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***Emerging changes in attitudes to inter-institutional collaboration: the case of organizations providing social services in communities***

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**Abstract:** *The need to change the government's role and focus more on stakeholders' collaboration when striving to get over economic, social and environmental challenges is highlighted in strategic documents of the most of the EU countries. Also, scholars argue that collaboration between institutions and sectors is a significant when seeking for sustainability of a country. It is evident that improvement of interinstitutional collaboration practice requires a permanent deep look into a situation despite dozens research which have already determined the key factors of collaboration effectiveness. Thus, in our paper, we aim to identify the most important drivers for strengthening interinstitutional collaboration in organizations providing social services. With this aim in mind, we have examined the social service employees' attitudes to interinstitutional collaboration as a means to ensure quality of services and, then, we have identified the key factors that allow forming strong long-term collaboration relationships between institutions providing social services. Our research shows that interinstitutional collaboration gives an opportunity to provide better quality social services, thus contributing to the improvement of social service standards in the state. On the other hand, we have observed that practitioners tend to put lesser emphasis on the importance of leadership while not mentioning joint values and collaboration process control mechanisms at all. Finally, it should be noted that in the case of our research, no interinstitutional collaboration constraints described in literature were emphasized. It seems that successful cases of interinstitutional collaboration have one feature in common – the problems are avoided, and misunderstandings are solved before their escalation.*

**Keywords:** *public government; inter-institutional collaboration; social services*

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## Introduction

Inter-organizational collaboration is necessary due to complexity of goals in the field of public administration. Interaction between organizations enables successfully getting over economic, social and environmental challenges and providing benefits for the community rather than following special interests (Skelcher, Sullivan 2002, Mura et al., 2017). The practice of interinstitutional collaboration is developed through governmental agencies, networking between local communities and non-governmental organizations. Moreover, the principle of collaboration is included into the strategic development documents of the EU countries, i. e., “Lithuania 2030” (2015), „Sustainable Development Goals in the Netherlands” (Lucas et al., 2016), “Poland 2030” (2014) etc. In all these documents the need to change the government role and focus more on collaboration is highlighted as well as better civic participation is promoted. Despite the fact that some of the EU states seem to have developed contours of neo-Weberian administration (Polzer et al., 2016), in part of social service provision, New Public Government paradigm is invoked most of the time (Vedel, 2018).

In the field of scientific research, the topics of partnership, collaboration networks and other forms of interaction between the government, business and the public sector maintain their relevance (Dorado, Giles, Welch, 2009; Provan, Vaesie, Staten, 2005; Gilchrist, 2006; Niesten, 2017; Fodor, Fles’tea, Onija, Curs’eu, 2018; Hang, 2019; Andrei et al., 2016). Researchers argue that collaboration between institutions from different sectors is a significant factor when seeking for sustainability of a country (Leon Bravo et al., 2017; Govindan et al., 2016; Aderibigbe, Nwokolo, Oluwole, 2019; Uvarova, Vitola, 2019; Androniceanu et al., 2019b) and also when it comes to innovations dedicated to solving social issues (Van Tulder et al., 2016; Musteen et al., 2018; Silverman, 2018, Bilan et al., 2017). However, while emphasizing the effectiveness of collaboration strategy, the authors also note that it is not fully clear how to evaluate the quality (Van Tulder et al., 2016; Draskovic et al., 2017) and success (Provan, Milward, 2001) of interinstitutional partnership and collaboration process. After a systematic review of the studies on improving collaboration quality (Androniceanu, 2017), Loes et al. (2008) noticed that such methods such as groups, expert survey and process participant survey allow to best answer the question of what factors are essential in one situation or another. This methodological observation in no way opposes the research which determined the collaboration drivers and characterized essential issues like trust, communication, history of collaboration, supportive leadership etc. (Gray, Wood, 1991; Gray, Stites, 2013; Ciobanu, Androniceanu, 2018). However, improving interinstitutional collaboration in practice requires a permanent deep look into a given situation.

Considering the relevance of this topic, we aim to identify the most important drivers for strengthening interinstitutional collaboration in the organizations providing social services.

The research was based on interorganizational collaboration principles as stated by Gray and Wood (1991), Perrault et al. (2011), Yoon et al. (2017) and on our previous research in the field (Raišienė, Baranauskaitė, 2018; Raišienė, Skulskis, 2018). The main focus of attention is put on such collaboration aspects as complexity of collaboration, significance of collaboration process, stakeholder participation and collaboration's influence on the quality of end product or service. Surveys were chosen to be conducted in social (care) institutions because public service processes are especially dynamic while traditional practice which were very recently considered appropriate cannot ensure the quality of clients' interests and provided services.

