An Analysis of the Contracted Service Providers of Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS)

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An Analysis of the Contracted Service Providers of Oklahoma Department of Human Services

(OKDHS)

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the

Department of Public Policy and Administration

West Chester University

West Chester, Pennsylvania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Public Administration

By

Elsie Marie Chocho

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, Engineer Richard Chocho, who constantly inspired me to never give up on this journey, and to my dearest mother, Ms. Truphosa Chocho, who faithfully cared for me physically through a great part of it.
Acknowledgments

I would like to sincerely thank and appreciate my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Angela Kline, for her guidance, support, feedback, and expertise throughout this endeavor. My greatest drive was her unwavering encouragement, patience, and faith in me during this process. To my committee members Dr. Crossney and Dr. Davis, for your exceptional knowledge and addition to the academic field of public administration, and to us practicing professionals as well, thank you so much; your support and guidance remain unrivaled.

Thank you to West Chester University for accepting me into this amazing program and developing a well-accredited doctoral program that fits perfectly well with the goals and objectives of professionals such as me. May you continue creating the space and environment for students to keep learning and positively impacting society.

To Dr. Aimee Franklin and Dr. Seth Gor, my longtime friends, mentors, and biggest academic support systems, thank you for your encouragement and support throughout my academic life.

To my mother and father, my greatest cheerleaders throughout this journey, your unwavering faith in my ability to pursue and complete this dream, forever remained my motivation during this journey. Thank you for all the sacrifices you have made and continue to make for me. To my sisters and brother, thank you for cheering me on. I hope I have made you all proud.

To my friends and family, whose encouragement, support, and push to complete this journey never ceased, even when I doubted myself, thank you!

And more so, and above all, to my Savior, Jesus Christ, my God Almighty, there is none greater than you Jehovah!! You reign above all! Thank you!
Abstract

Collaboration between organizations across all sectors - public, private, nonprofit, for-profit, etc., has evolved into the mechanism by which complex modern societal problems are solved since several government organizations struggle to meet their objections and goals independently without the assistance of other agencies. Contracting out of social services, e.g., child welfare services, has been used as one way for public organizations to formally partner with external sectors, to not only reduce government spending, lower the cost of doing government business, increase efficiency, and provide high-quality goods and services, but to also provide the expertise required in client treatment and service.

However, to always ensure that these overall objectives are being achieved, and that the general good, interest, and value added to the public remain the underlying principle throughout these relational systems and inter-organizational efforts, the performance of these systems must be continuously assessed. To assess the productivity and performance management and outcomes of these systems however requires the development of clear measures, methods, performance indicators, monitoring, evaluation, and appraisal processes by governments, yet the process of evaluating the performance of networks and systems engaged in collaborative governance is not only complex but also seen to be often convoluted by other challenges.

This study, therefore, provides the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) with a clear view of how the collaborative governance regimes (CGR) framework developed by Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) can be utilized to assess its contracted service providers and affirm the value of these existing relationships.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

The continuous shifts and transformation in how public governments are managed and driven to identify more efficient ways to provide public services have steered governments towards creating collaboration and networking channels. Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS), as a public agency is engaged in a complex network system that involves a significant number of stakeholders and partners and thus should always work towards ensuring all collaboration efforts are for the public good. Referencing Agranoff and McGuire (2003), O’Leary et al. (2012) define collaboration as the process through which multiorganizational organizations and cross-boundary networks operate to solve wicked problems—i.e., complex intricate societal problems that are beyond the scope and ability for a single organization to solve. O’Leary et al. (2012) detail four main reasons or justifications why collaboration and efforts toward interorganizational partnerships have increased in public management.

According to O’Leary et al. (2012), these include, first, major public dilemmas requiring public interventions are becoming significantly larger and more complex than one single organization can handle, thus requiring new tactics to address and create solutions for them. Secondly, the push for public agencies to be more effective in public service provision has led them to be innovative in identifying improved ways of doing so, with the overall goal of reducing costs and waste of public funds. Thirdly, the growth and development in information technology and information-sharing avenues created by these platforms have allowed for collaboration to be integrated into public administration and governance. Lastly, the shift towards more community engagement and participation by citizens with their public agencies to find solutions to their own societal problems and be included in the decision-making process has
ledgovernments to pursue new strategies and mechanisms to incorporate this change (O’Leary et al., 2012).

Purpose of Study

The gargantuan size of OKDHS as a public agency, being the largest public agency in Oklahoma, with over 6,000 employees under an umbrella of several programs and departments that subsequently partner and collaborate with a myriad of external stakeholders, including the non-governmental organizations, the juvenile court system, drug and substance abuse treatment providers, foster care agencies, mental health providers and therapists, etc., makes it is easy for the essential principles and standards that govern governmental collaborative systems and governance to be overlooked in the process.

The increasing demand and rise of collaborative governance and systems have been driven by the presence of complex ‘wicked problems’ within public societies as well as the increasing complexity of the environmental contexts themselves that these wicked problems exist and must be solved (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015). OKDHS Child Welfare Service (CWS), along with its contracted service providers and external partners, provides direct services and treatment services to vulnerable families within Oklahoma, and, thus, the enhancement and maximization of positive outcomes and impact of this network system in general on this population remains vital. In a concerted effort to solve the wicked problem of child abuse and neglect within Oklahoma, the CWS employees, primary consumers (i.e., families served), as well as external private and public organizations all benefit from the collaboration.

With the myriad of professional organizations and agencies all varying in their norms and values, doctrines, principles, business models and dynamics, and conceptual, theoretical approaches, the overarching theories and frameworks of collaborative governance within the
public system cannot be ignored. Therefore, the overall effectiveness, responsiveness, and functionality of these cross-boundary collaborative efforts must be continually examined to ensure that they remain aligned with the practice of public policy decision making, with the main objective of increasing public value.

According to Shafritz and Hyde (2012), “more conservative philosophies of less government and less regulation” [led] “to the realignment of public sector and private sector roles through privatization” due to “increased pressure to contract out […] and promote privatization of the public sector” (p. 371). However, whereas bureaucrats are expected to adhere to the oath to uphold, practice, and commit to the public values, ethics, and norms as derived from the US Constitution, this same expectation may not be quite requisite for the private manager, despite an increased shift to the privatization of public goods and services. This therefore begs the question, what values and norms are private organizations contracted to provide public goods and services committed to? The deontological framework of duty and principle (which appears to support public service), contrasts with the teleological approach (which appears to support “utility maximization” i.e., “net benefit over harm”) Lewis, 2014, p. 515), which may be more aligned with the private sector.

Therefore, this research study attempted to analyze service providers contracted out by OKDHS, specifically the CWS Program, and whether the service providers’ overall ethical principles align with those of the public organization. As noted by Moore (2007), “effective collaboration between [OKDHS Child Welfare Services and its service providers] involves balancing interests of multiple stakeholders with divergent theoretical orientations and approaches to practice” (p. 3).
Research Question(s) and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to answer two main research questions: How effective are OKDHS contracted service providers in achieving their goals of providing public services?” and “What philosophical tradition and moral principles underlie and guide the contracted agencies in service provision and do any shared beliefs and values exist between the service providers and OKDHS?. The assumption is that agencies and organizations contracted by public agencies to conduct direct public service provision on behalf of the government will align their overall practices and ethical standards utilized in their decision-making with those of public administration.

Chapter 2 (Literature Review) of this study details various approaches that examine the collaborative relationship between public agencies that contract out their services to private and non-governmental organizations and the specific framework utilized in this study i.e., the Collaborative Governance Regime (CGR) developed by Emerson et al. (2011). Using the qualitative methodology, Chapter 3 (Research Design), specifically details the data collection process completed through in-depth interviews with both OKDHS and its service providers, using semi-structured questionnaires. Utilizing the Collaborative Governance Regime’s general categories, Chapter 4 (Findings), details the responses to the interviews conducted with both OKDHS and its contracted service providers. Finally, Chapter 5 (Discussion and Conclusion), discusses the effectiveness of the relationship between OKDHS and its service providers and how effective OKDHS’ private/contracted service providers are in achieving their goals and objectives of providing a public service to OKDHS clients; finally exploring areas of both strength and weakness, while further suggesting ways to improve on this collaborative relationship.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review analyses literature that has been developed in an effort to therefore assist public organizations such as OKDHS maximize and efficiently manage their network systems and assess the values of their collaborative relationships. As this review of literature indicates, the contracting out or privation of public services by government agencies continues to evolve and be an area of continuous growth and research. However, to ensure the establishment of effective and responsive public programs, advanced and novel strategies and approaches need to be continually developed to build and strengthen these partnerships and bridge problems caused by fuzzy hierarchy and authority boundaries (Kettl, 2015). The common themes and components of interagency relationships and collaborative efforts such as performance monitoring tools and processes, trust and accountability, performance measurements, quality of services, communication levels and styles, political contexts, etc. are all typically highlighted and determined as significant factors impacting these relationships and processes, whether directly and indirectly.

This study borrows from the collaborative governance definition stated by Emerson et al. (2011) as:

the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively actors the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could otherwise not be accomplished. (p. 1)

This definition clearly nuances the significance of the decision-making process and how that component factors in the process of interagency or intergovernmental relationships, which encompass all types and levels of stakeholders, i.e., public and/or private. Notably as well, is the idea that the purpose to be accomplished in this process is public in nature. According to the Ansell and Gash (2008) definition of collaborative governance referenced by the authors
Emerson et al. (2011), this decision-making process is “…formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative…” (p. 544 in original). Thus, for future reference, a review of the decision-making processes and systems that encompass these dimensions would be beneficial to such a study/analysis.

Referencing Ostrom (1990), Emerson et al. (2011) define governance on the other hand, as managing individual and group behavior through commonly agreed norms and rules. This therefore implies that there needs to be a consensus between the governed and governing body of the norms and rules that surround actions and behaviors. To indicate the breadth and depth of the application of collaborative governance across several different streams of theory and research, Emerson et al. (2011) mention different studies that applied collaborative governance to child and family services, including, Berry et al. (2008), Graddy and Chen (2006), Page (2003), and Sowa (2008).

The establishment of several welfare legislation starting with an amendment to the Social Security Act of 1935 saw a significant expansion of contracting out of social services in the late 1960s, leading to further privatization of family welfare services in the 1990s. This review of literature aims to show how these common factors of collaborative governance have continued to influence the relationships between child welfare government agencies as public organizations, and their contracted partners or service providers, and subsequently, the services that these non-profit or private organizations render to their clients per their contracts. The review of literature is structured to basically follow and track the progression of the topic over time, beginning with a brief overview of the inception government efforts to privatize or contract out child welfare services.
Haly (2010) attributes the practice of outsourcing child welfare services to the oil and energy crises of the 1970s, that then led western democracies to adopt neoliberal policies. The financial burden welfare services were placing on modern economies led to developing communities resorting to outsourcing these services due to welfare cutbacks. Referencing Rosenthal (2000), Elder et al. (2012) indicate that public child welfare agencies have contracted out their services to private organizations or contractors since the 1800s, and incrementally done so over time due to increased constraints on public and fiscal resources. According to the authors, the increased costs of child welfare related to new federal mandates, the number of children in state custody, the duration of out-of-home care and the costs related to this care in general, led to the requirement for states by the federal government, to achieve improved permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families, thus leading to more reliance on contracted services for social welfare services. Because state welfare budgets were increasing yet not matching the demands, in the 1990s, national surveys indicated an increase and reliance on privatization of social services to cater for these new restraints in public resources (Elder et al., 2012).

