

**Institutional Effects of Inter-organizational Collaboration:  
The Case of *Mère et Enfant (Palestine)*\***

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In this paper, we explore the institutional effects of interorganizational collaboration. We argue that collaboration can act as a source of change in institutional fields through the generation of proto-institutions: new practices, rules and technologies that transcend the particular collaborative relationship and may become new institutions if they diffuse sufficiently throughout the institutional field. Based on a study of the collaborative activities of a small, nongovernmental organization (NGO) in Palestine over a four-year period, we propose that those collaborations that are both highly embedded and have high levels of involvement among the partners are the most likely to generate proto-institutions.

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we explore the institutional effects of collaboration, focusing on the immediate local effects of individual collaborations that may form the basis for broader, longer-term, field-level change. Collaboration is often entered into in order to develop new solutions to complex problems. These solutions are sometimes adopted far beyond the boundaries of the collaborative process (Lawrence, Phillips & Hardy, 1999) and can therefore become institutionalized in the wider field (Powell, Koput, & Smith-Doerr, 1996). Therefore, although collaborations may reproduce existing conditions in an institutional field (e.g., Warren, Rose & Bergunder, 1974), they also have the potential to transform fields (Phillips, Lawrence & Hardy, 2000) by acting as an important source of innovation in institutional fields.

To study the institutional effects of collaboration, we conducted a qualitative study of the collaborative activities of *Mère et Enfant (Palestine)*<sup>1</sup> – a small nongovernmental organization (NGO) that provides nutritional services to women and children in Palestine. Mère et Enfant has collaborated with a broad range of organizations creating local effects at the level of the collaboration, as well as effects that extended into the larger field. By focusing on multiple instances of collaboration by a single organization, this research design allows us to assess the impact of different forms of collaboration on the initial stages of change in an institutional field.

This paper makes a number of important contributions to institutional theory. First, we empirically explore one avenue – interorganizational collaboration – through which change in institutional fields can be initiated. Despite the emphasis on interorganizational relationships and interconnections in institutional theory, collaboration as a source of change in institutional fields

has not been widely examined. Our empirical findings provide direction for future research in this area. Second, in focusing on the intermediate and local effects of collaboration as a stage within the process whereby an institutional field changes, we help to fill gaps in both the institutional theory and collaboration literatures. Institutional theory has tended to focus on field-level dynamics over relatively long periods time and has spent relatively little time exploring the micro sources of these macro changes. Research on collaboration, on the other hand, has tended to focus on immediate outcomes for participating organizations while largely ignoring the macro effects of collaboration on the institutional fields in which they occur. Finally, we show how a qualitative methodology can enhance our understanding of institutional theory by using a systematic cross-case analysis to develop strongly grounded theory. Qualitative methods have seldom been used in institutional theory literature so our study provides an important alternative perspective on institutional processes.

We present our argument in four steps. First, drawing on the collaboration and institutional theory literatures, we argue that collaboration can act as a source of change in institutional fields, describe how that process might work, and develop our research question. Second, we describe the methodology used to study *Mère et Enfant* and the collaborations in which it was involved. Third, we present the results of the analysis of these cases and explore how collaboration can initiate change in institutional fields. Finally, we draw some conclusions for the study of collaboration and institutional theory.

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<sup>1</sup> *Mère et Enfant* is a pseudonym. All other organizations are referred to by their real names.

## **COLLABORATION AND THE STRUCTURATION OF INSTITUTIONAL FIELDS**

While a range of different definitions of collaboration exists in the literature, we define collaboration as a cooperative, interorganizational relationship that is negotiated in an ongoing communicative process, and which relies on neither market nor hierarchical mechanisms of control (Heide, 1994; Lawrence et al., 1999; Phillips et al., 2000). This definition of collaboration is inclusive enough to encompass a wide range of collaborative arrangements (e.g., consortium, alliances, joint ventures, roundtables, networks, associations), and yet provides a set of critical characteristics that distinguishes it from other forms of interorganizational activity. Most importantly, it distinguishes collaboration from those interorganizational relationships that are cooperative, but in which cooperation is either purchased (as in a supplier relationship) or based on some form of legitimate authority (as in a relationship between a state regulatory agency and a firm operating within its jurisdiction).

