

# Multidisciplinary Working Models to Promote Collaborative Leadership in the Healthcare and Social Care Sectors

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**Abstract:** *Effective leadership in contemporary settings often demands collaboration across diverse disciplines. This systematic term paper explores various multidisciplinary working models aimed at promoting collaborative leadership within organizations. This term paper was geared towards examining multidisciplinary working model, in order to know whether it promotes collaborative leadership in organizations. Contextually, the paper drew examples from the health and social care sectors. By synthesising findings from a range of scholarly sources, this term paper elucidates the principles, structures, and strategies underpinning successful collaborative leadership initiatives in organisational practices. Additionally, the term paper highlights emerging trends, challenges, barriers, and opportunities in implementing multidisciplinary working models and comes up with diametrical findings: though a multidisciplinary approach maintains its effectiveness in the organizational working process, there exist other models, such as inter - professional and interdisciplinary models, which have proven to be more beneficial and effective, especially in the social care and health care sectors.*

**Keywords:** Collaborative Leadership, Multidisciplinary Models, Organizational Practices, Health Care, Social Care

## 1. Introduction

In today's complex and interconnected world, addressing multifaceted challenges requires collaborative efforts across disciplines and sectors. Collaborative leadership, which emphasizes collective problem - solving, shared decision - making, and mutual accountability, has emerged as a key approach to navigating the complexities of modern society, especially the complexities in organizational practices (Samur, 2022).

Ibarra & Hansen (2011) opined that at the heart of effective collaborative leadership lies the integration of diverse perspectives, expertise, and experiences through multidisciplinary working models.

This research delve into the multifarious landscape of multidisciplinary working models aimed at fostering collaborative leadership in organizations. By examining the strategies that facilitate effective collaboration across disciplines, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how diverse teams can work together synergistically to achieve common goals. Furthermore, it aims to shed light on the challenges and barriers that organizations and leaders face in implementing such models, offering insights into potential solutions and best practices.

### Research Question

Through a comprehensive review of existing literature, case studies, and empirical research, this study aims to address the following key questions:

- 1) What are the different multidisciplinary working models employed to promote collaborative leadership across various organizations?
- 2) What are the key strategies and mechanisms that contribute to the success of these models in fostering collaboration and innovation?

- 3) What are the common challenges and barriers encountered in implementing multidisciplinary working models, and how can they be effectively addressed?

### Significance of study

The significance of this research topic is underscored by the increasing recognition of the limitations of siloed approaches to problem - solving and decision - making. In the fields of healthcare and social care, there is a growing realization that addressing complex issues requires leveraging the collective intelligence and diverse perspectives of multidisciplinary teams. Moreover, the COVID - 19 pandemic has highlighted the urgency of fostering collaboration and innovation across disciplines to respond effectively to rapidly evolving challenges.

### Operationalization of Concepts

There are different meanings to a particular term or word. The aim of this section of my work is to establish the particular meanings of the concepts under research.

**Multidisciplinary:** This generally refer to an activity involving different areas of study, but in the words of Georges (2019), a multidisciplinary context is where collaboration occurs among individuals or teams with expertise from different disciplines.

**Model:** A model might mean a type of product and something to be imitated, but for this study, I will be using the definition of Fatout (2017 p.4) which says that model is "a hypothetical description of a complex entity or process".

**Collaborative Leadership:** Collaborative leadership is a style of leadership or approach that emphasizes shared decision - making, collective problem - solving, and mutual accountability among team members. In collaborative leadership, the focus is on fostering cooperation, communication, and synergy among individuals or groups to achieve common goals and objectives (Ang'ana, Ongeti, & Chiroma, 2023).

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## 2. Literature Review

### What is multidisciplinary working model?

As stated earlier, a multidisciplinary working model refers to a framework or approach that involves collaboration among individuals or teams from different disciplines or fields of expertise to address complex problems or achieve common goals. Multidisciplinary approach is mainly used in the social care or health sector. In a multidisciplinary working model, professionals with diverse backgrounds, skills, and knowledge bases come together to share insights, perspectives, and resources, leveraging their collective expertise to tackle multifaceted challenges.