The reinventing government movement, that saw governments begin to generally rely on external private organizations to provide public services and goods, led to the development of collaborative relationships and complex networks outside of the bureaucratic walls of public agencies to solve complex societal problems, referred to as wicked problems. This subsequently led to government officials aiming and searching for ways to be more effective and efficient in not only building and maintaining these relationships, but also the process of quality public service provision. Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) define this collaboration as the process through which public and private stakeholders engage each other to create networks and work together to
solve complex societal problems through generally mutual agreements. The authors underscore the key features of the different perspectives of overall collaborative governance to include the following: the development of norms and trust building, patterns and theories of communication and information sharing, coalition engagements based on commonly shared policy beliefs, the development of trust during the process of consensus building and negotiation processes, and lastly, performance and goal achievement.

In examining specifically, the perceptions of contracted service providers regarding collaboration efforts with government child welfare agencies, Moore (2007) highlights certain environmental and interagency factors that influence, or impact interagency collaborative efforts and relationships, similarly highlighted by Emerson and Nabatchi (2015). These common factors include: the characteristics of the individual actors themselves—i.e., stakeholders; individual leadership traits such as values and norms, perceptions, styles, etc.; case management strategies; communication systems; management approaches; and finally, trust and accountability; which are the same factors highlighted as key features of overall collaborative governance.

While the common overall goal of both public and contracted service providers should remain the best interest of the public and always working towards increasing this value, divergent and different practice approaches influenced by factors such as leadership styles and the leaders’ respective perceptions, as well as organizational interests, may sometimes influence this process. According to Moore (2007), examining the barriers eliminated by these perceptions and case management strategies is beneficial to promoting successful and thriving collaboration efforts between child welfare agencies and their contracted service providers. Moore’s (2007) study concluded that the “key components that influence collaboration include quality leadership, conflict management, cooperation, tending to the communication process to build
trust, developing a common language, and understanding the organizational culture of each agency” (p. 24).

Lambright (2008b) introduces the challenges faced by public administrators in monitoring contracted services providers and ensuring their accountability, through proper use of service monitoring tools and strategies. The author utilizes both the agency and stewardship theories, as approaches that explain accountability in relationships, to explain the motivations that drive contracted service providers to appropriately utilize service monitoring tools in their provision of public services as contracted by their government agencies. According to Lambright (2008b), while agency theory assumes that the maximization of financial self-interests and personal goals, and a reward system measurable by current market values, is what generally drives individuals and organizations, many government-contracted service providers are nonprofits, whose main interests tend to be motivated by their missions and therefore, not their self-interests. Stewardship theory, on the other hand, assumes that individuals and organizations are driven and motivated by the desire to achieve collective goals, as their interests are aligned to each other, and that the rewards are intangible in nature.

Lambright (2008b) notes that the government agencies examined in the study failed to evaluate the outcomes and the quality of the services delivered by their service providers as elements/components of performance measurements, yet service inputs and outputs themselves may not always be indicative measures of desired outcomes. Referencing several authors, Lambright (2008b) states that the capacity for government organizations to monitor their contracted service providers is often lacking and therefore, service monitoring tools are vital accountability systems in any collaborative relationship.

According to the author, appropriate and proper use of the monitoring tools involves
timely, accurate and complete reporting of the information collected by the service provider using these tools, and therefore service providers thus need to be motivated to do so. Some of the noted motivating factors for service providers’ use of service monitoring tools include the following: receipt of future government contract rewards, and the avoidance of penalties; for service improvement and legal compliance purposes; and thirdly, relationship building through conflict and dispute resolution, and establishment of trust and cooperation (Lambright, 2008b).

In another separate study, Lambright (2008a) explored the barriers faced by contracted service providers in their use of service monitoring tools and the implications for contract monitoring and accountability by public agencies, with the aim of offering a deeper understanding to the processes that public organizations apply to obtain information from their contractors. The author utilized the principal-agent theory and explained the barriers caused by the presence of conflict and lack of monitoring capacity and accountability measures. The three main barriers identified in the study include: a motivation barrier (contractor lacks interest in using the monitoring tool); an ability barrier (contractor lacks the ability to use the monitoring tool); and, lastly, an understanding barrier (contractor’s and government’s understanding of what tool to use do not match). However, the author states that both internal and external mechanisms can be used to both ensure accountability and as control measures (Lambright, 2008a).

In their research discussing the potential disadvantages and benefits or values of competitive outsourcing of welfare services to private for-profit and nonprofit organizations, given the significant growth and reproduction of government contracts following the enactment of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996, Riccucci and Meyers (2008) highlight worker attributes as one of the major factors that affect the delivery of quality public services by private organizations. The authors reference different
studies that indicate different performance results for child welfare services that were contracted out and ran by nonprofit agencies. While one study indicated negative overall performance outcomes for families and foster children with outsourced child welfare services, others showed positive results, including overall cost saving and better provision of social services. The authors underscore, however, that comparative analyses should not be conducted across public, nonprofit, and for-profit sectors, as their performance outcomes are all different, and unique to the different sectors.

Neoliberal policies and structures are other factors reported to negatively impact family outcomes for families involved in the child welfare systems (Haly, 2010). The Sociological Post-Modernist School and Neoliberal Chicago School of Economics are two approaches used to illustrate how governments espoused neoliberalism through private contracted services of child welfare service provision contrast (Haly, 2010). While the post-modernist school advocates for governments’ support for welfare services and policies and support for needy families, the Chicago School supports free-market capitalism and policies and privatization to reduce government spending.

Neoliberalism led to shifting public services back to the private sector so as to increase competition and efficiency in service delivery, which meant competing in the tendering process and intentional efforts geared towards positive outcomes, goal achievement and performance optimization among private organizations. Since this also meant that public agencies had to adopt a business-like attitude and compete with the private sector, child welfare agencies, like all other public agencies, had to ensure tight budgets and fiscal restraint through reduced cost of doing business, e.g., by cutting down client services and administrative staff positions. Haly (2010) indicates that the introduction of competition to public welfare did little to improve
service delivery and welfare outcomes to public consumers, concluding that “neoliberalism was profoundly damaging” to public welfare (p. 127).

Thornton and Cave (2010) introduce the role and influence of organizational form and institutional characteristics (i.e., of for-profit and nonprofit organizations) on the provision of public services by the private sector and offer several explanations for their findings that for-profit agencies offer quality services and better outcomes for social services, compared to their nonprofit partners. Rigorous and in-depth monitoring by government agencies of for-profit organizations, along with market competition, appear to have both led for-profit agencies to provide more effective public services along with higher quality outcomes. Intensive state monitoring tools and systems are seen to motivate private agencies, especially for-profit agencies, to effectively place efforts towards quality public service provision (Thornton & Cave, 2010).

Existing competition among agencies, especially within a geographical market is also seen to offer a second plausible explanation for the disparity in the quality of public services rendered between for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Markets with many contracted service providers, and thus higher competition, tend to produce quality outcomes, regardless of the organizational form/characteristics. Lastly is the possibility that the outcomes are not being accurately reported especially in situations where the agencies are self-reporting. Overall collective performance measurements and standards, therefore, remain key in this process.

In looking at performance measurements therefore, and the expected consensus on what those measures should be, it would be paramount for all the stakeholders and partners in the collaborative relationship to collectively agree on them. And this agreement would need to begin at the very onset of the relationship, i.e., during the negotiation and contract drafting stage. This
would subsequently ensure high-quality services are rendered from the onset of the relationship. Generally, performance-based contracting is often seen as a way of encouraging the quality of social services and the promotion of outcomes in child welfare services (Garstka et al., 2012). However, the assumption is that developing shared goals and objectives and the process of how to achieve them, is a complex process. Garstka et al. (2012) underscore the importance of tailoring these contracts to individual relationships, especially given the difference in legislative mandates across states and counties.

Furthermore, considering the overall effect of political environments or contexts surrounding these partnerships, legislative mandates surrounding, and governing child welfare public agencies may not necessarily be the same as legislative mandates governing private organizations providing public services. A mutually shared understanding of the expectations must be developed. Therefore, it appears contracts are a very critical element in this process, and just as Garstka et al. (2012) state referring to research conducted by the National Quality Improvement Center on the Privatization of Child Welfare Services (QIC PCW), contract monitoring strategies, to promote quality services delivery, is vital.

Another crucial element as discussed by Vanderploeg and colleagues (2016) includes standardized training of public agency staff, not only in developing quality performance-based contracts, and overseeing and monitoring them, but also in other organizational systemic areas such as the use of effective reporting tools, the use of effective communication systems, the development of effective leadership mechanisms and organizations, and lastly understanding how to influence contractor motivation and ensure overall organizational buy-in of the shared programmatic goals and objectives.

The leadership systems of any organization will greatly determine the overall success of
collaborative relationships and partnerships. In their study (Willging et al., 2018), list factors such as knowledge of overall policy and organizational ideological trends, characteristics of organizational leadership systems, the specific public-private partnerships, process of procurement and contracting, effective collaboration and cooperation, and lastly support for organizational staff, as those that influenced the manager’s ability to support the child welfare service being researched in the study. The assumption is therefore that these same factors can be transferred to the factors that would influence the support public managers would give any public-private service delivery program. The impact of public managers on the success of these relationships cannot be ignored as they greatly influence and determine the overall direction the partnerships would go.

Emerson et al. (2011) formulate a framework of collaborative governance represented by the following main components, which they label “drivers,” that determine (i.e., drive) the direction and dynamics of such relationships and systemic contexts: leadership, consequential incentives, interdependence, and uncertainty. According to the authors, the collaborative governance regime (CGR; Figure 1) is a system through which cross-boundary collaboration driven by “principles, rules, norms, and decision-making procedures” leads to actors’ actions and overall outcomes and impacts (p. 5). The three broad dynamics of collaborative governance according to the authors include principled engagement (i.e., discovery, definition deliberation, and determination), shared motivation (i.e., mutual trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, and shared commitment) and lastly, capacity for joint action (i.e., procedural, or institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge, and resources (Emerson et al., 2011).
Emerson et al. (2011) offer a framework that includes theory-building variables significant to any collaborative governance system, and explains what factors lead to successful and effective collaboration and governance, and how such systems can potentially adapt or transform a complex wicked societal issue within the system. Generally, as the process of contracting out public services through collaborative governance continues to evolve and expand over time and be a trend that is most likely to be supported by current competitive markets and political environments, many of the major components and elements of collaborative governance and relationships and interagency partnerships have continued to remain constant over time.