This distinction is critical because collaboration tends to effect change in institutional fields in a different way than markets and hierarchies (Gray, 1989; Phillips et al., 2000). Institutional fields develop through processes of structuration whereby patterns of social action produce and reproduce the institutions and relationships that constitute the field (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Giddens, 1976). Through repeated interactions, groups of organizations develop common understandings and practices that form the institutions that define the field and, at the same time, these institutions shape the ongoing patterns of interaction from which they are produced. Market transactions and hierarchical relationships are based on highly institutionalized governance mechanisms that provide a well-understood framework within which negotiations take place (Heide, 1994). In contrast, the negotiations associated with collaborations tend to be

more complex and fundamental, leading to new understandings, norms, and practices that, in turn, may be transmitted throughout the field (Phillips et al., 2000).

There are several reasons for this: collaboration processes tend to be more decentralized than markets and hierarchies, requiring more mutual exchange of information; monitoring in market and hierarchical relationships tends to involve more standardized external measurement procedures, while collaboration depends on informal socialization processes and internal monitoring; and the roles of organizational representatives in a collaboration are more complex and less specified than in market and hierarchies (Heide, 1994). Thus, collaboration has institutional effects because it represents an arena in which the processes of structuration described by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) can be enacted: interorganizational interaction can increase in intensity, coalitions can form, information can be exchanged, and an awareness of involvement in a common enterprise can develop.

### **Collaboration and Institutional Innovation**

Drawing on institutional theory (e.g., Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Jepperson, 1991; Leblebici et al., 1991; Powell, Koput, & Smith-Doerr, 1996) and work on organizational structuration (e.g., Barley, 1986; Pentland, 1992), we suggest that collaboration can play a role in the production of new institutions by facilitating their creation and making them available interorganizationally. Institutions are social entities characterized by their self-regulating nature: “institutions are those social patterns that, when chronically reproduced, owe their survival to relatively self-activating social processes” (Jepperson 1991: 145). More specifically, we define institutions as relatively widely diffused practices, technologies, or rules that have become entrenched in the sense that it is costly to choose other practices, technologies or rules. Practices, technologies and rules can therefore be more or less institutionalized depending on the extent of their diffusion and the

strength of these self-activating mechanisms – the “set of rewards and sanctions” (Jepperson 1991: 145) – that hold them in place in an institutional field. We refer to practices, technologies and rules that are narrowly diffused and only weakly entrenched, but which have the potential to become widely institutionalized, as “proto-institutions”. These new practices, technologies and rules are institutions in the making – they have the potential to become fully fledged institutions if social processes develop that entrench them and they are diffused throughout an institutional field.

In examining the ways in which interorganizational collaboration might lead to the development of new institutions, we follow other descriptions of institutional processes that suggest a process or stage model of institutional innovation and diffusion (e.g., Leblebici et al. 1991; Strang & Meyer, 1993; Zeitz, Mittal & McAuley, 1999). Specifically, we propose a theoretical framework in which collaboration plays a potentially catalytic role through the following multi-stage process. Collaborative relationships are often designed to produce some form of innovation (Gray, 1989). Thus new practices, technologies and rules often arise within the collaboration itself. At this point in the process, the collaboration has not produced any institutional effects – change has occurred, but only within the boundaries of the collaboration. In some cases, however, these new rules, technologies and practices diffuse beyond the boundaries of the specific collaborative context in which they were developed, and are adopted by other organizations in the field – they become “proto-institutions”. Only after a proto-institution appears in the field can it be adopted by other organizations and become institutionalized. Although not all proto-institutions will become fully-fledged institutions (Zetit, Mittal, & McAulay, 1999), they represent important first steps in the processes of institution creation, thus potentially forming the basis for broader, field-level change.

We argue that this process depends on the specific characteristics of collaboration – that the extent to which structuration is facilitated through the development of proto-institutions will vary significantly across collaborations. Thus, an important issue in understanding collaboration as a source of change in institutional fields lies in examining the relationship between the characteristics of the collaboration and the emergence of proto-institutions.

*Research Question: What are the characteristics of those collaborations that are associated with the production of new practices, technologies, and rules and with their initial diffusion beyond the original collaboration?*

## **METHODOLOGY**

In this study, we adopt a qualitative, multi-case comparative research design based on our primary aim of theory development. We chose a qualitative methodology because we needed rich data that could facilitate the generation of theoretical categories that we could not derive satisfactorily from existing theory. In comparing across cases, the unit of analysis is the collaboration, rather than the organization: we examine multiple instances of collaboration by a single organization in order to assess the impact of different characteristics of collaboration, without the confounding impact of organizational characteristics.