The article consists of four parts. The first part of the article concisely presents the aspects of interinstitutional collaboration. The second part discusses the influence of interaction between the specialists providing social services on the quality of services provided by the organization. The third part presents the research methodology while in the fourth part, the attitude of specialists providing social services to the factors of strengthening interinstitutional collaboration is revealed.

## **1. Theoretical background**

### **1.1. Key aspects of inter-organizational collaboration and networking**

Brinkerhoff (2002) states that collaboration is an agreed mean like every other political or economic order, following which both partners widen their opportunities. Inter-organizational collaboration could be treated as a special type of activity when joint activity is carried out by several executors, management subjects, institutions of systems (Puškorius, 2007; Jovovic et al., 2017; Draskovic et al., 2016). It is a form of social interaction between organizations which aims to coordinate joint actions, unify individual effort and develop mutual help, especially human resource interchange. Collaboration strategy works when each participant receives benefits higher than possible risks taken. Synergy is a core attribute of collaboration. The synergy between collaborating organizations creates a competitive advantage because through collaboration, a result which could not be achieved separately is reached (Lee, 2011).

Investigating inter-organizational collaboration success, the criteria that are mentioned most often in the scientific publications are as follows: creating a system of collaboration relationships and processes; clear vision and goals; enabling partners' competences; leadership; information exchange and coordination of communication processes; understanding joint benefits; creation of control system; management of collaboration process; creation of internal requirements (rules); teamwork; coordination of different interests and opinions; mutual trust (Valaitis et

al., 2018; Grossmann, 2012; BahlPuolse, 2014; Perrault et al. 2011; Yoon et al., 2017; Lazányi et al., 2017; Calefato et al., 2018; Kubak et al., 2018; Brinkerhoff 2002).

The researchers also examine problems of collaboration, three of which stand out the most. Firstly, there is a risk of collaboration being ineffective which derives from poor distribution of tasks and responsibilities. If there is no unanimous agreement on the responsibilities of every partner which allows to easily avoid responsibility, the collaboration process begins to stall (Giguere, 2001; Androniceanu, 2019a). Misaligned goals and unequal levels of commitment to the collaboration is the second very significant barrier (Weinstein, Cook, 2011). Finally, when the collaborating actors begin working with activities which do not usually fall under their competences and/or responsibilities or work with new partners, institutions can find it difficult to reach a consensus on joint goals, results and quality (Siekelova et al., 2017).

As can be seen, inter-organizational collaboration is a complex activity requiring knowledge and competences in management and other fields (Haseeb et al., 2019) Collaboration characterizes in both common work organization and specific collaboration peculiarities and obstacles (Vasile, Androniceanu, 2018).

In the age of globalization, it has become common that not only private but also public sector organizations organize the majority of functions and processes through collaboration networks. A network is a form of interaction between subjects which connects individuals, groups and organizations with intertwined goals and enables them to exchange information, thus increasing the effectiveness of each individual's activity (Bonte et al., 2018; Rahman et al., 2019).

Whenever organizations in a network face a necessity to reach for a joint goal and agree to share organizational resources and risks, interaction should evolve to a more mature form – partnership or integrative collaboration. Such collaboration between subjects is not a simple cooperation or efforts to exchange benefits where each actor of an agreement takes on their responsibilities. Integrative collaboration means that an interorganizational or inter-institutional team make joint decisions, solve problems and share tasks, striving for a *super-organizational* goal.

However, in practice it is not easy to unanimously separate the processes of networking and collaboration. Some authors note that modern networking is coordination based on interactivity, reflexiveness and collaboration which is more focused to intertwining and connecting problem solving and functioning rather than leading into and persuading to apply them. However, in the case of public administration when networking is required on all levels of management, institutions are expected to work outside their usual institutional limits or even seek to jointly solve political level problems (OECD, Public Governance Reviews, 2011), which can be difficult to implement under the circumstances of strictly defined functions and inflexible funding. Therefore, traditional management methods remain relevant on any level of inter-institutional interaction maturity in the public sector.

Due to inflexibility of functions and work funding mechanisms, non-governmental and private sector organizations have more favorable conditions to apply the principles of organizational collaboration. Thus, when the state is

providing public services, inclusion of NGOs and private organizations is very important and beneficial (Isett, 2011).

Compared to inter-institutional networks, intersectoral collaboration networks have several specific defining characteristics. Firstly, despite multi-relational dependency and continuous interaction, the network as a whole is autonomous from the perspective of management structure and process management of separate subjects it consists of (Walker, O'Toole, Meier, 2007, p. 739; Poór et al., 2018). Secondly, relationships in networks are based not on the subordination of institutions but negotiations (Kersbergen, Waarden, 2004, p. 149). In addition, properly organized intersectoral network activity forms a joint macroculture which is defined as a system of actions grounded on shared values. Shared values facilitate carrying out joint activity (Robins et al., 2011). It should be sought to transfer the intersectoral collaboration benefits into the practice of inter-institutional collaboration.