Factors of collaborative governance such as performance measurements, accountability, efficiency, quality service delivery and monitoring process, leadership and decision-making, contract development, competitive outsourcing, outcome evaluation, etc. have all remained as
major factors from the onset of research involving this topic. Therefore, a comprehensive
analysis of the OKDHS’ contracted service providers would indeed need to examine these
factors, to assess their effectiveness and successful goal achievement.

This study will specifically assume Emerson et al.’s (2011) 9th proposition, “the impacts
from collaborative action are likely to be closer to those intended and targeted by the regime with
fewer unintended negative consequences if they have been specified in a shared theory of action
developed through collaborative dynamics” (p. 20), and explore whether OKDHS and its
contracted agencies share a common theory of action and how this impacts their overall
outcomes and goal achievement. Assuming that OKDHS’ contracted service providers have
embraced public service as their overall goal, as OKDHS does as a public agency, the study
explored whether shared goals and objectives between the two (i.e., OKDHS and its service
providers), thus exist and if so, whether this contributes or impacts the performance of the
network system.

This study will apply the diagnostic or logic model approach to collaborative governance
drawn up by Emerson et al. (2011) for this case evaluation and attempt to assess the outputs and
outcomes of these relationships and program goals.
Chapter 3: Method

Restatement of the Problem and Research Questions

In seeking to assess the OKDHS’ contracted service providers’ effectiveness in their provision of public services, the research study seeks to answer two main research questions: “How effective are private service providers in achieving the goal of providing a public service?” and “What philosophical traditions and moral principles underlie and guide the contracted agencies in service provision and do any shared beliefs and values exist between the service providers and OKDHS?” The study examined different common themes of collaborative governance that include areas such as the process of performance measurements, accountability, program monitoring, trust, and the challenges faced by agencies or organizations in meeting programmatic goals or objectives.

The overall premise of the study is that since private agencies are contracted by public agencies to provide direct public service on behalf of the government, they will often try to align their overall practice and the ethical standards utilized in their decision-making processes with those of public administration and any diversion from this practice, would negatively impact their overall performance and goal achievement in relation to collaborative governance.

The continued new public administration shift that supports more contracting out and privatization of public goods and services has led to the realignment of the public sector versus private sector roles and philosophies, and a much-needed discourse on the different frameworks that explain and create the foundation of public administration (Shafritz & Hyde, 2014). This has meant continually assessing the different public-private relationships and governance systems that have over time been created to meet different public goals and expectations, such as reduced government public spending and the supporting principles of the teleological...
approach (i.e., “utility maximization”; Lewis, 2014, p. 515).

**Research Design**

The research design of the study involved a qualitative methodology approach with two main purposes; first to examine how effective OKDHS private contracted service providers are in achieving their goals and objectives of providing a public service to OKDHS clients; and secondly, to compare the philosophical traditions and moral principles that guide these contracted agencies in their service provision and examine whether there exists any shared or common beliefs and values between these service providers and the public agency based on their collaborative relationship. While all these agencies combined have formed a network that assists in the provision of public goods and/or services on behalf of OKDHS, the specific aspects of the collaborative relationships and connection are yet to be explored.

Using qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews, the study analyzed what the selected service providers consider as their programmatic goals or objectives and how these organizations monitor and measure performance within their organizations i.e., success and failure, and then compare these with those of OKDHS to determine whether these organizations' strategies and/or approaches align in any way with those of the principal agency (OKDHS). The study also aimed to determine what barriers, if any, hinder the success of these collaborative relationships, and attempt to suggest ways to overcome these.

**Population and Sample**

The data collected during the study was descriptive in nature, collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted individual interviews with both the contracted service providers and child welfare employees. Based on the researcher's professional role within OKDHS, i.e., a CWS that has continually utilized the contracted
providers’ services by referring OKDHS clients, the study utilized the purposive sample method, specifically, the convenience and snowball sampling methods, as the researcher is part of the said network. Hesse-Biber (2017) describes convenience sampling as the selection of informants based on "who is available, has some specialized knowledge of the setting, and ... is willing to serve in that role" (p. 56), and the snowball sampling method as, "sampling from a known network" (p. 57).

The purposive sample included participants who were well informed and knowledgeable in their overall organizational systems, including areas such as the overall goals and processes of their respective organizations, collaborative efforts within their organizations, overall purposes of these relationships, internal systemic and collaborative governance components such as organizational rules and policies, communication channels, policy compliance, leadership factors, etc., as the interview guide questions covered these areas and more. The participants all thus held some level of leadership positions within their respective organizations.

Study Instruments

Both the interview instruments used in the study consisted of four main sections borrowed from the overall major components comprised within the “diagnostic or logic model approach to collaborative governance” as developed by Emerson et al. (2011, p. 7). These included: principled engagement/shared motivation, system context, [system] drivers, and, lastly, outputs and outcomes. The specific questions under each section were then designed to try and capture some of the aspects and/or elements of collaborative governance such as accountability, trust, communication, and performance measurements among others, from the perspectives and/or perceptions of both service providers as well as that of
OKDHS. While the interview guide questions for OKDHS participants (Table 1) generally focused on OKDHS as an organization, the interview guide questions for service providers (Table 2) focused on the specific service providers’ organizations.

**Table 1**

*The Semi-Structured OKDHS Interview Guide*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Principled Engagement /Shared Motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do you and/or OKDHS define collaboration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What is the basis of this definition?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How does OKDHS determine what organizations to collaborate with?</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. How does it determine whether to maintain or terminate that relationship once established?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. How does OKDHS ensure there is a shared commitment and mutual understanding of any shared goals with its contracted service providers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. How does OKDHS determine the legitimacy of its public service providers and ensure this is maintained after contract establishment?</td>
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<tr>
<th>B. System Context</th>
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<tr>
<td>5. What are some of the overall crucial policies and legal arrangements that bind OKDHS service contractors?</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. What forms and levels of communication are utilized between the organizations and how effective would you describe them?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. How accessible are OKDHS’ top-level decision-makers to service providers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. How is trust established and maintained between OKDHS and its service contractors?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. How is conflict may arise from the relationship between OKDHS and any of its contractors resolved?</td>
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<th>C. Drivers</th>
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<tr>
<td>10. How would you say the type of leadership and specific leadership qualities or traits within contractors and OKDHS impact the relationship between both organizations?</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. What, if any, are some incentives offered by OKDHS to its external partners to drive and motivate the desire for collaboration with OKDHS?</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. What are some of the deterrents/barriers?</td>
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<tr>
<th>D. Outputs &amp; Outcomes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. How does OKDHS measure its success or failure in public service provision?</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. How would you describe the process of securing a contract with OKDHS?</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. How does OKDHS enforce public service compliance with its contractors? And address any contract failures/violations?</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. What are the consequences and/or processes involved in any service provider contract violations if any?</td>
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</table>
17. What are some identified areas open to improvement when it comes to collaborative efforts between OKDHS and its contracted service providers?
18. How do you think your relationship with service providers affects OKDHS clients directly or indirectly?

Table 2

The Semi-Structured Contracted Service Providers Interview Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Principled Engagement/Shared Motivation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do you and/or your agency define collaboration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What is the basis of this definition?</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How do you determine what organizations your agency should collaborate with?</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. And determine whether to maintain that relationship once established?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. How do you ensure there is a shared commitment and mutual understanding of the shared goals?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. What would you list as some of the shared goals with OKDHS?</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. What are some of the policies and/or legal arrangements that bind your contract with OKDHS?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. What are the consequences of any contract violations if any?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How would you say political environments or contexts impact contract issuance by/with OKDHS, if at all?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. What forms and levels of communication are utilized within your organization and OKDHS and how effective would you describe them?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. How accessible are OKDHS’ top-level decision-makers to your organization?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Is there feedback received from OKDHS regarding the services issued to their clients per your service provision contract?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. How would you say trust is established and maintained between your organization and OKDHS and are there ways that this trust can be improved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. How is conflict that may arise from this relationship resolved between the two organizations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. How do you determine who to approach to assist with this process?</td>
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<td>11. How would you say the type of leadership and specific leadership qualities and/or traits within your organization and OKDHS impact the relationship between both organizations?</td>
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<td>12. What are some of the incentives and/or motivations for collaboration with OKDHS?</td>
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service provision?
   a. What would you say are some identified areas of improvement, if any? 
15. How do you think your relationship with OKDHS affects your clients directly or indirectly?

**Descriptions of Interview Sections and Questions**

This section includes brief explanations of the different components included in the CGR Framework. In this study, the system stakeholders include OKDHS as the principal agency, and its contracted service providers as the collaborating actors; all interacting to provide public goods and services to their mutual clients.

**Principled Engagement and Shared Motivation**

According to the framework developed by Emerson et al. (2011), Principled Engagement, Shared Motivation and Capacity for Joint Action components all fall under their “Collaborative Dynamics” dimension. These three components constantly interact, and the resulting actions are what represent what is referred to as a collaborative governance regime (CGR) Emerson et al. (2011). These components capture and distinguish between elements such as the shared purpose, values, interests, motivation, commitment, and legitimacy, etc., between different system stakeholders mutually working towards solving societal problems (Emerson et al., 2011).

**System Context**

According to Emerson et al. (2011), both external and internal system dynamics and factors such as political environments and legal contexts, impact both the working relationship of a collaborative governance regime and the actions of these networks and can either create opportunities or create barriers or challenges. The complex layers of collaborative systems can often determine the actions, or lack thereof, of the actors and, thus performance, as well as the
specific roles of each system actor. The authors underscore that according to their framework, these factors impact the collaborative governance system not just at the onset but throughout the duration of the relationship.

_Drivers_

In their collaborative framework, Emerson et al. (2011) particularly distinguish between the specific conditions or variables that impact the cooperation between organizations from “essential drivers without which the impetus for collaboration would not successfully unfold”, which the authors list as including, “leadership, consequential incentives, interdependence, and uncertainty” (p. 9). Drivers generally set in motion the collaborative dynamics mentioned above and determine what direction and form the system actually takes.

