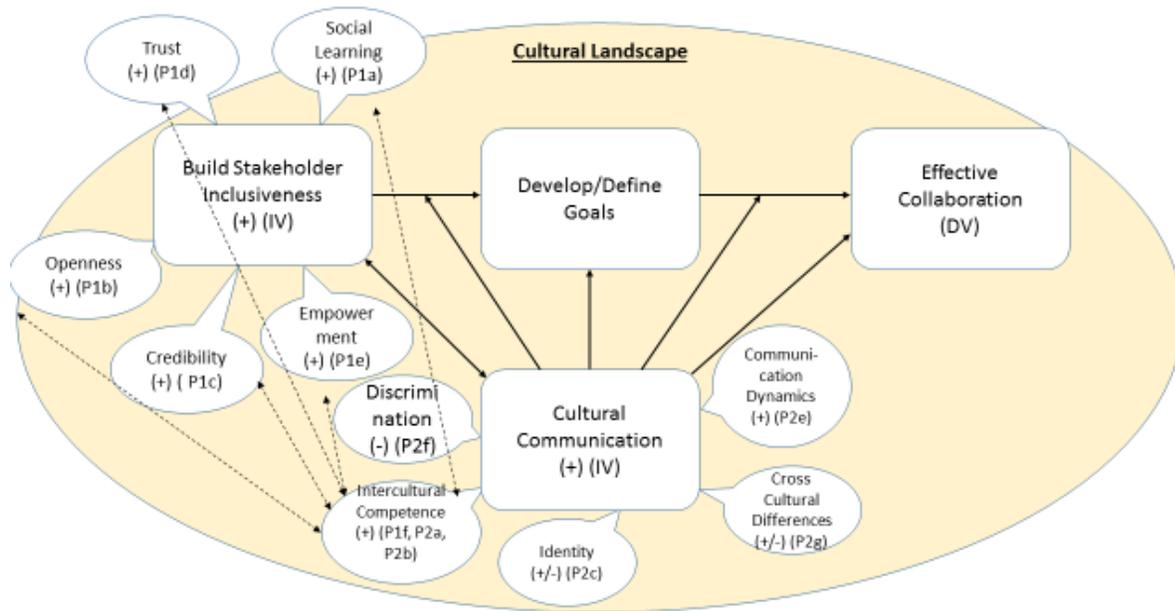
Figure 3. Cultural/Stakeholder Collaboration Effectiveness Framework / Model
(Adopted from concepts discussed in Erdiaw-Kwasie et al. (2015) and Arasaratnam (2015)

DISCUSSION, ADDITIONAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AND RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

To restate, this research develops a Typology of Cultural/Stakeholder Collaboration that challenges and identifies gaps thus far explored in the literature. It explores the path to increasing collaboration through building stakeholder inclusiveness, which then encourages the respective stakeholders to develop mutually acceptable goals, resulting in increased collaboration. However, cultural communication, which is the path to collaboration, is an underdeveloped research area, and its increase in effectiveness of intermediate outcomes (stakeholder inclusiveness – mutual goal development – increased collaboration) offers great opportunities for additional research.

A full abstract will soon be under review and revision internally to further explore this area using the following research questions and propositions described in the model shown in Figure 3, with a primary focus on research question two:

1. What factors increase stakeholder inclusiveness and can help collaboration in a multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural environment?
   P1a. Increased social learning between stakeholders will increase inclusiveness and have a positive effect on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.
   P1b. Openness between stakeholders will increase inclusiveness and have a positive effect on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.
   P1c. Credibility (both demonstrated and acknowledged) between stakeholders will increase inclusiveness and have a positive effect on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.
   P1d. Trust between stakeholders will increase inclusiveness and have a positive effect on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.
   P1e. Stakeholder empowerment will increase inclusiveness and have a positive effect on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.

P1f. Each of the listed factors (increased social learning, openness, credibility, trust, and empowerment), when increased, can result in increased cultural competence for stakeholders, which can increase cultural communication, and have a positive effect on multi-stakeholder, multicultural collaboration.

2. How do factors of cultural communication help or hinder collaboration in a multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural environment?

   P2a. Stakeholder increased cultural competence will have a positive effect on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.

   P2b. Stakeholder increased cultural competence will have a positive effect on stakeholder inclusiveness factors (increased social learning, openness, credibility, trust, and empowerment), which can result in increased stakeholder buy-in, which can have a positive effect on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.

   P2c. Stakeholder recognition of peer stakeholders' identity will have a positive effect on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.

   P2d. Stakeholder(s) insistence on putting their own identity first will have a negative effect on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.

   P2e. Communication dynamics can present either positive or negative effects on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.

   P2f. Stakeholder discrimination can present negative effects on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.

   P2g. Stakeholder cross-cultural differences can present either positive or negative effects on multi-stakeholder, multi-cultural collaboration.

Future research is an opportunity to explore present best practices and offer methods to increase collaboration in multi-cultural/multi-stakeholder environments. As organizations become increasingly global in their operations, the need to understand this area becomes increasingly relevant – especially in improving communication between divergent cultures/stakeholders. The author will review additional literature to further inform gathering of empirical evidence. The author's viewpoint is that this is an organizational unit of measure. The author believes the optimum method to gather additional evidence will be through conducting interviews/interventions, using action research methodology with employees that work in organizations that interact in multi-cultural, multi-stakeholder environments. The interviewees will be from United States Department of Defense organizations that perform Theater Security Cooperation duties that assist partner nations in building capabilities and capacities. This reiterative approach will further clarify how the factors of cultural communication may impact collaboration within the sampled organizations.

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BIOGRAPHY

Doug Straka has worked as a Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) Program Analyst for the U.S. Department of Defense Enterprise for the past six years. Straka has worked closely with nations the U.S. partners with, to develop action plans to increase their abilities to prevent, protect, respond to and mitigate WMDs. Through developing composite teams from U.S. military joint service components and the U.S. government interagency, he has tailored programs that best meet each partner's needs.

Straka previously served 20 years in the Army as a Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear Defense Officer in a variety of operational, institutional and strategic assignments.

Straka earned a Master in Business Administration from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, Florida in 2003. He is currently in the 2018 COHORT of the University of South Florida Doctorate of Business Administration.