### **1.2. Inter-institutional collaboration in a context of the quality of social services**

Social services are one of the main parts of state social protection system. A social service institution is described as a subject providing social services: a company (joint-stock company, limited liability company, individual enterprise), an institution (public institution, budget office), an organization (association, charity of support fund, religious community or center, family) (LR Law on Social Services, 2006). Social service organizations work on a state or municipality level, solving the problems of local communities.

Due to the complexity of provided services, social service sector institutions cannot work separately from other organizations or stakeholders. Social service provision is related to the support from various other institutions, healthcare and education sector organizations in particular. Furthermore, social service institutions cannot be limited to one-sided processes because the consumers and related members of the society play a significant role in determining the necessity of service improvement (Raipa, Petukienė, 2009).

Finally, the work results and service quality of institutions providing social services significantly depend on the attitudes and competences of their leaders (Adomaitienė, Balčiūnienė, 2017). Kouzes and Posner (2003) carried out a research for a decade which tried to evaluate the influence of leaders' professional skills and abilities on the functions carried out by the organization. The research concludes that the leader's ability to collaborate is the most important in order to reach good work results (Pauhofova et al., 2017).

As it may be seen, collaboration principle is among the most important for institutions providing social services. However, it is not easy to implement this principle. Research by Večkienė et al. (2013) shows that institutions providing social services can be characterized by four essential barriers of collaboration:

- Different priorities, models and structures of governmental

institutions which are different to coordinate in order to efficiently collaborate;

- Different organizational culture. Governmental institutions and NGOs organize the provision of social services very differently. Governmental institutions often characterize in the culture of institutionalization, service provision follows specific rules and procedures while NGOs provide services in an informal way with more initiative and flexibility;

- Not sharing the power to make decisions. Interorganizational activity coordinator is not only under the greatest responsibility but also greatest power to make decisions. Collaboration effectiveness drops if coordinator does not include all organizations working together into the decision-making process;

- Specifics of institution work funding. When social support is provided by an interdisciplinary team or a network of institutions, very often a question arises, thanks to which institution the essential result was achieved, who was the owner of the process? More state subsidies are allocated to the institution with the highest input.

Inter-institutional collaboration obstacles in providing social services are also influenced by various problems on the team level. For instance, it could be insufficient inclusion of team members, weak commitment to strive for joint goal, skepticism towards collaboration strategy, lack of communication competences, strictly defined bureaucratic procedures and no possibility to pay for additional work done and so on (Večkienė et. al, 2013, Foster and Hagan, 2015). Due to this reason, it is important to take care of not only institutional collaboration assumptions and organizational conditions but also opportunities of quality interaction between individuals.

## **2. Research methodology**

The research was conducted in two stages.

Firstly, we sought to examine the social service employees' attitudes to inter-institutional collaboration as a mean to ensure quality of services, a questionnaire survey was carried out. The general sample for the survey was Lithuanian social care institutions providing long-term and/or short-term social care services for the elders. In total, there are 180 such organizations in Lithuania. The invitation to participate in the survey was sent to all of them, and 105 organizations agreed to take part. Hence, a sample of our research covers 58 percent of population.

The mean of the population in cases of a considerably large sample is tending to be distributed in accordance with the normal distribution in accordance with the central limit theorem. Consequently, there is a known formula for the confidence interval of the mean of responses:

(1) 
$$\mu = \bar{x} \pm Z \times \sqrt{\left(1 - \frac{n}{N}\right) \times \frac{s}{\sqrt{n}}}$$

where  $n$  is the size of the sample,  $N$  is the size of the population,  $s$  is the estimated value of standard deviation of the population,  $Z$  corresponds to the threshold value of the standard normal distribution. Taking the level of precision  $\alpha=0.05$ , the corresponding  $Z$  is 1.96;  $N$  in our case is 180. As we use the formula (1) for responses expressed percent, the formula for the required size of sample after substitution of the known values becomes as follows:

$$n = \left[ 1 - \frac{105}{180} \right] \cdot \frac{3.84}{e^2} \cdot p(1-p)$$

where  $e$  is the acceptable error expressed in per cent; standard deviation  $s$  is used for the case of the binomial distribution  $s = p(1-p)$ ; probabilities of responses  $p$  are expressed in per cent.

Taking  $e=5\%$  and trying different combinations of probabilities, which are going to be found in responses, we then can calculate required sizes of samples by each probability (Table 1), for the ratio  $n/N=0.58$ .