_Outputs and Outcomes_

Referencing Huxham et al. (2000), Emerson et al. (2011) define the outputs of collaborative governance as the actions that result from the collaborative processes, stating that “collaborative governance is generally initiated with an instrumental purpose in mind, that is, to propel actions that could not have been attained by any of the organizations acting alone” (p. 340 in original). According to the authors, continuously creating and providing new channels for determined joint collective actions denotes an effective collective governance regime and thus, shared goals and aims must be explicitly expressed. Alternately, Emerson et al. (2011) define outcomes as the impacts of the actions resulting from collaborative governance and these can be both intended and/or unintended and are more “explicit and measurable” when “accountability for collaborative outcomes is deemed important” by the stakeholders/actors (pp. 17-18).
It is important to note that the cyclic nature of collaborative governance relationships and systems as seen in the fact that “the nature and extent of impacts is consistent with desired outcomes targeted by the collaborative partners during the iterative principled engagement process” (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 18)—i.e., actors’ engagement determines outcomes which in turn determine impacts.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

The information gathered from participants included the different aspects of the collaborative processes and the relationships observed between OKDHS and its contracted service providers, and the analysis examined how effective these private organizations are in their provision of the public services. The interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom; with the aim of completing between 20 to 30 interviews of no more than an hour each, all collected through semi-structured interview guides that included both closed and open-ended questions.

A total of 30 participants were contacted via the participation/recruitment email, but only 21 interviews were conducted, which included 10 OKDHS employees and 11 service providers, as the remaining 8 participants failed to respond to the email requesting their participation. The researcher utilized two different semi-structured interview guides respectively, one for the OKDHS participants and the second for service providers participants. A content analysis of the different agencies’ publicly available records was to be examined during the study, if so, deemed necessary, as a supplement for any required information. Further, any required follow-up contact with participants for any feedback purposes was to be conducted via telephone and/or email.

Since the interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom, the same technology was
utilized to record the audio, to further allow for ease of data transcription thereafter. Both the recorded audio and transcribed data were stored through the WCU’s One Drive account using the researcher’s personal password-encrypted laptop/computer to be later destroyed upon completion of the study and/or within a minimum of 3 years per IRB requirements. The researcher transcribed the audio recordings using Zoom as well (or any other applicable approved software) and selected those "passages perceived to be key research issues" (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 308). The appropriate descriptive, categorical, and/or analytical codes were then assigned to the data through grounded theory, for purposes of analysis to assist the researcher in "locate key themes, patterns, ideas, and concepts that may exist within the data" (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 317). The data analysis was to be completed using the selected qualitative/descriptive data analysis computer software tool, Dedoose, offered through the WCU Information Systems and Technology (IST) website, however the researcher opted to simply utilize Excel to group the themes and assigned codes and thereafter analyze the data.

Using the diagnostic or logic model approach to collaborative governance framework developed by Emerson et al. (2011), which details the specific elements and components of collaborative governance, and how these interact to produce desired results/states in such relationships, in analyzing the relationship between OKDHS and its service providers, this research examined what factors have led to this collaboration, its success (or failure), and the effectiveness of these collaborative governance relationships. The overall goal was to hopefully provide valuable information that the participant organizations can both, first, utilize to maintain the status of any existing areas of success, and secondly, work to improve any areas of failure or weakness, while also assisting the organizations better understand the different relational dynamics and how these impact their overall respective performance.
Chapter 4: Findings

This is the results chapter, and it examines a description of the data collected from the study. The study consisted of a total of 21 interviews, which included 10 OKDHS employees and 11 contracted service provider representatives/employees. The interviewees from the contracted service providers/organizations included employees from mental health organizations, foster care agencies, group homes, other public organizations/agencies, etc. The interviewees from OKDHS included employees within CWS specifically, but playing different roles within CWS, including permanency planning, the training unit, medical field, etc. All OKDHS participants in the study held a leadership role, while all contracted service providers were experts in their specific fields.

The systematic structure utilized in processing the data involved the two fundamental subprocesses of the grounded theory approach of qualitative data analysis: unitizing and categorizing (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). In the first step, the researcher developed and isolated information units from the verbatim interview scripts. In the categorizing subprocess, the researcher then organized these information units into CGR’s general categories as developed by Emerson et al. (2011); a process simplified through this study structuring the interview guide questions under the mentioned categories.

The qualitative data analysis process followed the grounded theory procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1998), as referenced by Rudestam and Newton (2015). The researcher referenced by the authors listened to the interview recordings, while reading along with the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts, making necessary changes and edits along the way. The researcher then highlighted crucial words and information passages while making codes on the margins of the hard copies of the interview transcripts that they had printed. However, whereas
the researcher referenced by the authors entered the transcripts and codes into a qualitative computer software program, this study utilized the Excel program to organize and categorize the data into information units under the different categories. This involved refining the data and selecting only key information and excluding redundant information.

The responses were grouped into common themes identified under each of the overall components developed by Emerson et al. (2011), in their logic model of collaborative governance. According to the authors, the principled engagement, shared motivation and capacity dynamics are collaboration dynamics influenced by drivers as they interact with each other within the CGR, which lead to actions whose impacts cycle back into the CGR; with the overall overarching framework all working within a system context.

The data is presented in this study generally in three steps, with the findings presented in a descriptive format. The first phase examines common variables identified from the interview responses gathered from OKDHS employees, the second the responses gathered from contracted service providers employees, and lastly an overall analysis of the data.

**OKDHS Employees Interview Results**

1. **Principled Engagement and Shared Motivation**

   The findings of this section were collected from questions 1 to 4 which asked respondents about their definitions of collaboration, how the principal agency selects external partners to collaborate with, and ensures their legitimacy in public service, as well as some of the shared goals between the OKDHS and its contracted service providers. In defining collaboration, OKDHS employees defined the collaborations as the following: bringing all stakeholders, community partners, service providers, clients, and other government agencies to the table to solve common societal problems, building deeper relationships, working to create synergy, and problem-solving together. Serving children and families to ensure the safety of children in
Oklahoma and strengthen families was a main goal identified between OKDHS and its contracted service providers, which was seen to align with the mission and vision of OKDHS. Recognizing other people’s expertise while respecting and listening to their voices and communicating across the board were noted as being vital to the process. Some direct responses to the definition of collaboration included:

- Collaboration is working with our community partners and trying to achieve a common goal of assisting families.
- Collaboration is bringing all partners, stakeholders, service providers, and the people we serve to the table to talk about our goals and mission.
- Collaboration is a joint effort to make sure we are communicating across the board in whatever capacity we need to communicate, including wants, needs, and concerns; so just making sure we are discussing things across the board.

In determining what organizations OKDHS decides to collaborate with, employees indicated that these included organizations that provide external specialized services such as counseling, substance abuse, domestic violence, and foster care services. Four respondents indicated that the overall measurable outcomes and the ability of the external partners to meet societal or community needs through their services were key. Referrals, recommendations, a good reputation with evidence-based practices, accessibility to clients as well as pre-determined systems, and lists of contracted service providers, were also listed as some of the ways OKDHS employees individually determined who to collaborate with. Interestingly, in this sense, some OKDHS employees viewed themselves as being the key determinant of whom to collaborate with, as they individually selected what service providers to utilize for their clients, from the pre-determined list of contracted service providers. The level of funding and budgeting were other common themes also noted in this section as determinants of organizations OKDHS collaborated with. One interviewee’s response to how OKDHS determined whom to collaborate with was:

- They use services dependent on the needs of the family. For example, substance abuse, we know we need substance abuse providers. And those are the type of
services they would then collaborate with in order to help the family.

- We send out a lot of feelers and then we base it on community response. So we kind of open up and say, hey, who's willing and who has the ability to provide the services, and then we get with them and say, this is what we offer and this is what this is how we would pay for that. And then depending upon what they say, sometimes we've had people that aren't willing to partner with us. And so even though we may think they're a great opportunity, and they're a great option, they may not fit, just based on their inability to partner with us in some areas.

Some of the main factors that OKDHS uses to determine whether to maintain or terminate a collaborative relationship with a service provider included, the level and quality of customer service, accountability of the service provider, ability to continue serving and successfully impacting the intended populations, service providers’ responsiveness to OKDHS, ability to communicate and share information, the ability to maintain their OKDHS service-delivery contract, the impacts, and results of the collaboration, and finally the alignment of service providers’ policies and procedures with those of OKDHS.

OKDHS ensures there is a shared commitment and mutual understanding of the common goals with its service providers through frequent communication, through clearly defined goal-achievement timelines e.g., family reunification timeframe, through the establishment of charters and very structured partnerships, and through direct stakeholder engagement such as regular meetings. The continued legitimacy of the OKDHS contracted service providers is ensured through internal systems and processes such as billing and performance audits, the establishment of performance-based contracts, and their adherence to established federal and state regulations, as well as feedback gathered from the community, employees, and clients.

2. System Context

The findings of this section were collected from questions 5 to 9 which asked respondents about aspects surrounding the internal dynamics of their organizations including policies, legal arrangements binding service providers to their contracts, communication channels utilized to
engage contracted service providers, accessibility of OKDHS leadership to service providers and
two key aspects of collaborative governance, trust, and conflict resolution. The identified crucial
internal and/or external legal arrangements and policies that bind OKDHS contracted service
providers included memoranda of understanding (MOUs), determined forms and levels of
communication and information sharing e.g. the frequency of providing written reports by
service providers, tracking done by advisory panels comprising of community members and the
populations being served, policies surrounding cultural awareness, and most importantly, federal
and state statues and protocols as well as intergovernmental agreements—e.g., specific
parameters of certain programs such as domestic violence classes. One respondent’s answer to
how OKDHS ensures a continued commitment to the shared goals was:

- We do a lot of MOUs. When they enter into a contract with us, we create an
  MOU that says like, what they're doing, what our goal is, what their goal is, what
  they what we expect from them, whether they stick with us. And that's kind of
  what we hold on to and look back through.

Some means utilized in tracking the contracts and/or MOUs to ensure compliance by service
providers included providing OKDHS with monthly reports, and the direct use of laws and
regulations that guide service provision to clients. For example, service providers offering
domestic violence services must abide by requirements set forth by the Oklahoma Attorney
General. OKDHS employees and contracted service providers use of all forms of communication
to engage and interact with each other, including the use of email, telephone, face-to-face
meetings, and virtual platforms such as Zoom. Regularly scheduled face-to-face group and team
meetings, involving stakeholders were the most common and valuable form of communication
favored by OKDHS employees.

As top-level decision-makers and leaders significantly impact the overall culture of an
organization, their accessibility to stakeholders and partners often impacts the ongoing
interactions of all the components of the network system. OKDHS’ upper-level leaders were reported as being accessible to most contracted service providers, when needed, with some departments assigned liaisons who contracted service providers could reach out to as well. Some contracted service providers appeared to have special access to certain levels of leadership and thus received ‘preferential’ access. Overall contact with OKDHS leadership was through email, telephone contact, and during regular meetings.