### **Research Site: Mère et Enfant**

Mère et Enfant is an international NGO that operates in a number of different countries. Its headquarters are located in Europe, and it is funded primarily by its home country's government. Our interest is in one particular "branch" of Mère et Enfant – Mère et Enfant (Palestine), which operates in the West Bank and Gaza (for the sake of brevity, we will refer to the branch as Mère et Enfant for the remainder of the paper). The emphasis in this region is on child nutrition: the reduction of infant mortality; the improvement of the nutritional status of

children; the provision of nutritional rehabilitation to malnourished children; and the raising of awareness of the importance of good nutrition. It treats children directly by providing medical and nutritional services in clinics in the West Bank and Gaza and uses an outreach program to provide services in rural communities. It provides training to health care professionals in such areas as diarrhea management, breast-feeding, and safe weaning. It conducts research into the nutritional status and food security and other matters related to the health of Palestinian children. Finally, it provides information and education about nutrition and poverty.

The context of *Mère et Enfant* was of particular importance in our choice of a case study. The political and social situation in the region at this time both limited and opened up options for collaboration. Politically, the Palestinian National Authority had recently been formed, which marked the beginning of rapid change and a high degree of uncertainty in the institutional field, as new political structures were put into place. Socially, the West Bank and Gaza were both densely populated areas facing serious public health issues: many Palestinians lived in refugee camps or rural areas; the population was growing rapidly; and, half the population was under the age of 14. The infant mortality rate was estimated by Palestinians to be 50 deaths per 1,000 live births. Diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections accounted for more than half of all child deaths in Palestine. Thus there was a considerable need for health care beyond the ability of the existing system to provide. A large number of international NGOs operated in the region due to these social problems and also because of international interest in supporting the fledgling Palestinian State. This situation provided *Mère et Enfant* the opportunity, and created the necessity, for collaboration. As a relatively small player, it had much to gain from working with larger, international NGOs; and, because of its expertise in nutrition and its knowledge of the region, it had something to offer prospective partners.

## Data Collection

Our primary contact during the data collection process was the manager of Mère et Enfant. The manager is an expatriate who manages the 60, primarily Palestinian, employees of Mère et Enfant. Since taking up his position in 1993, the manager of Mère et Enfant had embarked on an explicit strategy of collaboration with a variety of organizations. While these collaborations (see Table 1 for summaries) differed in terms of their magnitude and impact, together they formed a broad strategy encompassing a collaborative orientation that was intended to enhance Mère et Enfant's ability to raise funds and deliver services related to nutrition.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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In addition to interviewing the local manager on several occasions, we also interviewed employees in the organization, members of the advisory board of Mère et Enfant, relevant members of the Palestinian National Authority, and some Palestinian managers in the organization. Once we had a clear idea of the history and current activities of the organization we began to investigate the collaborations in which the organization was involved. With the help of the manager, we arranged interviews with at least one representative, who played an active role in the collaboration, of each of the organizations that had collaborated with Mère et Enfant since the manager's arrival. Interviews were conducted in English, lasted between one and two hours, were semi-structured, recorded and transcribed. We conducted one interview by telephone as the representative was not in the country at the time of our visit. The interviews focused on the history and the outcomes of the collaboration for the participants and for the institutional field. We also collected a range of documents from our interviewees in order to better understand their organizations and the nature of the collaborations with Mère et Enfant.

## **Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this article consisted of three stages: (1) developing summaries of each collaboration; (2) coding the summaries for the characteristics and effects of collaboration; and (3) analyzing the pattern of relationships among the conceptual categories.

In the first stage of the data analysis, we constructed chronological descriptions of each collaboration, describing how it came about, when it happened, who was involved, and its major outcomes. We confirmed that we had understood events correctly by checking the summaries with the manager of *Mère et Enfant*. The second stage of analysis involved coding each summary with respect to its characteristics and effects. This was a highly iterative procedure (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that involved moving between the summaries, existing theory, and the raw data. From the summaries, we initially advanced first order descriptions based on broad categories that were developed from the theory. We then refined these categories by tracing patterns and consistencies (e.g., Strauss, 1987): we scrutinized interviews and documentation, and revised and elaborated our initial ideas, as additional evidence suggested modifications or elimination. The analysis continued with this interplay between the data and the emerging patterns until the patterns were refined into adequate conceptual categories (Eisenhardt, 1989).