**Table 1. Calculations of sample by probability of  $e=5\%$**

$P$	$(1-p)$	$N$	$p$	$(1-p)$	$N$
95	5	43	45	55	180
90	10	81	40	60	180
85	15	114	35	65	180
80	20	143	30	70	180
75	25	168	25	75	168
70	30	180	20	80	143
65	35	180	15	85	114
60	40	180	10	90	81
55	45	180	5	95	43
50	50	180			

(Source: the authors' research, 2019)

There were 341 properly filled questionnaires returned. The research participants included 105 institution leaders, 122 social workers, 36 employment specialists and 78 social worker assistants. The research participants and organizations they represent are not named in the article due to confidentiality. The social – demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. The social – demographic characteristics of respondents**

	Institution leaders		Social workers		Employment specialists		Social worker assistants	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Age</b>								
21-30	0	0,0	18	14,8	7	19,4	6	7,7
31-40	35	33,3	37	30,3	18	50,0	12	15,4
41-50	40	38,1	40	32,8	6	16,7	42	53,8
51-60	20	19,0	23	18,9	5	13,9	18	23,1
60 and more	10	9,5	4	3,3	0	0,0	0	0,0
<b>Gender</b>								
Men	15	14,3	6	4,9	0	0,0	0	0,0
Women	90	85,7	116	95,1	36	100,0	78	100,0
<b>Education</b>								
Higher (university)	100	95,2	86	70,5	18	50,0	6	7,7
Higher (non-university)	5	4,8	36	29,5	18	50,0	60	76,9
Other	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	12	15,4
<b>Experience in social service institutions in years</b>								
Up to 1	0	0,0	10	8,2	6	16,7	12	15,4
2-5	60	57,1	40	32,8	18	50,0	54	69,2
6-10	10	9,5	20	16,4	0	0,0	8	10,3
11 and more	35	33,3	52	42,6	12	33,3	4	5,1

(Source: the authors' research, 2019).

The research questionnaire provided statements which the respondents had to evaluate by choosing one of the answers: definitely agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, definitely disagree. In the article, the positive (definitely agree and agree) and negative (disagree and definitely disagree) responses from the respondents are joined together for better visualization and generalization of prevailing situation.

To ensure the internal compatibility of the questionnaire, *Cronbach's Alpha* coefficient was calculated. It was determined that in both subscale cases the coefficient is higher than 0.8. Thus, the questionnaire is proved to be appropriate (Table 3).



**Table 3. The internal compatibility of questionnaire in subscales**

Subscale	Cronbach's Alpha
Inter-institutional partnership	0,928
Stakeholder participation	0,957
Complexity of services	0,946
Improvement of collaboration process	0,924

(Source: the authors' research, 2019)

The results of the research were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Comparison of several independent samples was carried out through single-factor dispersion analysis. In order to determine the significance of differences in the respondents' responses according to their position, Chi-squared criterion was invoked. The differences between answers of respondents from different positions were statistically significant ( $p < 0,05$ ).

The goal of the second stage of the research was to identify the key factors that allow to form strong long-term collaboration relationships between institutions providing social services. With this goal in mind, from 2018-12-10 to 2019-01-11 we initiated a structured interview all of 105 social service institution leaders that participated in the last survey. It was sought to clarify the applied practices and characteristic features of institutions that successfully develop inter-institutional relations. Firstly, a selection of respondents to participate in the second stage of the research was made. Only the leaders who evaluated the inter-institutional collaboration of their organizations as *very successful* were invited. The respondents were selected by being asked to evaluate their experience on a scale of 1 to 4 where 1 means "I evaluate the inter-institutional collaboration of our organization as *unsuccessful*", 2 – "I evaluate the inter-institutional collaboration of our organization as *fairly unsuccessful*", 3 – "I evaluate the inter-institutional collaboration of our organization as *averagely successful*" and 4 – "I evaluate the inter-institutional collaboration of our organization as *very successful*". 72 filled in questionnaires were returned which translates to 75.6 percent rate of return. Interestingly, the vast majority of answers were distributed between answers 3 and 4. Only one respondent chose the second option while not a single respondent stated that the inter-institutional collaboration of the represented organization is unsuccessful.

A total of 20 experts who met our criterion of *very successful* inter-institutional collaboration were invited to participate in the survey. Thus, four open questions were formed and e-mailed to these respondents. The questions asked as follow: 1) What are the most significant assumptions that let your organization to maintain productive reciprocal relationships with other organizations? 2) What specific decisions / practices / characteristics decide the productive inter-institutional collaboration of your organization? 3) What methods and practices do you invoke in solving inter-institutional collaboration problems? 4) What would you advise to organizations that wish to strengthen their inter-institutional collaboration relations with their partners and governmental institutions?

The interview results were generalized and detailed answers were presented in tables.