As trust is a key component in a CGR system, its establishment and subsequent sustenance thereafter was explored. According to OKDHS employees, trust between OKDHS and its contracted service providers is established through the provision of quality service to OKDHS clients, service providers following and abiding by the guidelines of their contracts, transparency by all partners, effective communication, sharing information regularly both formally through written reports, and informally through OKDHS’ points of contact, and finally by the individual partners remaining consistent in their actions. Any conflict that may arise between OKDHS and its contracted service providers during this process is resolved through mediation, fact-finding procedures, communication between both entities, and transparency. Sometimes, however, the conflict is resolved through concession, and in some extreme circumstances, not resolved at all. Some of the responses received to the question about conflict included:

- Depends on the conflict. If it’s with a contractor, it is resolved between the contract monitor and the provider. If it is with a sister agency, it goes back to having a conversation and determining who will be involved in that conversation. Depending on what the conflict is then, this determines who will be involved. But really it always involves coming to the table and talking about it, and being aware of it, then finding a way to resolve it.
3. Drivers

The drivers section included questions 10 to 12 which explored respondents’ perspectives on types of leadership and leadership traits, and some of the incentives and barriers towards collaborating with OKDHS. Leadership qualities and traits are often seen to impact the relationship between a principal agency and its stakeholders, and sometimes even within itself as a public agency. Often with continually shifting leadership structures and leaders, OKDHS’ leaders and their individual personalities can thus influence these collaborative relationships. The most common traits required of OKDHS leadership that impact both internal and external relationships according to the respondents, included, individuals that were seen as authoritative, assertive, focused, goal-driven, transparent and with integrity.

The traits that impacted the external relationships with contracted service providers included leaders with a service-centered mindset, innovative, focused on creating and building partnerships, community-focused, informed, knowledgeable, open-minded, transparent, and those that modeled a business attitude towards OKDHS as a public agency. Some of the main motivating factors as expressed by OKDHS employees that drive contracted service providers to want to collaborate and maintain a collaborative relationship with OKDHS included access to government funding and grants, the possibility of contract renewal, and the mutually shared goal of public service provision, with an overall desire to positively impact the populations served by both OKDHS and its contracted service providers.

Major barriers seen as hindering these collaborative efforts or the desire for contracted service providers to remain in a collaborative relationship with OKDHS include insufficient funding, government bureaucracy (which often slows down processes), negative interactions and experiences with some OKDHS employees, breakdown in communication channels, and lastly,
OKDHS’ ‘territorial nature’ as a major principal public agency. The significantly large population served by OKDHS is also seen as a deterrent to this collaborative system, as not all clients, and their specific needs and array of required services, can be met by the limited number of service providers sometimes present within a community.

4. Outputs and Outcomes

Information on outputs and outcomes was gathered from questions 13 to 18 which looked at OKDHS’s measurements of success and failures, the process of securing contracts with OKDHS and ensuring compliance thereafter, consequences of violations of the same contracts, any areas of improvements per OKDHS employees’ perspectives, and finally, how OKDHS employees perceive that their personal relationships with contracted service providers might impact the populations served if at all. The assumption is that the measurement of any public organization’s success and failure would be aligned with its success or failure in its provision of public service among the population served.

OKDHS employees viewed performance measures as being generally centered around factors such as the overall indices and metrics set by the federal statutes regarding children’s permanency (e.g. permanency timelines including reunification rates, and the length of time in state custody), changes in specific socio-economic and cultural characteristics in the target populations (such as behavioral changes through treatment, rates of ‘recidivism’ leading to the re-involvement of OKDHS, the overall number of cases of child abuse and neglect within the state), and finally, the actual needs of the families served being met by OKDHS.

The specific forms of measurements utilized by OKDHS to determine success or failures in the above areas included quantitative data collected using internally generated tools, through federal and state Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR), through community engagement
and feedback, and through interviews conducted with OKDHS partners. To better understand whether contracted service providers were meeting OKDHS expectations, the study explored whether OKDHS employees were knowledgeable on the rules and regulations governing the contracted service providers through their contracts with OKDHS. Few employees were knowledgeable about the process of securing a contract with OKDHS, with some postulating that it depended on who the individual contracted service providers were personally connected to, within OKDHS, and others stating that it was through a bidding process or through OKDHS placing a public call for proposals. One response indicated:

- The process of securing a contract depends on the rules of what that is. Depends on funding stream requirements, and the division requirements. But most generally, most of everything will go through contracts and purchasing rules and regulations. It will sometimes depend on something we have put out there as a call for proposal. Sometimes agencies will put out what they call a referral for information. And that’s more about just garnering what is out there to get an idea, and not necessarily that they will give you a contract. Sometimes a provider will have a program or service and will contact someone at the state level whether a director or administrator and start a conversation about that. But it still goes back to the funding stream as that determines how you can spend the money.

As public service agencies are tasked with providing public services to the communities they serve, this should thus remain the broad objective of the collaboration. The efficiency and effectiveness of the processes that would therefore lead to the achievement of successful results should be monitored, and any violations and/or lack of compliance with these processes should be addressed. Through contract monitors, OKDHS monitors and enforces compliance with its contracted service providers through regular audits, reviews, feedback from clients, and investigations. The consequences of contract non-compliance or violations by contracted service providers included termination or non-renewal of the contracts, sanctions, and/or legal actions. Mediation to try to resolve the issues beforehand is one channel utilized during this process. Ongoing education, training, and reviews and adjustments to the scope of work performed by all
partners are provided to ensure that contracted service providers remain knowledgeable on the expectations.

Finally, in any network system, there is always room for improvement in performance levels and productivity, as well as the action steps that system actors could undertake to improve the system. According to Emerson and Nabatchi (2015), the units of analysis for measuring performance levels as pertaining to actions/outputs, outcomes, and adaptation in a CGR include efficacy, external legitimacy, and viability respectively; with efficacy referring to “the extent to which outputs are aligned with the CGR’s collective purpose...” (p. 200); external legitimacy to “whether the outcomes have contributed to positive perceptions or the improved status of the CGR among external stakeholders” (p. 200); and finally, viability referring to “the capacity to continue generating outputs, outcomes, and other CGR-related work in light of changing conditions” (p. 201).

Regarding collaborative efforts between OKDHS and its contracted service providers, some of the areas OKDHS could improve on included being more transparent in sharing information and feedback, both internally and externally, creating more open communication channels, and having round tables that include all actors involved in the network system and process, offering more training to its employees, the recruitment of culturally competent contract service providers (with a focus on equity in race and diversity), and finally, developing a human-centered system design given the magnitude and size of OKDHS as an agency and how the size of the agency itself makes collaboration and partnering efforts difficult. All OKDHS employees interviewed reported feeling that their individual personal relationships with OKDHS contracted service providers had a direct impact on the clients or populations served by OKDHS and OKDHS contracted service providers.
**Contracted Service Providers Interview Results**

**1. Principled Engagement and Shared Motivation**

Questions 1 to 3 covered this section and explored contracted service providers’ definition of collaboration, selection of organizations to collaborate with, and the process of determining whether there exists any mutual goals and objectives. The common themes identified in contracted service providers’ definition of collaboration included mutually working as a team, partnering, sharing information and knowledge, and expertise to collectively solve problems, and sharing resources and services to find a common solution to a mutually identified goal; with the basis of these definitions being grounded on community needs and the need to leverage resources including money, staff, and expertise. Service providers recognized that the different moving parts of this network system involve several teams including different CWS specialized teams that play a major role in the process. Two contracted service providers defined collaboration as below:

- It's mutually working for the goal of our client.
- I would feel that our agency would define collaboration as working as a team for the betterment of our clients served. Because I feel like whenever you collaborate, you team up and try to figure out what this client may need, because all our clients need different things. In order to figure that out, we have to do that teamwork; working together to make sure that those services don’t fall through the cracks.

In determining what organizations to collaborate with, contracted service providers opted for partners that can help provide resources to their clients, based on their target population, based on the results of completed needs assessments, community data trends and assessments, long-term relationships developed over time, and finally, as sometimes, through legal mandates. Once established, service providers maintain the collaborative relationship and network system by keeping open lines of communication, being a good partner, through honesty and
transparency, through sharing as much information as possible, and finally, understanding that collaboration is about maintaining and building relationships. Some of the responses reported by contracted service providers included:

The contracted service providers ensure that there is a shared commitment and clear understanding of the shared common goals through regular joint operational group or team meetings, documented and signed MOUs, engagement in community events, using predictive index scores, continued communication and interaction with partners, strategic planning that includes partners, and finally, by collecting data on an organization’s collaborative characteristics.

2. System Context

The findings of this section were collected from questions 4 to 10 and explored some shared goals between the organizations, policies, and arrangements included in contracts, consequences of contract violations, forms of communication utilized and their effectiveness, the process of providing/receiving feedback from OKDHS, as well as trust and conflict as crucial aspects of collaborative governance. Whereas all contracted service providers considered meeting their individualized clients’ needs and providing necessary resources and treatment services or programs to the families they serve, as common goals shared with OKDHS CWS (e.g., therapeutic needs, housing, parenting skills, batterers intervention, family domestic violence, etc.), the focus of all the listed goals surrounded child safety, permanency and the overall well-being of the families being served in general, including family reunification listed specifically, as a federal and state measured objective.

- One of the big goals of the ISP is usually to improve parenting skills. Or address the parents’ childhood trauma, so their trauma doesn't impact their child. That's a big one. Others can be the different groups who have like batterers intervention. You know, so there are lots of different things like the sexual abuse, the SANO
program, sexual abuse non-offender. That's a 12-week program for parents who are not the offending parent, but they need education on boundaries and appropriate sexual expectations and all those things.

- So, with DHS, our goal is that they understand the contract that we signed with them to be a provider, we make sure that they understand that every boy needs to have a CASA or an informal support. And we have both Individual Therapy and then we have Group Play Therapy. And the boys that are needing one on one services for their trauma, we make sure that DHS will give us special funding outside of the contract agreement for that. So we will have available staff and we could pay them, they have to understand the goal. So we make sure that when we're collaborating, they understand their part in it and we understand our part, and that we all stick to the goal of getting the boys out of our home within six months.

Service providers were able to list several internally binding policies, agreements, and/or legal arrangements per their OKDHS contracts, with these including, conducting regular audits (e.g., financial and licensing audits), regularly submitting reports to OKDHS, following state statutes and OKDHS regulations, maintaining and storing of confidential client information, service providers’ attendance and participation in meetings, training, and committees, clear delineations on the level and quality of client engagement and participation in specific programs/services, and finally, specific hiring requirements (e.g., required levels of attained education). Termination of contracts, policy changes, and discontinued funding were identified as the consequences of contract violation by contracted service providers. The most significant impact of political environments and/or contexts on OKDHS contracts was mostly two-fold. Two examples of some responses received regarding legal arrangements included:

- For instance, our parenting program consists of a 12-week session of nurturing parenting skills, a 12-week session of compassion workshop, which is also an Anger Management class, and a minimum of 2 family or Parent-Child observations. We have to do quarterly reports, court reports, and completion reports. And it even goes down to staffing, as I have to hire at least a bachelor's, I can't hire an associate; we have a minimum of a bachelor's.
- Well, for example, that contract says that we will provide childcare, meeting DHS licensing regulations. The contract stipulates the number of children and the ages of the children served.
First, political appointments subsequently impact agency leadership appointments. For example, an elected governor would appoint the agency director of their choice, who then appoints the CWS leadership team, sometimes based on their individual relationships. And since interagency relationships are often impacted or influenced by the overall organizational culture propagated by an organization’s leadership, if the appointed leaders place value on collaborative relationships and network systems, this could be included on their public agency’s agenda and overall goals, with continuous efforts made to ensure that these are enhanced and improved on.