There are several multidisciplinary working models employed across various organizations to promote collaborative leadership. Each model may vary in its structure, processes, and goals, but they all share the common objective of fostering collaboration, innovation, and effective leadership. From existing literature, some of the identified multidisciplinary working models include cross - functional teams, matrix organizational structure, project - based collaboration, strategic partnership and alliance, etc. (Sytych, Wohlgezogen, & Zajac, 2018).

Research evidences indicate that multidisciplinary practices are more suitable with individuals with complex needs and long term condition in the health sector (Social Care Institute for Excellence [SCIE], n. d).

Knapp, McDavid, Mossialos, & Thornicroft (2007) identified some of the benefits of multidisciplinary working model to include reduced costs, improved consumer health outcomes and functioning, utilization of medical services and enhanced quality of life.

Multidisciplinary design usually represents a complex group of practitioners who are professionals in their fields. As professionals, all their viewpoints and expertise are valuable in the decision - making process (Adamczyk & Twidale, 2007). This is a clear way by which these professionals bring in their wealth of experiences in decision making process that forms collaborative leadership. Sometimes, it might appear difficult to distinguish the role of a leader in such setting. However, successful working practice in such setting needs a recognizable leader who is identified as the manager or a coordinator; saddled with the responsibility of coordinating activities, holding meetings and effectively sharing data records. In this multidisciplinary setting, the team members may not necessarily be located on the same

premises in order to successfully work together. This do not only save the organization's time but also curtail the problem of logistic dilemma.

### Challenges and Barriers Encountered in Implementing Multidisciplinary Working Models

Recent research result have it that multidisciplinary team work emphasizes the practice of independent form of collaboration unlike other forms of collaboration. Multidisciplinary practice predominantly focuses on work alone within one own competence and responsibility. For this reason, the gain of the multidisciplinary practice model might not be achieved because without strong organizational collaboration among practitioners, the impact of the practice may be negative rather than positive (SCIE, 2018b). For this reason, researchers have discovered other forms of collaborative organizational work that leads to better results. This include the concept of interdisciplinary practice.

### Multidisciplinary vs. Interdisciplinary

As evidently documented in some health care sector researches, a multidisciplinary approach has proven to be an efficacious tool which is used to facilitate collaboration between professionals, and it also improve the outcome of care (Saint - Pierre, Herskovic, & Sepúlveda, 2018).

Saint - Pierre et. al., (2018) clearly indicated in their work that the benefits of multidisciplinary teams is enormous and it benefits both the service users and the professionals themselves. These benefits might include the ability to holistically and comprehensively view the client's needs, care continuity, availability of variety of skills, and educational and mutual support on the part of the professionals.

However, some practitioners and researchers have distinguished another good approach along with multidisciplinary approach. This is called **interdisciplinary approach**. The differences between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach are not very very obvious at the first insight because they both reflect common values or goals essential to providing holistic, effective and culturally sensitive care to its service users (Schultz, Walker, Bessarab, McMillan, MacLeod, & Marriott, 2014).

According to a table presented in Chapter 13 of the work of Schultz et al., (2014) on *Interdisciplinary Care to Enhance Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing*, the major differences between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary are specified as follows:

Team model	Characteristics	Limitations
Multidisciplinary team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctor controls team</li> <li>• Team meets to coordinate client care</li> <li>• Clients are not included in decision-making processes.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clients not involved</li> <li>• Services may be omitted, fragmented or duplicated</li> <li>• Team members expertise may not be used effectively.</li> </ul>
Interdisciplinary team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The team is not necessarily led by the doctor. They work within their areas of expertise and coordinate the work of others. Leadership is provided by the person with the most expertise in the given situation?</li> <li>• Reports of functional progress, decision making and care plans are informed by case conferences</li> <li>• The client is the centre of the team's focus and plays an important role in goal setting</li> <li>• Ideas are exchanged that lead to changes in clients' treatments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Team meetings require time</li> <li>• Team members may need to be trained in team processes</li> <li>• Individual team members need to cede some control to the team so that client care is driven by the team processes</li> <li>• The doctor needs to allow team decision making yet take medico-legal responsibility for outcomes.</li> </ul>

Figure 1: Schultz et al., 2014).