### 3. Research results

Inter-institutional partnership ensures the continuity of social and person-oriented services and contributes to service-recipients' integration into society

#### 3.1 Results of the survey

Social service providers work in partnership with stakeholders with an aim to implement the organization's mission. The requirement of collaboration is defined by the LR Law on Social Services X-493 (2006). The law states that social service management, appointment and provision is based on the mutual support between the person, family, community, organizations protecting the interests and rights of social groups and municipality and governmental institutions. The survey aimed to analyze whether the organizations represented by the research participants collaborate with other organizations in providing services and whether attention is given to improving the partnership.

Table 4 illustrates the distribution of respondents' answers on a subscale "Inter-institutional partnership". Based on the answers of the respondents it can be seen that the studied social care institutions usually work in collaboration with other institutions while also developing inter-institutional partnership. This result of the survey is important in evaluating the quality of services as partnership and collaboration open the opportunities to share good experience in turn improving work results and service quality.

**Table 4. Answers to the statements of "Inter-institutional partnership" in percent**

Statement	Answer distribution, %			$\chi^2$ *	p
	No opinion	Disagree	Agree		
Among the collaborating organizations we discuss how to improve interinstitutional partnership	10,0	6,5	83,5	76,495	0,000
The institution I represent is always maintaining mutual relations with various organizations to provide social services	9,1	6,2	84,7	58,832	0,000

Statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) differences are highlighted,  $\chi^2$  \*- Chi squared, p – statistical significance of the criterion.  
(Source: the authors' research, 2019)

Further, the results that reflect the specifics of participation in inter-institutional collaboration process.

The goal of social service implementation is the social service provider's support to the service recipient in order to solve particular social problems. LR Law on Social Services (2006) emphasizes the principle of collaboration. Therefore, invoking the subscale "Stakeholder participation" of the questionnaire, characteristics specific to inter-institutional network participants' inclusion and involvement were analyzed.

The distribution of respondents' answers (Table 5) shows that the respondents least agreed with the statement "Service recipients are introduced to the opportunities of involvement into decision making" (88.3 percent) even though social care institution workers themselves have quite good knowledge on the system of enabling service recipients. As Motiečienė (2012) states, professionals working in social service provision must base their work on enablement paradigm, which in turn allows to achieve one of the essential principles of social service organization and provision – social justice. Therefore, the *stakeholder enablement is a very important factor of strengthening inter-institutional collaboration*, which, as the research shows is not used to its fullest.

**Table 5. Distribution of answers to the statements of subscale "Stakeholder participation" in percent**

Statements	Answer distribution, %			$\chi^2$ *	p
	No opinion	Disagree	Agree		
I am familiar with the procedures of stakeholder inclusion into service planning and evaluation.	1,8	6,5	91,7	74,97	0,000
Generally, all stakeholder groups are included into service planning and evaluation.	0,0	9,4	90,6	53,98	0,000
It is mandatory to consider the service recipients' opinion in order to improve the service quality.	0,0	0,0	100	1,99	0,574
I am familiar with the system of service recipient enablement.	4,1	3,2	92,7	43,3	0,000
The service recipients are introduced to opportunities of involvement into decision making.	2,3	9,4	88,3	26,08	0,002
Methods which allow to enable stakeholder' participation in service provision and improvement decisions are actually used.	1,8	3,5	94,7	46,38	0,000
Both service recipients and providers possess sufficient possibilities to participate in decision making for service improvement.	2,9	3,5	93,6	32,91	0,000

\* Chi-squared criterion, p – statistical significance of the criterion.

(Source: the authors' research, 2019)

In order to ensure the quality of services, service provider must control the service provision process. Service recipients must be able to access the continuity of services based on a holistic and societal approach. Taking the principle of complexity into consideration is also recommended in the LR Law on Social Services (2006) which states that social service provision for a person is coordinated with social service provision for the person's family. This means that the institution providing services recreates, maintains and strengthens relationships with the client relatives and family.

To examine the nature of complexity of services provided by social care homes, statements under the "Complexity of services" subscale were created. The distribution of respondents' answers is presented in Table 6. The analysis of the results shows that social care institutions regularly review the necessity of the most important services (100 percent of respondents agreed with this statement). 98.6 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement "Implementing the mission of the institution is facilitated by partners support in providing social care services". 83.3 percent of the respondents believe that their institution provides services on a societal level. The results of the research show that services should be developed more in the environment of the community.