The third stage of the data analysis involved a cross-case, comparative analysis to examine the relationships among the theoretical categories. Specifically, we were interested in the relationships between the characteristics of collaboration and its effects. As part of this process, we used the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to modify and simplify the conceptual categories, constructed in stage two, to create simpler, more robust categories that could more clearly be related to one another. Based on the patterns evident in our stage two analysis, we collapsed the various categories describing characteristics of collaboration into two

broader dimensions, which we refer to as *involvement* and *embeddedness*. We then developed scales for involvement and embeddedness, and rated each collaboration as low, medium or high on each. Finally, we developed a scale for the degree to which each collaboration led to the creation of proto-institutions. The results allowed us to discern patterns linking the characteristics of collaboration to the development of proto-institutions, the details of which are explained in more detail in the following section.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Our research question asks what are the characteristics of those collaborations that are associated with the generation of proto-institutions. Thus, we first develop and apply a set of dimensions that parsimoniously describe the characteristics of Mère et Enfant’s collaborations. We then explore the institutional effects of these collaborations and relate them to the characteristics of collaboration.

### **Characteristics of Collaboration**

In order to examine the characteristics of collaboration, we applied DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) work on structuration to develop three dimensions: (1) the pattern of interactions among collaborating organizations; (2) the structure of the coalition formed by collaborating partners; and (3) the pattern of information-sharing among collaborating partners. For each of the three characteristics, we worked iteratively between theory and data – operationalizing DiMaggio and Powell’s theoretical categories in a collaborative setting, applying them to the empirical data, and identifying a range of possibilities for each according to the collaborations under study.

First, in examining each collaboration to ascertain the nature of the interactions it involved, we identified differences in the *depth* and *scope* of interaction. The depth of interactions ranged from *shallow*, where interactions were restricted to the Mère et Enfant

manager and his counterpart, to *deep*, where the interactions extended to other personnel from Mère et Enfant and the collaborating organization. The *scope* of interactions ranged from *narrow*, where Mère et Enfant interacted only with its collaborating partner to *broad*, where Mère et Enfant interacted with third parties during the collaboration. Second, in analyzing Mère et Enfant's collaborative arrangements we identified three distinct structures. In the case of a *donation*, Mère et Enfant received funds or other forms of help from its partners in aid of particular activities. In the case of a *partnership*, the collaboration was characterized by a new coalition in which Mère et Enfant and its partner worked together to carry out particular activities. In the case of *representation*, the collaboration involved a new coalition in which the collaborating organizations represented each other's interests to outside parties. Third, we identified three patterns of information flow: *unidirectional*, where one of the collaborating organizations learned from the other; *bi-directional*, where all collaborating partners learned from each other; and *multi-directional*, where collaborating organizations and third parties learned from each other.

These three dimensions, while interdependent, each capture an important characteristic of the collaborative relationship. For instance, unless a collaboration was characterized as having a "broad" pattern of interaction, it could not be characterized as either having "multi-directional" information flows or a "representational" coalition structure. This does not mean, however, that these dimensions collapse into one: a collaboration could have broad patterns of interaction, but neither multi-directional information flows nor a representational structure. Thus, these dimensions describe analytically distinct, though empirically interdependent, concepts.

**Aggregate analytical dimensions of the collaboration process.** Having coded the collaborations in terms of interaction, coalitions, and information, we looked for ways to

condense this conceptualization into a smaller number of simpler, broader dimensions. Our purpose was to classify the collaborations in a way that allowed us to more easily relate them to their effects. By examining the empirical results across the initial categories and drawing on the theoretical literature, we identified two aggregate dimensions – *involvement* and *embeddedness*.

First, collaborations can involve high or low levels of involvement among the collaborating partners. This dimension focuses on the internal dynamics of the collaboration – the ways in which the participating organizations relate to each other. High levels of involvement entail (1) deep interactions among participants, (2) partnership arrangements, and (3) bilateral information flows. For example, in the collaboration with Médecins sans Frontières, a number of personnel from both organizations worked together. The organizations partnered to provide a multi-faceted approach to nutritional problems. Information flowed between the organizations as they learned from each other about the need for this service and how best to provide it. In other words, the two organizations were closely involved with each other as part of this collaboration.