Despite the similarity and commonality of the majority of their characteristics, the table above shows that there are still some striking differences between multidisciplinary team working model and that of interdisciplinary team. The disparity exist clearly in approaches in the structure of care and support in a given health setting. For instance, while multidisciplinary approach appear to be more focused on the treatment itself, without the involvement of the client, the interdisciplinary approach is made perfect by its involvement of service users in the treatment process. This helps in building strong horizontal chain of collaboration between the client and practitioners. Another clear remarkable feature of the interdisciplinary approach is that the team of practitioners does not necessarily build their

practice base on the doctor's expertise but rather, each member of the team contributes to the work based on their skills and knowledge.

Another table presented in the work of Prizer & Browner (2012), which was titled: Multidisciplinary vs. Interdisciplinary models of Care, drew emphasis in the collaboration method with patients. It shows that patients are not really involved in the decision - making process of the multidisciplinary system, but in contrast, the interdisciplinary approach allows patients to interact with each stakeholder in the group and also access the practice of the practitioners.

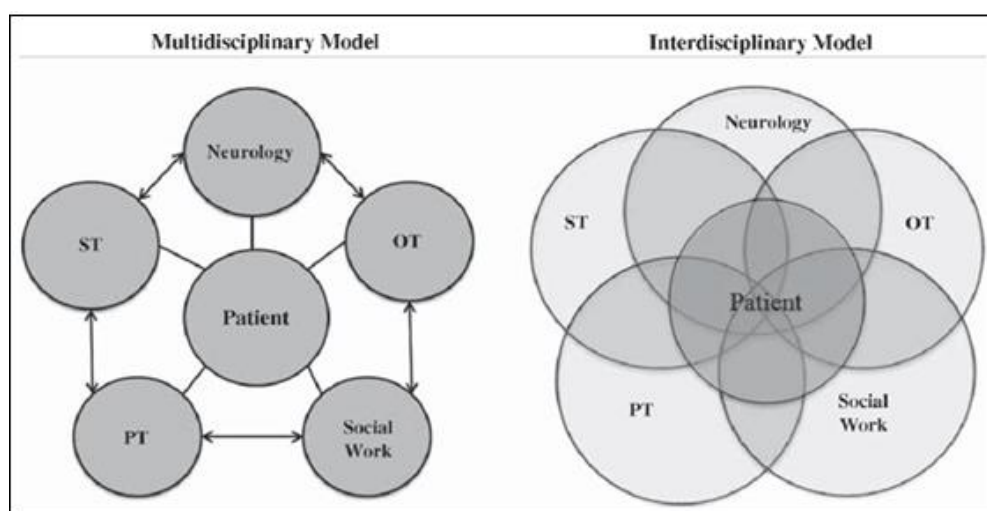


Figure 2: Multidisciplinary vs. Interdisciplinary models of Care, Prizer & Browner, 2012

The roles of both multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary collaboration types has risen greatly and they play a crucial role in matching services to the needs of children and young people. However, it still remains a hard task for social work professional working in such setting, especially for workers who work with youths. This always happens due to the lack

of experience of social service providers rather than those healthcare practitioners in all types of clinical settings (Rumping, Boendermaker, & Doret, 2017).

### How does Multidisciplinary Model Promotes Collaborative Leadership?

The basic aim of leadership is to deliver effective results through others. For many years now, scholars have made several research on leadership theories in order to give explanation to the complexity of leadership and to unravel the reason why it has a multidimensional phenomenon (Benmira & Agboola, 2020). One thing has remained clear, and it is the fact that effective leadership is recognized as a key to the success of many organizations, mostly when it is done in collaboration with major stakeholders (Maalouf, 2019). As a result of this, the success of each organization/team is known to be the achievement of its goals, and this can only be achieved in a setting that allows for collaboration. Weihrich & Koontz (1994, p.144) further buttressed it by defining leadership as “*the art or process of influencing people to strive of their own accord to achieve the common goal of the group*”.

