

Modeling and Replicating Effective Collaboration: A Case Study of The Harvard Stem Cell Institute

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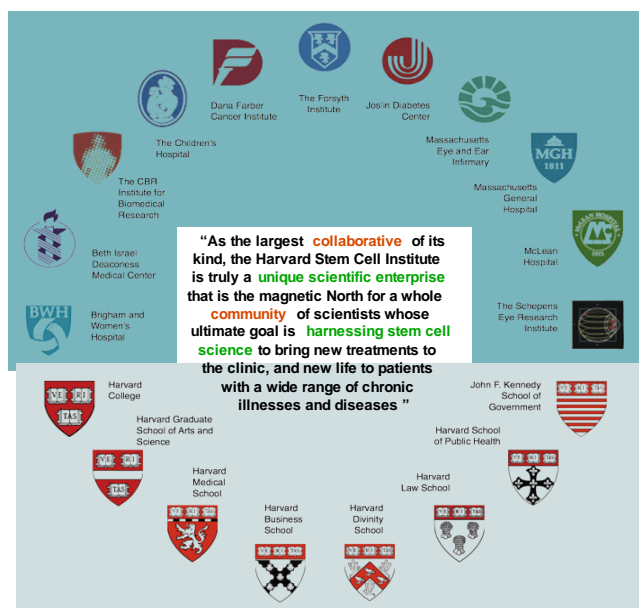
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A Community of Collaborative Networks

The Harvard Stem Cell Institute is a three year old startup that requires linking academic research, clinical practice, and, ultimately commercial investment. HSCI is also creating a new research and development business model – a community of collaborative networks – to take complex technology to market more quickly than traditional business models.

Innovation increasingly occurs within collaborative networks. No one organization has the talent, the resources, or the time for the continuous innovation of its products, processes, and business model that the global marketplace requires. So any one organization is likely engaged in more than one collaborative network at any given time. Each network has a specific purpose and encompasses specific stakeholders from each partnering organization. Each network looks for differing kinds of value and may vary in its importance to individual participants. Collaborative networks overlap and interact dynamically, introducing complexity in the day-to-day work. Complexity reduces productivity and introduces risks – exactly the opposite of what the collaboration was intended to achieve.



HSCI as Choreographer

Every collaborative community needs a choreographer, a person or organization that coordinates community members and ensures that they act in synchrony towards achieving the intended purpose and strategic intent of the collaboration. HSCI (the entity) is the choreographer of this community and has the responsibility of enhancing the productivity and managing the non-scientific risks of a community of collaborative networks. To do so, it must establish and support a conducive environment for effective collaboration that is focused on obtaining desired outcomes. Within each project team (a single collaborative network) the team leader has similar responsibility. Thus, the choreographer's role is intellectually challenging and operationally sophisticated, requiring an understanding that one must give, while never forgetting that which one seeks to get within the specific context of the collaboration. It is the ultimate example of influencing without authority.

Research Methodology

We have documented the experiences and results of effective collaboration among a team of scientific researchers. Research on the team is based on a multi-method, longitudinal design, emphasizing open-ended interviews with members of the selected team, HSCI senior management, and a content analysis of organizational documents, and archival records.

Results and Implications

HSCI's opportunity can be simply stated – improve scientific and commercial results by improving the collaborative ability of the HSCI community. For that to occur, HSCI must develop an organization-wide capacity to collaborate. That is, collaboration must be a core competency of individuals who are supported by processes and systems to make collaboration an organizational capability. More specifically, the paper: 1) Proposes a model that links the key behaviors of collaboration to the metrics HSCI cares about and the implications that has for how the teams carry out their work, 2) Identifies structural or environmental barriers inhibiting collaboration and details means for overcoming them, and 3) Recommends a structured approach to research team formation, launch, and operation that creates a conducive environment for effective team collaboration

To ensure that collaborative networks are an effective means by which to achieve scientific objectives, the ability to successfully manage the networks must be an organizational ability, and not dependent upon individual abilities. For that to occur, research organizations must develop an organization-wide capacity to collaborate. That is, collaboration must be a core competency of individuals who are supported by processes and systems to make collaborative innovation an organizational capability.