The second key dimension – embeddedness – describes the degree to which a collaboration is enmeshed in interorganizational relationships (Dacin, Ventresca & Beal, 1999; Granovetter, 1985). In contrast to involvement, this dimension highlights the connection between the collaboration and the broader interorganizational network. Highly embedded collaborations involve: (1) interactions with third parties, (2) representation arrangements, and (3) multi-directional information flows. For example, in the collaboration with Care International, the pattern of interactions was broad in the sense that it involved a third party, the Australian Embassy, as Care International interacted with the Embassy to secure the grant that funded the project. A new coalition was established as Mère et Enfant secured representation from Care – a much larger and well-known organization – in its dealings with the Embassy. Information loads

increased in a multi-directional manner when, as a result of the collaboration, not only Care, but also the Australian Embassy, learned about Mère et Enfant's work with women and children, as well as its expertise in working with women in rural communities.

Finally, we categorized each collaboration according to the degree of both involvement and embeddedness (see Table 1). Six collaborations were classified as high involvement because they had all of the characteristics described above (deep interaction, partnership, bi-directional information flows). Two collaborations were categorized as low involvement because they had none of these characteristics. Three collaborations were classified as high embeddedness because they exhibited all of the relevant characteristics (broad interactions, representation and multi-directional information flows). Four collaborations were categorized as low embeddedness because they had none of the characteristics. Finally, one collaboration was classified as medium embeddedness because it had two of the three characteristics.<sup>2</sup>

### **Institutional Effects of Collaboration in Mère et Enfant**

Our analysis of the construction of new institutions focused on the degree to which Mère et Enfant's collaborations produced new practices, technologies and rules that were diffused beyond the boundaries of the collaboration. Because our interest is in the initial stages of the process of institution creation – the development of proto-institutions – we counted only those practices, technologies and rules that diffused beyond the boundaries of the collaboration as significant in terms of being an institutional effect. In identifying new practices, we counted only those patterns of action that, while developed within the collaboration, were reproduced outside

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<sup>2</sup> Although this approach to rating means that collaborations rated as medium might have different configurations of the relevant characteristics, we believe that this is reasonable because it reflects our attempt to measure embeddedness in a general way and our argument that these characteristics cluster into the higher level embeddedness construct.

it. Similarly, we identified new technologies where new methods for solving problems were adopted outside the collaborative contexts in which they were developed. Finally, new rules were identified where new understandings of legitimate behavior became reproduced outside the collaboration itself. Although an important issue with respect to new institutions is the breadth of their acceptance and impact across the institutional field, our focus here is on the initial stages of the construction of new institutions. We argue that those new practices, technologies and rules that diffused beyond the collaborative context in which they developed formed the basis for what could become field-level institutions.

There was a significant variation in the extent to which the collaborative activities of Mère et Enfant produced new practices, technologies and rules that diffused beyond the collaboration itself. Table 1 presents these results and shows the extent to which each collaboration was associated with the diffusion of new practices, technologies or rules as high, medium or low. Two collaborations produced no practices, technologies or rules that transcended the boundaries of the collaboration and consequently are categorized as low. Five collaborations produced and diffused new practices and were categorized as medium. One collaboration was associated with the diffusion of both new practices and rules outside the original collaboration and so was categorized as high.

If we examine the relationship between the level of involvement, the degree of embeddedness of the collaboration, and the degree to which it was associated with the development of proto-institutions, we see the following. First, low institution creation is associated with both low levels of involvement and low levels of embeddedness. Second, medium institution creation is associated with high levels of involvement and low, medium or high levels of embeddedness. Finally, high institution creation is associated with both high levels of

involvement and high levels of embeddedness. We therefore argue that both the level of involvement among collaborating organizations and the level of embeddedness of the collaboration in the institutional field have significant effects on the degree to which the collaboration is likely to initiate the production of new institutions.

We suggest that high involvement facilitates the interorganizational learning necessary for the invention of new practices, technologies and rules, while embeddedness facilitates their transmission beyond the boundaries of the collaborative relationship. The deep, operational ties, two-way information flows and partnering that characterize high involvement collaborations foster the development of innovative solutions (Gray, 1989; Hardy et al., 1998) that form the basis of proto-institutions. Once the new practice, technology or rule is developed within the collaboration, its diffusion depends on the way in which the collaboration is connected to third parties and involves flows of information out from the primary collaborating partners to others in the field (Phillips et al., 2000). These connections need not be characterized by the high levels of involvement associated with the primary collaborators; while innovation may demand high involvement, the diffusion of an established practice, technology or rule is more dependent on the number of connections and opportunities for inter-organizational communication.