Although public agencies should remain neutral in their interaction with public populations regardless of the clients’ race, tribe, religion, political affiliations, etc., and politics should not affect public service and the populations served by public agencies, contracted service providers indicated that political promises by policymakers sometimes do affect the families served.

Secondly, and of greater significance, on the impact of political environments on contracts, was funding. The allocation of state funds is often determined by the present political leadership and what funding areas are deemed as being of state importance. As OKDHS is a state agency, it relies on government funding and budget allocation, and thus direct budget cuts often impact the services rendered or the level of services the agency can provide to its clients. Thus, the more funding allocated to it, the more services it can render through contracted service providers and vice-versa; the lower the funding, or subsequent budget cuts, the less the number of contracts approved, or amounts available for contracts.

Service providers utilize all forms of communication between their organizations and OKDHS CWS, including telephone calls, face-to-face meetings, emails, and text messaging. Virtual forms such as Zoom, and social media, were also listed; with emails described by most respondents as being highly ineffective but providing more confidentiality and privacy as well as
being traceable. Nevertheless, each listed form had both advantages and disadvantages, with virtual options for example, allowing for more people from different locations to be present at meetings, and face-to-face allowing for a more personal experience. Accessibility to an organization and its leaders however remains an important factor regardless of the form of communication utilized. And top OKDHS leadership was considered not easily accessible, although the contracted service providers were knowledgeable on who OKDHS CWS leadership comprised of, and who within the agency they could contact as needed. A pre-existing personal relationship between OKDHS CWS leadership and a contracted service provider was sometimes considered an added advantage to the provider.

The feedback loop or process and its effectiveness is a necessary component of any network system, and the assumption would be that OKDHS as the principal agency would provide its contracted services providers with feedback, with the expectation or goal that they would utilize this information in decision making and service improvement. The formal methods in place for service providers to receive feedback from OKDHS CWS on their performance included audits, statewide meetings, service provider state ranking systems based on the overall quality of service to customers, regular evaluations, and during the process of accreditations. For those service providers that reported receiving no form of feedback from OKDHS, they alternatively had informal methods of collecting this data internally, for example, through direct client surveys and interviews, and information gathered from lower-level CWS employees and other external partners, such as court representatives and child placement providers (e.g., foster parents). One response to feedback regarding the services rendered indicated:

- So, we do evaluations with stakeholders every six months. We're accredited by a national accreditation and are also audited every three years. And with that, we send out stakeholder evaluations every six months and then compile the data.
From the perspective of contracted service providers, trust between their organizations and OKDHS is established and maintained through consensus on shared common goals, through developed MOUs that guide the agreements, through continued effective communication, continued long-term relationships between the two actors, through consistency in the organization’s actions, and through honoring the contracts. Any conflict that may arise between OKDHS and the contracted service providers is resolved through effective communication as professionals, via determined protocols, and sometimes through OKDHS-assigned points of contact. To effectively do this, however, and navigate the resolution process, contracted service providers either follow the chain of command, address the conflict directly with the specific individuals or source of the conflict, or approach OKDHS-designated leaders, with these conversations being mostly guided by OKDHS rules and policies.

3. Drivers

The drivers section was covered under questions 11 and 12, which examined leadership and leadership traits that impact collaboration, as well as the incentives to collaborate with OKDHS and any perceived barriers towards the process. In evaluating the contracted service providers’ perceptions regarding leadership qualities and traits that impact inter-organizational and collaborative relationships, key qualities listed included, flexibility and open-mindedness, value for collaboration, knowledge of other systems, a unifying leader, openness to feedback, and a sense of responsibility for people.

The incentives encouraging contracted service providers to engage and collaborate with OKDHS included funding, as a financial incentive, and the achievement of positive outcomes and socio-economic impacts of their public service on the populations served. Whereas these encouraged and supported the desire to collaborate, lack or poor communication, lack of
sufficient funding, government bureaucratic red tape, and processes including complex
government structures and systems, a myriad of government policies and procedures, inflexible
government regulations, restricting contracts, and concerns plaguing OKDHS internally such as
high employee turnover, were listed as constraints to collaborative efforts, with an example of a
major barrier to collaboration response being:

- Timing is so big, to get anything done or changed or whatever, that takes 50
  years. And the reason for that, usually is regulation, their inability to be flexible
  quickly, because they have to get things passed through so many different levels,
a lot of red tape.

4. Outputs and Outcomes

This section involved questions 13 to 15 and explored the process of securing contracts
with OKDHS, contracted service providers’ measurements of success and failure, any identified
areas of improvement in this process, and lastly their perceptions of how their relationships with
OKDHS impact the target populations. The process of securing a contract with OKDHS was
viewed by contracted service providers as not only challenging, but also detailed and requires a
great knowledge of OKDHS social services and the agency’s funding criteria and processes.
Contracted services providers listed utilizing the following methods to measure their successes
once contracts were secured and duly established: client engagement during services/treatment,
changes in behaviors by clients’ post-service-provision, rates or recidivism, number of clients
served, and through needs assessments conducted pre- and post-services. An example of a
response from a service provider on the question about their measure of success and failure
indicated:

- Well, the clients really; whether we close a case, and the clients have what they
  need, that's viewed as a victory. And if it helps them achieve a better future, then,
  that that's a victory for us. Or if they even have a glimpse of how to be what we're
  looking for, that is, to be self-sufficient; in a way that, if in the future, they need
  help with whatever, they know how to have that, they know who to reach out to
and, have a general knowledge of how to help themselves, then that is us being successful.

Some identified areas needing improvement according to contracted service providers included clear documentation of past and present family trends, improved communication, and an increase in support and services provided to the populations served. Contracted service providers felt their relationship with OKDHS impacted the populations served both directly and indirectly, through areas such as funding, licensing, as well as clients’ individual perceptions of OKDHS. A positive relationship between contracted service providers and OKDHS—modeled on mutual respect, professionalism and understanding—directly impacts clients’ perceptions of the partners, with a more effective collaborative relationship leading to more families receiving higher positive outcomes, e.g., higher reunification rates.

**An Overall Analysis of the Findings**

Whereas OKDHS employees viewed collaboration generally as more relationship-focused with an overall goal of problem-solving, contracted service providers viewed collaboration as being more a holistic process beyond partnering or teaming up to problem-solve, given their inclusion of terms such as *shared information, knowledge, resources, and expertise* in their exploration of the terminology. This overall definition follows Barbara Gray’s (1985) definition of “the act of collaboration” (p. 912), referenced by Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) as “the pooling of appreciations and/or tangible resources (e.g., information, money, labor) by two or more stakeholders to solve a set of problems which neither can solve individually” (p. 16). This thus implies that contracted service providers understand and perceive collaboration as going beyond just ‘assembling’ or ‘congregating’ stakeholders, but instead, as a process that includes the “multifaceted attitudes, behaviors, and resources of people working together towards this shared goal” (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015, p. 16).
According to Emerson and Nabatchi (2015), Ansell and Gash (2008) define collaborative governance as “a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative…” (p. 544 in original). However, as Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) in their definition further view collaborative governance as actually going beyond the efforts initiated by governments, this study’s data results indicated that OKDHS contracted service providers, likewise, initiate these efforts through their intentional decision-making processes regarding what organizations to collaborate with.

One of the four main ways that Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) distinguish CGRs from other collaborative actions and schemes, is in their distinctness that “CGRs develop intentional institutional and procedural norms and rules that foster collaboration (as opposed to simple ground rules for guiding behavior in short term endeavors)” (p. 19). This is very much observed in the responses contracted service providers provide regarding their decisions on what organizations to, one, collaborate with, and two, whether to maintain these relationships thereafter. Contracted service providers are seen to be relatively selective on who they choose to collaborate with; selecting organizations that serve similar populations, can provide resources to the target population, can maintain long-term relationships, and from community data trends and needs assessments that may support this. This implies, therefore, that their efforts to collaborate span from voluntary participation, where such efforts emerge from self-initiation by the organizations - one of the three formative types of CGR according to Emerson and Nabatchi (2015), which, in turn, influences the way this CGR is formed, its composition and the dynamics of the collaboration.
Based on the contracted service providers’ selection of collaborators through the voluntary nature of these recruitments and thus participation, the nature of this CGR can be determined to be self-initiated. Emerson and Nabatchi (2015) discuss the selection and recruitment of participants in a CGR by the individual stakeholder or members of the collaborative relationship and state that, “who the participants are and whom they represent are central issues in public engagement…[as] getting the right people to the table is important” (p. 32). Therefore, by placing intentional efforts to select participants that align with certain principles (e.g., those with longstanding long-term relationships), intended outcomes (e.g., resource provision to clients), and, finally, the reasons behind continuously maintained relationships, this study can conclude that this network system is cohesive.

In discussing public-private network dynamics and what holds networks together, Agranoff (2007) states that one factor that supports network cohesion is a mutual dependency between the parties, especially one steered by the availability of shared resources (a major reason utilized by contracted service providers in determining whom to collaborate with). As different resources, such as funding and expertise, vary between the system participants—with OKDHS requiring professional expertise to meet the needs of its clients, and selecting collaborating partners based on this need, while on the other hand, contracted service providers require funding—this mutual dependency thus impacts the range of commitment of the two and conceivably builds cohesion and holds the network together. Furthermore, contracted service providers are observed to be familiar with and aware of the shared goals or objectives between them and OKDHS.

For this cohesion to be maintained long-term however, one key aspect of the system that must remain consistent is a shared commitment to the goals of the network system among the
stakeholders i.e., a shared motivation and drive to not only remain within the collaborative system but a desire to further meet both the individual and shared goals set forth by the collaborative system. Emerson et al. (2011) define motivation as a “self-reinforcing cycle consisting of four elements: mutual trust, understanding, internal legitimacy, and commitment” (p. 13). Referencing Huxham and Vangen (2005), the authors state that the process is cyclic; as principled engagement, steers shared motivation (meaning shared motivation is a result of principled engagement), and, at the same time, once instituted, shared motivation strengthens the process of principled engagement.

Contracted service providers ensure, both formally (through obligations such as drafted MOUs, strategic planning actions, holding regular joint meetings, etc.), and informally (through effective communication and assessing the existence of an organization’s collaborative characteristics), that a shared commitment not only exists but that it will be maintained. This helps bolster their motivation to remain in the collaborative system and thus achieve both their individual organizations’ goals as well as the network system’s goals. Emerson and Nabatchi (2011) state that the movement of shared motivation through its “interactive elements of trust, mutual understanding, internal legitimacy, and commitment” (p. 68) occurs at either an interpersonal level between participants—e.g., an OKDHS CWS employee and a contracted service provider employee, or indirectly between the two organizations, where shifting from the interpersonal level to the inter-organizational level is done through communication between the participants representing the two organizations.