Is multidisciplinary working model an effective tool for collaborative leadership? This have always been a debatable point. In some health and social care organizations, multidisciplinary approach is not designed to involve all key actors and might only include various professionals working independently, but not necessarily collaboratively. Kanter (1994, p.17) found that collaboration implies ‘*a process that allows individuals and organizations to combine their human and material resources in order to achieve objectives that they could not achieve on their own*’. Going by this definition, collaboration might not fit in into the team setting of multidisciplinary team conditions. In the health care setting, for instance, each professional is takes responsibility of a different patient care needs. Prizer & Browner (2012) appraised the effectiveness of multidisciplinary care in outpatient setting for Parkinson’s Disease treatment and showed that multidisciplinary treatment model has led to a remarkable melioration in patients’ condition, but their results are very limited as they measured only short term outcomes of the patients. Therefore, due to the limited availability of evidence on the potency of collaborative healthcare delivery approaches, clinicians are saddled with the task of working to improve the care delivery through incorporating patient choices and goals into treatment.

On the other hand, the interdisciplinary approach adopts a patient - centered perspective in conducting assessment, diagnosis and treatment of diseases. These whole process is done by a team of health professionals together with the patient. While the multidisciplinary approaches encourage communication between professionals, the interdisciplinary approach facilitates an open and continuous communication between the service users and all the professionals involved in the treatment process (Martinez, 2020).

A recent scholarly research have identified a new type of team collaboration in organizations. This is known as **inter - professional** team model. This method is built on routine employment of strong relational skills of key actors and effective coordination of their practices with others (Weiss et al., 2018). Many literally works, as well as practices, interchangeably use the terms ‘interdisciplinary’ and ‘inter - professional’. There still exist a notable difference between them. The term ‘inter - professional’ signifies a broader

perspective and may include persons who have professional license or certification in other related professions (Weiss et al., 2018).

Generally speaking, inter - professionalism encourages the contribution of all participants and also allow them to learn from each other and benefit from their mutual collaboration. By that very fact, we may assume that a culture of inter - professional relationship can be successfully built with a dedicated and committed group of people who benefit from learning together. This also promotes collaborative leadership, and even more!

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding the theoretical underpinnings of collaboration in multidisciplinary team work is crucial for developing comprehensive strategies. The following theoretical perspectives guided this research.

#### 1) Community of Practice Theory (Wenger, 1998):

The Community of Practice (CoP) theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how multidisciplinary teams can collaborate effectively to promote collaborative leadership. According to Wenger, CoPs are groups of persons who share a common interest or profession and come together to learn from each other through collaboration and knowledge sharing. In the context of multidisciplinary working models, CoPs serve as platforms for professionals from different disciplines to collaborate, exchange ideas, and develop shared practices and expertise. CoPs facilitate the development of collaborative leadership by fostering a sense of belonging, mutual respect, and collective responsibility among team members (Wenger, 1998).

#### 2) Systems Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968):

Systems theory offers insights into the interconnectedness and interdependence of various components within multidisciplinary working models. According to von Bertalanffy, systems are composed of interconnected elements that interact with each other to achieve common goals. In the context of multidisciplinary teams, systems theory highlights the importance of understanding the complex interactions between individuals, disciplines, and organizational structures. By viewing multidisciplinary working models as dynamic systems, organizations can identify leverage points for promoting collaborative leadership, such as enhancing communication channels, fostering cross - disciplinary learning, and aligning organizational goals and incentives (von Bertalanffy, 1968).

#### 3) Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979):

Social identity theory posits that individuals derive their sense of self from being members of social groups and categories. In the area of multidisciplinary working models, social identity theory emphasizes the importance of fostering a shared identity and sense of belonging among team members from different disciplines. By emphasizing common goals, values, and norms, organizations can promote a sense of unity and cohesion among multidisciplinary teams, facilitating collaboration and collective action. Social identity theory also highlights the role of leaders in shaping team identity and promoting

inclusive leadership practices that value and respect the contributions of all team members (Cantaert, et al., 2022).

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, organizations can develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence collaborative leadership within multidisciplinary working models and identify strategies for promoting effective collaboration, innovation, and collective leadership across diverse teams and disciplines.