The collaboration between Mère et Enfant and the University of Oslo's School of Nutrition provides an example of how high levels of involvement and embeddedness have significant effects on the early stages of institution creation. The academics initially came to Gaza in 1994 to offer their services to the Palestinian Ministry of Health as part of an ongoing initiative with the Nutrition Council of Norway to develop a nutrition and food policy for the region. The manager of Mère et Enfant had learned about the initiative and contacted the Oslo academics, informing them of Mère et Enfant's expertise in child nutrition in the West Bank and Gaza, as

well as its experience in working with the Ministry of Health. A collaboration was established in which Mère et Enfant and the Oslo academics worked together on a number of initiatives including, for example, training of ministry officials, joint research, community educational programs and the training of Mère et Enfant personnel.

This collaboration embodied a high degree of involvement. Interactions were deep engaging the Oslo academics with Mère et Enfant employees. It represented a partnership with Mère et Enfant employees working closely with the academics on the various projects. Information flows were bi-lateral: Mère et Enfant learned of a potential competitor; while the Oslo academics learned of Mère et Enfant's presence in the region and its expertise in nutrition. They also learned how to use Mère et Enfant's expertise in working with the Ministry of Health. The collaboration was also highly embedded. Interactions were broad in that the collaboration connected Mère et Enfant to a variety of ministries and NGOs in the region. For example, "the workshop came out of a long period of meetings and negotiations between professors from Norway and the Minister and others from the Ministry of Health, [Mère et Enfant] and UNWRA" (*Mère et Enfant Newsletter*, 2(8): 1). Each collaborating partner represented the other's interests to the Ministry: when the academics returned to Norway, they relied on Mère et Enfant to maintain relationships and to promote their interests with the various ministries, while Mère et Enfant modified its programs to reflect the interests of the academics.

This collaboration led to the creation of proto-institutions in that new practices and rules that originated in the collaboration diffused beyond it. New consultation practices were developed in the collaboration as Mère et Enfant established and enhanced its expertise in the area of nutrition by virtue of its highly involved relationship with the academics: "I think that the [Norwegians] found that they just couldn't work with the Ministry of Health.... So it was worked

out by the Ministry and the Norwegians that they would work through us” (Mère et Enfant manager). That these practices then diffused beyond the specific coalition to establish Mère et Enfant’s status as the legitimate regional expert on nutritional matters was due to the highly embedded nature of the collaboration. Similarly, new rules in the form of nutritional policy and a new governance structure initially emerged in the collaboration, by virtue of Mère et Enfant’s local expertise and the training and experience of the academics. Again, that these rules diffused beyond the collaboration to be approved by the Ministry of Health and to form the basis of a national policy was due to the embedded nature of the collaboration.

We can formalize the relationships found in our study and illustrated in the example above as follows:

*Proposition: Collaborations that have high levels of involvement among partners and that are highly embedded in their institutional field will be positively associated with the creation of new proto-institutions.*

## **CONCLUSION**

We believe that this paper makes a number of significant contributions to institutional theory and research. First, we have explored in some detail how interorganizational collaboration can lead to the development of proto-institutions. Our findings suggest that for collaboration to contribute to the first stages of institution creation in this way, it demands not only a high level of involvement among participants but also a collaboration that is highly embedded. This suggests that organizations wishing to effect change in institutional fields must pay attention not only to their relationship with their collaborating partner, but also to how the collaboration embeds them in the wider institutional field. Organizations that focus solely on the partners may secure

competitive advantages from collaborations, but they may forego the opportunity to effect more fundamental change in the field in which they operate.