**Table 6. Distribution of answers to the statements of subscale "Complexity of services" in percent**

Statements	Answer distribution, %			$\chi^2$ *	P
	No option	Disagree	Agree		
Partner inclusion allows to ensure the continuity of provided services.	1,8	1,8	96,5	27,83	0,001
The institution regularly reviews the necessity of the most important services.	0,0	0,0	100	7,35	0,062
Implementing the mission of the institution is facilitated by partners support in providing social care services.	1,5	0,0	98,6	19,22	0,004
The institution provides services on a societal level.	7,9	8,8	83,3	67,37	0,000
The leadership of the institution coordinates the organization of services in an inter-institutional structure.	1,8	0,6	97,6	34,09	0,000
I am familiar with multi-disciplinary approach to service provision through good practice of inter-institutional collaboration.	5,0	3,2	91,8	16,17	0,063
A team of colleagues representing various professions and institutions allows to ensure the quality of services.	0,0	2,6	97,4	22,83	0,001

\* „Chi-squared” criterion, *p* – statistical significance of the criterion.  
(Source: the authors' research, 2019)

Finally, the survey examined the improvement of inter-institutional work organization.

The respondents' answers to the statements under the "Improvement of collaboration process" showed that social care institution workers positively evaluated all aspects provided for evaluation: importance of stakeholder expectations for joint goal (97 percent of respondents agreed with the statement "When organizing inter-institutional collaboration, it is important to consider the stakeholder expectations when striving for joint goal"), attention to stakeholders expectations (96.5 percent agreed with the statement "Institution in which I work gives constant attention to stakeholder expectations related to service provision process") and effort to more effectively organize collaboration (97.7 percent of the respondents agreed with the statement "During meetings we and partners discuss the possibilities of improving the effectiveness of joint work"). (Table 7).

**Table 7. Distribution of answers to the statements of subscale "Improvement of collaboration process" in percent**

Statements	Answer distribution, %			$\chi^2$ *	p
	No option	Disagree	Agree		
When organizing inter-institutional collaboration, it is important to consider the stakeholder expectations when striving for joint goal.	1,8	1,2	97	18,41	0,031
Institution in which I work gives constant attention to stakeholder expectations related to service provision process.	2,3	1,2	96,5	54,996	0,000
During meetings we and partners discuss the possibilities of improving the effectiveness of joint work.	0,6	1,8	97,7	75,54	0,000

\* „Chi-squared” criterion, p – statistical significance of the criterion.  
(Source: the authors' research, 2019)

The majority of the respondents agreed to all statements which shows that join goals and coordinated process of joint work are key factors of strengthening inter-institutional collaboration.

### **3.2 Results of expert interviews**

The first question asked the respondents about the most significant assumptions that allow their organization to maintain long-term productive reciprocal relations with other organizations. Between the most mentioned, legal and institutional collaboration assumptions were mentioned. In addition, the respondents mentioned general problem solving, creation of joint experience, sharing experience and knowledge, effective leader communication. The respondents also emphasized

that in order to maintain long-term collaboration, it is important that all partners have the interest, see benefit and have high motivation to reach for organizational goals which in itself cannot be reached without the help and involvement of other organizations. The detailed results are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8. Assumptions of inter-institutional collaboration**

No.	Category	Sub-category	N	Transcribed phrases
1.	Legal assumptions	Legal acts regulating public service provision, municipality level decisions and other legal documents.	8	„[...] municipality board provisions that create conditions to seek good inter-institutional partnership results.“ (Resp.2); „[Legal] documents regulate which institutions the foster home should collaborate with.“ (Resp.5); „[...] we collaborate with hospital, clinics, social support department, municipality.“ (Resp. 6); „We follow all Lithuanian Republic laws, have our lawyer“. ( Resp,7); „[...] legal assumptions“ (Resp.8); „We follow Lithuanian Republic social security and work minister’s [...] order [...], family support provisions“ (Resp.12); „[...] knowledge and understanding of legal base has influence too“ (Resp.17); „Legal [assumptions].“ (Resp.19).
2.	Institutional assumptions	Inter-institutional and interorganizational collaboration agreements, formalized inter-institutional relations.	7	„Collaboration agreements are made with other institutions – non-governmental organizations, culture, education and other institutions, agreeing to jointly participate in project activities, attracting funding [...]“, (Resp.5); „[...] partners help in satisfying citizen’s needs“ (Resp.6); „Institutional assumptions.“ (Resp.8); „We have signed collaboration agreements. We plan activities.“ (Resp.10); „[...] provisions and work process description were made anew [...] in order to reach more effective work organization“ (Resp.12); „We have signed several collaboration agreements, thus committing to each other and we try to follow our commitments.“ (Resp.14); „A collaboration agreement is made “ (Resp.19).
3.	Organizational assumptions	Well understood inter-institutional collaboration interest	2	„One of the main assumptions is the mutual benefit seeking for results“ (Resp. 4); „The collaboration is most successful when partners understand and help in satisfying citizens’ interests“ (Resp.6).
		High employee motivation to seek for organizational mission and goals	4	„[...] Collaboration [...] is very close due to low age of our citizens. We participate in collaboration for the young mothers that live at us“ (Resp.9) „Motivation, goodwill and search for innovations are important“ (Resp.10); „[...] openness, wish and informal employee attitude to activity, relations and person“