#### 4. Results

The literature review has revealed an image that subtly shows evidence of the impact of a multidisciplinary approach on collaborative leadership due to a lack of evidence in this area of research. It is clear that collaborative work demands that professionals from diverse sectors work together around the needs of clients, their society, families, and their communities. Failure to work together results in a waste of resources and a poor experience of collaboration, and in some cases, clients suffer harm. Teams that assemble relevant professionals are seen as effective teams. This becomes possible when it encourages better coordination of their work and provides each member with the opportunity to collaboratively care for service users with the help of teamwork.

Though the literature review presents other collaborative team settings that might work even better for promoting collaborative leadership, such as interdisciplinary and inter-professional teams, it remains indubitable that a multidisciplinary approach creates a setting to enable professionals from diverse backgrounds to communicate better about each other's responsibilities and roles and construct co-creation.

#### 5. Discussion

Certainly, it is established that multidisciplinary model has great effect in promoting professional interaction and achievement of beneficial goals, but it is difficult to assume that it automatically leads to collaborative leadership due to its lack of sufficient involvement of all key stakeholders as well as its propensity to vertical decision making.

Obviously, there is paucity of evidence which would enable us to understand how a multidisciplinary team model can be used in the future to promote collaboration leadership. Multidisciplinary model can best be seen as "*a process of interaction that includes two activities, the process of working together to establish a partnership and the process of working together to achieve the desired outcomes of the partnership*" (Wilson, 2013)

Whether collaborative leadership is linked with multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or inter-professional teams, each member of such team needs to ask themselves these important questions:

- 1) Who needs to be involved in order for the best team's outcome to be achieved?
- 2) How can each team member work together to achieve those outcomes efficiently and effectively?

- 3) What is each team participant's professional and personal contribution to the main goal?
- 4) How can a leader facilitate the optimum functioning of the team and the best outcomes for the beneficiaries?

These questions will help in arousing our thoughts on the subject matter and guide through further studies in different dimensions of collaboration.

#### 6. Recommendation

Based on my exploration of multidisciplinary working models, I have realized that it is evident that organizations can benefit greatly from implementing such approaches to address complex challenges and drive innovation. To effectively leverage multidisciplinary teams and foster collaborative leadership, organizations should consider the following recommendations:

- 1) **Facilitate Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Organizations should create structures and processes that facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration, such as cross-functional teams, project-based initiatives, and communities of practice. Leaders should encourage cross-disciplinary learning, knowledge sharing, and innovation by providing resources, incentives, and recognition for collaborative efforts.
- 2) **Create a Supportive Organizational Culture:** Organizations should cultivate a culture that values diversity, inclusivity, and collaboration. Leaders should actively promote a climate of psychological safety where team members feel empowered to share ideas, challenge assumptions, and take risks without fear of judgment or reprisal.
- 3) **Invest in Leadership Development:** Organizations should prioritize leadership development programs that equip leaders with the skills and competencies needed to effectively lead multidisciplinary teams. This includes training in communication, conflict resolution, team building, and cultural competence to foster collaboration and cohesion among team members.
- 4) **Promote Effective Communication:** Effective communication is essential for successful collaboration within multidisciplinary teams. Organizations should implement communication strategies and technologies that facilitate information sharing, feedback exchange, and decision-making across disciplines and hierarchies.
- 5) **Align Incentives and Recognition:** Organizations should align incentives and recognition systems to promote collaborative leadership and teamwork. Leaders should recognize and reward behaviors that contribute to collective goals and outcomes, such as collaboration, knowledge sharing, and mentoring.

#### 7. Conclusion

In conclusion, multidisciplinary working models are essential systems for organizations to promote collaborative leadership and innovation within an interconnected world. These teams take advantage of diverse individuals to address complex issues, generate new ideas, and achieve innovative solutions. Collaborative leadership requires leadership, communication, organizational culture, and interdisciplinary

collaboration. Through interdisciplinary collaboration, leadership training and support, organizational culture, communication, and rewards and recognition, organizations can work within multidisciplinary working models to help realize their strategic goals and successful change in a dynamic world. Multidisciplinary working models will be equally crucial to ensuring the long - term viability of any organization.

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