Effective communication amongst the stakeholders, partner meetings, index scores, and goal-achievement timelines, etc., are seen as being mutual efforts made between both OKDHS and its contracted service providers to support this. The possession of these shared elements
helps strengthen and sustain the relationship between OKDHS, as the principal, and its contracted service providers as its agents, and thus build trust; a major element of shared motivation according to Emerson et al. (2011). While trust is built and developed over a period of time as stakeholders continue to work together and engage with each other and demonstrate their predictability, reasonableness, and dependability, it, in turn, reduces the costs of doing business, improves the stakes invested in organizational relationships and the overall stability of these relationships, and finally also improves the process of exchanging information and knowledge as well as innovation (Emerson et al., 2011).

Agranoff (2007) discusses the fundamental role trust plays in the establishment and maintenance of networks and according to the author, although trust is an imperative element in the “numerous transactional relationships among agencies and organizations…[it] is not guaranteed by action” (pp. 121-122). Whereas trust can be more difficult to develop in certain circumstances or cases, as the partners exchange information and knowledge, and continue to learn from one another given their individual expertise, competency, and contribution to the network system and common purpose, any pre-existing or pre-determined judgments hindering the development of trust, and the “collective confidence” in the system start to be developed (Agranoff, 2007).

As one of the four elements of capacity for joint action, (along with leadership, resources, and procedural and institutional arrangements), the value of knowledge and the process of sharing and exchanging this knowledge within CGRs is clearly delineated by Emerson and Nabatchi (2011). Citing Saint-Onge and Armstrong (2004) the authors state that the capacity for collaborating organizations to effectively share and transfer high-quality knowledge both within the organizations themselves as well as with organizations determines the degree of their
performance as well as that of the network. The authors state that “knowledge is the currency of collaboration” and must not only be “shared with others but also generated by the participants working together” (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2011, p. 71).

This crucial element of collaborative governance is ensured between OKDHS and its contracted service providers through the requirement for contracted service providers to participate and be involved in stakeholder meetings, formal and informal training, and committee and advisory groups as a part of their established contracts. These not only offer platforms for which both partners can share information and knowledge but also opportunities to brainstorm and generate further knowledge and data that can be effectively utilized by the system to inform decisions and guide action steps. The shared information, different partners’ capacities, as well as the different areas of expertise presented by the collection of human capital around any such roundtables and meeting groups can be maximized and effectively utilized by OKDHS and its partners to try and generate solutions and interventions for the existing wicked problems surrounding child abuse and neglect within the state of Oklahoma. Face-to-face interactions, activities arranged between organizations, and relationship-building, as informal communication channels, are seen as vital modes through which knowledge is shared between the organizations and subsequently, trust is built (McGuire, 2006).

However, to effectively initiate this knowledge and information-sharing process, and efficiently navigate the action steps required to achieve any desired network system’s outcomes and objectives will require the skills of a successful collaborator and/or leader. Successful collaborative governance systems and structures require unique leadership skills, competencies, and traits that work towards fostering elements of organizational collaboration such as trust, inter-organizational management and structures, network performance, organizational and
network legitimacy, hierarchy, and authority. McGuire (2006), identifies four general competencies required by leaders operating within inter-organizational contexts and these include: “building a sustainable relationship, managing through influencing and negotiation, managing complexity and interdependencies and managing roles, accountabilities and motivations” (p. 38). The author discusses “game management and network structuring” as the processes through which these leadership tasks and activities operate within a collaborative network (McGuire, 2006, p. 37).

With leadership identified as the most crucial element of joint capacity (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2011), indeed, the expectation, therefore, was that both OKDHS and its partners are informed and knowledgeable on the unique leadership skills and competencies required by a successful collaborator, and would thus place efforts to recruit leaders possessing the same. Some of the aggregate skillsets compared across studies as complied by O’Leary et al. (2012) include personal individual attributes such as empathy, honesty, patience, trustworthiness, goal-oriented, open-minded, flexibility, etc.; communication skills including listening, understanding, close relationships, etc.; group process skills such as negotiation, mediation, compromise, facilitation, builds trust, effective team participation, etc.; conflict management skills including conflict resolution, welcomes conflict; strategic leadership skills such as creative thinking, roles and accountability management, creates shared vision, stakeholder identification, decision-making, stakeholder management, etc.; sharing skills such as shares resources, fairness, inclusiveness, etc.; and finally, technical or substantive knowledge skills including technical expertise, performance establishment, and monitoring, network coordination, outcome and impact evaluation, data collection and analysis, etc.

Since possessing technical and substantive knowledge is a major skill set required of a
successful collaborator, in-depth knowledge of setting the network goals and objectives, the establishment of performance measurements and monitoring as well as the assessment and evaluation of outcomes and outputs is vital to this process. According to Agranoff (2007), analyzing the success in goal achievement is a method that can be utilized to measure performance in hierarchical organizations but not in networks; as hierarchical organizations are self-governing and the actors in a network may have different objectives. Therefore, the performance of networks should be measured by assessing the value and benefits these relationships add to the public domain by examining the network processes and outcomes. Agranoff (2007) indicates that public value is reduced through any decline in efficiency as a result of institutional, political, and technical constraints.

Examining the barriers of collaboration as expressed by contracted service providers, whereas some of the listed issues were internal constraints that OKDHS CWS could embark on remedying (e.g., lack or poor communication, lack of knowledge of OKDHS systems, high employee turnover, etc.), some were internal or external pressures arising from the bureaucratic nature of the public agency OKDHS is (e.g., number of government statues and policies that govern the actions undertaken by the agency). The shared areas of improvement such as improved record-keeping, better communication, improved engagement and collaboration efforts, updated variables and indicators used to measure performance, increased levels of transparency, better feedback, and training, were all areas that OKDHS as the principal agency should focus on, so as to enhance its collaborative relationship with its service providers.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The overall purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of OKDHS contracted service providers in achieving their goals and objectives in the provision of public services, examining what principles guide their actions during this process, and whether any shared values exist between them and OKDHS as the principal public agency. Emerson and Nabatchi (2011) list the effectiveness of outcomes as one measure of performance that can be utilized to assess the productivity of CGR. Through the CGR framework developed by the authors, the qualitative data collected during this study painted an overall picture of the perceptions held by contracted service providers of this complex network system and their significant role in the public value added by child welfare services.

Discussion of Findings

The transformation of governance and government systems from the traditional bureaucratic models and systems involving hierarchical forms of power and authority as discussed by sociologists like Max Weber, has since led to reforms in the public sector and the reforms in the principles and frameworks that govern the public sector and administration since the 1980s. In assessing the success in goal achievement and performance measurement, Emerson and Nabatchi (2011) emphasize the need for CGRs to conceptualize and measure the outputs, outcomes, and responses to these outcomes. The authors however recognize the complexity of this process given the autonomy of organizations collaborating across boundaries, and thus created a matrix that organizations can utilize to undertake their productivity measurement.

The performance metrics utilized by OKDHS contracted service providers, including the rates at which children involved in the child welfare system attain permanency, the rates of re-involvement with OKDHS CWS, and successful service completion by clients, etc. are some
outcomes and benefits that this collaborative relationship is seen as adding to the overall public value on the populations served. As OKDHS uses federal standards and metrics, as well as socio-economic and cultural changes within its client population, to measure performance, some of the principles that guide the decision-making processes by its contracted service providers in delivering public services align with these same measures as used by OKDHS and can thus be deduced as being sufficient. Kettl (2015) underscores the importance of public organizations setting clearly enough defined goals that third-party partners engaged in these complex independent relationships can also pursue. Given OKDHS contracted service providers’ ability to articulate some of these shared goals, speaks to the success of this objective and thus the providers’ awareness of the goals.

Using effectiveness, i.e., external legitimacy, as a unit of analysis for the productivity of the CGR as defined by Emerson and Nabatchi (2011), the study indicated that contracted service providers made deliberate efforts to collaborate with OKDHS, as well as decisions to remain within the network system thereafter, through ensuring that the requirements and policies outlined in their contracts and legal arrangements with the principal agency are met. This indicates therefore a positive perception of the CGR among these external stakeholders. Emerson and Nabatchi, however, note the difficulty in actually measuring this effectiveness but rebut this with the “straightforward meaning of effectiveness: the extent to which the collaborative outputs produce intended outcomes” (p. 201). And with contracted service providers’ ability to articulate some of the measures put in place to assess the extent that the CGR’s actions produce the intended outcomes, this effectiveness can certainly be measured.

To continuously build positive external perceptions and encourage continued partnerships with existing service providers and drive other organizations to partner with OKDHS in the
delivery of public services, OKDHS will need to continue locating attractive incentives to motivate and direct this attention to them. Kettl (2015) states that these incentives must not be too vast that they create inefficiency, and these partners must also be allowed to operate and play their roles flexibly, with OKDHS still controlling policies and processes. Kettl (2015) states that for governments to do this, while still focusing on the achievement of public interest, they “require enough leverage to maintain [their] sovereignty over [their] partners without exercising so much leverage that it crushes individual liberty” (p. 141).

OKDHS’ focus on public interests and the achievement of publicly driven goals as a public agency, is seen as being achieved, from the list of incentives identified by contracted service providers in the study which included community service, positive public outcomes such as reunification of families and the progression of child welfare cases. These further secured the relationship and thus the CGR. Thus, applying these incentives as a benchmark used by OKDHS contracted service providers to determine their actions, guide their decision-making process, develop their individual goals, as well as, their motivation to remain in the CGR, one can conclude that public service delivery and the overall principles and values that govern public administration and public sector management have been transferred to them, with the overall good of public interest remaining their main objective, just as with OKDHS as a public agency.

**Limitations of the Study**

Some limitations were noted with this research design, that impacted the extent to which the findings could be generalized and applied to other studies; with most of the restricting elements involving the population studied and the research design utilized.

The population and sample used in the study limit the possibility of generalization of the findings. While the study aimed to reach the highest number of participants per the research
design, i.e., 30 participants, the study only sampled 21 participants. Whereas the researcher attempted to increase the sample using method possible, participants’ scheduling availability significantly hindered this goal. This number comprises a negligible percentage of both OKDHS employees, as well as OKDHS, contracted service providers overall within the state. However, the sampled contracted service providers varied across the different services rendered to families served, including foster care, substance abuse treatment, other public organizations, family treatment services, etc. Furthermore, the OKDHS CWS employees sampled also comprised of employees serving different leadership roles within CWS including permanency planning, training, medical, community engagement, etc.