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No.	Category	Sub-category	N	Transcribed phrases
				(Resp.11); „we are committed to each other“ (Resp. 14).
4.	Characteristics of inter-organizational interaction	Effective leader communication	3	„Good inter-institutional partnership and collaboration results are reached due to productive institution leader communication.“ (Resp. 1); „[...] benevolent relations, personal connections“ (Resp.3); „Direct communication with leaders of other institutions“ (Resp.15).
		Joint problem solving	4	„[...] joint problem solving“ (Resp. 1); „Collaboration is most successful when all partners understand and assist“ (Resp.6); „United we can do more“ (Resp.7); „Good inter-institutional partnership and collaboration results are reached due to ability to communicate, solve problems here and now, discussion“ (Resp.17).
5.	Applied practices	Creating joint experience through activities	4	„[...] participation in events“ (Resp. 1); „[...] participation in socio-cultural, educational and other activities“ (Resp.5); „We participate in events. Participate at each other events“ (Resp.10); „[...] when we know each other, sincere communication with colleagues from other organizations [is formed]“ (Resp.18).
		Sharing experience and knowledge	4	„[...] sharing experience, knowledge“ (Resp. 1); „We participate [...] in order to raise employee qualification“ (Resp.10); „Sharing good work experience.“ (Resp.19); „Good communication“ (Resp.20).

(Source: the authors' research, 2019).

The second question sought to find out what decisions, practices and characteristics decide the productive inter-institutional collaboration of organizations represented by the respondents. As much as 16 out of 20 interview participants mentioned the importance of the organization itself in inter-institutional collaboration. The respondents stated that their organization characterizes in initiative and goodwill in relations with partners. Respondents emphasized the importance of all partners understanding goal and unambiguously formed agreements. In addition, features like trust atmosphere and strengthening employee involvement and commitment were mentioned as important for relations (Table 9).

**Table 9. Practices and features deciding productive interinstitutional collaboration.**

No.	Category	Sub-category	N	Transcribed phrases
1.	Active and positive attitude towards inter-institutional collaboration	Initiative in relations with partners	1 2	„The organization’s productiveness depends on the organization itself. Various meetings and other activities with inter-institutional partners are organized [by the organization]“ (Resp.1); „[...] information on relevant questions is updated“ (Resp.2); „organized and active employee, full of ideas“ (Resp. 4); „Depends on their own initiative“ (Resp.6); „Ability to offer collaboration aspects relevant to every organization or institution“ (Resp.7); „Innovations and search for them is important“ (Resp.10); „Leaders that are able to stand for their field“ (Resp.9); „Managers showed initiative to meet with education institutions, informal education organizations, foster homes, education assistance services, medical institutions, municipality administration and to discuss their activity and collaboration opportunities“ (Resp.12); „Firstly, the willingness, effort and initiative of the organization itself allow to expect a successful and productive collaboration“ (Resp.14); „Depends on the necessity. Some institutions find us while we search for others ourselves.“ (Resp.16); „Constant collaboration of colleagues [...] Thus creating an unbreakable bond.“ (Resp.17); „Institution organizes various events and invites representatives from other organizations so that they can get to know our activities.“ (Resp.18).
		Goodwill towards partners	4	„[...] benevolent communication“ (Resp.2); „[...] benevolence, wish to do more [...]“ (Resp.3); „Openness, creativity, personal relations and new connections“ (Resp.11); „Human resources, employee professionalism, knowing the necessary information, benevolence“ (Resp.15)
2.	Management aspects	Joint understand of the goal by all partners	3	„Seeking a joint goal, benevolence, wish to do more, to provide higher quality services.“ (Resp.3); „Join goal allows to ensure close collaboration, [...], willingness“ (Resp.4); „Setting joint goals, moving in the same direction“ (Resp.13).
		Agreements formed in detail	4	„Precisely and clearly formed collaboration agreements, forms of support“ (Resp.7); „Commitments of all sides are discussed“ (Resp.8); „Objective communication“ (Resp.9); „Follows ratified provisions, rules, descriptions which allow to ensure organizational and institutional collaboration“ (Resp.12)



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No.	Category	Sub-category	N	Transcribed phrases
3.	Inter-institutional interaction culture	Trust atmosphere	3	„Create celebrations that become traditions, commemorating calendar celebrations“ (Resp.5); „Openness“ (Resp.7); „Why we collaborate successfully? Firstly, due to the feeling of unity and common human characteristics [...] existence of good atmosphere“ (Resp. 9);
		Strengthening employee involvement and commitment	5	„[...] depends on the employees' attitude“ (Resp.6); „Consensus between employees, interpersonal relations, commitment, involvement into collaboration processes, sharing good experience.“ (Resp.5); „Employees usually do more than they are supposed to [for their position]“ (Resp.9); „Employee motivation and initiative is important when activity is not constrained to the inside of the organization“ (Resp.10); „Human resources, employee professionalism, knowing the necessary information, benevolence“ (Resp.15).