The results of our study also suggest that collaboration could be an important form of institutional entrepreneurship (DiMaggio, 1988) even for small organizations. While the concept of institutional entrepreneurship has provided an important addition to institutional theory, discussions have tended to focus on the activities of powerful actors, such as state organizations and professional associations, working alone to shape institutional fields (e.g., Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; DiMaggio, 1991; Lawrence, 1999). In contrast, this study illustrates the potential for interorganizational collaboration to act as a catalyst for the initial stages of change in institutional fields, and consequently for organizations to work together to overcome size or resource limitations and begin to shape their institutional fields. *Mère et Enfant* would likely have had great difficulty in achieving these institutional effects on its own, being a relatively small, under-resourced organization. Interorganizational collaboration can, therefore, be a route for small, less powerful organizations to initiate changes in its institutional field.

Finally, this paper has important methodological implications for research into processes of change in institutional fields. This study has demonstrated the utility of fine-grained, qualitative approaches to studying institutional phenomena. While contemporary research in institutional theory has been dominated by large-scale, quantitative methods that track change across a field over time, there is much to be gained from examining more localized dynamics that can be dealt with in a more intensive fashion. Furthermore, we have tried to demonstrate that the use of qualitative research methods does not necessarily mean abandoning a systematic and transparent approach to data analysis. In presenting our findings and developing our propositions,

we attempted to ensure that the steps by which we came to our conclusions were clear and that our findings could, in fact, be replicated by another set of researchers operating on the same data.

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**TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF COLLABORATIONS**

Description of the Collaboration	Inv <sup>*</sup>	Emb	PI
<b>Médecins sans Frontières:</b> Collaboration to develop a mental health care program designed to address the psychological problems of mothers that are often associated with malnutrition among Palestinian children. Two MSF psychologists worked in M&E's Hebron clinic for a year. In addition, the psychologists trained M&E's staff in mental health issues. The combination of mental health care and nutritional education was new for MSF and led to a subsequent collaboration, based on the same model, with another NGO dealing with children who had been in jail.	High	Low	Med
<b>Care International:</b> Collaboration to help women in the community to develop income generation projects. Care secured \$10,000 from the Australian Embassy and then helped train M&E personnel in setting up the projects, such as raising rabbits and goats or making clothes, with women in the community. The initial scheme was modified during the course of the collaboration in order to extend access to a wider group of women. By collaborating with M&E, Care developed strategies for accessing impoverished women in isolated rural communities and implemented them in a subsequent collaboration with a local NGO.	High	High	Med
<b>The University of Oslo's School of Nutrition:</b> Collaboration established to coordinate the Oslo School's relationship with the Palestinian Ministry of Health including the training of Ministry officials by M&E and the Oslo academics. In addition, a workshop was organized to develop strategies for food safety and control, nutrition, chronic diseases, clinical nutrition, and food security. As a result of the workshop, the Ministry of Health, other ministries, and NGOs consulted M&E on nutritional matters. M&E also secured access to the Norwegian Embassy that, in turn, led to contacts to other embassies, and to other Norwegian NGOs.	High	High	High
<b>Peace on Earth:</b> Collaborated to help with child care and income generation projects in the Hebron office. Peace on Earth continued to draw on M&E's expertise concerning women in rural areas as it embarked on a new collaboration with a NGO involved in hydrology. As part of the formal collaboration, Peace on Earth also made representations on behalf of M&E to the Japanese Embassy, which resulted in \$93,000 for a new building in Gaza.	High	High	Med
<b>The United National Children's Fund:</b> Collaborated to develop M&E's expertise in training breast-feeding counselors. M&E thus became qualified to carry out all the training of hospital personnel responsible for teaching mothers to breast-feed their infants, following which UNICEF would register the hospitals as "baby-friendly." As a result of the collaboration UNICEF learned about nutrition in the region and appointed a field officer to the region following the collaboration.	High	Med	Med
<b>The World Food Program:</b> Collaborated to distribute food to M&E's 100 neediest families. M&E employees selected the families and distributed the food. Both partners participated in the evaluation to discern methods of targeting families, ensuring secure food distribution, and to combine food distribution with nutritional education. WFP used these new methods in subsequent collaborations with other regional NGOs.	High	Low	Med
<b>Oxfam:</b> Collaborated on developing a nutritional survey. Oxfam contributed \$5,000 towards the costs of developing the survey.	Low	Low	Low
<b>Pharmaciens sans Frontières:</b> Collaboration to distribute medicine to needy families. PSF contributed medicines worth approximately \$13,000 per year enabling M&E to dispense medication to children suffering from malnutrition and related illnesses.	Low	Low	Low

\* Inv: Involvement; Emb: Embeddedness; PI: Proto-institution Creation