Whereas OKDHS CWS and service providers serve the entire state, the majority of the participants were located within Oklahoma County. Geographical factors such as distance and proximity to each other could directly impact the elements and components of collaboration, especially under the *system context*, such as political influences, the methods and types and communication channels utilized, jurisdictions, socio-economic and environmental factors as identified by Emerson et al. (2011). Just as noted by Moore (2007), “contracts, policies, procedures, and practices vary from county to county,” which just like in this referenced study, affects the extent to which this study can also be generalized (p. 16). These noted limitations however can be sufficiently addressed through more in-depth longitudinal studies.

As a part of the network being studied, the researcher utilized Hesse-Biber’s (2017) snowball sampling method, i.e., "sampling from a known network", to gather the sample (p. 57). This can cause bias in the responses of the participants and thus impact the results of the study. The study attempted to reduce this bias by ensuring anonymity in the collection of the responses,
by assigning each participant non-identifying pseudonyms as well as excluding non-identifying factors such as names of the contracted organizations.

A third limitation involves the design of the interview guides. Some of the interview questions were stacked which caused a lack of clarity in the responses and caused respondents to only answer part of the questions. This possibly created a focus on some elements that individual respondents could have perceived as being more essential to answer than others, thus creating a skew in the data collected. The researcher attempted to overcome this by using follow-up questions during the interview process. The number of questions under each section as well as the specific questions, on the two individual interview guides, also differed which would possibly create a bias based on the quantity of information gathered for each of the sections. However, the researcher drafted these as such due to the study’s focus specifically being on the contracted service providers.

Lastly, the study only utilized the participant’s personal perceptions, knowledge, and reflections of the different components being questioned, and thus leaves room for bias. Referencing Creswell (2003), Moore (2007), states that “all methods have limitations, but bias in any single method could neutralize cancel biases of other methods through triangulating data sources,” and thus the mixed methods approach permits researchers to avoid this (p. 17). Therefore, an in-depth review of agency policy documents and contracts governing some of these collaborative networks and relationships by the researcher, for example, would have assisted in limiting this bias.

Nevertheless, the study focused on the effectiveness of these interagency relationships from both the perspective of the employees of the principal agency, OKDHS CWS, and those of the external partners, contracted service providers, as direct actors in the network; with the
overall aim of suggesting how to improve on these relationships, and subsequently, the public outcomes of the populations served, and so the findings may still apply to any collaborative efforts between OKDHS CWS and all its other contracted service providers across the board.

**Recommendations and Further Research**

According to Emerson and Nabatchi (2015), the collective purpose of CGRs can be grouped into “policy-oriented” CGRs or site-specific, where policy-oriented focus on issues surrounding a specific area or sector, while site-specific focus on issues surrounding a particular location. As interagency collaboration and joint decision-making among partners remain a crucial dimension and significantly impacting component in CWS, further research specifically into which of these two areas of purposes are most impacted by the collaboration efforts. Given the environmental and demographic differences that surround populations, such further research could help public agencies such as OKDHS determine how to tailor their CGRs or inter-organizational collaborative efforts.

Although the methodology utilized in this study encompassed only assessing the perspectives of OKDHS CWS employees as well as those of contracted service providers, further research into the perceptions of the populations actually served and impacted by these relationships would add value to any research study as the information collected from this group would significantly add value to the data and research findings. This coupled with a review of the contract and policy documents guiding the service providers compound further areas of such a research study. More in-depth longitudinal studies that span over longer periods of time, larger geographical areas, as well as more service providers or the population size, than this study specifically covered, would increase not only the data collected but also the generalizability of the results of such a study.
Conclusion

McGuire (2006) states that “the right people for the effort are those who possess the policy-making resources—finances, knowledge, information, expertise, experience, legal authority, and labor—on which the collaborative effort depends in order to attain its goals” (p. 37). Kettl (2015) also concurs that “managing government’s set of indirect tools requires a different collection of people, skills, organizational processes, and control mechanisms” (p. 52). In analyzing and assessing the definition and views on good governance and its features as it relates to government, Rhodes (1996) discusses Osborne and Gaebler’s (1992) ten principles of entrepreneurial governments and clearly notes several components that pertain to service providers including areas such as the promotion of competition among them by entrepreneurial governments, participatory management, and motivating action from the private sector as well to solve problems embedding their communities. And thus, these relationships remain a vital component of public governance moving forward.

As governments and public organizations such as OKDHS continue to expand and develop their inter-organizational relationships and collaborative efforts, with “devolution, rapid technological change, scarce resources, and rising organizational interdependence […] driving increasing levels of collaboration” (Thompson & Perry, 2006, p. 20), monitoring the value and benefits of these relationships and assessing the performance of these network systems, to ensure the creation of more efficient, effective, and action-oriented mechanisms will remain a major role of any government involved in such systems. As governments monitor their partners, the said partners must be willing to self-monitor as well, to ensure their compliance with shared rules so as to build their credibility, commitment, and joint decision-making (Thompson & Perry, 2006).
This study’s findings help provide a glimpse into some of the crucial areas required in such exploration and efforts, as well as some of the principal public administration frameworks already developed that can assist public agencies in successfully navigating this process and thereafter make necessary recommendations toward improving their systems and collaborative efforts and relationships. A transparent awareness of such efforts by OKDHS to its contracted service providers would also add a layer of accountability, notably, another critical component of collaborative governance.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Participation/ Recruitment Email

Dear [Participant Name]

I am a Doctoral Student at West Chester University studying the relationship between Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) and its contracting private organizations in providing clients with quality public goods and services. I am interested in interviewing you for my study because you are a [professional title of interviewee] of OKDHS. My study aims to highlight the successes in these relationships and processes, while also underscoring any areas that may require improvement.

Kindly note that, although I am currently an employee of OKDHS within the Child Welfare Department, this study is not being conducted on behalf of OKDHS or in my capacity as an OKDHS employee. Furthermore, my research efforts will not have any impact on any OKDHS employees and/or service providers. Your participation will include a confidential, semi-structured interview, conducted virtually on Zoom, which should last no more than one hour. The audio will be recorded using the same platform and your responses kept confidential. All data will be stored securely and the collected aggregated data, will not include any participant identifying information.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and access to the completed research study will be available upon request. Should you choose to participate, kindly review and submit your Informed Consent through the below anonymous link.

https://wcupa.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4IXWhIAgUXxEaLs

The West Chester University IRB has approved this project IRB-FY2022-108 on January 10th, 2022. If you have any questions, please email Elsie Chocho, Principal Investigator: ec939671@wcupa.edu or the IRB: irb@wcupa.edu
Thank you in advance for your time and consideration,

Chocho Elsie Marie  
WCU DPA Doctoral Candidate  
512.420.3700, ec939671@wcupa.edu

Dr. Angela Kline  
Dissertation Committee Chair  
610-436-2650, akline@wcupa.edu
Appendix B: Consent Form

Project Title: An Analysis of the Contracted Service Providers of Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS).

Investigator(s): Elsie Chocho; Dr. Angela Kline

Project Overview:

Participation in this research project is voluntary and is being done by Elsie Chocho as part of her Doctoral Dissertation to analyze the effectiveness of Oklahoma Department of Human Services' contracted service providers. Your participation will take about 45 minutes to an hour to complete a semi-structured interview.

The research project is being done by Elsie Chocho as part of her Doctoral Dissertation to analyze the effectiveness of Oklahoma Department of Human Services' contracted service providers. If you would like to take part, West Chester University requires that you agree and sign this consent form.

You may ask Elsie Chocho any questions to help you understand this study. If you don’t want to be a part of this study, it won’t affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind and stop being a part of the study at any time.

1. **What is the purpose of this study?**
   - analyze the effectiveness of Oklahoma Department of Human Services' contracted service providers

2. **If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:**
   - complete a semi-structured interview
   - This study will take 45 minutes to an hour of your time.

3. **Are there any experimental medical treatments?**
   - No

4. **Is there any risk to me?**
   - None.
   - Minimal risks can always occur, although not expected, and should any risks arise, these will be immediately reported to the committee chairperson/advisor and members for immediate review. There will be no identifying information from the interviews so as to avoid any potential victimization of employees by employers.

5. **Is there any benefit to me?**
   - None. The study, however, will present an opportunity for private organizations to reflect on their respective organization's ethical behaviors and decision-making practices, specifically in regard to collaboration in public administration, and how these are in line with OKDHS' as a public agency

6. **How will you protect my privacy?**
   - The session will be recorded.
Interviews will be conducted virtually through Zoom and be recorded using the same medium for purposes of decoding.

Your records will be private. Only Elsie Chocho, Dr. Angela Kline, and the IRB will have access to your name and responses.

Your name will **not** be used in any reports.

Records will be stored:
- Password Protected File/Computer
- Records will be destroyed After manuscript development, but no less than three years

**7. Do I get paid to take part in this study?**
- No

**8. Who do I contact in case of research-related injury?**
- For any questions with this study, contact:
  - **Primary Investigator:** Elsie Chocho at 512-420-3700 or ec939671@wcupa.edu
  - **Faculty Sponsor:** Dr. Angela Kline at 610-436-2650 or akline@wcupa.edu

**9. What will you do with my Identifiable Information/Biospecimens?**
- Not applicable.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

Kindly type Name and Date in the below box:
Appendix C: Informed Consent Email

Dear [Participant Name]

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation research study. As a reminder, your participation will remain voluntary and will not include any participant identifying information.

Kindly sign the submitted Informed Consent indicating your voluntary participation in the study.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration,

Chocho Elsie Marie
WCU DPA Doctoral Candidate
512.420.3700, ec939671@wcupa.edu

Dr. Angela Kline
Dissertation Committee Chair
610-436-2650, akline@wcupa.edu
Appendix D: IRB Approvals

Jan 10, 2022 10:51:59 AM EST

To: Elsie Chocho
Department: Public Policy and Administration.


Dear Elsie Chocho:

Thank you for your submitted application to the WCUPA Institutional Review Board. We have had the opportunity to review your application and have rendered the decision below for An Analysis of the Contracted Service Providers of Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS).

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 3.(i)(A). Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection.

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

If there are any questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to irb@wcupa.edu

Sincerely,

WCUPA Institutional Review Board IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA00014155
January 31, 2022

Dear Ms. Chocho Elsie,

Per 45 CFR 46.110, the DHSIRB has reviewed your application for project #073012022, “An Analysis of the Contracted Services of Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS),” under expedited review.

The determination notice is attached. I am also attaching copies of the materials that we reviewed.

Pursuant to 45 CFR 46.104(d)(2) of the federal regulations, we have determined that your project is properly exempt from review.

Continuing review is not required. However, if any unanticipated problems should arise involving risks to subjects or others, those should be reported to the DHSIRB and/or DHSIRB human protections administrator.

If you have questions about this notification, please contact us at DHS.IRB.Application@okdhs.org.

Thank you!

Bill Bryant
Human Protections Administrator
Innovation Services
Oklahoma Department of Human Services
Work Cell: (405) 613-5685
William.Bryant@okdhs.org

DHS.IRB.Application@okdhs.org