(Source: the authors' research, 2019)

The third question of the interview asked the interview participants to share the methods and practices their institution invokes to solve collaboration problems. It is important to emphasize that as much as 8 out of 20 respondents stated that they do not run into collaboration problems while the majority of other respondents claimed that they can only remember small misunderstandings. The interview showed that more difficulties occur when collaborating with medical institutions as due to imperfections in legal base, information exchange process between social service and medical institutions is constrained. In these cases, procedural measures have to be invoked which delay problem solving but allows to find a decision that satisfies all partners. Speaking of managing difficult situations where relationship temperature has to be regulated, respondents mentioned reciprocal understanding, benevolence, effective communication and strengthening trust via joint activities.

Finally, the interviewed were asked to provide recommendations for other social service institutions that wish to strengthen their inter-institutional collaboration with partners. More than half of the questioned leaders of social service institutions emphasized the importance of communication. According to the respondents, informal communication, openness in relations, attention to and respect for partners, mutual understanding and tolerance to mistakes are of extreme importance. The answers also mentioned the necessity for all of the collaborating sides to have a unified understanding of joint goal, what problems are being solved by joint effort and what opportunities are created by collaboration. Moreover, in order for collaboration to be fruitful, clarity and strict definitions of inter-institutional relations is important in order to stimulate mutual commitment. Finally, the respondents drew attention to the fact that management support is essential for inter-institutional relations as well as experience of joint activity and problem solving and the employee communication culture and work motivation of the partnering

organizations. The answers make it obvious that the respondents recommend practices that they apply themselves.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The necessity of inter-institutional collaboration is highlighted by many researchers and public sector experts. Despite the current governmental reforms which are focused on centralization of management functions and the implementation of the neo-liberal model, the New Public Governance principles such as the involvement and networking remain important in the field of social services.

Collaboration between public, non-governmental and private organizations and well-coordinated inter-institutional activities gives an opportunity to provide better quality social services, which contributes to the improvement of social service standards in the state.

In Lithuania, the manifestations of inter-institutional partnership in the public sector are also evident. On the other hand, collaborative networking needs improvement. The further development of the collaborative network and the quality of services depend to modern-trained professionals who could be capable to maintain and coordinate partnerships between social service institutions, NGOs, citizens' communities and private business organizations. Inter-sectorial partnerships ensure the quality of performance of organizations providing social services as well as open opportunities for sharing good practices. It is also revealed that stakeholder involvement strengthens inter-institutional collaboration, however it is not fully exploited providing community-based services in the case. Improving the process, as well as defining common goals are key factors in strengthening inter-institutional collaboration.

On the other hand, our research on the essential factors allowing to form strong and long-term inter-institutional collaboration relations between social service institutions shown that the good practice of inter-institutional collaboration features the characteristics named in the literature, such as reciprocal interest of the partners, precisely formed and officially defined goals of interaction, sufficient and effective communication, initiative of interaction participants, benevolence, mutual trust and motivation, joint and positive collaboration experience etc. The comparison of interorganizational interaction theory and factors mentioned by social service institution leaders allows making an observation that practitioners tend to put lesser emphasis on the importance of leadership while not mentioning joint values and collaboration process control mechanisms at all. On the other hand, the respondents mention partners' initiative, motivation, involvement and commitment, creation of joint experience, management support and importance of managerial decisions. This compensates the unmentioned factors and allows to implement all functions of inter-institutional collaboration management.

Finally, it should be noted that in the case of our research, no inter-institutional collaboration constraints or problems described in literature were

emphasized. It seems that successful cases of inter-institutional collaboration have one feature in common – the problems are avoided, and misunderstandings are solved before their escalation.

The practical implications. The research demonstrates which activity and decision fields should be given higher attention by social sector organizations which require the involvement or support of other institutions and organizations in order to accomplish their mission. It is extremely important to emphasize that the essential aspects of productive inter-institutional collaboration increase the value of well-defined goal, structured but open relations and active relation creation with partners. In addition, these aspects do not discuss the constraints of collaboration, assuming that they occur when the abovementioned matters and practices are not efficiently applied. However, legal and institutional assumptions of inter-institutional collaboration cannot be devaluated. Therefore, it would be purposeful to investigate what ratio of external and objective (legal and institutional) and organizational and subjective (managerial and informal) means leads to the best results of inter-institutional collaboration.

#### **Authors Contributions**

The authors listed have made a substantial, direct and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

#### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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